

POLICY ON ALTERNATIVE WORK STRATEGIES

Audience

The primary audience for this Policy is administrators and staff. The section titled “Work Based Outside of the State of Illinois” applies to all Northwestern employees (except Northwestern University-Qatar).

Owner

Office of Human Resources

Effective Date

This Policy goes into effect July 6, 2021.

Policy Statement

Northwestern University thrives by bringing together diverse staff, faculty, and students to engage in learning, scholarship, creative work, and the production of new knowledge. Historically, the institution has created and delivered value through the in-person interaction between students, researchers, faculty, and staff with their local and global communities. The results have been active collaboration, shared experiential learning and teaching, groundbreaking research and partnerships, animated discussions, long-lasting relationships, and more.

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic precipitated fundamental changes in the way we teach, learn, and collaborate with one other. Moreover, the extended period of virtual work has provided valuable insights into the potential benefits of thoughtful use of Alternative Work Strategies for our staff and for our institution. Northwestern recognizes that the implementation of Alternative Work Strategies supports a variety of goals related to staff engagement and well-being, recruitment and retention, sustainability, service excellence, cost efficiencies, space utilization, and the overall enhancement of the employment experience.

This Policy establishes a common, ongoing framework with shared definitions, within which school and unit leadership can implement various Alternative Work Strategies in accordance with their operational needs. To maintain the vibrancy that characterizes our campuses, the University expects that most employees will continue to work on designated campus locations for a majority of their workweek.

Subject to the terms of this Policy, Alternative Work Strategies may be implemented at the school or unit level. School/unit leadership is responsible for making determinations on acceptable modalities equitably and based on legitimate business and operational requirements. They are also responsible for submitting their plans for HR review and documenting individual arrangements with eligible staff. Strategies and arrangements can vary by school, unit, and position. Any arrangements instituted under this Policy are subject to revocation by the school or unit leadership at any time with or without prior notice. School/units are encouraged to consult with their HR Business Partners prior to revoking an Alternative Work Strategy. This Policy will be assessed regularly and refined as needed.

Eligibility

Alternative Work Strategies are typically initiated by school and/or unit leadership. Strategies may be deployed locally for defined increments of time to determine which modalities best suit the needs of the school/unit, while accounting for differences in job types, customer service demands, HR system

constraints, seasonal support needs, and—when possible—personal preferences. Some positions, including but not limited to non-exempt (i.e., hourly) positions, may be ineligible to participate in certain Alternative Work Strategies depending on the nature of the position, the work required, their incumbent’s state of residency, or the academic, business, and/or operational needs of the school or unit.

This Policy supersedes the Flexible Work Arrangements guidance. Practices enabled under Flexible Work Arrangements are provisioned through the Policy on Alternative Work Strategies going forward. An Alternative Work Strategy may be requested by the employee and must be approved by the employee’s supervisor and the school/unit leadership (or designee). The approval or denial of a request is based on business and operational needs. Participation in an Alternative Work Strategy may be terminated at any time by the supervisor or by the employee with the agreement of the supervisor. Both managers and employees can consult with the [Office of Well-being](#) to discuss Alternative Work Strategies.

This Policy does not apply to job positions covered by a collective bargaining agreement.

Definitions

The following definitions are established for the purpose of this Policy in effort to ensure consistent and standardized term use in University discussions and Policy administration.

Alternative Work Strategies is an umbrella term that encompasses all alternative approaches to traditionally-structured, in-person work in an employer-designated location within designated work hours or shifts. The adoption of Alternative Work Strategies will enable schools and units to consider different ways of utilizing physical workspaces, technology, and other tools to support how employees perform their work and interact with colleagues, students, and visitors.

There are several modalities of Alternative Work Strategies, including:

- **Remote Work (*Telecommuting*):** Work done from any approved location other than a traditional, employer-designated place of work (e.g., on campus) for a portion of work time.
- **In-person Work:** Work done on site, in the traditional employer-designated place of work (e.g., on campus).
- **Flextime:** A type of alternative schedule that gives an employee and their supervisor greater latitude in choosing their particular hours of work, or the ability to change work schedules from one week to the next depending on the employee's personal needs. Under a flextime arrangement, an employee might be required to work a standard number of core hours within a specified period but have the discretion to work the rest of their required hours at other points during their workday. For example, employees may be required to be present in the workplace from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and allowed to work the rest of their shift for the day outside of the core hours. Flextime does not alter the total number of work hours required in a workweek.
- **Compressed Workweek:** In a compressed workweek, employees work longer daily hours over fewer workdays. For example, instead of working five eight-hour days per week, employees might work four ten-hour days per week.
- **Part-time:** A work schedule of at least 18.75 but fewer than 37.5 hours per week is considered part-time and may have prorated vacation, holiday, and sick time. Employees who work fewer than 18.75 hours per week are not benefits eligible. Refer to [Section 2.2 of the Staff Handbook](#).

