



National Institutes of Health
Office of Management

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Resources

REMOTE WORK @ NIH



Guidance for the Institutes, Centers, and Offices of the National Institutes of Health

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INTRODUCTION TO REMOTE WORK

Remote Work is an increasingly common arrangement at not only the NIH but across federal government and in the private sector. The considerations, process, and templates contained in this document are guidance only, and are not official policy. The information herein seeks to answer questions members of the NIH community may have about remote work and to assist both supervisors and employees in establishing successful remote work arrangements.

What Is Remote Work?

An arrangement in which an employee's official duty station is an approved alternative worksite. The approved alternative worksite may be inside or outside the local commuting area of the Agency worksite and is typically, although not always, the employee's residence.

Remote work is not an employee entitlement, but rather a workplace flexibility that may be available dependent on a variety of factors and with supervisory approval.

Synonyms For Remote Work

Virtual Worker, Full-time Teleworker, Permanent Teleworker

What Is The Difference Between Telework And Remote Work?

An employee who has a remote work arrangement permanently works from an alternative worksite that is not a NIH owned or leased facility. An employee who has a telework arrangement works from home on a regular or ad hoc basis but reports to the agency's official duty station at least once a week/two days a pay period¹.

This distinction is important because a remote worker's official duty station is the alternative worksite, and they receive locality pay based on that duty station. Remote workers may still be eligible for telework with supervisory approval, if they wish to regularly or on an ad hoc basis work from an additional alternate site (i.e. a co-working arrangement). Travel back to their work unit's primary worksite is covered by travel policy.

What Are The Benefits Of Remote Work?

Remote Work is a workplace flexibility that can help NIH retain employees who would otherwise leave their current positions. One of the most common reasons employees request a remote work arrangement is due to family responsibilities – for instance, their spouse is being relocated for work. Many are thrilled to learn they are able to continue working for the agency. Establishing a remote work arrangement also benefits the agency, as it eliminates the need to recruit and train a replacement. Remote workers also report improved work/life balance, feeling more productive, and having an increased sense of loyalty to the agency.

“Work is what we do, not where we are.”

- General Services Administration

¹ See [OPM Fact Sheet: Official Worksite for Location-Based Pay Purposes](#)

SUPERVISORY CONSIDERATIONS FOR REMOTE WORK

General

- Can the employee's set of job duties be accomplished remotely?
- Has the employee demonstrated that they are able to work independently with little supervisory oversight?
- Does the employee meet any IC/Office minimum PMAP criteria for remote work eligibility?
- What tools are available to help the employee manage their workload/deadlines?
- How will the employee be kept informed about office policies and procedures?
- Will you be able to ensure the employee is provided with a consistent workload, and does not miss out on assignments or opportunities due to being out of sight?
- Have you discussed with the employee your expectations for this arrangement, and what will happen if this arrangement does not work out?
- How many remote work arrangements can be accommodated in the work unit?
- Are you applying the remote work standards across the organization in ways that are consistent and based on clear standards and guidelines?
- Have you discussed how the employee should contact you in case of an emergency?

Work Schedule

- What hours of work does the employee anticipate keeping?
- Are there specific hours when he/she must be available (i.e. time zone considerations)?
- How should the employee communicate any changes in their schedule to you?
- How would the employee inform colleagues and customers about how to reach them?
- What are your expectations for their participation in meetings?
- Have you established a schedule of regular meetings to check-in?

Technology

- What technology will be needed to ensure the remote worker can fully participate in meetings and other office activities?
- Will the employee need administrative rights to any databases? Should any existing rights be terminated?
- How will security needs be met remotely?
- Can you ensure meeting materials are provided in advance on a regular basis?

Other Considerations

- Will the IC/O or employee pay for phone and/or internet service?
- What supplies will the employee need and how will they be provided?
- Are there financial impacts, such as travel costs? Note that local travel would be based on the remote duty location, and per diem and other expenses would only apply when the employee traveled outside of their new commuting area – i.e. to the primary office.
- Are there other hidden financial costs, such as shipping work materials to and from the employee's remote duty station?

EMPLOYEE CONSIDERATIONS FOR REMOTE WORK

General Remote Work Considerations

- Are you comfortable monitoring your productivity and ensuring deadlines are met?
- How do you feel about attending meetings when you are not physically present?
- How will you take the initiative to remain involved in office activities?
- Have you researched how a remote work arrangement could potentially impact your pay and/or benefits?

