Flexible Work Arrangement Guidelines

The Financial and Administrative Services (FAS) portfolio aims to provide exemplary and responsive support services to the university community. To be successful in this goal, FAS strives to provide an employment experience that fosters employee engagement, allowing employees to perform at their highest levels. Flexible work arrangements (FWAs) can contribute to this goal when implemented consistently and equitably, and when they have a positive or neutral effect on the business results and the FAS work environment. These guidelines are the result of the recommendation of the FAS FWA committee that was charged in 2018 with drafting clear guidance on the implementation of FWAs for the consideration of the Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer and are in accordance with the university’s HOP 5-2130 Telecommuting and HOP 5-2110 Work Schedule policies.

As an employer, FAS must compete in a modern work environment with contemporary expectations about accessibility to flexible work arrangements. FAS must shift to explaining why a position may not qualify for a FWA as opposed to defending a position against the FWA being counter-productive to business needs. FAS departments will evaluate positions according to business needs to determine which positions are FWA eligible. A FWA should not have a negative effect on business results or the work environment. As a service-oriented portfolio, FWAs should always support FAS values:

- **Service** - A FWA should not interfere with FAS’ commitment to offer responsible, reliable and seamless support. Employees on FWAs should still be responsive to clients. Clients should not be impacted by a change in service level or responsiveness because of a FWA.

- **Stewardship** - FWAs should allow FAS to continue being exceptional caretakers of the resources entrusted to FAS. Over time, FWAs can result in cost savings in real estate and utilities, as well as minimize the costs associated with high turnover and low employee engagement.

- **Integrity** - FAS performs work in a transparent, honest and accountable manner. FAS commits to meeting all compliance and reporting standards. FWAs promote integrity across the portfolio by demonstrating the trust FAS has in each employee to complete their work on behalf of the whole portfolio.

- **Innovation** - Many types of FWAs allow employees to work in an environment that enables them to do their best work, whether by establishing meeting-free time, teleworking or a compressed work week that allows employees time to think and be creative. When suitable, FWAs can stimulate higher productivity because they can allow an employee to work where, when and how they are most effective. FWAs can allow for an employee to have a better work-life balance, leading to less stress, which also can promote creativity and innovation.

- **Diversity** - FWAs offer the opportunity for FAS to be a more inclusive workplace for gender, caregiver status, generational issues, disabilities, religious observance and military service. Staff members come from diverse origins, genders and lifestyles. Flexibility facilitates inclusion.

- **Teamwork** - FWAs should be evaluated on the impact to a team. Communication plans should ensure continued teamwork and engagement from the team so that commitments are met.
FAS Approach to Flexible Work Arrangements

FWAs are mutually beneficial arrangements between the department and employees in which both parties agree on when, where and how works gets done. In a portfolio as diverse and complex as FAS, FWAs must meet FAS business needs and can be approached in several different ways.

- **Regular Flex** - Ongoing, planned flexible arrangements where an employee can flex their start and stop times, or work from home on a certain day(s) of the week. By arranging a consistent schedule of flexibility, the employee, team members and supervisor are able to plan on the employee’s ongoing flexibility and arrange meetings and events based on a set schedule. The FWA Agreement requires a set schedule, for example, in-office Monday through Thursday, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., and telecommute every Friday.

- **Occasional Flex** - An agreement between an employee and supervisor that on occasion, the employee has the flexibility to address a situation without having to take time off. The supervisor and employee should have a discussion regarding the limits of this type of agreement. This approach allows for employees to request the ability to use the FWA occasionally without having to use sick time or vacation time. This category of FWA encourages employees to think in advance about “How would I get my work done if I suddenly couldn’t come in to work?” or “Will my boss let me make up time?” without having to fill out a new FWA Agreement on the morning of the emergency, only to have it possibly denied. This category also leads to less unpaid time off and absenteeism, resulting in increased productivity. Supervisors still have the discretion to decline the specific request due to business reasons when it is submitted. This FWA can be a formal or informal agreement. Non-exempt employees should always enter time worked accurately at the correct time of day that work was actually accomplished, and add a note regarding approval from supervisor to do so. Exempt employees should enter number of hours worked accurately and also add a note explaining when work was accomplished and approval from supervisor to do so.

- **Seasonal Flex** – A flexible work arrangement based on seasonal workload. Individual FWA Agreements are not required if a revised schedule applies to an entire work unit, but the work unit’s revised schedule should be documented with the director of the department. An example is working from 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the summer to avoid extreme temperatures.

- **Multi-Flex** - An employee can have multiple types of FWAs. The FWA Agreement should be completed with all options identified. For example, an employee can have occasional flex to take care of unexpected appointments and also have a flextime arrangement to work outside the 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. business day, plus be able to telecommute every other Monday.

