

Alternative Work Strategies (AWS) Survey Results

June 2022

Survey Highlights

- Responses reflect a **high satisfaction** with Alternative Work Strategies.
- At the same time, respondents desire **even more flexibility** and opportunities for remote work.
- Responses indicate a **high risk of attrition** in pursuit of more flexible work arrangements.
- Attrition risk is **even more pronounced** among younger employees, female-identifying employees under 40 years.
- Respondents report **greater satisfaction with their current work arrangement** the more days they spend remotely.
- Managers and employees report **increased levels of productivity and well-being** resulting from AWS.
- Employees have **adjusted to AWS norms** and expectations and are meeting requirements of their roles according to staff and managers.

Overview

Survey Background

- Staff survey was launched in May 2022 to assess the success of Alternative Work Strategies Policy and to help inform future decision about flexibility and remote work at Northwestern.
- 4,691 staff submitted a survey response for a 64% response rate, indicating high interest in the topic.
- 40% (1,888) of survey respondents shared an open-ended comment.
- Survey was administered by Institutional Research and analyzed by Office of Organizational Strategy & Change. All responses are strictly confidential.

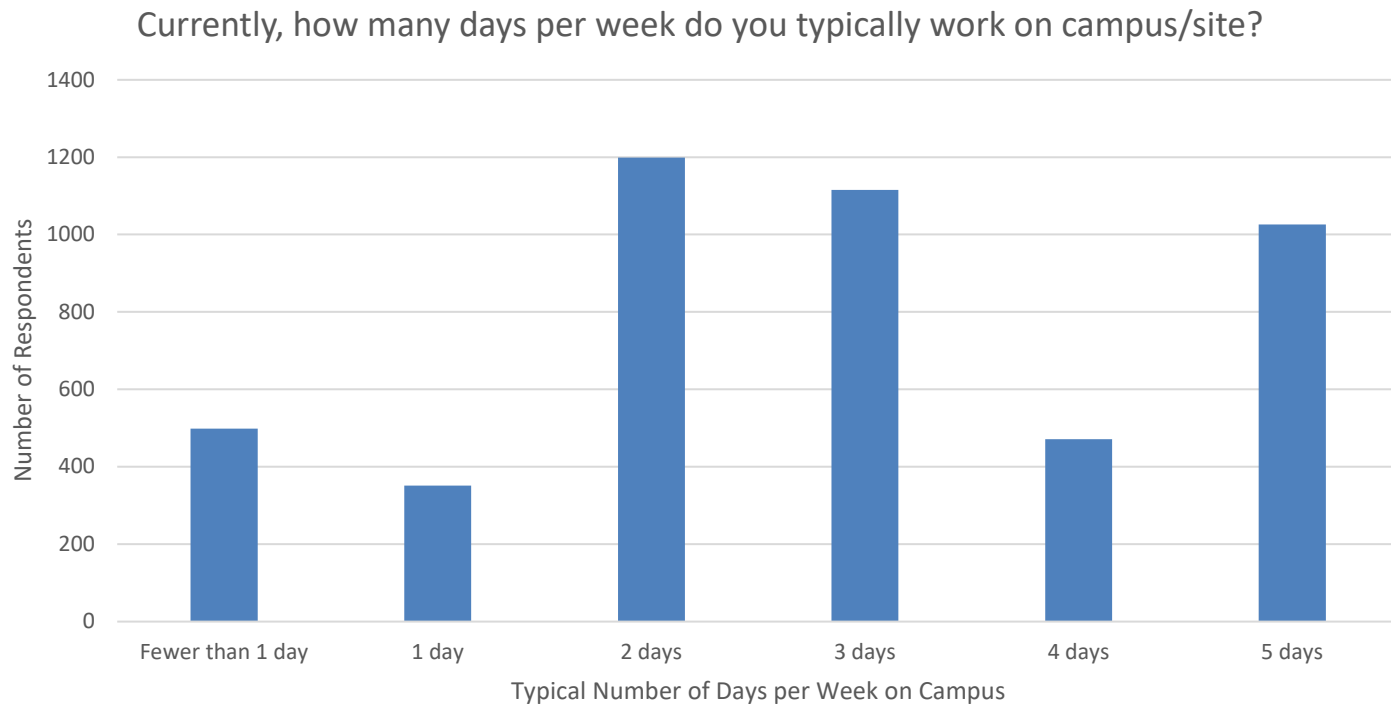
Alternative Work Strategy (AWS) Utilization

Nearly all staff report using at least one Alternative Work Strategy (AWS).

