



**Government
of South Australia**

Office of the Commissioner
for Public Sector Employment

REMOTE WORKING FOR PRODUCTIVITY

Managers Guide

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Introduction

Remote or home working is not a new concept and you may have employees who work from home on a regular basis but in most situations, this will be a day or two a week. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has presented a situation where employees may have to work from home for prolonged periods of time.

Adherence to social distancing guidance must be followed to stem the spread of this virus. Chief Executives should ensure any employees who can work from home do so to minimise exposure. If a working from home arrangement cannot be accommodated, executives are asked to explore alternatives including access to leave entitlements or granting of the COVID-19 special leave with pay provisions. These arrangements should be reviewed regularly with managers and executives.

Chief Executives and Executives are also encouraged to consider the following options:

- Offer the option for employees to work reduced hours then access existing leave provisions for the remaining hours of the day e.g. carers leave if children are at home etc.
- Consider moving employees to an output-based model of work rather than accounting for their hours. This requires priorities to be completed within agreed timeframes, rather than requiring employees to be online during office hours, potentially being unproductive. (Also referred to in the sector as attendance tracking or an Approved Days Off arrangement rather than flexi time).
- If none of the above are legitimate options, look at alternatives, which may include allocation of tasks from other areas of the agency, providing employees with the option to reduce their hours for a period of time.

Productivity and employee wellbeing will be the main challenges as we move to this new way of working. Managers should check in with staff at least daily to ensure employees remain connected to the workplace and deliverables are communicated, and that they are adjusting to the change in workday structure.

Practically, this will require managers to consider:

- How the work of employees and teams support continued service and program delivery.
- How to manage team members who may be unwell or unable to work for extended periods.
- How to communicate with team members and across agencies.
- How to support employees to adjust to changes in ways of working, maintain connection and enable an inclusive work environment.
- How to maintain perspective and motivation of self and team members.
- How to set clear expectations with team members to support performance and enable employee wellbeing.

This Guide provides some practical steps you can take to ensure employee wellbeing, safety and support at home, team connection, and monitor outputs of those who are working remotely.

Set clear expectations

There is a risk that employees may not have clarity of priorities within and across teams so it's important to define and put in place well documented processes and ensure they are followed by all.

It's important to make sure all team members understand their role (especially if the focus changes throughout the period they are working from home), and that they clearly understand their performance outcomes, targets and deliverables.

Set common ground rules and then ensure consistency of application across the team. It's a good idea wherever possible to develop these with input from the team to promote 'buy in'.

It is important to establish new team norms and ways of working as a remote team so team members are clear on what is expected of them. Set clear expectations with those who are working from home. Below are some suggestions:

- Agree hours of work – For example: this may be different from their normal office hours as they are not travelling to and from work or may also have caring responsibilities to juggle. Consider availability around stakeholder and client needs.
- Agree availability - are there certain times in the day you want to connect with them?
- Agree how you are going to communicate e.g. by phone. Microsoft Teams, WebEx, Skype or email.
- Agree the platform you are going to use to share documents e.g. Microsoft Teams, SharePoint etc. and ensure all team members know how to access, upload and retrieve documents, and that employees are comfortable using the agreed technology to communicate.
- Set up a regular schedule of check in meetings – this can enable you to keep track of work outputs, solve problems and provide advice and guidance.
- Ensure that employees understand expected key outputs and deadlines for completion etc.
- Schedule regular team meetings so teams still feel connected and can update each other on what they are working on and where they may need help. It is suggested that these may be twice a week, one at the beginning and one at the end of the week.
- Set up regular one-on-one meetings with each employee (at least weekly) – ask the employee to set the agenda for these to ensure that they have time to talk to you about any issues or barriers they are facing with their work.
- Agree the whole team will use their cameras when video conferencing. This will help with engagement, social connection and allows you to read body language etc.
- Ensure you respond to emails, missed phone calls etc. in a timely manner.

Encourage regular connection and the team to support each other

Remote/home working can be quite a culture shock for some, especially for those who place a high value on office interaction. Ask the team to keep in touch with each other, coordinate virtual coffee breaks etc.

Create virtual common spaces like message boards, Microsoft Team sites or intranets, allowing remote workers to interact with their colleagues and enabling the type of informal interaction they might have in an office. Encourage the use of the 'chat' facilities between team members.

You can strengthen these connections further with video conferencing regular team meetings via Microsoft Teams, Skype, WebEx etc.

Regular communication will help remote workers feel less isolated and more included, while creating additional means of accountability and motivation.

Avoid micro-management

Focus on the overall goal and outputs rather than daily activity and hours. Managers should follow up regularly with their remote team members to communicate objectives and give continuous feedback based on results. Avoid requesting a daily report of activity unless this is part of the normal culture when working in the physical office. You need to trust your employees and demonstrating this will help motivate your employees to apply discretionary effort. Setting clear expectations with team members from the beginning will promote autonomy and provide greater levels of employee engagement, and productivity. Consideration should be given to setting shorter-term goals and there may be a need to re-prioritise longer term goals.

Sense employees' need for support

Managers need to recognise signs of distress among their people, both directly (through conversations) and indirectly (through observation). Human Resources can provide managers with up-to-date information and guidance to enable their conversations with employees about sensitive subjects arising from the pandemic, including alternative work models, job security and prospects, overall staffing impact and tension in the workplace.

Managers should have regular conversations with their employees to identify challenges and concerns. This will help employees feel supported and cared for. If employees feel stressed or anxious about the current situation encourage them to utilise the Employee Assistance Program or direct them to a credible source of information such as the Australian Department for Health, SA Health or WHO organisation (links provided below).

Focus on objectives to create clarity amid uncertainty and disruption

Managers can have a greater impact on discretionary effort by setting clear objectives that connect employees' efforts to the organisations' priorities, rather than trying to redefine activities and behaviours associated with individual roles in response to a change event.

To be effective, employees need to be clear about expectations and have a clear line-of-sight between their work and the operational and/or strategic priorities of their agency and government. A clear understanding of roles and expectations supports greater productivity, motivating employees to maintain and improve their performance.

A direct link between their individual performance and the achievement of business goals can boost employees' confidence even in a challenging business environment.

Even though the full impact of the COVID-19 outbreak is yet to be determined, clear objectives and regular updates on the possible changes will help ensure employees maintain focus, energy and a sense of purpose, rather than feeling as though they are simply treading water.

Managers should not pretend they have all the answers but rather be clear on what they do know and how they will keep their employees informed as the situation changes.

Reach out if needed

It is easy to let our own health and wellbeing slip when adjusting to a new routine, dealing with ambiguity and managing change. Focusing on your wellbeing will enable you to stay healthy and look after the wellbeing of your team members. Working from home does not mean you are required to 'go it alone' – it is important you maintain contact with others. Microsoft Teams, WebEx and Skype are a great way to collaborate and interact for both work and non-work topics and to avoid social isolation. Share concerns and discuss problems or issues with peers, your manager or a colleague, as this will help to bring perspective to the situation.

Also remember to celebrate the small wins and share your successes with your team, as it can be more difficult to feel a sense of achievement or progress when working remotely.

Remember you can also contact your Employee Assistance / Manager Assist Programs.

Further support;

For details of your Employee Assistance and Manager Assist Programs provider please refer to your agencies intranet pages or contact your HR team.

[OCPSE Working from Home Checklist](#)

[Working from Home – Employee Guide](#)

COVID-19 latest Information:

[Australian Department of Health](#)

[SA Health](#)

[WHO Organization](#)