Knowledge Management Research: Telework in Child Welfare

Research Question

Telework and flexible scheduling is an increasingly common way for public and private entities to manage their workforces. Work from home or alternate worksite arrangements allow businesses and agencies to provide additional work-life benefits to employees, eliminate commute times, reduce overhead costs associated with physical workspaces, and in some cases, streamline workflow by enabling work to be completed in the field.

To support child welfare agencies in transferring select operations online and out of a centralized worksite, the Knowledge Management Team has developed the following questions to deepen the understanding of telework practices as they relate to child welfare:

- ▶ What common elements of telework programs should agencies be aware of?
- ▶ What are best practices for telework in child welfare?
- ▶ What are some examples of state telework agreements and other relevant employment policies?

These questions were used to inform a search of scholarly literature, technical assistance products, agency program and policy materials, and relevant resources from other related fields. The resources reviewed can be found in the "Resources" section. Findings are reported below.

Limitations

This search returned only one resource pertaining to telework specific to child welfare agencies. There were, however, a number of resources found that issue guidance from the authority of an overarching entity. For example, many telework guidelines fall under jurisdictions' human resources policies and are applicable to all state employees. These broader resources are included in this response as they reflect the general landscape of existing practices.

Findings[*]

Common Elements of Telework Guidance

A few common elements emerged from a review of the policies, practices and scholarly literature collected in this search. At minimum, resources shared guidance on the following components:

Security and Personally Identifiable Information

Telework policies include statements that employees will be able to abide by the entity's larger security policies and fulfill requirements for keeping publicly identifiable information (PII) safe and confidential. Many telework policies point to an overarching security policy and stipulate that employees will be granted access to information by supervisors on an as-needed basis.

Additionally, many policies state that **any** information stored on personal equipment used for teleworking (e.g., computers and cell phones) may be subject to inspection and/or release as public record. Such information includes documents, text messages, and internet records, depending on the policy.

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[*] Note: Inclusion of any particular program, project, process, or tool does not indicate endorsement by the Capacity Building Center for States or the Children's Bureau.

Technology, Hardware, and Equipment

Policies and best practice literature outline minimum requirements for the equipment necessary for telework. Commonly listed technology assets deemed essential for remote work include a computer with access to high-speed internet, a phone, a printer, and occasionally a fax machine for secure document transfer. Some agencies issue these assets, while others state that equipment must be provided by the employee.

Policies also state that steps must be taken to protect agency-issued technology (such as use of surge protectors) and release the agency from liability for damage to any personal equipment used.

Workspace

Some policies include clauses that grant the agency the authority to inspect and approve the employee's workspace as a condition of telework. This includes the employee's home, if the home is designated as the employee's alternate worksite. Language often includes a statement exempting agencies from reimbursement for costs associated with telework, such as rent, electricity, heat, and internet expenses.

Eligibility

Eligibility for telework is outlined in several policies and is not applicable to all employees. Common features of telework eligibility include the ability to perform essential job duties without resources exclusive to the central worksite, compliance with telework policies, good standing with respect to conduct and performance, and supervisory discretion.

Monitoring Performance

Mechanisms for monitoring performance vary from policy to policy, though all policies that were reviewed noted that monitoring is an essential part of the telework agreement. For some, performance above a certain threshold is considered a criterion for telework eligibility, while others simply state that telework privileges may be revoked if performance falters. Guidelines and best practice literature commonly state that clear expectations for performance should or will be set as part of any teleworking agreement.

Best Practices

A few agencies and organizations have issued publications containing what they consider to be best practices in their teleworking environments. Not all practices are applicable to telework that is authorized or implemented on an emergency basis, such as in response to the Coronavirus outbreak, but are included for reference and potential consideration later.

Technology and Data Security

Technology and Equipment Best Practices for Teleworkers and Mobile Workers

Adapted from the *Telework & Flex-Schedules Toolkit* (San Mateo County Office of Sustainability, n.d.).

