



ACTION 5:

Remote Work

Update the university's telecommute policy to make remote work a flexible daily option for as many employees as possible, while still delivering excellence in research, teaching, and the student experience for both in-person and remote modalities.

Opportunity

The coronavirus pandemic in 2020 has provided OSU with a unique opportunity to fast-track the infrastructure and cultural changes needed to support remote work as a viable option for employees. Working and learning from home has now been normalized, and many employees have demonstrated to themselves and their supervisors that they can be productive and even happy working remotely. Given the proper support, working remotely can be a daily option, reducing the time spent commuting and providing more freedom and job satisfaction for employees.

Current State

The current OSU telecommute policy assumes a long-term commitment rather than accommodating flexibility. Current policy says that all employees must have a telecommute agreement in place, signed by their dean or department head. The remote work arrangement must be deemed to be in the university's financial interest. The OSU telecommute policy was temporarily suspended for the duration of the pandemic-related stay-at-home order, allowing employees to work from home without a signed telecommute agreement in place.

Discussion

Lessons from the Pandemic

During the spring of 2020, OSU's response to the coronavirus pandemic included a rapid shift to remote work and remote learning where possible. Within the course of one week, OSU transitioned from an on-campus environment with nearly 30,000 individuals in one place to a distributed digital working and learning environment. While some essential employees continued to report to campus, a large portion of faculty and staff whose work could be conducted on a computer began working from home. This is not a perfect comparison to a typical remote work arrangement. Many have had to balance work with childcare as daycare facilities and public schools closed to prevent the spread of coronavirus. Some do not have adequate space in their home to work comfortably. And for some, their work has been compromised by the lack of in-person connection to students and colleagues. These circumstances have shown that remote work is not an all-or-nothing solution.

However, many OSU employees are quite capable of completing their work online, and some prefer it to a traditional office environment. Once the Corvallis campus returns to in-person instruction, many have expressed a preference to continue to work remotely at least a few days each week. An ideal remote work policy is one that allows for employees to make this choice in a way that is supportive of both their needs and the requirements of their position.

Evidence indicates that policies which support flexible remote work will improve both employee productivity and institutional resilience. OSU has already begun surveying employees to understand and harness the lessons learned from the COVID-19 remote working experience. With new information in hand about perceived barriers and benefits to remote work, the next step will be to create a representative committee of stakeholders from across campus to update the current university telecommute policy and develop a lasting strategy to support flexible remote work for OSU employees.

Cost
\$

Lead
OSU Leadership

Partners
OSU Human Resources,
OSU Transportation Services

Timeline
Medium

Complementary Actions
Daily Parking (Action 1)
Commute Platform (Action 2)