Remote Work Environment

- Can you create an environment that will allow you to focus on work and minimize personal distractions?
- Will you be able to maintain personal and professional boundaries when your home is also your workplace?
- Will you maintain a professional appearance while working remotely?
- If applicable, do you have adequate dependent care?
- Have you discussed how often, if at all, you will be able to travel back to your work unit's primary worksite? How will you feel if your travel is limited to once or twice per year?

Work Schedule

- How will you uphold your scheduled tour of duty, ensuring you are not working less or more?
- Are you willing to shift your hours of work to be available during normal business hours, if your remote work location is in a different time zone?

Technology

- Are you comfortable using various forms of technology to remain connected?
- Can you obtain a reliable, high-speed internet connection?
- Will you ask for a remote connection if one is not offered for a meeting?
- Are you comfortable talking on the phone or through a video call for extended periods of time, on a regular basis?
- How would you deal with technology failures, such as poor phone connections or VPN issues?

Miscellaneous

- Do you have training needs that will not be able to be accommodated remotely?
- Do you have concerns about showing others that remote work is effective? If so, how do you plan to overcome this?
- If applicable, have you addressed any concerns about how a remote arrangement could potentially affect career development and/or advancement opportunities?
- Do you fully understand your supervisor's expectations, and what will happen if the arrangement does not work out?
- Are you prepared to maintain and build customer relationships as a remote worker?

PROCESS FOR INITIATING A REMOTE WORK ARRANGEMENT

1. Employee and supervisor have an initial conversation about desire for remote work²
2. Supervisor reaches out to their OHR/Client Services Division point of contact to keep them informed for planning purposes³
3. Employee completes a remote work application
4. Supervisor reviews the remote work application and, if approved, signs it
 - If not approved, supervisor provides the employee with a written explanation regarding why the arrangement cannot be accommodated
5. Supervisor and employee work together to complete a remote work agreement
6. Employee, supervisor, and second-level supervisor sign the agreement. All parties keep a copy for their records and also provide a copy to the Administrative Officer (AO) to initiate the change of duty location.
7. AO contacts OHR to initiate the Change of Duty Location action
8. OHR processes the personnel action
9. If applicable, employee completes a new telework application⁴
 - Supervisor approves new telework application
 - Timekeeper updates telework information in ITAS
10. It is recommended that employees contact their Benefits Specialist to discuss any impact on health insurance programs, tax withholding, etc.
11. If applicable, supervisor explores any resulting technology needs (blackberry, videoconferencing programs, computer equipment, etc.)
12. Employee ensures they have any necessary property passes before relocating
13. AO orders and ships any necessary supplies
14. Employee and supervisor conduct a review of the agreement every 6 months or upon any changes to the remote work arrangement

² Suggestion of remote work arrangement may be initiated by the employee or by the supervisor, if the employee has indicated they will be relocating, and the supervisor wishes to retain the employee.

³ If applicable, also consult Collective Bargaining Agreement or NIH Manual Chapter 2204 on Reasonable Accommodations.

⁴ Remote workers are eligible to telework. However, their regular work at their assigned duty station is not considered telework. Telework for remote workers occurs when they are working from an additional alternate location – for instance, a co-working environment.

BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

These best practices were compiled using feedback gathered from NIH employees that are currently remote workers. Employees and supervisors in or considering a remote work arrangement should consider how you can incorporate these into your remote working environment to maximize efficiency and communication.

Communication Best Practices

- Remote work requires trust between supervisors, employees, and team members. Ensure conversations occur before the remote worker relocates to establish expectations and processes for team interaction.
- Establish specific meetings between supervisor and remote worker for the first 60-90 days to touch base on how the remote working situation is operating.
- Establish regular check-ins between supervisor and remote worker, as well as team and remote worker, to touch base on project progress and updates.
- Establish a procedure or method of letting the team know when the remote worker is unavailable (marking times on calendar, sending an email to team, etc.).
- Ensure access to and promotion of online training resources.
- Establish expectations of how often remote worker will travel to on-site location and maximize face time with colleagues and customers when the opportunity presents itself.
- Remote work works best for employees who do not need a lot of guidance and can work well independently.
- Don't allow your status as a remote worker to impact customers; service should be seamless.
- Make an effort to call colleagues on the phone or via webcam rather than relying on e-mail.
- Continue to participate in team meetings, through videoconferencing, if possible.

