

# TELECOMMUTING GUIDEBOOK

This manual provides guidance on navigating telecommuting at the University of South Carolina.



**Human Resources**  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

## **DISCLAIMER**

The language used in this document does not create an employment contract between the employee and the University of South Carolina. The University reserves the right to revise the content of this document, in whole or in part. No promises or assurances, whether written or oral, which are contrary to or inconsistent with the terms of this paragraph create any contract of employment.

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## **BACKGROUND**

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic which began in 2019, many employers, including the University of South Carolina (USC), transitioned employees to remote work. Virtual meetings and classes through collaboration tools like Microsoft Teams and Zoom became standard practice. In 2021, the University implemented a revised Telecommuting Policy in response to the pandemic and updated guidelines for state government and higher education employees. This policy aimed to recognize the benefits of remote work arrangements, enhancing productivity and providing workplace flexibility for both the University and its employees. Post-pandemic, many employees expressed concerns about their health and safety, preferring to continue working remotely or in a hybrid model. Our approach aligned with the practices of other institutions in South Carolina and many private sector employers.

With a greater emphasis on a vibrant and healthy campus culture that supports our students and our customers, the University of South Carolina has transitioned back to in-person work on campus. The overall goal of returning to campus is to strengthen our community, enhance communication and provide the best possible support to our students, which is essential to our mission.

## **RETURN TO CAMPUS PLAN**

The University of South Carolina will require employees to return to campus beginning July 1, 2025. This ensures we provide the highest level of support and engagement for our students, faculty, and staff. Being physically present also enhances collaboration, communication and the overall sense of greater campus community.

## **SCOPE**

This Guidebook is written to reflect the new guidelines for the University of South Carolina – Columbia Campus and applies to all full-time and part-time faculty, staff and administrators in FTE, Research Grant, Time-Limited and temporary positions.

## TELECOMMUTING CONDITIONS

The expectation is that USC faculty and staff will perform work onsite. However, we recognize that there may be certain situations where remote work (hybrid or fully remote) may still need to occur. Remote work should not be the standard practice and a completed [Telecommuting Justification Form](#) will be required for consideration. Telecommuting requests must adhere to one or more of the following conditions (unless otherwise noted):

1. The position requires the faculty or staff member to work remotely or hybrid (i.e. regional admissions recruiters or when grants designate specific geographic restrictions). No additional justification required;
2. The employee has a unique or specific skillset that cannot be replaced through recruiting in the South Carolina workforce if vacated;
3. Adjunct faculty who teaches a uniquely specialized subject matter that is considered difficult to replace and/or recruit if vacated;
4. Position that does not directly interact with students, faculty, staff, or constituents. The position is considered a critical role for the area and the employee has demonstrated they can maintain productivity while working remotely and/or has attributes to work independently and productively; or
5. Faculty and staff who are engaged only in online degree programs (e.g., Palmetto College on-line programs or Master's degree programs offered exclusively online). No additional justification required.

If a faculty or staff member does not meet the specified conditions for remote work, exceptions will be considered by using the same [Telecommuting Justification Form](#) and process.

In addition to the above conditions, staff must have at least one year of employment with the University and possess the necessary skills and experience to perform their role remotely, without direct support. However, leadership retains the discretion in enforcing this requirement and may evaluate exceptions on a case-by-case basis.

## **FACULTY JUSTIFICATION PROCESS**

If the faculty member does not meet the Telecommuting Conditions number 1 or 5 above, but leadership would still like to consider their faculty member to telecommute, there is a formal process to consider their request:

1. A [Telecommuting Justification Form](#) must be completed. The form must be reviewed and signed by the Dean.
2. The [Telecommuting Justification Form](#) must be submitted to the Provost via email to [PROVWORK@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:PROVWORK@mailbox.sc.edu).
3. Based on a review by the Provost, a decision will be made to grant or deny the telecommuting request.
4. Telecommuting decisions are final and there is no appeal process.

## **STAFF JUSTIFICATION PROCESS**

If the staff member does not meet the Telecommuting Conditions number 1 or 5 above, but leadership would like to consider their staff member to telecommute, there is a formal process to consider their request:

1. A [Telecommuting Justification Form](#) must be completed. The form must be reviewed and signed by the Division Vice President or Division Leader.
2. The [Telecommuting Justification Form](#) must be submitted to Human Resources by email to [Telecommute@sc.edu](mailto:Telecommute@sc.edu).
3. Based on a review by the Vice President of Human Resources (HRVP) and/or designated Human Resources staff, a decision will be made to grant or deny the telecommuting request.

