

POLICY ON WORKPLACE STRATEGIES

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I. Audience

The primary audience for this Policy is School/Unit leaders, Managers (including faculty who supervise staff), Administrators, and staff (as defined on page [1.3 of the Staff Handbook](#)).

The section titled “[Work Based Outside of the State of Illinois](#)” applies to all Northwestern employees (except Northwestern University-Qatar).

This Policy does not apply to employees covered by a collective bargaining agreement, unless otherwise set forth in such an agreement.

II. Owner

Office of Human Resources

III. Effective Date

This updated Policy goes into effect September 1, 2022.

IV. 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. The institution creates and delivers value through the 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.

Northwestern recognizes Workplace Strategies as a set of strategic tools that can be leveraged to achieve those same results, as well as a variety of institutional goals related to staff engagement and well-being, recruitment and retention, sustainability, service excellence, cost efficiencies, space utilization, and the overall empowerment of employees to do their best work.

This Policy establishes a common, ongoing framework with shared definitions, within which School/Unit leadership can implement various Workplace Strategies in accordance with their operational needs.

Northwestern is a campus-based community, and a certain level of physical presence will always be required for most staff positions. In support of the University's commitments to the student experience, faculty, research excellence, scholarship, creative work, and teaching, the University expects that many employees will work on-site at their designated campus locations for three or more days each week. However, Strategies and arrangements can vary by School, Unit, department, team, and position.

School/Unit leaders have the discretion to determine, develop, and communicate their own internal approach and approval process for Workplace Strategies. They may establish non-negotiable schedule parameters and core hours, based on business or community support needs.

Managers and designated School/Unit approvers are responsible for making determinations on acceptable modalities based on legitimate business and operational requirements. They are also responsible for equitable decision-making and documenting individual arrangements with eligible staff.

All staff participating in Workplace Strategies are subject to the performance standards and expectations for their position.

This Policy may be reviewed and amended from time to time.

V. Definitions

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

School/Unit Leaders	Deans, Vice Presidents, and/or their designees for the purposes of approving Workplace Strategies and Workplace Strategy Plans in the School or Unit.
Managers	Staff and faculty in roles responsible for supervising staff employees.
Administrators	Staff in roles responsible for operationalizing the human resources function within the School, Unit, or department.
Workplace Strategies	Umbrella term that encompasses all alternative approaches to traditionally structured, In-person Work in an employer-designated location within designated work hours or shifts. Workplace Strategies 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. Workplace Strategies may be implemented for a team/department by a Manager, or a staff member may request an individual Workplace Strategy for themselves. Workplace Strategies can be combined as necessary to meet the needs of the organization.
Workplace Strategy Plan	Workplace Strategy developed and established by a Manager that applies to an entire team or department. The Plan includes a set of clear parameters and expectations for participating employees.
Seasonal Arrangements	Workplace Strategy applied during a certain season or time of year, such as during the summer or during breaks between academic terms.
In-person Work	Work performed at a Northwestern University worksite (e.g., on campus).
Remote Work (Telecommuting)	Type of Workplace Strategy where work is performed from an approved location other than a traditional, employer-designated place of work (e.g., on campus) for a portion of work time.
Hybrid (steady/annual schedule)	Type of Workplace Strategy where work is performed partially In-person and partially Remote (e.g., weekly schedule of three days In-person and two days Remote).
Hybrid (tailored/seasonal)	Type of Workplace Strategy Seasonal Arrangement where the on-site and Remote schedules fluctuate based on the nature of the work and the time of year (e.g., student-facing roles where more In-person work is required during the academic year).
Primarily Remote	Workplace Strategy where work is performed from a Remote location and In-person presence is only occasional or “as needed.” With Northwestern’s campus-based community, this arrangement is available only in limited circumstances. Schools/Units may consider certain cases based on the criteria outlined below (see Criteria for Determining Eligibility for Workplace Strategies and Decision-Making Guidance Regarding Remote Work).

Flextime	Type of Workplace Strategy that provides an employee and their Manager greater latitude in determining their work schedule beyond standard business hours, or the ability to change work schedules from one week to the next depending on the needs of the operation or personal needs of the employee. 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 In-person 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 standard work hours required in a workweek.
Compressed Workweek	A Workplace Strategy where employees work longer daily hours over fewer workdays (e.g., 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 hours per week, 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 page 2.2 of the Staff Handbook .
Job Sharing	A Workplace Strategy where 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.

