

Guide to Managing Employees Remotely

Prepared by the Division of State Human Resources

This information is designed to help agencies and their managers navigate telework questions related to novel coronavirus (COVID-19). We hope this resource helps you make sound decisions in the workplace.

***Please note:** We will adjust these guidelines as we learn more about the spread and impacts of the virus and adjust business operations.*

Governor Henry McMaster signed an Executive Order directing all nonessential state employees to not physically report to work and urging social distancing to slow the spread of COVID-19. **State agencies should shift to telecommuting operations to the maximum extent possible.** Telecommuting is no longer just an option to offer, it is a necessary mode of work to help slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus. If an employee can telecommute, **they should be telecommuting** unless their presence in the office is essential, mission critical or necessary to the continuity of state government operations. Effective telecommuting strategies will help keep our employees safe while they continue providing important services to the citizens of South Carolina.

Please remember that telecommuting should be defined broadly to include work from home options that can be done without access to a computer or work phone.

Implement Immediately

We must all be vigorous in our efforts to continue serving the residents of our state. Develop a plan today for how you can support your staff while they telecommute. **Do not delay – take steps to enable all staff who are able to telecommute immediately.**

Set Expectations for Availability and Flexibility

Telecommuting employees should strive to be available as they would during normal work hours. Acknowledge that this goal may be affected by circumstances such as school closures. Parents and other employees adjusting to telework may not be as responsive as normal, so it is important to allow reasonable flexibility and recognize the real challenges our employees are facing during this difficult time.

Many agencies have policies that prohibit children from being present while an employee is telecommuting. **Agencies should temporarily waive policy requirements for alternate child care arrangements for telecommuting employees.** Employees may still be required to take leave if child care prevents them from working. Agencies should offer reasonable scheduling flexibility so parents and guardians can provide necessary care.

The South Carolina Department of Administration recommends developing temporary telecommuting guidelines specific to the COVID-19 response and having each employee acknowledge receipt of the guidelines via email to their supervisor. For sample guidelines, please visit <https://admin.sc.gov/COVID19/HR/PoliciesGuidelines>.

Promote Connection:

Encourage all employees who have an agency-issued mobile phone to forward their desk phone to the mobile phone. Advise employees to ensure their agency-issued mobile phone number is in their signature block or out of office message. If an employee does not have an agency-issued mobile device, ensure they know how to check messages remotely.

Advise all employees to keep their calendar updated frequently while they are commuting and to share their calendar with their supervisor if they have not already done so.

Schedule Regular Meetings

This is the first time many of our employees are consistently working from home. There will be experience gaps as we navigate this new terrain. Staying connected with your team is critical.

In order to promote connection and monitor employee morale, agency staff should transition meetings to teleconferences or remote conference formats to the extent possible. This is one of the many tasks that can be done remotely.

It is recommended that supervisors hold daily calls with their staff to monitor workload, give assignments and engage with their employees. Document the daily meetings.

Accountability is Critical

Clear and consistent performance management principles should guide managers as they work with employees who are working remotely. The focus should be on the final product, not on the process used to develop it.

Leaders and managers must hold staff accountable for performance, not their presence.

Consider that performance may look different right now. Assigned work may need to shift more to training and professional development rather than normal tasks. Professional development and training are still work.

Require regular check-ins by employees, and we strongly encourage the use of a daily task tracking document to monitor employees work. For examples of tracking task logs, please visit <https://admin.sc.gov/COVID19/HR/ManagingEmployees>.