Guidelines for Flexible Work Arrangements

The following guidelines for FAS staff with FWAs are supplemental to the guidance, policies, forms and resources found on the UT Austin Human Resources website: https://hr.utexas.edu/current/fwa or https://hr.utexas.edu/manager/fwa. FWAs are based on a department’s business functions within the portfolio, the specific job duties for positions within the department and individual work units. Directors should work with their leadership groups to determine which FWAs are options for their work units and employee groups. FAS Human Resources Support Services (HRSS) personnel are also available to consult with directors, managers and
supervisors at all levels on the variety of options as well as provide guidance on approaches to implementation.

Each director in FAS is expected to document how FWAs will be implemented in their units as outlined in the FAS Flexible Work Arrangement Implementation Guide and Toolkit. Management of employees and FWAs within a director’s area should be consistent and equitable. The expectation of improving implementation of FWAs should be set by the director.

A FAS FWA is required to set expectations and foster transparency between department and employee. A detailed proposal using the UT Flexible Work Arrangement Agreement addressing how, when and where work will be performed must accompany the agreement. It must include an assessment for the areas of the job that fit a flexible work arrangement and any solutions that will be put into place.

All FAS supervisors with FWA eligible positions are expected to consider formal requests and proposals for FWAs objectively, consistently and fairly to ensure an equitable process across the FAS portfolio. However, supervisors are not obligated to grant approval if the FWA is not supported by the nature of the work, or would interfere with business results or teamwork. The personal circumstances of employees or their reasons for proposing a FWA should not drive the decision to approve or deny the FWA. Supervisors should consider workplace needs and work performance goals. Supervisors should use the manager self-assessment tool found in the FAS Flexible Work Arrangement Implementation Guide and Toolkit to ensure they are being fair and consistent with the expectations of the portfolio.

FAS leadership recognizes a shift in culture in FWA implementation may create new management challenges for supervisors. Managing many FWA appropriate positions, tracking metrics to determine effectiveness of FWAs across a work unit and accommodating a potential increase in FWA requests generates extra work. FAS Human Resources Support Services (HRSS) personnel are available to help train and to address these challenges at all levels of the portfolio.

FWAs are not considered permanent and may end at any time due to performance concerns, organizational needs or team structural changes. Generally, the supervisor or the employee should give at least 30 days’ notice in advance of ending or changing an arrangement, business needs permitting. FWA agreements should be reviewed and updated as needs change, in addition to a regular annual evaluation. The workplace is ever changing and FWAs should respond to those changes.

Some FWA requests may require assessment under different university policies. For instance, an employee with a request for accommodation based on a disability should not be reviewed as a FWA. Requests for accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act must first be reviewed and approved by the Office for Inclusion and Equity. Supervisors should consult with FAS HRSS for further clarification whenever needed.

Teleworking Specific Guidelines

Equipment

As outlined in the UT Austin policy on telecommuting (HOP 5-2130), the equipment needed to support an employee in a telework environment should be part of the FWA conversation between supervisor and employee. At a minimum, an employee must have access to an operable telephone, internet and a network capable of reaching the university’s campus network.

FAS departments are not required to provide a laptop and peripherals to employees who are approved to telework,
but should evaluate the issuance of laptops to telework-eligible positions during the normal computer replacement cycle for their department. The department will not be liable for damages to employee-owned equipment being used in telework or that may result from teleworking, nor are they responsible for operating costs, home maintenance, or any other incidental costs (e.g., utilities, telephone and insurance) associated with the use of the employee's residence for teleworking. In addition, employees will not be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses for materials and supplies that are reasonably available at the regularly assigned place of employment.

University equipment located at the remote work site is subject to all policies and restrictions related to use of state owned property. Participating employees are responsible for any equipment and software used at the remote work site and accept financial responsibility for any equipment that is lost, stolen or damaged because of the employee's negligence, misuse or abuse.

Safety and Security

Use of personal computers to host university data is highly discouraged. Any employee using a personal computer to host university data is making their personally owned device subject to subpoena and open records requests. Refer to UT Austin policy on telecommuting (HOP 5-2130).

Employees are responsible for safeguarding information regardless of where, when and how they work. The UT Austin Information Security Office site offers a wealth of information about the security protocols that must be followed when using either personal or UT Austin computers outside of the office setting.

Threats to information security are always changing. As technology advances, approved tools will change as well. The UT Austin IT security site also provides information on regular IT security enhancements. All UT Austin employees are encouraged to visit that site regularly.

Injury

As outlined in the UT Austin policy on telecommuting (HOP 5-2130), “an injured employee participating in telecommuting must notify his or her supervisor immediately and complete all requested documents. Workers' Compensation benefits will apply to injuries arising out of and in the course and scope of employment.”