Component	Best Practices
Computer Equipment	▶ Laptop computers are the "tool of choice" for teleworkers and mobile workers. Nearly all participating organizations provide laptop computers and docking stations to their employees. ▶ Most organizations have standard types of laptops, making equipment repair and replacement easier. Computers are typically replaced every 3 years. Laptops generally are not considered an extra cost for equipping a teleworker; rather, they are included in the cost of equipping an employee.

Component	Best Practices
Remote Access	▶ A secure virtual private network (VPN) is the most common means of remote network access. Secure ID tokens are frequently used for an additional layer of security. Thin client remote access applications are becoming more popular, especially where greater security is a concern.
Telecommunications	▶ Many organizations are beginning to use Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), a technology that enables the user to make telephone calls over the internet. VoIP eliminates the need for a second phone line and significantly reduces long-distance charges.
Internet Connection	▶ Broadband internet access usually is required as part of a home office set up. Most organizations do not contribute to this cost unless the employee gives up office space. ▶ Wireless internet access over cell service is growing in popularity, as is the use of mobile devices.
Collaboration Tools	▶ The use of desktop collaboration tools, including video conferencing and file sharing applications, is growing among participants.

Data Confidentiality Best Practices for Employees

(San Mateo County Office of Sustainability, n.d.)

- ▶ If possible, set up the home office in a separate room with a door that can be closed and locked.
- ▶ Keep work-related files and confidential information (that can be removed from the office) in a locked storage cabinet when not in use.
- ▶ Do not leave confidential information unattended.
- ▶ Know who is responsible for backups.
- ▶ Use surge protectors to protect equipment from damage from power surges.
- ▶ Unplug equipment in electrical storms.
- ▶ Turn off desktop/laptop computers when not in use and consider using cable locks for extra security, if warranted.
- ▶ Never leave laptops unattended in a vehicle, even in the trunk.
- ▶ Do not eat or drink around computer equipment.
- ▶ Do not transmit confidential information via any wireless technology, email, or the Internet unless the connection is secure, or the information is encrypted.
- ▶ Do not store unencrypted confidential information on a laptop computer/desktop computer's hard drive, USB drive, CD, flash memory card, or other storage media.
- ▶ Password-protect all confidential information and accounts with access to confidential information.
- ▶ Do not share passwords, and do not document passwords.

Protecting Personally Identifiable Information: Telework Best Practices

Adapted from *Protecting PII Telework Best Practices* (Department of Homeland Security, 2012).

When	Do	Don't
Before you telework …	▶ **Plan ahead to ensure that sensitive documents can be safely accessed remotely.** Organize your files so that they are easily accessible via remote access software. Use approved, portable electronic devices that are encrypted, thereby adding a layer of protection to your data. ▶ **Obtain authorization from your supervisor to take home sensitive documents, and make sure documents containing sensitive PII are marked "For Official Use Only" or "Privacy Data."** Inventory your hard copy documents when you leave the office and before you return them to the office.	▶ **Don't forward emails to your personal email account or use nonapproved portable electronic devices.** Have a backup plan in case you experience issues with network connectivity, but never transfer or download data to your personal computer, personal email account, or to nonencrypted devices. ▶ **Don't take sensitive PII home that you do not need.** Limit your removal of sensitive PII from the office to only that information that is relevant and necessary to the work outlined in your telework agreement.
Transporting documents …	▶ **Secure sensitive data when not in use.** If you must leave your laptop or hard copy documents inside a vehicle, lock them in the trunk but only for short periods of time. When traveling, place sensitive data in a hotel safe when not in use.	▶ **Don't leave your laptop or hard copy documents unattended overnight.** Maintain accountability of your data by ensuring documents are secured when not in use.
At home …	▶ **Log in through remote access software, if applicable.** Organize your workspace at home so that work files are separate from personal files and can be properly safeguarded. ▶ **Take advantage of collaboration software tools,** but do not post sensitive PII on the agency intranet sites, SharePoint collaboration sites, shared drives, multi-access calendars, or on the Internet (including social networking sites) that can be accessed by individuals who do not have a "need to know." ▶ **Secure your data and ensure other household members do not have access to it.** Organize your workspace at home so that government property and information are kept separate from personal property and can be properly safeguarded.	▶ **Don't email or save files containing sensitive PII to your home computer.** Don't print agency records to your home printer. ▶ **Don't store sensitive PII on collaboration software tools unless it has been approved for such use.** Access must be limited to those that have an official need to know. ▶ **Don't leave files containing sensitive data lying out in the open.** Never leave sensitive PII in view of children, spouses, or visitors. Sensitive PII should be secured in locked cabinets and your computer/devices should remain locked when not in use.

