



TELEWORK POLICY

PURPOSE:

Harris County recognizes that there are certain advantages to both the County and its employees if some employees are authorized to work at locations outside County facilities. Harris County supports teleworking as an alternative work arrangement and allows Department Heads to implement telework arrangements, where appropriate, for eligible employees.

The purpose of this policy is to promote telework as a means of achieving solutions to administrative efficiencies, reducing traffic congestion, addressing pandemics/epidemics, improving environmental quality, creating an atmosphere for employees to increase productivity and job satisfaction, and sustaining the hiring and retention of a highly qualified workforce by enhancing work/life integration.

DEFINITIONS:

“Telework” means to perform County work functions at locations away from offices in County facilities at the discretion of the Department Head.

“Telework schedule” is the days and hours agreed upon by the Department Head and employee about when the employee may telework.

“Telework site” is the location away from the offices in County facilities where an employee has been authorized to Telework. The telework site should be the employee’s home unless the employee’s Department Head approves for the employee to work from an alternative telework site.

GENERAL:

County departments may implement telework arrangements, where appropriate, for eligible employees in recognition of the positive personal and management impacts of such arrangements, including reduced commuter stress and traffic congestion, and increased workplace flexibility. Teleworking can both serve the needs of Harris County government and its clients.

Telework affords some employees a flexible work option when both the employee and the work to be performed are suited to such an arrangement. Telework is not appropriate for all employees.

All departments will incur the cost for any expenses they approve for telework. Expenses for telework require the approval of the Department Head. The Department Head may delegate the authority to approve minimal telework expenses and should set spending limits accordingly.

No employee is entitled to, or guaranteed the opportunity to, telework. Offering the opportunity to telework is a management option, based on the discretion of the employee's immediate supervisor and Department Head. Department Heads have a right to refuse to make telework available and to terminate a telework arrangement at any time.

Departments should consider [ADA requirements](#) when reviewing telework requests.

TERMS OF TELEWORK PARTICIPATION:

Teleworkers are expected to meet all the responsibilities, perform all the duties, and comply with all the policies that apply to any worker in a similar role, regardless of the location.

Employees may telework when they:

- Meet all eligibility requirements listed below and throughout this policy.
- Hold jobs that are suitable to be performed away from a County office. Teleworkers must have a portion of their workload that can be performed away from the office without diminishing the quality of customer service or the overall productivity of the department. Employees whose job tasks are restricted by location will not be approved to telework.
- Have written approval of their manager/supervisor and Department Head to telework.
- Have reviewed and signed the [Telework Policy Acknowledgement form](#).
- Can maintain adequate performance levels.
- Maintain a designated telework site that allows them to perform all job requirements. This designated workspace should be ergonomically sound, safe and provide a good work environment.
- Have internet connectivity at the telework site with sufficient speeds to conduct their required work.

Teleworkers understand that:

- The telework work site must be pre-approved by their department. Employees may not temporarily work remotely from outside the greater Houston area unless agreed upon by their Department Head.

- They are accountable for their time and are expected to be regularly accessible and available to their supervisors and coworkers during their telework schedule using routine electronic means, including telephone, email, Microsoft Teams, and Skype.
- They need to follow their department's call-in and leave request procedures. Personal leave time must be arranged in the same manner as employees working at a County worksite. Teleworkers who are unable to work due to illness, must use sick leave or other paid leave and report their absence to their department as soon as practicable.
- They must keep accurate records of their work time and work performed in the manner required by their department, including maintaining accurate work logs.
- They should be available to attend in-person meetings or report to a County office when requested. Teleworkers understand that they may be called to work in a County office on their regular telework schedule to meet department needs.
- Telework does not change compensation, benefits, vacation, or other paid leave.
- Telework does not alter requirements to comply with an employee's duties and responsibilities and County and department policies.
- Telework creates no additional overtime or compensatory time requirements. All overtime and compensatory time should be approved by management before being accrued.
- Violation of the "Telework Policy" may lead to disciplinary actions up to and including termination of the teleworker's employment with Harris County.

TELEWORK ELIGIBILITY:

Department Heads should review the following areas when considering the suitability of a telework agreement:

- **Employee suitability.** The employee and supervisor will assess the needs and work habits of the employee, compared to qualities customarily recognized as appropriate for successful telecommuters. Characteristics of the employee will include a demonstrated conscientiousness about work time and productivity, self-motivation and ability to work well alone, as well as ability to communicate effectively with supervisors, co-workers, support staff and clients.
- **Job responsibilities.** The employee and supervisor will discuss the job responsibilities and determine if the job is appropriate for a telework arrangement. An employee's work must be of a nature that in-person interaction with internal or external customers or project workgroups is minimal and the employee's tasks can be performed successfully away from the office.
- **Equipment needs, workspace design considerations and scheduling issues.** The employee and supervisor will review the physical workspace needs and the appropriate location for the telework. The need for specialized material or equipment

in order to telecommute should be minimal. Employees interested in telecommuting must already have a safe and ergonomic home office environment, the primary materials and equipment needed at their home in order to telecommute and be able to operate a computer or other equipment independently, to the degree that they will be able to work remotely.

