



Telecommuting Framework

ADMINISTRATORS, CUPE STAFF + NON-TEACHING FACULTY

Drafted by: Human Resources
Date: June 2021
Released: June 22, 2021

1. Introduction and General Principles

ECU's Strategic Plan prioritizes the need to develop flexible infrastructure and support to meet community needs. Studies suggest an increase in productivity and quality of work when employers offer flexible work arrangements like telecommuting to employees, so long as the arrangements are properly managed and implemented.

Common benefits of telecommuting include:

- Increased employee job satisfaction
- Increased energy, creativity and ability to handle stress
- Reduced employee absenteeism
- Improved ability to attract and retain high-performing and experienced employees
- Fewer distractions, leading to improved productivity
- Reduced carbon footprint by lowering transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions

Clearly defined responsibilities and parameters are needed for any employee who is telecommuting. However, due to the wide variety of roles and working arrangements at ECU, it is impractical to provide for a singular telework arrangement. The details of any individual arrangement must therefore be determined at the departmental level and based on this telecommuting framework.

The general principles of this framework include:

- Governance
 - Manage the university's risk and responsibility to ensure employee safety and wellbeing
 - Establish mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the practice
 - Clarify expectations of all prospective parties
- Fairness and Equity
 - Enable consistency across the university in how we approach and practice telework
 - Increase transparency in the process
- Professionalism
 - Address the evolving needs, abilities and professional status of ECU employees
- Competitiveness
 - Attract and retain employees with progressive, forward-thinking initiatives
 - Demonstrate the university's commitment to sustainability

2. Definitions

In this framework:

“**Employee**” means a person employed by ECU in an administrator, support staff, and non-teaching faculty position.

“**Telework**” or “**telecommuting**” means work typically performed on ECU premises but instead is performed at an employee’s residence or another remote location **within the province of British Columbia**. For clarity, telework does not include work that must be completed remotely due to the nature of the work.

“**Telework Agreement**” means the document that outlines the terms and conditions between the employee and their supervisor for the duration of the telework, which is approved by the senior administrative leader and communicated to the Human Resources prior to the start of the telework.

“**ECU property**” means equipment (including, but not limited to, telephones, computers, printers and software), services (including, but not limited to, electronic networks) and university information (proprietary, confidential or personal) provided by the university to the telecommuting employee.

3. Procedure

General Terms

- 3.1. The telework arrangement is voluntary (unless otherwise required by the university or by government legislation) and must be agreed to by the employee and their senior administrative leader.
- 3.2. While performing work at the employee's home, the employee continues to be considered an ECU employee, and remains under the direction of their supervisor and is required to perform duties in a manner consistent with all ECU policies and guidelines.
- 3.3. All university employee terms and conditions and/or Collective Agreements¹ remain in effect where administrative or staff employees are telecommuting.
- 3.4. Telework is not a replacement for dependent care (e.g., child, elder or pet care). The employee must have arrangements in place to ensure work demands are met.
- 3.5. Telecommuting employees are responsible for the safe and secure handling of all ECU property that is taken off campus or accessed from home, including but not limited to laptops and electronic files.
- 3.6. Telecommuting employees continue to be bound by the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* of British Columbia and all other applicable legislation.

Eligibility and Approval

- 3.7. Telecommuting eligibility will depend on the nature of the employee's role and the needs of the university. Telework is not suitable for all positions and situations, nor is it an entitlement or a benefit affecting the terms and conditions of employment.
- 3.8. The supervisor shall determine if a probationary employee is eligible for telework.
- 3.9. Employees who undergo performance management may have their telecommuting privileges revoked until the employee can demonstrate a sustained level of improved performance.
- 3.10. The arrangements are voluntary (unless otherwise required) and may be initiated by:

¹ A letter of understanding has the capacity to accommodate the provisions in a collective agreement, as demonstrated in Telework projects delivered by BC Hydro, the City of Vancouver (also CUPE 15), and Vancouver Community College.

- An employee, who must send a written request to their supervisor or senior administrative leader. The request shall describe how the proposed arrangement ensures work is effectively and efficiently performed, and specifies the telework frequency (i.e. days and hours of request).
- A supervisor or a senior administrative leader, based on the operational requirements of the area. Employees shall provide their consent before the start of a telecommuting arrangement.

3.11. The senior administrative leader must take the following factors into consideration when exercising their discretion to implement teleworking arrangements:

- a. The nature of the position, the job duties and the impact on colleagues and department
- b. Whether the telework arrangement would maintain or improve service or productivity
- c. The employee's suitability, taking into consideration performance and ability to work without direct management or frequent in-person interaction with their colleagues
- d. The manner and frequency of contact between supervisor/senior administrative leader and employee
- e. The nature of equipment and supplies associated with the request and the appropriateness of the home office environment
- f. How communications, teamwork and collaboration will be accomplished while working remotely. Telework arrangements involve considerable discussion, usually involving the entire team.