Telecommuting decisions are final and there is no appeal process.

**Note:** While no Telecommuting Justification Form is needed for Telecommuting Conditions #1 or #5, in order for Staff to receive the HCM Peoplesoft Tile for the Telecommuting Agreement, you will need to notify [Telecommute@sc.edu](mailto:Telecommute@sc.edu) with the Employee Name and USC ID.

### **IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS FOR FACULTY AND STAFF:**

1. Eligibility for telecommuting is based on specific conditions; however, meeting one or more of these conditions does not guarantee approval. Final decisions regarding telecommuting requests are made by College/Division leadership before HRVP review, ensuring alignment with university priorities and operational needs.
2. These conditions do not apply to ADA accommodations or emergency remote work due to extreme bad weather, natural disaster, pandemic health crisis or other contingencies.

## CORE GUIDELINES

- All offices must be open during their core business hours. For administrative offices, the core hours are Monday-Friday from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm.
- Departments must be fully functional during core business hours, ensuring all functions and services are readily available to any customer who visits the office in person.
- All employees in student, faculty, staff, or constituent-facing positions require an on-campus presence (unless they have an approved justification, exception or ADA accommodation request).
- Position postings:
  - All out-of-state job postings must be reviewed and approved by Talent Acquisition before being posted to USC jobs.
  - Refrain from advertising “remote work opportunity” as a benefit on job postings.

## OUT-OF-STATE TELECOMMUTING

Generally, working out-of-state is not permitted. However, exceptions may be granted based on specific telecommuting conditions. Certain states have been designated as “prohibited” due to significant differences in their employment laws compared to South Carolina, which poses a risk to the university. Employees may not work in these states unless their role or position explicitly requires it - such as regional admissions recruiter or positions where the job location is specified in a condition of a grant.

## PROHIBITED TELECOMMUTING STATES

- |                        |                 |                 |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| • Alaska               | • Indiana       | • Oregon        |
| • Arizona              | • Maine         | • Pennsylvania  |
| • California           | • Massachusetts | • Rhode Island  |
| • Colorado             | • New Jersey    | • Vermont       |
| • Connecticut          | • New Mexico    | • Washington    |
| • District of Columbia | • New York      | • West Virginia |
| • Idaho                | • North Dakota  | • Wyoming       |
| • Illinois             | • Ohio          |                 |

## **POLICY STATEMENTS**

Determining that a telecommuting arrangement is not suitable for a position or employee, and/or modification or discontinuance of an approved remote work arrangement are not grievable actions under the [State Employee Grievance Procedure Act](#) of South Carolina. Telecommuting is not suitable for all employees and/or positions. **The decision to allow an employee to telecommute is solely at the discretion of the University and is not a universal employee benefit or right.**

Remote work arrangements may be modified, discontinued or reactivated at any time at the discretion of the University. Telecommuting must be based on clearly defined and measurable benefits for the university and taxpayers. Approvals for telecommuting are granted non-discriminatorily, ensuring compliance with state and federal laws.

Employees may only telecommute from an out-of-state location if specific prior approval is granted by their leadership and Human Resources/Office of the Provost. There will be some exceptions based on either the nature of the job or the location for the work (e.g. a student recruiter for the mid-west or for a researcher collecting samples from the northeast). Any out-of-state postings must be reviewed by Talent Acquisition before advertising.

**Telecommuting is not a substitute for personal responsibilities such as childcare or dependent care. Employees must ensure that personal obligations do not interfere with their job responsibilities and must use accrued leave when necessary.**

Formal agreements must be reviewed annually and updated as conditions change. All regular telecommuting arrangements require a formal Telecommuting Agreement, which must be processed in HCM PeopleSoft.

For complete details, refer to policy [HR 1.22 Telecommuting](#).

## EMPLOYEE TELECOMMUTING CHECKLIST

### **SPEAK TO YOUR SUPERVISOR:**

If you believe you are eligible for telecommuting, contact your supervisor to discuss your options. Your supervisor will inform you whether you are eligible to work remotely or hybrid.

- *Optional:* You may want to complete the [Telecommuting Individual Readiness Assessment](#) and discuss the result with your supervisor.
- If you **do not meet** the Telecommuting Conditions and/or your supervisor determines remote work is not appropriate for your position, your request to telecommute will be denied.
- If you **do meet** the Telecommuting Conditions, and your supervisor supports the request, a Telecommuting Justification Form will be submitted on your behalf for the appropriate approvals. (Note: This only applies to USC-Columbia campus.)