Telework and Dependent Care

While performing job duties, teleworking employees are expected to arrange for dependent care just as they would if they were working in the office. In the event that a teleworking employee is faced with caring for a dependent, and the level of care needed for a dependent prevents or significantly disrupts work accomplishment, the teleworking employee should notify their supervisor and only record actual hours worked on the timesheet and use leave or other flex work arrangements to account for the other hours.

Inclement Weather and Main Campus Closures

When an inclement weather event results in the closure of our main campus, and a teleworking employee is able to work from home with minimal impact to their day-to-day business interactions, they should record regular work hours.

In the event an inclement weather event results in the closure of our main campus, and a teleworking employee is unable to work from home because the individual’s day-to-day business requires a high level of interaction with
employees on main campus, or a campus technology system adversely impacted by the weather renders their work inoperable, they may use Emergency Leave for that day. The employee should enter emergency leave to prevent loss of income and preserve personal accruals.

In most circumstances, a teleworking employee has no need to enter both regular work time plus emergency leave. The intent of emergency leave is keep an employee’s salary whole due to unanticipated emergency events, not to accrue extra compensatory time.

**Out-of-State and Out-of-Country Employees**

Before beginning a teleworking arrangement for work performed outside of the state of Texas, consult with central HR Strategic Workforce Solutions as out-of-state and out-of-country teleworking may affect employment law and other specific policies.

**Communication and Collaboration**

It is critical that employees who are working both in and outside the office use appropriate collaboration tools. Managers and employees should use the systems that work best for their business needs. Good communication between supervisors and employees is essential for successfully completing work and is especially necessary in a flexible work environment. In addition to feedback at regular intervals, supervisors should continue to carry out annual performance appraisals that fall during the flexible work time frame.

*Virtual Private Networks*

A virtual private network (VPN) permits secure access to certain university resources when connecting from off campus or via the wireless network. A VPN establishes a secure connection between devices and university resources by creating an “encrypted tunnel” for the data communication. A VPN connection may be necessary when teleworking.

UT Austin has been using a two-factor authentication process to protect and secure online information. The two-factor authentication tool called Duo provides a more secure online learning and working environment. Current VPN users have been contacted by email with instructions on how to set up their Duo account. Learn more on the [VPN with Two Factor Authentication](#) webpage.

*Video Conferencing*

Video conferencing uses both audio and video to allow people at different sites to meet together over the Internet. A video conference can be a conversation between just two people (point-to-point) or several people at multiple locations (multipoint). Besides audio and video transmission of the conversation, video conferencing can be used to share documents and display information on your computer. These features allow for improved collaboration, more personal engagement, more content sharing and improved productivity.

Microsoft Teams allows employees to connect with FAS colleagues - as well as colleagues outside FAS and UT Austin - via chat, audio, and video calls. Online meetings enable participants to share a screen or a program, add attachments and create shared notes. It is possible to connect to Teams meetings from anywhere by using a desktop app, a web browser, or a mobile device to chat and join meetings, and audioconferencing is available via telephone. Because Teams is configured with an Office 365 account, colleagues can access features that provide information about others’ calendars, free/busy times, and “do not disturb” periods of concentrated work.
For tools or services that are being considered as a reasonable accommodation, a case-by-case analysis of accessibility features is recommended. For example, Microsoft Teams is an effective tool for direct sign language but does not yet have the ability to provide live captions in all cases.

Cloud-Based Document/File Storage

Using cloud-based storage provides the convenience of having access to your files from nearly any device with an internet connection, and may offer additional features such as real-time document collaboration with colleagues.

OneDrive is another service available with an Office 365 account to allow you to store and share work related files with colleagues in and outside of UT Austin. Each user has their own OneDrive, which can be used to store all work files that can be accessed on any device that has Internet access. Traditionally, OneDrive is used for personal files and ad hoc collaboration, while SharePoint operates as the backbone for storage a group’s work-related files. Similar to OneDrive, content stored within SharePoint can be accessed by devices that can connect to the Internet.

UTBox is a campus-wide service that allows faculty, staff and students at UT Austin to use Box cloud-based file sharing for business and academic purposes. UTBox can be accessed via https://utexas.box.com or from https://utbox.utexas.edu. For more information, see the UTBox wiki and FAQs.

Starting a Flexible Work Arrangement

FAS employees who are interested in a flexible work arrangement must first speak with their supervisor to see if they are eligible and to gain approval. All eligible and approved FAS staff must submit the following forms to their supervisor to participate in a flexible work arrangement:

- FAS Flexible Work Arrangement Agreement Form
- UT Flexible Work Arrangement Request Proposal

Once all signature approvals are obtained, agreements and any additional department-specific FWA forms should be forwarded to FAS Human Resources Support Services (HRSS) to be stored in the employee personnel file.