Best Practices for Effective Supervision of Employees with Remote Work/Flex Schedules

Considering Remote Work Requests

Employees interested in remote work are encouraged to approach their supervisors in advance of submitting applications to participate in the program. While employees may express their interest in the program, as a supervisor, there are factors that you need to consider before making a recommendation to support (or deny) their requests.

Your role in this process is critically important and should not be taken lightly. You should thoughtfully consider a number of aspects through an operational lens, including but not limited to:

- **Student Experience:**
  - How will the student experience be impacted by allowing individuals to work remotely or work differing schedules?
  - Will there be sufficient staff in the office to support student needs?
  - Can their needs be met without interruption?

- **Impact on Other Departments/Constituents:**
  - How will remote work and/or flex scheduling impact your department’s ability to serve other units, campus constituents and visitors?
  - Can their needs be met without interruption?

- **In-Office Staffing:**
  - Will having employees working remotely or on alternate schedules have an impact on others working in the office (e.g., pick up more foot traffic, handle tasks that can't be done off-campus)?
  - Will there be sufficient coverage to allow for in-office workers to take available leave?
  - How will morale be positively or negatively impacted by allowing remote work/flex scheduling based on the nature of departmental operations?

- **Scheduling Training/Meetings:**
  - How will training and meetings be conducted if certain employees are not physically present?
  - Will meetings maintain the same level of effectiveness and continuity if there is a virtual presence?
  - What are possible challenges?

- **Other Operational Impacts:**
• Can departmental timelines be met if the employee is not physically present?
• Will any productivity be lost (by the remote worker and/or department as a whole)?
• What steps need to be considered regarding department communication with the remote worker?
• Does your department have sufficient equipment available for the individual to work remotely?

Employee Assessment (Individual seeking a remote work arrangement)
• Is the employee a strong performer?
• Are there any concerns surrounding the employee’s ability to independently manage their time and work activities?
• Are there concerns about the employee’s ability to be productive from an alternate work location?

IMPORTANT: REMOTE WORK (TELECOMMUTING) IS A MANAGEMENT OPTION AND IT IS NOT SUITABLE FOR ALL EMPLOYEES OR ALL POSITIONS. AS A SUPERVISOR, YOU CONTROL THIS PROCESS, SO FEEL EMPOWERED TO EITHER REJECT OR RESTRUCTURE ANY PROPOSED ARRANGEMENTS OR AGREEMENTS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF YOUR DEPARTMENT.

Best Practices to Deploy when Reviewing Remote Work Requests
• Review eligibility requirements.
• Do not base your decision on speculation.
• Be objective and do not let any personal bias intercede.
• Be fair in your approach and decision-making when entertaining remote work requests for all employees under your purview.
• If you receive multiple requests, you should review and consider all requests and possible impacts at the same time.
• Be flexible. If you can’t approve a request as presented, try to identify other possible options.

What should you do if you are not comfortable with approving a remote work request long-term?
Before rendering a decision in the online remote work/flex work application system, you should have a discussion with your supervisor (a.k.a. next level supervisor). If your supervisor is not the department head/chair, the department head/chair should be included in your discussion with your supervisor.

When you meet with your supervisor (and department head/chair):
• Be candid in expressing your concerns.
• Make sure that you are factual when you are disseminating information to your supervisor.
• Be prepared to provide specific examples.
• If appropriate, discuss any alternative strategies. For instance, consider utilizing a tryout period. This is a conditional remote work approval for a limited period of time (e.g., 90 days, 6 months). If a tryout period is elected, make sure the details are noted in the online remote work/flex work application system.
After the meeting with your supervisor and department head/chair, it will be the responsibility of the department head/chair to communicate up the administrative channel. This is done to garner their support and to inform their future decision making.

**Denials**

If the decision is made by you, your supervisor and department head/chair to deny a request, it will be the department head/chair’s responsibility to verbally communicate the rationale regarding the denial up the administrative channel to the dean/division. The dean/division will be responsible for communicating information to the vice president, and then the vice president will convey the information to the president’s cabinet member. The vice president and president’s cabinet member will decide how, who, and what will be communicated to the employee. The supervisor should not enter a “deny” decision in the online remote work/flex work application system until after the information has been communicated up through the administrative channel.

*Note: If the denial is simply related to an employee not meeting an objective eligibility requirement, there is no need to meet with your supervisor and department head/chair. However, an email should be sent to all parties in the administrative channel for situational awareness. Examples of scenarios that do not require meetings with members of the supervisor’s administrative channel*

- Applicant is not in an FTE position
- Applicant has not been in an FTE position for at least 12 months
- Applicant does not meet other eligibility criteria (e.g. Notice of Substandard Performance in the last 12 months). Management should contact the Office of Human Resources (Employee Relations area) before denying an application based on disciplinary action. Minor infractions such as a verbal counseling may not preclude participation.