VI. Policy/Procedures

A. **Criteria for Determining Eligibility for Workplace Strategies**

School/Unit Leaders and Managers should use the following criteria to determine position eligibility for Workplace Strategies:

1. All Workplace Strategies should prioritize each staff position’s contribution to the [Mission and Values](#) of Northwestern and their respective School or Unit.
2. 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 Workplace Strategies.
3. Once approved and implemented, Workplace Strategies should have either a net-positive or a net-neutral effect on business results and the work environment. In other words, the same work is getting accomplished at another time, in another place, or in another way, ideally having a positive impact.

School/Unit Leaders and Managers may determine that certain positions are ineligible to participate in certain types of Workplace Strategies depending on the nature or classification of the position, the work required, the employee's state of residency, or the academic, business, and/or operational needs of the School or Unit.

B. Equitable Decision-Making

School/Unit Leaders and Managers are expected to make decisions equitably and without regard to employees' protected characteristics or activities. All Workplace Strategies are to be assessed via a fair, consistent, and transparent process. However, equitable consideration does not guarantee identical Strategies for every employee.

Managers and School/Unit leadership decisions to exclude specific positions/roles from participating in Workplace Strategies are subject to the application of Northwestern's policies against discrimination and retaliation.

C. Operational Responsiveness

Newly implemented Workplace Strategies should begin with a 30–90-day trial period to assess feasibility. Managers should review and assess the Workplace Strategies regularly during the trial period to ensure they fully support academic and business needs and, if necessary, adapt these Strategies accordingly.

Established and ongoing Workplace Strategies should always be flexible and responsive to the changing needs of the workplace. They should be reviewed and updated as academic and business drivers change and, at a minimum, annually.

Workplace Strategies are not permanent or otherwise guaranteed to continue for any period of time. School/Unit Leaders and Managers retain the discretionary authority to change or revoke Workplace Strategies (either temporarily or permanently) as needed, either for business or operational needs, special work functions or activities, seasonal variations in work volume, or for performance-related reasons. In the event a Workplace Strategy is revised or revoked, reasonable advance notice to the employee of at least 30 days is preferred. However, in certain circumstances, Workplace Strategies may be changed or revoked without prior notice.

School/Unit Leaders and Managers are expected to consult with their HR Business Partner prior to revoking a Workplace Strategy.

D. Formal and Occasional Workplace Strategies

Workplace Strategies may be instituted formally as long-term arrangements or occasionally as temporary arrangements based on either operational or individual employee needs, subject to the approval of the Manager (e.g., an employee with a Hybrid remote schedule may request to work fully remote for a short time period, such as one week, or an on-site employee transitioning from a leave may request to work a Flextime schedule for their first week back to work).

E. Workplace Strategy Plans for Departments or Teams

Managers may develop and implement a team/department-wide [Workplace Strategy Plan](#), subject to the approval of the School/Unit Leader or their designee. The Workplace Strategy Plan form is a tool intended for planning, communication, approval and documentation purposes and may not be necessary for plans that are already approved and documented with the School/Unit. School/Unit Leaders may determine the extent that it is required as part of the local approval processes.

F. Workplace Strategies for Individuals

Staff members may request individual Workplace Strategies via the [Workplace Strategies Proposal Form](#). Workplace Strategies must be approved by the Manager and the School/Unit leadership (or designee). While individual needs may factor into some proposals, the approval or denial of all requests must be based on business and operational needs, not the individual reason for the request. Managers should not ask about an individual's personal circumstances beyond what the employee voluntarily discloses.

If a staff member reveals their request is based on personal health reasons or a disability, the request must be referred to the [Office of Equity](#) for appropriate handling consistent with the University's [Reasonable Accommodation Policy](#).

G. Documentation

School/Units are responsible for tracking and documenting Workplace Strategies. Approved formal Workplace Strategies can be documented via the [Workplace Strategies Proposal Form](#) (for individuals) or the [Workplace Strategy Plan](#) (for teams) and stored with the Manager and/or School/Unit Administrator depending on local practices.

Occasional or temporary flexible arrangements do not require formal documentation, but require approval from the Manager and expectations should be clearly set forth in writing (e.g., an employee who normally works on-site requests and is approved by their Manager to work from home for one day to meet a repair person).

VII. Communication Expectations for School/Unit Leaders and Managers

School/Unit leadership and Managers are encouraged to have open dialogue with staff regarding the continuation and/or implementation of Workplace Strategies in their environments as part of their business and talent strategies.

Managers should clearly communicate and document expectations for work assignments, check-ins, and any other parameters related to supporting the utilization of a Workplace 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 Workplace Strategy is subject to change

VIII. Decision-Making Guidance Regarding Remote Work for School/Unit Leaders and Managers

When determining the extent to which a position can be performed on a remote basis and/or how many days the individual will work on-site, Managers should consider the following criteria:

- Degree to which the work requires in-person interaction with other members of the Northwestern community
- Whether the responsibilities of the role can be effectively performed remotely
- Market-based competition for/access to talent
- Unique or niche skills, not otherwise readily available in the local market
- Other business-critical circumstances or academic needs
- Equity (e.g., whether other staff members in similar roles on the same team are permitted to work remotely)

More resources for decision-making and communication guidance can be found in the [Workplace Strategies Toolkit](#).