3.12. Implementation of telework arrangements is at the sole discretion of the applicable senior administrative leader and done on a case-by-case basis. If a request is approved, the specific terms and conditions of the arrangement are set out in a written Telework Agreement, signed by the telecommuting employee, their supervisor and the senior administrative leader. A written Telework Agreement may not be required if extraneous circumstances require the university to have employees work from home (e.g., for health and safety reasons).²

The Agreement (if applicable) should contain a minimum of the following information:

- Number of hours and/or days per week to be worked on campus
- Number of hours and/or days per week to be worked off campus
- Agreement on prior notice if the telework schedule is on an ad hoc basis
- Agreement on whether ECU or personal computers are to be used
- Employee contact information for all times when working off campus

3.13. A copy of the Telework Agreement must be filed with HR. A Telework Agreement does not continue into a new managerial or reporting relationship.

² In these circumstances, the university's requirements serve as the agreement for teleworking, and a further written Agreement is not needed.

Telework Arrangements vs. Accommodation

- 3.14. Telework arrangements are not substitutions for, or part of, the accommodation for employees with disabilities. In cases where an employee requests a telework arrangement for medical reasons or to accommodate a disability, the university has a duty to accommodate (to the point of undue hardship). As is the current process, employees should work with HR to arrange for accommodation related to illness, disability or family status.

Considerations for Telework

- 3.15. Although telecommuting can work in many situations, this does not mean it is appropriate for every type of job. Telework arrangements must be discussed and agreed upon by supervisors and employees. Ultimately, it is up to the senior administrative leader to determine if the arrangement is appropriate.

Some operational and job considerations include:

- University operating hours, which may restrict the flexibility of work schedules for employees who oversee services to students and employees
 - Peak or critical periods when employees may be required on campus
 - Jobs that require most or all of the work to be done on campus (e.g., lab monitoring, facilities maintenance, front line client services)
 - Jobs that require access to equipment or information that is only available on campus (e.g., technical support services, some research work)
- 3.16. The supervisor and employee can agree to an ad hoc teleworking arrangement (e.g., telecommuting on a project basis, rather than on a regular weekly schedule). The terms of such arrangement must still be documented in the Telework Agreement.

4. Accountability and Monitoring

- 4.1. A successful teleworking arrangement requires open communication between the employee and supervisor. Arrangements are best to be set up for a trial period with an interim review (i.e., after 2-6 months), allowing issues to be identified and corrected through adjustments of the arrangement. A review conducted at the end of a trial period can evaluate performance and productivity as well as the impact of the telework arrangement on the department.
- 4.2. Telecommuting employees must be available for contact at any time during a scheduled work day through such methods as email, a dedicated phone line or a cell phone.
- 4.3. Senior administrative leaders must periodically evaluate their implementation of this arrangement in conjunction with HR to ensure compliance with the terms of the telework framework.

It is incumbent upon HR, in its stewardship role for workplace practices, to provide this framework to enable consistency of approach and practice across the university.

Termination of Telecommuting Arrangements

- 4.4. Telecommuting arrangements and agreements may be terminated by either party with one month's notice.

Hours

- 4.5. Total number of work hours are not changed as a result of telecommuting. The employee must continue to work their contractually required number of hours.
- 4.6. Telework is not a full-time endeavor. The number of days per month that an employee is permitted to telework varies depending on the particular circumstances. As a general guideline, however, it will not exceed three days per week (unless otherwise required by the university).

5. Equipment and Workspace

- 5.1. An employee who is teleworking must follow the equipment and software requirements as prescribed by IT Services. Availability of hardware and/or software may delay or restrict an employee's request to telework.
- 5.2. The use of ECU-owned notebook computers is preferred for telecommuting. This may be the employee's primary work computer, or alternatively one from a pool of departmental notebook computers that is returned when not in use. The supervisor and IT Services can assess the needs

and approve either the use of a portable workstation or an employees' personal computer. This decision is recorded in the Telework Agreement.

- 5.3. IT Services may outline minimum security requirements for telecommuting employees.
- 5.4. Telecommuting employees are responsible for setting up and maintaining a home office (e.g., equipment, internet and phone connection, utilities, insurance) at their own expense.

Workspace, Safety and Ergonomics

- 5.5. Telecommuting employees are responsible for providing a suitable and secure off-site workspace at their own expense. The home workspace must be formally determined to be satisfactory by the supervisor before the employee may perform duties.
- 5.6. For safety reasons, telecommuting employees cannot meet with co-workers or work clients at their home, or provide their home phone number or address for contact to conduct work from home. Communications must be through the employee's ECU email and phone number (that may be forwarded to their home) or office address.
- 5.7. The home workspace is considered an extension of the university's workplace. Thus, it is subject to and governed by applicable *Workers' Compensation Act*, its associated regulations, and WorkSafe BC. Telecommuting employees are expected to comply with safety as well as normal reporting requirements for any work-related accident or injury.
- 5.8. The university can provide the employee with the information necessary to ensure that the workspace is safe, ergonomically suitable, and complies with relevant requirements. A home office safety checklist can serve as a resource for managers and employees, and may be incorporated into a telework agreement.