Guidance Document: Employing the Flexible Work Options Framework

Telecommuting, as currently defined, was a specific response to a stressed situation. It was an emergency measure. It did not have the full benefit of intentional planning. Due to the pandemic and the need to minimize population density, telecommuting slowly became interchangeable with no or very limited campus presence. We must now shift from this understanding to consider the concept of Flexible Work Options. This empowers supervisors and employees to explore approaches to work and design plans that include campus presence to support operational needs, excellence in service, and our institutional values.

Our framework for building flexible work options, where possible and appropriate, should reinforce or advance our values. What are some of our core values as we approach work at SUNY New Paltz?

- Inclusion
- Sustainability
- Healthy work-life balance
- Excellence in instruction and services
- Excellence in student experiences on a residential campus
- High level of service to students and employees and, in some departments, members of the public
- Remaining an employer of choice (Recruitment and Retention)
- Mindset of growth and innovation
- Culture of caring for employees

Consideration of any flexible work plan should take into account equity and fairness across a unit; **however**, it is important to note that a flexible work plan is not "one size fits all" and each request needs to be considered individually for approval.

Not all positions are eligible for a flexible work plan. There are positions that require full campus presence for reasons including but not limited to the following:

- Regulations prevent the work from having a flexible or off-site schedule (Those in the following bargaining units are not eligible for flexible work

options: CSEA, PEF, NYSCOBA and NYSPBA, due to civil service rules, time and attendance rules, etc.)

- The work does not lend itself to off-site work or flexible scheduling.
- Flexible scheduling or off-site work, in whole or in part, does not meet operational needs.

In addition to the guidance offered here, HRDI is offering professional development to support effective communication and planning for flexible work options. Sessions include: Understanding Operational Needs and Designing Staffing Plans and Supporting Your Return to Work [the emotional labor part not the work part]. Visit [this link for more information about ongoing offerings or to register](#).

Some principles to guide planning and discussion

1. An individual who wishes to explore a flexible work plan must be deemed effective and currently meeting or exceeding all work expectations of their obligation or appointment. Approval of such plans are at the discretion of the college and does not set a precedent or practice with regard to the position.

2. Instructional faculty may not change course modality already scheduled. Department Chairs and Program Coordinators should discuss expectations for campus presence and support of student and departmental needs with Deans, if there are questions or concerns.

3. The primary work site remains SUNY New Paltz campus. This is to comply with all state employment regulations. Therefore, an all off-site or all-remote plan is not possible currently (except for those whose obligation, appointment or leave status includes remote work or service or as may be stipulated in an ADA accommodation plan). Plans must maintain the current FTE of the individual's appointment. Before approving an employee request to change FTE, HRDI must be consulted.

4. A flexible work plan must be registered with HRDI, approved by the supervisor AND VP/ AVP/Dean of the unit. [Access the form here](#).

5. A flexible work plan can take one of three forms. A plan for summer 2021, a plan for Fall 2021, or a plan that covers summer and fall 2021. Upon review and approval from a VP/AVP/Dean, a plan may be renewed or ended if operational needs are not being met. Plans will need to be documented.

6. All employees remain obligated to all college policies, procedures and agreements as applicable. Flexible work plans must also follow current safety guidelines – knowing that they will continue to evolve as public health conditions and guidance change.

7. Flexible work plans should address such considerations as:
   - Tools or equipment needed to perform the work- understanding that the college will not be able to provide at-home computer set-up or at-home set up of related computer equipment. Please consult with IT and consider laptop and docking-station purchases in the normal cycle of replacing office computer towers.
   - All college-owned equipment must be well maintained and kept electronically and physically secure. Employees must remain responsive to IT for any maintenance and updates that may be required.
   - The college will not reimburse, subsidize, or pay for cell phones, internet/cable connection, etc. or other fees or expenses incurred to conduct work under this plan. This is not applicable to those who have cell phone stipends or other supports as a function of their obligation.
   - The employee agrees to maintain an adequate and professional work environment when off site to ensure effective and consistent performance.

8. All units and individuals need to determine the best service model for the campus community and constituents they serve. Make sure the plan addresses expectations for in-person interactions for work areas, including walk-in assistance, access during normal or core campus hours, and what services will be supported virtually or with reduced in-person contact.

9. The design of a flexible work plan should make clear that the plan for one individual does not create undue burden on any individual whose work is

on campus.

10. Any individual with a flexible work plan will need to ensure they are accessible, responsive, and effectively communicate with their supervisor, team members, those they serve, as well as with campus partners. Request to use sick leave, vacation, or any other kind of accrued leave while working at an alternate work location must be requested and approved by the employee's supervisor in the same manner as when working in the office. Likewise, plans should make clear how time off or time away will be communicated and appropriately recorded.

11. All areas should address the importance of a reliable physical presence in the work environment for all members of a unit to maintain a positive, connected, and productive workplace culture. This includes when in-person presence is expected and when virtual engagement is allowed.