- 83% (n=3876) use remote work; 41% use flextime (n=1941). Job sharing, seasonal arrangements, part-time, and a compressed workweek were all utilized by less than 5% of the workforce.
- 12% (n=538) of respondents do not use AWS. Of those...
 - 61% (n=320) do not utilize it because their job responsibilities are incompatible with AWS
 - 16% (n=83) do not use it because their manager and/or local guidance does not permit them to use an AWS
 - 9% (n=47) do not use it because they are not interested

On-campus/On-site Presence

There is a wide range in the number of days a week individuals report typically working on campus.



AWS Implementation and Expectations

The process and expectations around AWS are working smoothly.

- 96% (n=3867) of respondents strongly or somewhat agree that their AWS enables them to **meet the expectations of their role**.
- 96% (n=3746) strongly or somewhat agree that they **know the days and/or times** that they are expected to be on campus.
- 95% (n=3814) strongly or somewhat agree that they know the **preferred or expected modality** of their meetings.
- 98% (n=3916) strongly or somewhat agree that they know when they are **expected to be available to respond** to requests when working remotely.
- 94% (n=3725) of staff strongly or somewhat agree that when working remotely, they **are able to minimize the barriers** of a virtual environment.
- 93% (n=1165) of **managers** feel they **have the resources necessary** to manage their team effectively across remote and in-person modalities.

AWS Benefits

Open-ended responses to the prompt, “Please share any other feedback” indicated benefits to employees.

- 20% commented that Alternative Work Strategies **increased their productivity**.
 - For example, “The ability to have a work environment that structures both remote and in-person work has significantly increased my productivity and has allowed me to further develop my role at the University.”
- 31% stated that AWS **benefited their work/life and well-being** dimensions such as decreasing commuting times and costs, providing eldercare/childcare flexibility, and improving morale.
 - For example, “The ability to work remotely has been a great benefit for my work/life balance as a working parent, allowing me to fulfill all of my work duties and work full days without commuting and still allowing me to conduct drop off/pick up for my kids school. I'm really grateful for this flexibility and it's one of the reasons I've been happy at my current job/increased my own job retention.”

AWS Benefits (cont.)

- 20% of respondents see AWS as an **effective retention and recruitment tool**, though many also voiced the **risk of decreasing flexibility**.
 - For example, “The AWS strategy is great, and incredibly important to my team. In an industry where there are little to no perks (raises, bonuses, staff appreciation, etc.) if the ability to work remotely at least two days per week is taken away, I am certain that my team would leave Northwestern.”
- Only 2% of respondents saw **neither reasons for nor benefits of having AWS** – some had an appetite for more in-person work.

AWS Satisfaction

Most respondents indicate high satisfaction with AWS.

- 81% (n=3681) of staff strongly or somewhat agree that they are **satisfied with their current working arrangement**.
- 92% (n=3700) of staff strongly or somewhat agree that their AWS gives them an **appropriate level of flexibility** in the workforce.
- 88% (n=3519) indicate that they strongly or somewhat agree that they are **satisfied with how their manager uses AWS**.
- 95% (n=1189) of managers strongly or somewhat agree that the availability of **AWS has been positive for their team**.

Open-ended responses corroborate the satisfaction.

- Over half of respondents reported a positive experience with AWS or expressed appreciation for it.
 - For example, “I honestly love this hybrid work schedule... I love the flexibility and it is the best work environment I have had in a very long time.”

Despite high indicators of satisfaction, other survey responses indicate a desire for greater flexibility and a risk of attrition to gain greater flexibility.

Flexibility and Attrition Risk

The desire for greater flexibility poses a significant attrition risk.

- 39% of staff strongly or somewhat agreed that they are **considering opportunities outside of Northwestern** to gain greater flexible and/or remote work options.
- **Managers** believe teams would **benefit from increased flexibility**
 - 80% (n=934) of managers strongly or somewhat agree that their **team's retention rate** would benefit if they had greater flexibility to allow remote work.
 - 83% (n=982) of managers strongly or somewhat agree that their **team's well-being** would benefit if they had greater flexibility to allow remote work.
 - 72% of managers strongly or somewhat agree that their **team's productivity** would benefit if they had greater flexibility to allow remote work