- **Job Sharing:** A work arrangement in which the responsibilities of one full-time position are shared by two employees. Job sharing differs from part-time work in that job share partners are expected to be interchangeable in work assignments and represent a single employee in all respects. The job-sharing participants each work a minimum of 18.75 hours a week and receive part-time benefits.
- **Seasonal Arrangements:** A work arrangement in which the employee uses a flexible work arrangement during a certain season such as during the summer or during breaks between academic terms.

Alternative Work Strategies Implementation Steps

1. All schools and units that adopt Alternative Work Strategies are required to submit their plans to the Office of Human Resources for review to ensure equitable decision-making.
2. School and unit leaders are expected to make decisions equitably without regard to employees' protected characteristics or activities. However, equitable decision-making does not guarantee identical results in every instance. All Alternative Work Strategies should be job appropriate, operationally viable, and legally compliant. Other factors (including but not limited to physical space or time-keeping system constraints) and employee performance may be considered in making decisions pertaining to individual requests or departmental availability of Alternative Work Strategies.
3. Schools and units should review and assess the Alternative Work Strategy(ies) regularly to ensure they are responsive to operational needs and adapt these strategies accordingly. Schools/units retain the discretionary authority to change Alternative Work Strategies (either temporarily or permanently) as needed, either for organizational needs, special work functions or activities, seasonal variations in work volume, or for performance-related reasons. Schools/unit leadership may also establish non-negotiable schedule parameters and core hours, based on business or community support needs.
4. Any Alternative Work Strategy proposed by a staff member that constitutes a request for an accommodation of a disability must be referred to the Office of Equity for appropriate handling consistent with the University's [Reasonable Accommodation Policy](#).
5. Staff and faculty who are not granted Alternative Work Strategies can seek review of the decisions by the Office of Human Resources via HRBP@northwestern.edu for staff and Office of the Provost via facultyrecords@northwestern.edu for faculty. Schools'/units' decisions to exclude specific positions/roles from participating in Alternative Work Strategies are subject to the application of Northwestern's policies against discrimination and retaliation.
6. At no time will Alternative Work Strategies be considered an entitlement of employment at the University.

Expectations for Leadership Communications in Schools and Units

School and unit leadership are encouraged to have open dialogues with staff regarding the implementation of Alternative Work Strategies into their environments as part of their business and talent strategies. Schools/units should consider Alternative Work Strategies that are job appropriate, operationally viable, and legally compliant. For example, a position that requires the employee to be on-site regularly may not allow for remote work. Other Alternative Work Strategies, however, might be effectively utilized for staff not eligible for remote work (e.g., flextime, a compressed workweek, etc.).

All staff participating in Alternative Work Strategies are subject to the same performance standards and expectations for their position that were in place prior to the school's/unit's adoption of such Strategies. Managers should clearly communicate and document expectations for work assignments, check-ins, and any other parameters related to supporting the utilization of an Alternative Work Strategy. Typical discussion topics should include:

- Frequency and type(s) of required in-person meetings
- Frequency of "check-in" meetings with immediate supervisor
- Responsiveness expectations (e.g., via email, telephone, Microsoft Teams, and other communication platforms)
- Other communication expectations with team members, internal stakeholders, external contacts, etc.
- Availability and hours expectations
- Core hours during which all or most employees are required to be in person
- Areas of focus during remote work
- Confirmation that the Alternative Work Strategy is subject to change

Work Based Outside of the State of Illinois (Not applicable to Northwestern University-Qatar)

Schools and units must contact and obtain approval from the Office of Human Resources prior to extending an employment offer to or authorizing an Alternative Work Strategy for an individual whose assigned workplace is outside of the State of Illinois for any work commencing in calendar year 2021 and continuing beyond July 6, 2021 (the effective date of this Policy), including faculty, staff, and students. The Office of Human Resources—for staff and student workers—and the respective Dean's Office—for faculty—will consider the feasibility of out-of-state employment arrangements according to the following criteria:

- Market-based competition for/access to talent
- Unique or niche skills, not otherwise readily available in the local market
- Degree to which the work requires in-person interaction with other members of the Northwestern community
- Whether the individual is able to perform the responsibilities of the role remotely
- Other business-critical circumstances or academic needs

The school leadership or hiring manager must notify the respective HR Business Partner at HRBP@northwestern.edu and receive approval before a candidate is offered an opportunity to work regularly or temporarily outside of the State of Illinois to ensure the University and employees' compliance with tax laws and regulations.

It is the employee's responsibility to be aware of local tax implications of working outside of the State of Illinois. In addition, any active employee who moves to a location outside of Illinois must notify HRBP@northwestern.edu in advance of the move. **A change in myHR does NOT constitute notice and does not automatically result in the correct payroll tax deductions.** Generally, the Office of Human Resources will not make retroactive corrections to an individual's tax records unless there is evidence of prior approval by the individual's school or unit leadership and evidence of notice to HRBP@northwestern.edu.