Lifestyle Best Practices

- Establish a morning routine prior to starting work, similar to what you would do before going to the office.
- Remote participants are expected to participate in video meetings using the same professional guidance that they would if they were in person.
- Regardless of time zone, remote workers are generally expected to keep the same schedule as the regular office. In addition, keep work computer and calendars on Eastern Time Zone to avoid scheduling issues.
- Be sure to schedule breaks for lunch; when possible, take lunch away from the computer.
- Get out of the house once a day for a brisk walk during lunch or after work.
- Set task/deliverable goals for the day and/or week; block time off on calendar for increased accountability on projects.
- Find alternative places to work on occasion (i.e. a co-working location or other approved worksite to complete a writing project).

Technological Best Practices:

- Utilize a Share Drive. Include all relevant job information in one place. Provide samples and instruction materials on using the shared drive, as needed.
- Invest in [communication tools](#).
- Consider [team management and project systems](#).
- Ensure remote worker is set-up with Remote VPN and the ability to signed documents electronically.
- Ensure remote worker, supervisor, and team are familiar with using technology features, including video calling, instant messaging, and screen sharing.
- Ensure team has a dedicated conference call line to use for meetings in case additional team members are teleworking.
- Tape the remote worker's phone number to the most frequently used conference room phone lines.

Office Set-Up Best Practices

- Have a dedicated room to serve as the remote office.
- When first establishing a remote office, anticipate that the remote worker will need 1 – 2 days to test technology, work with CIT, and ensure everything is working properly.
- Make a list of any necessary hardware and identify which resources NIH can provide:
 - Consider using two monitors and a docking station
 - Have a home network that includes a printer, scanner, and a phone with a headset
 - Have a landline phone, blackberry, or iPhone with adequate reception
 - Have a document shredder that can handle multiple pieces of paper
- Ensure a reliable internet connection.
- Create a secure document storage system.
- Make calendar available to all team members and share calendar details. Be sure to note any time away or on leave.
- Ensure space is free of background noises: children, music, TV, pets, etc. Keep the space professional.

Supervisory Best Practices

- Establish clear expectations regarding the remote work arrangement. How will the employee's colleagues be kept informed of their coworker's availability?
- Ensure agreement clearly outlines the employee's work schedule.
- Schedule regular meetings to get caught up on the employee's workload and to fill them in on office happenings.
- Keep the remote employee engaged – invite them to still be a part of the team/community by regularly using videoconferencing at meetings and during office celebrations.

REMOTE ACCESS TOOLS AND RESOURCES

A variety of tools are available to support successful remote work for NIH employees.

Whether you are working in an alternate work location or teleworking, there are a variety of enterprise-supported collaboration tools and resources available to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) staff. For help with any of these tools or resources, contact the NIH IT Service Desk by calling (301) 496-4357 or visiting the [NIH IT Service Desk website](#). You can also contact your local IT support for assistance.

Remote Access to NIH Resources

VPN

- NIH's virtual private network (VPN) offers a remote connection to the NIH network that ensures staff can securely access NIH tools, resources, and files from anywhere that allows internet access. Where possible, you are encouraged to use mobile devices and cloud-based services without connecting to the NIH network.
- To access the NIH network, you must be authorized to access VPN. To learn more about requesting access or connecting to VPN, visit the [How to Use VPN at NIH document](#). You can also contact the [NIH IT Service Desk](#) at (301) 496-4357 or your local IT support for assistance.

Web Conferencing Tools

NIH offers web conferencing tools that allow you to communicate with internal and external collaborators around the globe.

Skype for Business (recommended for use with internal collaborators)

- A unified communications platform that enables messaging, web conferencing, screen-sharing, online meetings, and collaboration.

Webex (recommended for use with internal and external collaborators)

- A web conferencing and screen-sharing tool that you can use to collaborate with colleagues remotely.

VideoCast (recommended for use with internal collaborators)

- A video-streaming platform that allows you to broadcast your seminar, conference, or meeting live over the internet as a real-time streaming video
- The event can be recorded and made available to views as an on-demand video or downloadable file

Not sure which tool to use? Visit the [Virtual Meeting Options matrix](#).

File Storage and Collaboration Tools

You can easily and securely work on, store, and share documents using a range of file storage tools even when you are teleworking.