Flexibility and Attrition Risk

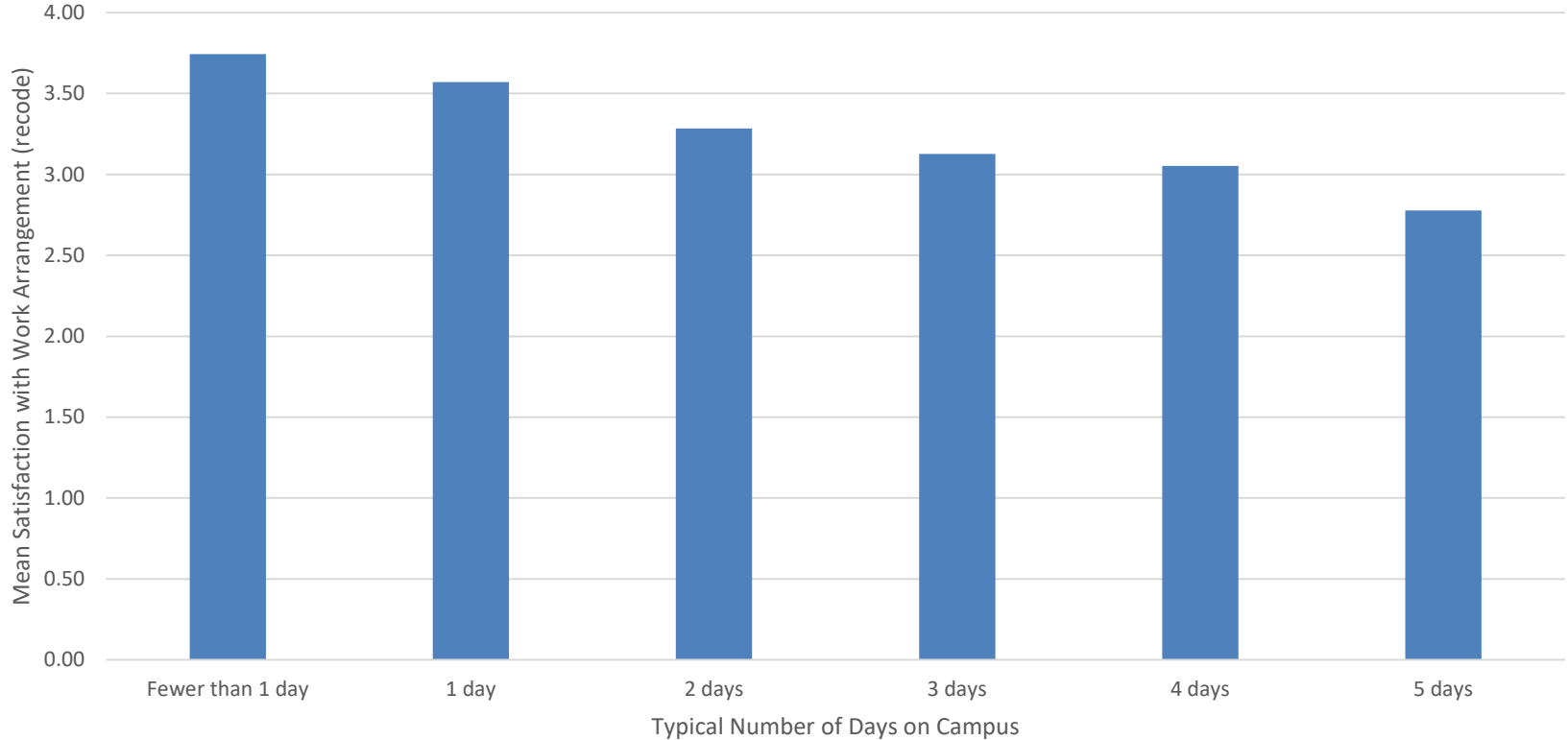
Open-ended responses also indicate a need for greater flexibility.

- 41% of responses expressed a **desire for more flexibility** and remote work
 - For example, ““We are required to follow the strict 3-day onsite rule when the work can actually be completed remotely without any issues. The strict guideline is in conflict with the current trend and put the recruitment and retention into a disadvantage to our office. Training and retaining a person takes significant resources. The loss in productivity and resources (translated into costs) are significant.”
- 16% believe Northwestern is currently **not offering enough flexibility to effectively retain and recruit** staff.
 - For example, “At this stage, AWS is not only necessary, but needs to have even more flexibility given the current health and economic climate.”