Health and Safety Hazards

Employees are responsible for maintaining remote work areas in a manner free from health or safety hazards that could endanger themselves or others. If an injury to an employee occurs at their remote worksite, the employee is responsible for notifying their manager of the injury in accordance with the [University's Workers' Compensation Policy](#). The University reserves the right to inspect employee's remote work areas for security, health, and safety purposes.

Appropriate Workspace

An employee is responsible for maintaining a clean and safe workspace.

An employee may not hold in-person work meetings in a private residence.

To better utilize limited workspace on campus, schools, and units are encouraged to consider how to leverage existing office space as a result of staff working a remote schedule. Staff working a significant portion of their week remotely on a regular basis may have their assigned workspace impacted.

Schedules and Timekeeping

The overtime and record-keeping requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) do not apply to exempt employees. Exempt staff members need to discuss specific scheduling arrangements with their supervisors and obtain their supervisor's approval of such arrangements in advance.

In contrast, staff members who are in non-exempt (i.e., hourly) positions are eligible for overtime and must conform to record-keeping and meal break requirements of the FLSA and applicable state laws. While Alternative Work Strategies are permissible for non-exempt staff, supervisors or their school/unit must consult with the Office of Human Resources prior to approving Alternative Work Strategies for non-exempt staff. Further, they must ensure that the HR timekeeping system can accurately record hours worked and that the staff member has sought and obtained their prior written approval to work in excess of 40 hours in any workweek. Overtime will be compensated as required by law, but failure to obtain written approval for overtime work may lead to disciplinary action. An Alternative Work Strategy for a non-exempt employee should not result in overtime work.

Paid Time Away from Work

A non-exempt (i.e., hourly) staff member who has an Alternative Work Strategy and is granted paid leave time, such as vacation or Incidental Sick Time, must record their time off in the same amount as the number of hours scheduled to work on the day(s) off. For example, if a staff member uses vacation on a day with 10 scheduled work hours, they must record their use of 10 hours of vacation for that day. This method of using paid leave time applies to all paid leave time as specified in [Section 6 \(Paid Time Away from Work\) of the Staff Handbook](#), except for holidays.

An exempt staff member who has an Alternative Work Strategy must adhere to the principles of recording time in appropriate increments. (Refer to [Section 8.3 of the Staff Handbook](#) for further details.)

Holidays

For a full-time employee, the typical hour value of a holiday is seven and a half or eight hours, depending on the position at issue. For part-time employees, the holiday hour value is calculated by dividing the employee's standard hours per workweek by five days. For example, Employee A's standard hours per week are 24 hours, and 24 divided by 5 (i.e., a standard workweek) equals 4.8 holiday hours.

If a holiday falls on a day that an employee is scheduled to work more hours than the value of the holiday, in order to receive full pay for the day, the employee will need to use accrued vacation time to cover the difference. Alternatively, with manager approval, the employee may work additional hours during the week in which the holiday occurs to offset the holiday-related shortfall.

Equipment

The University will maintain, service, and repair University-owned equipment.

Remote work employees who are required to purchase certain equipment or services to perform their job shall be reimbursed for such expenses, provided that they are incurred and that reimbursement is sought in a manner consistent with the University's reimbursement policies and practices. Employees who procure discretionary equipment or services to perform their job may not be reimbursed for such expenses. The school/unit will not be responsible for operating costs, home maintenance, property or liability insurance, or other incidental expenses associated with remote work employees' use of their personal residences or other remote work locations to perform work. Unless otherwise required by law or agreed to in writing prior to any loss, damage, or wear, the University does not assume liability for loss, damage, or wear of employee-owned equipment.

Schools and units will generally not purchase duplicate office furniture (e.g., desk, chair, file cabinets, etc.) or computing equipment for home offices. Exceptions will be made at the discretion of the school/unit.

Travel

An employee who elects to reside in a state or country other than the location of their Northwestern home department and is authorized to work remotely is responsible for expenses for any travel required for in-person meetings and events at the location of their home unit, whether it be Evanston, Chicago, Washington D.C., San Francisco, or New York. For example, if an employee living and working in Texas is required to be in the State of Illinois for in-person quarterly meetings, those travel expenses are the responsibility of the employee. Exceptions will be made at the discretion of the school/unit.

Security and Confidentiality

Access to the University's network by any equipment or means is at all times subject to the provisions of the policies on [Use of Computers, Systems, and Networks](#).

Employees must protect University information from unauthorized access, disclosure, or damage and comply with federal, state, and University rules, policies, and procedures regarding access, disclosure, and/or destruction of official University records. Under a remote work arrangement, the employee is responsible for ensuring that all forms of information (e.g., paper, electronic, conversations) are kept secure and confidential to at least the same degree as when the employee was/is working at a traditional University worksite. While working under any modality of Alternative Work Strategies, employees must follow University-approved security procedures in order to ensure confidentiality and security of data.

Property Insurance

University insurance will not cover any personal property that is used at home and will only cover University equipment brought to an authorized off-site location. For more information contact the [Office of Risk Management](#).