Business and Management

Business Rules

Adapted from the *Teleworking Guide to Best Practices* (Virginia Council on Technology Services Mobile Workforce Workgroup, 2007).

- ▶ Spend the right amount of time designing the right program.
  - ■ Ensure visible support from the top.
  - ■ Assemble a strong project team, including HR, IT, and Facilities personnel.
  - ■ Appoint a telework coordinator to serve as a constant and visible champion.
  - ■ Learn from other successful programs.
  - ■ Establish clear/written guidelines and policies.
  - ■ Once you've planned for what you can readily anticipate, move on to the pilot stage.
- ▶ Identify the roles best suited for remote work.
  - ■ Identify those employees who, by virtue of their job role and performance, are eligible to telework, and encourage them to do so.
  - ■ Denials of telework requests should be limited to business needs or performance.
- ▶ Create formal telework agreements.
  - ■ A formal agreement should be in place between the teleworker and manager, including those required to telework in the case of a continuity of operations event.
- ▶ Continuity of operations plan.
  - ■ Those employees identified as essential or critical in the case of a continuity of operations event should be required to "experience" teleworking by working remotely at least one day per month.
- ▶ Provide appropriate training and support resources.
  - ■ Both managers and teleworkers should participate in training and understand the telework policy and guidelines.
  - ■ Manager training must include managing remote work and measuring performance.
  - ■ Remote workers should have easy access to support resources, including policies, guidelines, frequently asked questions, handbooks, etc.
- ▶ Start with a pilot.
  - ■ Establish a pilot program that can be easily managed and evaluated.
  - ■ Broadly communicate benefits during the pilot.
  - ■ Modify the program based on what you learn from the pilot and expand after demonstrating the business case.
- ▶ Communicate, communicate, communicate.
  - ■ Clearly communicate the benefits and successes of teleworking to gain management support.
  - ■ Ensure ongoing interaction between managers and remote workers is sustained, and that open communication is maintained across all members of a workgroup.
  - ■ Managers and employees should maintain frequent contact with their Telework Coordinator to ensure the agency's policy and procedures are properly applied and to leverage available support resources.
  - ■ Promote a strong team culture and address the feeling of isolation that some remote workers will encounter.
  - ■ Allow members of a team to interact face-to-face before beginning remote work.
- ▶ Manage by what gets done, not by what you can observe.

- Manage teleworkers the same as other employees. Understand that they are performing the same work, just at a different location.
- Performance standards for remote workers should be the same as performance standards for onsite employees. All must be held accountable for the results produced.

Supervisory Relationships

A study published in the *Review of Public Personnel Administration* found that high-quality relationship-based supervision styles modulate the effect of remote work on workers' feelings of social isolation. Through an analysis of daily diary entries made by public servants working from home, researchers found that telework "leads to *greater* professional isolation and *less* organizational commitment," but that "a high-quality LMX [leader-member exchange], in which the leader and the employee trust each other, can reduce public servants' professional isolation on the days they spend working fully from home. Thus, our results highlight how relationship-oriented leadership approaches, in particular, might be beneficial and even required in a teleworking environment" (De Vries, Tummers, & Bekkers, 2019).

Additional Lessons Learned

Adapted from *Literature Review: Teleworking in Human Services* (Harbert, Tucker-Tatlow, & O'Sullivan, 2013); all references can be found therein.