Indeed has published an article on [How to Deliver Bad News to Employees](https://www.indeed.com/job-search/career-advice/how-to-deliver-bad-news-to-employees). The article offers information on how to prepare for delivering difficult news and offers helpful tips.

Below are a few scenarios that may assist supervisors, management and administrators on communicating remote work/flex schedule denials. These scenarios are intended to provide general guidance and may need to be altered depending on the presenting circumstances. The Coastal Carolina University’s Office of Human Resources (Employee Relations area) should be contacted for additional guidance.

**Remote work request denied based on performance.**

In this scenario, you are sharing with an employee that their application for remote work was not approved due to performance concerns.

*Script Example:* “Your remote work application was not approved. There is concern about your ability to complete your work activities in a remote work setting, as you have not demonstrated that you can independently take on tasks unless your supervisor expressly assigns work activities to you. Do you have any questions or anything you’d like to share? [Allow the employee time to respond.] While your remote work application has not been approved at this time, that does not mean that you can’t reapply...”
at a future date. You are welcome to have conversation with your supervisor on what steps you could take to improve in this area.”

**Remote work request denied based on job duties.**
In this scenario, you are sharing with an employee that their application for remote work was not approved due to job duties. Offer flex scheduling option, if feasible.

*Script Example: "Your remote work application was not approved. Your job description was carefully reviewed and it was determined that your position is not conducive to a remote work arrangement. This is not a reflection of your work performance. While remote work isn’t an option, flexible scheduling may be a possibility. Might you be interested in flex scheduling? If you’d like to consider flex scheduling further, let your supervisor know of your interest and then reapply for the flex scheduling program. Do you have any questions or anything you’d like to share? [Allow the employee time to respond.] While your current job duties may not allow for remote work, you are welcome to reapply in the future, if your job duties change.”*

**Remote work request denied based on departmental operations.**
In this scenario, you are sharing with an employee that their application for remote work was not approved due to departmental operations. Offer flex scheduling option, if feasible.

*Script Example: "Your remote work application was not approved. Based on my review of departmental operations and the constituents that we serve, it was determined that your position is not conducive to a remote work arrangement. This is not a reflection of your work performance. While remote work isn’t an option, flexible scheduling may be a possibility. Might you be interested in flex scheduling? If you’d like to consider flex scheduling further, let your supervisor know of your interest and then reapply for the flex scheduling program. Do you have any questions or anything you’d like to share? [Allow the employee time to respond.] While your current job duties may not allow for remote work, you are welcome to reapply in the future, if your job duties change.”*

**Approvals and Approvals with Conditions**
Remote Work Approvals and Approvals with Conditions can be done through the online remote work/flex work application system. An approval notification with a copy of the executed agreement will go to the supervisor and employee once the president’s cabinet member marks the action as approved.

**Approval Roles in the Online Remote Work/Flex Work Application System**
The approval process will vary, depending on organization of the division’s administrative channel. When facilitating requests through the system, the supervisor/manager/administrator user will have to adapt the workflow manually.

**Example 1:**
Other Program Aspects

- Based on state guidance, each approved agreement has to be reviewed at least annually. In order to align with the fiscal year, arrangements should not be approved beyond June 30, 2024. HR will provide information on the renewal process in coming months.

- As a reminder, an arrangement may end early for a number of reasons. They are
  - The employee leaves employment at CCU
  - The employee changes roles (within the department or moves to another department)
  - The employee requests an alteration or termination of the arrangement
  - The supervisor requests the alteration or termination of the arrangement.

  Regardless of reason, the supervisor will have to facilitate the process to notify HR of the early termination of the arrangement. Please contact HR for guidance, if such a situation arises.

- In the event an employee requests remote work/flex work as an accommodation, the supervisor should contact HR (Employee Relations). This includes requests to establish an arrangement as a form of an accommodation, as well as requests to provide special equipment or resources. HR must facilitate the interactive process in such cases.

- The State of South Carolina requires CCU to annually report certain aspects of the program. This reporting mandate requires the university to demonstrate a realized cost savings associated with the program. At some time during the course of the first year, if you have remote workers, it is anticipated that you will be asked about costs incurred such as equipment purchases, Segra licensure, etc. Please be sure to keep records on purchases and
be prepared to provide concrete data on cost savings realized through the implementation of a remote work strategy. Any purchases will have to come from existing departmental funds. Supervisors should consider transitioning to laptops, as appropriate, when the IT computer refresh program allows.

- Also, remote workers are expected to use encrypted CCU laptops or computers. Personal devices are not authorized for use.