OneDrive

- An internal file storage and collaboration tool that allows you to store and synchronize individual documents across multiple devices
- You can create a document on your computer, save it to OneDrive, and continue to work on it from another device, such as your MobileIron-enrolled mobile device
- Learn more about OneDrive on the [NIH File Storage and Collaboration Tools Portal](#); [video-based training](#) is also available

SharePoint Online

- An internal file storage and collaboration tool that allows you to store, access, share, and collaborate on files, documents, and data from anywhere
- Share and collaborate on files with an NIH team or group
- Learn more about SharePoint on the [NIH File Storage and Collaboration Tools Portal](#); [video-based training](#) is also available

Microsoft Teams

- An internal platform for groups to collaborate on files and data using chat, voice, and video.
- Set up a team page with your project, lab, or department members to centralize, organize, and streamline collaboration on multiple tasks
- Integrates with SharePoint Online, OneDrive, Box, and Power BI
- Learn more about Microsoft Teams on the [NIH File Storage and Collaboration Tools Portal](#)

Box

- An NIH enterprise-supported collaboration tool that allows you to securely share and co-edit files and data with external collaborators.
- Learn more about Box on the [NIH File Storage and Collaboration Tools Portal](#); [video-based training](#) is also available for administrators and users

Mobile Devices

NIH also provides the means to work remotely using mobile devices. Check NIH email, work and collaborate on documents with your colleagues, and host or attend meetings—all from your MobileIron-enrolled smartphone or tablet.

Derived PIV Credentials (PIV-D) is a technology solution that lets you access resources previously only available through a laptop or desktop computer. If you have enrolled in PIV-D and MobileIron on your mobile device, you can sign your timecard on ITAS, access the Learning Management System (LMS), and more. Not enrolled? Enroll your [Apple](#)* or [Android](#)* device today. You can also submit a service desk ticket for assistance.

General Information

There may be system or additional software requirements to use these programs. Depending on which operating system(s) your IC has deployed, you may or may not be able to use all of the products above or have access to the full range of capabilities.

However, in addition to the enterprise-support collaboration tools and resources listed above, some ICs may have additional offerings. Contact your local IT support for additional information about IC-specific services.

**Occasionally some people may experience an issue with NIH Login when trying to access articles in the AskIT Knowledge Base. Make sure that your PIV card is inserted, and you are using the Internet Explorer or Chrome browser. If the issue persists, contact the [NIH IT Service Desk](#).*

TEMPLATES

The following fillable forms can be used across the NIH to ensure important considerations are addressed before a remote work arrangement begins and so that consistent approaches are taken to remote work requests and arrangements.

- Remote Work Application
- Remote Worker Agreement

NIH REMOTE WORK APPLICATION

Applicant Name (*last, first*):

Status

- FT
 PT

Series/Grade

IC/Division/Office/Branch:

Duration of Request

- Short-term (less than 6 months)
 Long-Term (6 months or more)

Supervisor Signature:

Date:

- Approve
 Deny

To be Completed by Supervisor:

Please write explanation to support request and include why it is important to retain employee.

Division/Office Director Signature:

Date:

- Approve
 Deny

EMPLOYEE INFORMATION

(Completed by the Employee)

Dates / Duration of Remote Work Request

If a hardship request, please briefly describe hardship

(NOTE: additional documentation may be required)

Is this position considered mission critical?

- Yes
 No

Are you a Project Manager or Project Lead?

- Yes
 No

Can the position duties be done remotely?

- Yes
 No

Are you currently responsible for delivering in-person training or presentations?

- Yes
 No

Do you meet any IC/Office minimum PMAP criteria for eligibility?

- Yes
 No

Will return travel be required?

- Yes
 No

If yes, how often?

Will there be a time zone difference?

- Yes
 No

If yes, how will this be managed in conjunction with current hours of operation?

Please write explanation for the remote work request:

EMPLOYEE INFORMATION

(Completed by the Employee)

1a) How will you fulfill your daily responsibilities as a remote worker? How will you ensure milestones and accomplishments are being met as a remote worker?

1b) If you are a Project Manager or Project Lead: *How will you direct your team from a remote location? How will you track and assess the work of the individual team members?*

2) How will you remain engaged with the Division/Branch/Team as a remote worker?

3) How will you remain accountable for your work and ensure your Supervisor remains knowledge about your work activities?

EMPLOYEE INFORMATION

(Completed by the Employee)

Cost Comparison

Costs you may want to consider including space, equipment, technology, shipping, parking, etc.