Satisfaction

Mean Satisfaction by Days on Campus

Satisfaction with Current Work Arrangement by Number of Days On Campus



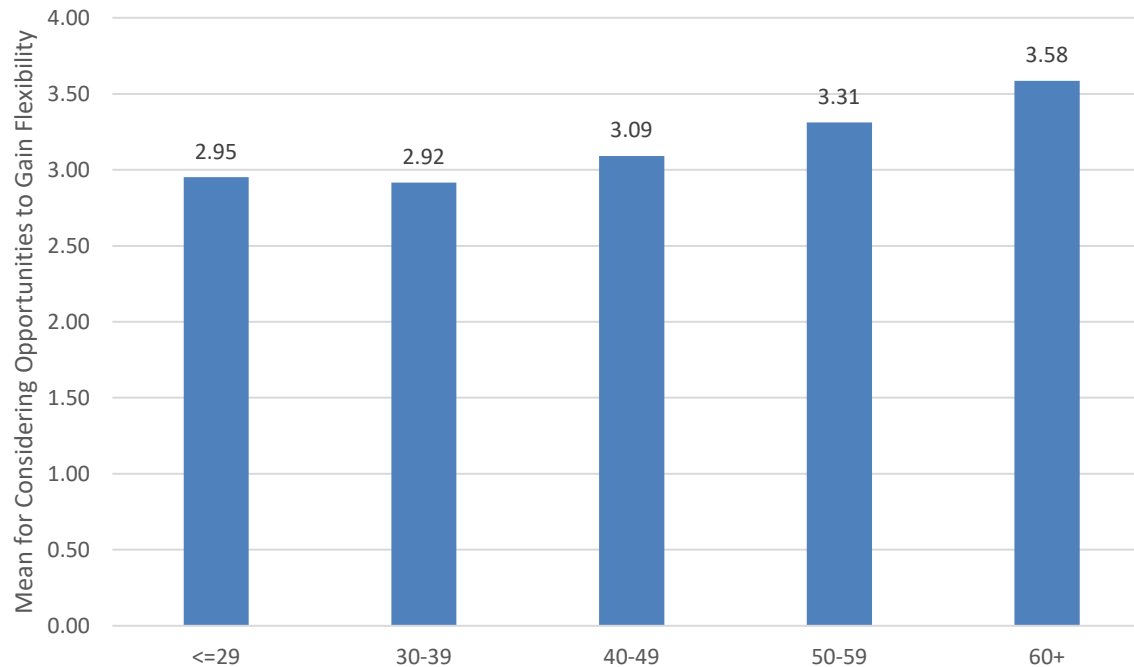
Legend for Interpreting Means					
I am satisfied with my current work arrangement (recoded)	5= Strongly Agree	4= Somewhat Agree	3= Neither Agree nor Disagree	2= Somewhat Disagree	1=Strongly Disagree

Flexibility and Attrition Risk

Mean Attrition Risk by Age

Age is significantly correlated with the likelihood to consider opportunities outside of Northwestern to gain greater flexible and/or remote work options.

Attrition Risk for Greater Flexibility by Decade



Legend for Interpreting Means

I am considering opportunities outside of Northwestern to gain greater flexible and/or remote work options.

1= Strongly Agree

2= Somewhat Agree

3= Neither Agree nor Disagree

4= Somewhat Disagree

5=Strongly Disagree

Mean Attrition Risk by Age and Gender

The attrition risk varies when broken down by specific demographic groups: *age and gender*.

- While gender was not correlated overall with attrition risk, younger women under 40 were somewhat more likely to agree that they are considering outside opportunities compared to younger men under 40 (2.89 vs 3.00 on a Likert scale of 5).
- The gender difference disappears for those over 40 (3.24 for both).

Methodology

Survey Methodology

- Launched via Qualtrics on May 5 to 7,385 Northwestern staff members. Invitation was signed by Lorraine Goffe (Vice President for Human Resources and Chief Human Resources Officer) and Kathleen Hagerty (Provost and Professor).
 - Qualtrics reminder emails were sent to those who did not submit a survey response on May 11 and 17. The survey closed on May 18.
 - The following groups were excluded from the survey: Non-benefit eligible staff (e.g., temporary staff, interns, contractors), salary continuations, leave of absence, and Qatar . Also excluded were all bargaining unit employees [L73 (custodians and library staff), L399 (engineers), NUPBPA (police officers) and L681 (laborers)].
- 4,691 (64%) submitted a survey response.
- Of the respondents, 1,888 (40%) provided a free response answer to the prompt: “Please share any other feedback.”
 - A random sample of 25% (470 responses) was extracted and analyzed through coding.