PROCEDURES:

Unless the department has already authorized or required an employee to telework, an employee wishing to request telework shall submit a [written request](#) to their immediate supervisor. A telework arrangement must be agreed upon by the employee's immediate supervisor and the Department Head and reduced to writing. Any changes to the written arrangement must also be documented in writing and approved by the employee's immediate supervisor and the Department Head.

Immediate supervisors should consult with their information and technology representatives and Universal Services in advance if an employee requires remote access or technology support in order to telework.

After an employee begins a telework arrangement, supervisors should conduct periodic reviews with the employee to evaluate the success of the arrangement. Reviews should be done at least once a year.

The employee shall participate in any County evaluation of telework.

The employee shall participate in any County-sponsored telework and/or technology training as requested by the employee's supervisor or Department Head.

All teleworkers must accurately report time worked in accordance with the Harris County Personnel Policies & Procedures and obtain authorization by the employee's supervisor or Department Head prior to working any hours beyond their normal work schedule.

In order to utilize sick leave on a telework workday, employees must contact their immediate supervisor as early as possible.

Teleworking employees shall not hold in-person business meetings with internal or external clients, customers or colleagues at their telework site.

Employees shall not conduct any unauthorized external (non-County) work during their telework work schedule.

WORKSPACE

Employees who telework must provide a designated work area in the approved telework site that provides a safe remote workspace free of hazards and other dangers and allows them

to perform all job requirements. Employees should periodically complete a [Safety Checklist](#) to ensure their telework site meets their department's safety requirements.

The employee will be responsible for all costs associated with providing a space to telework and for providing furniture and other equipment for the space used for teleworking. Office furniture will not be provided to employees who telework.

The designated work area should provide:

- Adequate noise control to ensure clear telephone and video conference calls to colleagues and constituents.
- Adequate privacy provisions, including, where appropriate, locking doors and windows to ensure that family or house members do not have access to confidential materials.
- Freedom from distractions and interruptions that might affect workplace performance.

Employees are responsible for avoiding work that is not normally part of the job when working at the alternative workplace, such as heavy lifting, and for taking normal precautions to avoid accidents. Employees are required to report any and all injuries or hazards that are directly related to the immediate work area and incurred when performing work for the County.

SUPPLIES: General office supplies (such as paper and pens) will be provided by the telework employee's department and should be obtained by the employee at the department's worksite. Out-of-pocket expenses for supplies normally available at the department's worksite will not be reimbursed.

HARDWARE, SOFTWARE AND DATA

Employees who telework are subject to the same internal County policies regarding the use of County provided equipment (hardware and software) and services as that of employees working at a County worksite. Employees shall not allow anyone, except authorized County employees, to use County-provided equipment (including hardware and software) and services.

Employees must keep County-owned property safe and avoid any misuse.

Specifically, employees must:

- Keep their equipment password protected.
- Store equipment in a safe and clean space when not in use.
- Follow all data encryption, protection standards and settings.
- Log out of any County applications and services when not in use.
- Disconnect from County remote access services when not working.
- Lock their workstation using CLT+ALT+DELETE when away from their computer. ● Refrain from downloading suspicious, unauthorized or illegal software.

Please note certain remote access solutions will require the employee to enroll in multi-factor authentication to be granted access to the service. In addition, it is highly recommended that all teleworkers enroll in Harris County Password Manager to facilitate password changes while working remotely.

HARDWARE: All property owned by Harris County and assigned to a teleworker may not be used for personal purposes and must be returned to the employee's department when the employee ceases to telework. The employee must complete and sign a [department inventory list](#) of all County-owned property provided to the employee for telework purposes. All inventory forms signed by employees should be placed in the employee's files. Upon termination of the telework assignment or employment, all County-owned property must be returned immediately, unless other arrangements have been made.

It is strongly advised that County employees who telework use County computer equipment to conduct County business. Only County-owned laptops and desktops are allowed to connect directly to the County network via the County's remote access VPN services that allow full access to resources on the County network.

Employees whose job functions require only limited access to County IT resources may use their own personal computer equipment to telework if they follow the County's cybersecurity requirements for using personal computer equipment to access County resources and if the use is approved by their Department Head and documented in their telework agreement. Limited access scenarios include employees who only need access to internet facing websites, cloud services, Microsoft Office desktop applications and/or a defined set of internal business applications that can be delivered through a virtual desktop service, a secure mobile device and/or mobile application service or an externally accessible website. Employees using personal computers and devices must only access County resources through secured remote access services prescribed for limited access use cases and must not be allowed to connect directly to the County network via a full access service such as VPN. In addition, they must ensure that their computer system is kept up to date with the most current security updates and patches and that an antivirus software is installed, enabled and kept up to date with the most recent security updates.