- Managers should provide increased, not decreased, support to teleworkers (Joice, 2000).
- Managers should consider implementing monitoring tools not just for productivity and task completion, but also to monitor quality (Joice, 2000).
- Guidelines need to be in place to address the issue of dependent care (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009; General Services Administration, 2006b).
- A policy needs to be in place in order to address the issue of worker's compensation for teleworkers (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009).
- Managers need to be trained on how to supervise teleworkers (Anonymous, 2006b).
- A member of the organization should be designated as the telework coordinator to oversee all aspects of teleworking in the company (A Guide to Telework in the Federal Government, OPM-VI-I-1).
- The telework coordinator should be responsible for duties such as assigning tasks, establishing communication, stating time frames, clarifying the quality of work expected, establishing review periods, providing feedback, and working to correct unsatisfactory behavior (Office of Workplace Programs, 2012).
- Determine communication standards for teleworkers who are dealing with information that is urgent, somewhat urgent, or not urgent (Department of Labor, 2009).

Resources (Alphabetical by Author)

Examples of Program and Policy Materials

Telework Policies and Manuals

Interim Telework Training Manual for Managers and Supervisors
Connecticut Department of Administrative Services
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DAS/Statewide-HR/A---Z-Listing-Task-PDFs/Telework/Interim-Telework-Training-Manual-for-Managers-and-Supervisors.pdf?la=en

Telework Policy
El Dorado County, CA Department of Human Resources
https://www.edcgov.us/Government/HumanResources/Documents/Telework%20Policy%20Adopted%203-6-18%20Fillable.pdf

Telework Technical Assistance Manual
New Hampshire Department of Administrative Services
https://das.nh.gov/hr/documents/Telework%20Manual%20NH.pdf

Telecommuting Policy
Washington, DC Child and Family Services Agency
https://cfsa.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cfsa/publication/attachments/GAP_Telecommuting_Program_Guidelines_0.pdf

Teleworking Policy
Virginia Department of Human Resources Management
https://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/docs/default-source/hrpolicy/pol1_61.pdf?sfvrsn=2

Telework Agreements

Interim Telework Agreement
Connecticut Department of Administrative Services
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DAS/Statewide-HR/A---Z-Listing-Task-PDFs/Telework/Interim-Telework-Agreement.pdf?la=en

Telework Agreement and Work Log
El Dorado County, CA Department of Human Resources
https://www.edcgov.us/Government/HumanResources/Documents/Telework%20Policy%20Adopted%203-6-18%20Fillable.pdf#page=10

Telework Agreement
New Hampshire Department of Administrative Services
https://das.nh.gov/hr/documents/Telework%20Manual%20NH.pdf#page=19

Telework Agreement Template
San Mateo County, CA Office of Sustainability
https://www.commute.org/files/programs/SMC_Telework_Toolkit.pdf#page=67

Miscellaneous Other Forms

Interim Telework Plan
Connecticut Department of Administrative Services
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DAS/Statewide-HR/A---Z-Listing-Task-PDFs/Telework/Interim-Telework-Work-Plan.pdf?la=en

Interim Telework Security Addendum
Connecticut Department of Administrative Services
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DAS/Statewide-HR/A---Z-Listing-Task-PDFs/Telework/Interim-Telework-Security-Addendum.pdf?la=en

Telework Log
El Dorado County, CA Department of Human Resources
https://www.edcgov.us/Government/HumanResources/Documents/Telework%20Policy%20Adopted%203-6-18%20Fillable.pdf#page=16

Worksite Self-Certification
New Hampshire Department of Administrative Services
https://das.nh.gov/hr/documents/Telework%20Manual%20NH.pdf#page=25

Home Office Safety Self-Certification Checklist Template
San Mateo County, CA Office of Sustainability
https://www.commute.org/files/programs/SMC_Telework_Toolkit.pdf#page=82

Sample Departmental Policy
San Mateo County, CA Office of Sustainability
https://www.commute.org/files/programs/SMC_Telework_Toolkit.pdf#page=67

Research Literature

The Benefits of Teleworking in the Public Sector: Reality or Rhetoric?
https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0734371X18760124
de Vries, Tummers, & Bekkers. (2018).

Investigates the impact of virtual work on employees' sense of connectedness and organizational commitment. The authors find that a quality relationship between supervisor and supervisee (termed leader-member exchange, or LMX) helps alleviate employees' feelings of isolation and increases commitment to the organization.