IX. Benefits, Schedules & Timekeeping Policies/Procedures for Employees with Workplace Strategies

A. Benefits

Certain Workplace Strategies, such as Part-time work or [Remote Work Based Outside the State of Illinois](#), may have an impact on employee benefits. Prior to requesting or beginning a new arrangement, employees are responsible for consulting with the Office of Human Resources to understand if and how a Workplace Strategy may impact their individual benefits and if they need to take any action as a result.

B. Timekeeping

Non-exempt employees with approved Workplace Strategies must accurately log all their hours worked in the HR timekeeping system.

While Workplace Strategies are permissible for non-exempt (i.e., hourly) staff, they must adhere to record-keeping and meal break requirements. Managers or the School/Unit Administrators must review policies related to [Work Hours and Payroll in the Staff Handbook](#) before approving Strategies for non-exempt employees (specifically Varying Schedule, Overtime, Reporting Hours, Lunch Periods and Rest Periods). If Managers or School/Unit Administrators have questions about flexible schedules and the timekeeping system, they should contact AskHR@northwestern.edu.

C. Overtime

Non-exempt employees (i.e., employees that are paid by the hour on a bi-weekly basis) are eligible for overtime pay and a Workplace Strategy for a non-exempt employee should not result in overtime work.

Regardless of whether a Workplace Strategy is in place, non-exempt staff members must follow department procedures for seeking and obtaining written approval to work overtime hours. Overtime will be compensated as required by law, but failure to obtain prior written approval for overtime work may lead to disciplinary action.

D. Paid Time Away from Work

A non-exempt (i.e., hourly) staff member who has a Workplace Strategy and is approved for paid time off, 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 a Workplace Strategy must adhere to the principles of recording time in appropriate increments. (Refer to [page 8.3 of the Staff Handbook](#) for further details.)

E. 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.

X. Remote Work Policies/Procedures

A. Work Based Outside of the State of Illinois

This section applies to all employees, including staff, faculty, student and non-student temporary workers (not applicable to Northwestern University-Qatar).

In exceptional circumstances, Northwestern recognizes the occasional need to hire or reassign an employee who will, due to the nature of a particular position or business needs of the

University, need to reside and perform their work in the U.S., but outside of the State of Illinois. School/Unit Leaders and Managers are expected to refer to the above [Decision-Making Guidance Regarding Remote Work](#) when considering offering employment to or approving a current employee to work on a Primarily Remote basis. When an employee's permanent place of work is outside the State of Illinois, that State's employment laws must be followed. School/Unit Leaders, Administrators and Managers may consult with their respective HR Business Partners if they have questions.

For tax purposes, the Office of Human Resources must be notified at least 60 days in advance if an employee is approved by their School/Unit to perform work in the United States from a remote location outside the State of Illinois. It is the responsibility of the employee and their Manager to complete and submit the [Remote Worker Notification Form](#) and any tax documents as advised by Human Resources. The employee is also responsible for updating their home address in [MyHR](#).

The University generally does not permit work to be performed from remote locations outside of the United States, except under very limited circumstances. Schools/Units are required to consult with their respective HR Business Partner (staff) or the Office of the Provost (faculty) before approving a current employee to perform work from a remote location outside of the U.S. or before extending an employment offer to an employee who will not be physically residing in the U.S. when they begin working, regardless of whether it is on a temporary or permanent basis.

B. Health and Safety Hazards

Remote Work 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 must notify their Manager of the injury in accordance with the University's Workers' Compensation Policy. The University reserves the right to inspect employees' Remote Work areas for security, health, and safety purposes.

C. 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 experience an impact to their assigned workspace.

D. 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.

E. 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, unless required by law. 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 or Unit.

F. Security and Confidentiality

Access to the University's network by any equipment or means is always 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 Workplace Strategies, employees must follow University-approved security procedures to ensure confidentiality and security of data.

G. Property Insurance

University insurance will not cover any personal property that is used off campus and will only cover University equipment brought to an authorized off-site location. For more information, contact the Office of Risk Management.

XI. Questions or Consultation about Workplace Strategies

School/Unit Leaders, Managers, and employees may seek consultation with the Office of Well-being or their HR Business Partner regarding potential or existing Workplace Strategies.

- HR Business Partners: HRBP@northwestern.edu
- Well-being: wellbeing@northwestern.edu