Employees who use their own personal computer equipment must not download and/or store any County information on their personal computer or device. Employees must only store County information in the network storage containers and online file repositories provided by and managed by the County. In the case that County information is stored on an employee's personal computer, that computer may be subject to public disclosure requirements (see Public Information Act). Personal computer equipment should not be used to connect to any Harris County network (wired or wireless) other than guest wireless when within a Harris County facility.

Employees are responsible for maintaining and repairing their personally-owned equipment. Harris County cannot assume any obligation for damage or loss to personal property. Teleworkers must protect against damage to County property. Surge protectors are required to be used with County-owned computers. If not used, the employee may be responsible for any damage caused.

SOFTWARE: Employees must follow the current software policies of the Universal Services Department. Employee-owned software must not be used for teleworking, except for antivirus and/or other security software that must be installed on personally-owned computers to allow access to County resources. When an employee is using a personal computing device, County business must only be conducted within the secure applications, digital containers and workspaces provided by the County and must not be conducted directly on the personal device using personal software. Employees must only use County provided software and services to conduct County business.

In addition, employees must help ensure that the computer operating system and applications provided by the County are patched and maintained. On County-owned and provided equipment, employees must not do anything to disable or disrupt the installation of security patches and system updates that are required to maintain the health of their system.

Employees should consult with their department's IT support staff to ensure that their security software conforms to the County's software policies. Generally, the County will not provide or reimburse employees for software that is commercially available for installment on an employee's personal computer. However, the Department Head has the discretion to purchase or reimburse employees for software that is installed on personally-owned equipment to address a legitimate business need approved in advance by the Department Head.

ACCESS: The County will not purchase or reimburse employees for the cost of an internet service provider or internet use. If the County's remote access system includes internet access or other dial-in services, the employee may only use the County provided internet access or other dial-in services in a manner consistent with that of employees working at a County worksite.

Teleworkers must be available by phone during their telework hours. Unless the County provides a County-issued phone, telework employees will be required to use their personal mobile or home phone.

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION: As a general rule, confidential and/or proprietary information may not leave County premises. If it is necessary for data to be downloaded or transported to be used off-site, employees must obtain approval of their supervisor and inform them of the methods being used to safeguard the information. Employees must maintain the confidentiality of County information and documents, prevent unauthorized access to any County system or information, and dispose of work-related documents in a manner that will not jeopardize the interests of the County. Failure to use due care in safeguarding confidential and/or proprietary information in all phases of possession (transportation, use, storage, and disposal) may be considered a performance matter that could end the telework agreement and subject the employee to disciplinary action.

PUBLIC INFORMATION ACT REQUESTS AND RECORDS RETENTION: Records that may be created at, sent to, or sent from the telework site may be subject to disclosure in response to a public information records request. Employees must use County provided digital repositories and services to store, process, and transmit County data and not use

personal software, services or their computer's hard drive. The fact that the record resides on an employee's personal computer does not affect its status as a public record. An employee who teleworks must maintain all records on the telework site computer consistent with the County's records retention policies.

SAFETY/WORKERS COMPENSATION:

Employees who telework may be covered by workers' compensation for job-related injuries occurring at their telework site during their defined telework schedule. The employee is responsible for maintaining a safe and ergonomic working environment, including the work area, bathroom, and other areas that may be necessary for working during the telecommuting arrangement. Workers' compensation will not apply to non-job-related injuries that occur in the telework site. The employee also remains responsible for injuries to third parties and/or members of the employee's family at their telework site. Harris County will not be responsible for injuries to third parties or members of the employee's family that occur on the employee's telework site.

In the event of a job-related incident, accident or injury during telework hours, the employee shall report the incident to their supervisor as soon as possible. Department Heads should follow established procedures to report and investigate workplace incidents, accidents or injuries.

Teleworkers must allow the County to inspect the telework site during normal working times for safety compliance with this policy to prevent accidents and when a job-related incident, accident or injury has occurred.

RECRUITMENT:

To assist with recruiting efforts, Department Heads should refer to the County's Telework Policy and include a link to the policy in job postings and job descriptions for positions that have been determined suitable for telework.

AD HOC ARRANGEMENTS:

Temporary telework arrangements may be approved for circumstances such as inclement weather, special projects or business travel. These arrangements are approved on an as-needed basis only, with no expectation of ongoing continuance.

Other informal, short-term arrangements may be made for employees on family or medical leave to the extent practical for the employee and the organization and with the consent of the employee's health care provider, if appropriate.

All informal telework arrangements are made on a case-by-case basis, focusing first on the business needs of the department.



Telework Acknowledgment Form

I hereby acknowledge that I have received and read the Telework Policy. I understand the contents and agree to abide by all requirements of the policy as stated. I recognize the policy may be changed, amended or supplemented at any time, with or without notice, and that such changes will supersede this policy.

Date: _____

Employee Name: _____

Employee Signature: _____

Manager's Name: _____