### **STEPS FOR TELECOMMUTING APPROVAL IN HCM PEOPLESFT (HCM) (STAFF ONLY):**

If the Telecommuting Justification Form is approved, you will be assigned the Remote Worker tile in HCM by Human Resources. Once you receive the Remote Worker tile, you will need to complete all steps. This process includes:

- Watching a training video.
- Reviewing and agreeing to all telecommuting terms and conditions.
- Verifying personal and tax information.
- Establishing remote work schedule.
- Uploading Equipment List.
- Receiving approval through appropriate workflow in HCM.

### **BEGIN TELECOMMUTING AND MAINTAIN OPEN COMMUNICATION:**

Successful telecommuting requires ongoing communication with your supervisor, who will outline expectations for your remote work. Telecommuting employees must adhere to the following requirements while working in their alternate location:

- **Office phone forwarding:** You must forward your office phone while working remotely, ensure calls are answered live unless you are in a meeting or on a scheduled break. Options include forwarding office phone to your remote location phone or creating a virtual number for office calls.
- **No “out of office” replies:** When working remotely, do not set out-of-office replies for emails or voicemails.
- **Performance reporting:** Submit required reports detailing completed tasks, including specific metrics.
- **Scheduled check-ins:** Participate in scheduled check-ins throughout the day and/or week, as determined by your supervisor.

### **ANNUAL REVIEW AND RENEWAL:**

Telecommuting arrangements will be reviewed annually, and the process will require the completion of a new Telecommuting Agreement in HCM each year.



## SUPERVISOR TELECOMMUTING CHECKLIST

### CAREFULLY AND OBJECTIVELY EVALUATE

Evaluate the potential for employees to telecommute based on the established Telecommuting Conditions. In addition to these conditions, further evaluation should consider:

- **Each position:** Determine whether the essential functions of the position can be effectively performed in an alternate work location with the same or improved performance.
- **Each employee:** Assess whether they possess the necessary skills and experience to perform their role remotely.
- *Optional:* A [Telecommuting Individual Readiness Assessment](#) may be completed for employees under consideration for remote work and used as an aid to discuss with employees.

### PREPARATION AND TRAINING

- Discuss remote work expectations with your leadership and confirm their support of your employees working remotely. Determine whether the telecommuting justification form needs to be submitted.
- Supervisors must read and review the [Succeeding as a Virtual Team Leader](#) document.
- Supervisors of staff should review the HCM PeopleSoft (HCM) Telecommuting Job Aid so they understand their approver role in HCM.
- Clearly define telecommuting expectations for both the position and employee. In addition to role-specific guidelines, all telecommuting employees must adhere to:
  - **Work hours:** Restrict remote work to slightly expanded core business hours. For example, those with an 8:30 am – 5:00 pm schedule may work remotely or hybrid between 7:00 am and 7:00 pm, following a set schedule.
  - **Response times:** Calls and emails must be answered within the same timeframe as on-site employees.
  - **Check-ins:** Participate in scheduled check-ins throughout the day and/or week.
  - **Break scheduling:** Set routine lunch hours and/or break periods so management knows when employees will be unavailable.
  - **Virtual meeting requirements:** Video must be turned on for all virtual interactions. Expectations for professionalism, attire background noise, and eating during meetings should be clearly communicated for those attending employment functions virtually.

- COMMUNICATING TELECOMMUTING DECISIONS WITH EMPLOYEE:**
  - Share your decision to approve or deny the telecommuting request based on fair and objective criteria.
  - If approved to telecommute, inform your employee that HR will assign them a **Remote Worker** tile in HCM to complete their Telecommuting Agreement, which will process through an automated workflow for approval.
  - Maintain ongoing discussions with employees about your expectations, ensuring continued communication and feedback to support a successful telecommuting arrangement.
  
- ANNUAL TELECOMMUTING REVIEW AND RENEWAL PROCESS:**
  - Telecommuting arrangements will be reviewed annually and the process will require the completion of a new Telecommuting Agreement in HCM each year.
  
- EPMS REVIEW & PLANNING STAGE REQUIREMENT (AS NEEDED):**
  - All employees who receive an EPMS review must have a Planning Stage established immediately after their EPMS review date for the upcoming year. This requirement applies to all employees, whether working remotely or on-site.
  - Before approving any Telecommuting Agreement, supervisors must ensure the Planning Stage is completed and in place for employees undergoing EPMS reviews.