Salary and Locality Pay	Current	Proposed
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Annual Travel Costs	Current	Proposed
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Other:	Current	Proposed
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Other:	Current	Proposed
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Other:	Current	Proposed
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
TOTAL:	Current	Proposed
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Training & Requirements

Active Telework Agreement	Date Completed	<input type="text"/>
<hr/>		
IT Security Awareness Training	Date Completed	<input type="text"/>
<hr/>		
Privacy Act Training	Date Completed	<input type="text"/>
<hr/>		
Other:	Date Completed	<input type="text"/>
<hr/>		
Other:	Date Completed	<input type="text"/>
<hr/>		

Employee Signature

Date

NIH REMOTE WORKER AGREEMENT

Employee Name:

Position Title:

Institute/Center/Office:

This Remote Worker Agreement is entered into between and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

- 1) Due to has requested to work remotely from and has requested a transfer of duty station from to .
- 2) has agreed to change official duty station to . The following provisions apply:
 - a. The employee understands that their official duty station will be officially changed to and they understand that they will not receive the locality pay.
 - b. The arrangement will start , ending .
 - c. **If Applicable:** Within 30 days, or by the start date above, agrees to provide a medical justification/documentation for why he/she is requesting this arrangement and supporting the need for such.
 - d. The employee will be responsible for any costs related to their personal relocation to . will not be responsible for any costs related to the personal relocation.
 - e. The employee is responsible for current and future based workload.
 - f. The employee will work with their Supervisor, and the Telework Coordinator to update their Telework agreement within 48 hours of signing this agreement, if applicable.
 - g. The employee will remain in contact with their supervisor, team members, peers, and customers. They will log onto the VPN during their work hours. They will also log into Microsoft Lync messenger and be responsive to all Microsoft Lync messages, emails and voicemails.
 - h. The employee's tour of duty will be .
 - i. The employee will be held to reasonable standards regarding work performance, roles and responsibilities, as outlined in their performance plan (PMAP).
 - j. The employee agrees to follow time and attendance procedures, including the requirement to seek advance approval from their supervisor to use sick leave or annual leave.

- k. In the event that any IT equipment is temporarily inoperable during duty hours and the employee is unable to communicate via email or Microsoft Lync messaging, the employee will notify their supervisor or their designee immediately. The employee and the supervisor are to reach an understanding of whether the employee has other work assignments that can be completed without relying on the equipment.
- l. List below any employee-specific circumstances (i.e. leadership development programs, travel, etc.):

- 3) This remote work arrangement/change in duty station will be reviewed on a regular basis. [redacted] retains the right to terminate the remote work arrangement/change in duty station at any time and for any reason. This does not preclude management from taking other appropriate action regarding any performance, conduct, or time and attendance issues. The following provisions apply:
- a. In the event that [redacted] terminates the remote work
 - b. arrangement /change in duty station, the employee will have 45 calendar days from the date they are notified to return to work at the [redacted]. During this 45-day period, they will be expected to request leave if they are not available for duty.
 - c. The employee will be responsible for any costs related to their personal relocation to [redacted]. [redacted] will not be responsible for any costs related to the personal relocation. This provision applies regardless of whether the employee's return to the [redacted] is voluntary or involuntary.
 - d. The employee's failure to return as directed may lead to disciplinary action, up to and including removal from the Federal service.

- e. **If 2c Utilized Above:** Should the arrangement/change in duty station be renewed, the employee understands that he/she will periodically need to affirm through medical documentation that they continue to need this arrangement with the duty station in [redacted] due to health-related reasons.
- 4) The employee fully understands the terms and conditions of this agreement and affirms that this agreement was voluntarily entered into at their request. The employee acknowledges that they have been notified of their right to seek counsel before signing this agreement and affirms that they have not been coerced in any manner and enters into this agreement fully and freely.

This agreement constitutes the entire agreement between the employee and [redacted] and there are no other representations or obligations except for those enumerated herein.

This agreement becomes effective on the date of the last signature below:

Signed: [redacted] Date: [redacted]
[Employee]

Signed: [redacted] Date: [redacted]
[Supervisor]

Signed: [redacted] Date: [redacted]
[Next level manager or Executive Officer]

For more information, please contact:

Workforce Relations Division (WRD),
Office of Human Resources (OHR),
National Institutes of Health (NIH)

WorkFlex@nih.gov