## **ESTABLISHING & MAINTAINING A TELECOMMUTING AGREEMENT (STAFF ONLY)**

Individual Telecommuting Agreements must be submitted in HCM PeopleSoft (HCM) and approved through the designated workflow. These agreements will be reviewed annually, and the process requires completion of a new Telecommuting Agreement each year to document the agreed upon terms for remote work in the upcoming year. To the extent possible, Telecommuting Agreements will follow the fiscal year cycle, beginning on July 1 and ending on June 30. Employees who establish a Telecommuting Agreement after July 1 should still have an end date of June 30.

If an employee is no longer participating or needs to make adjustments to their Telecommuting Agreement, the employee must discuss changes with their supervisor. After the discussion, they may initiate the change in HCM. This will then initiate a new arrangement that is approved through the workflow in HCM.

## **INFORMATION PRIVACY AND SECURITY**

Employees who telecommute are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality and security of any information created or accessed while working remotely. They must adhere to all University of South Carolina rules, policies, and procedures regarding data security and confidentiality. This includes safeguarding sensitive information such as PHI (Protected Health Information) under HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) and PII (Personally Identifiable Information) protected under FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act), confidential University of South Carolina records and/or information and any other work-related data, including paper files used in the normal course of work. Employees must store such information in a secure place (lock and key) and/or computer properly locked to prohibit unattended access.

Remote employees must ensure that any virtual meetings and/or telephone calls where confidential information is discussed will occur in a private environment. Additionally, they must comply with all University rules, policies and procedures regarding the retention and destruction of confidential or sensitive information to uphold security standards.

Additionally, employees must follow University cybersecurity and IT protocols to protect electronic systems, networks, and data from breaches or misuse. This includes using only approved devices and networks for work-related tasks, maintaining strong passwords, enabling multi-factor authentication, regularly installing security updates, and promptly reporting any suspected cybersecurity threats to the IT department.

## **LIABILITY**

The University will not be liable for damages to the telecommuter's property resulting from participation in a telecommuting arrangement or utilization of personally owned equipment in performance of work duties. In submitting the Telecommuting Agreement, the remote worker shall protect, defend, indemnify, and hold the University and its employees, officers, directors and trustees harmless from and against all losses, costs, liabilities, claims, damages and expenses of every kind and character, as incurred, excluding workers' compensation claims, resulting from or relating to performance of duties at the alternate work location.

## **WORKERS' COMPENSATION**

The alternate work location is considered an extension of the remote employee's primary worksite. Therefore, Workers' Compensation may be applicable when performing official work duties in the alternate work location during the approved hours. Employees who sustain a work-related injury during approved work hours at an alternate work location must immediately report the injury to their supervisor. Employees must complete the [Employee Injury Report Form \(81-B\)](#) and the supervisor must complete the [Supervisor Report of Injury Form \(81-C\)](#) and follow appropriate procedures as detailed on the forms.

## **TAX AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

Remote workers are solely responsible for the tax and legal implications of the use of their alternate work location for business purposes. Some states and municipalities require remote workers to obtain permits to conduct business from home. Remote workers are advised to consult with a tax and/or legal professional to understand whether the remote work arrangement has any implications for their state or local laws.

## **LEAVE AND OVERTIME**

University time and absence policies and procedures apply to remote workers, and requests for time off must be made in accordance with established policies and procedures.

Remote workers who have provided medical certification prohibiting them from working are prohibited from working remotely. Remote work may not be used in place of sick time, FMLA, Paid Parental Leave, or other types of leave.

Remote workers are required to use accrued leave, as appropriate, to provide childcare, dependent care or when addressing other personal responsibilities. This includes time spent caring for ill household members.

Providing dependent care without taking leave, engaging in activities not related to job duties, or external employment during the workday may result in immediate termination of the telecommuting agreement, and/or disciplinary action up to and including termination from employment.

Remote workers may be required to work overtime as they would be if they were working on-site and must follow the same process for obtaining approval to work overtime.

For additional information about USC's time and leave policies please visit [DHR website](#).

## **HAZARDOUS WEATHER AND EMERGENCY LEAVE**

Employees who participate in telecommuting are required to work remotely or hybrid even if their primary workplace is closed due to an emergency, like inclement weather, for example. Participating employees must work remotely or hybrid, even if they were scheduled to report to their university work location on the day of the closure.

## **FAQ's**

Please refer to the [FAQ](#) section on the website for additional information. If you have additional questions, please email us at [Telecommute@sc.edu](mailto:Telecommute@sc.edu).



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