Literature Review: Teleworking in Human Services
https://theacademy.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/SACHS_Literature_Review_Telework_Report_2_2013.pdf
Southern Area Consortium of Human Services. (2013).

Reviews research literature on telework from 1998-2013 and provides recommendations and lessons learned. Contains information on specific telework programs, and examples of workers' compensation policies and telework agreements.

Other Guidance and Resources

Child Welfare Staff Engagement & Retention in Washington, DC: Alternative Work Schedules, Telecommuting & Other Supports
https://ncwwi.org/files/CW_Staff_Engagement__Retention_1-pager.pdf
National Child Welfare Workforce Institute

Summarizes a 2013 webinar on Washington, DC's efforts to retain social workers by implementing telework and alternative work schedules. Provides a high-level overview of critical findings and implications from Washington, DC's Alternative Work Schedule program.

Telecommuting & Teleworking Guidelines & Best Practices
https://www.oregon.gov/das/Policies/50-050-01.pdf
Oregon Department of Administrative Services

Outlines best practices for establishing telework programs. Topics include considerations for choosing eligible job classifications, accountability, providing and receiving feedback, worksite specifications, time keeping, security, and other pertinent aspects of telework.

Telework & Flex-Schedules Toolkit
https://www.commute.org/files/programs/SMC_Telework_Toolkit.pdf
San Mateo County, CA Office of Sustainability

Provides a comprehensive overview of telework and flexible work scheduling practices. Telework for the County of San Mateo is defined and case studies for how telework has been implemented in three county agencies is provided. Major considerations for program implementation, infrastructure, risk and liability, and training are outlined.

Protecting PII: Telework Best Practices
https://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/privacy_training/resources/teleworkbestpractices.pdf
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Identifies best practices for managing personally identifiable and sensitive information. Includes specific "do's" and "don'ts" as well as the rationale behind the precautions outlined.

Mobile Worker Toolkit: A Notional Guide
https://www.gsa.gov/cdnstatic/MobileWorkerToolkitDetailed.pdf
U.S. General Services Administration

Provides general guidance on working away from a centralized worksite. Topics include tenets of telework to ensure seamless service delivery, managing a mobile workforce, and tips for talking to colleagues about mobile work arrangements.

Quick Guide: Managing Teleworkers
https://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/docs/default-source/hr/managingteleworkers.pdf?sfvrsn=2
Virginia Department of Human Resource Management

Describes tips for managing employees in a remote environment. Uses plain language to communicate critical components of telework leadership.

Teleworking: Guidance and Assistance for Supervisors and Managers
https://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/hr-partners/telework
Virginia Department of Human Resource Management

Provides links to resources related to telework program development, virtual supervision and management, and learning and development opportunities for telework professionals.

Teleworking Guide to Best Practices
https://www.vita.virginia.gov/media/vitavirginiagov/resources/presentations/pdf/COTSMobileWorkforceWorkgroup_TeleworkingGuide.pdf
Virginia Council on Technology Services Mobile Workforce Group

Presents best practices for virtual work and describes telework practices within Virginia state agencies, the federal government, and the private sector. Provides case studies and examples of "award winning" telework programs.

Tips—Managing Remote Employees
https://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/docs/default-source/hr/Telework-Resources/tips-for-managing-remote-employees.pdf?sfvrsn=2
Virginia Department of Human Resource Management

Outlines various methods for supervising employees in a virtual environment provided by state government employees. Topics include communication, scheduling, trust, recognition, and tools.

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). *Implementation of mitigation strategies for communities with local COVID-19 transmission.* www.cdc.gov/COVID19

de Vries, H., Tummers, L., & Bekkers, V. (2019). The benefits of teleworking in the public sector: Reality or rhetoric? *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, *39*(4), 570–593. https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X18760124

Department of Homeland Security. (2012). *Protecting PII: Telework best practices.* www.DHS.gov/privacy

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San Mateo County Office of Sustainability. (n.d.). *Telework & flex-schedules toolkit.* https://commute.org/files/programs/SMC_Telework_Toolkit.pdf.

Virginia Council on Technology Services Mobile Workforce Workgroup. (2007). *Teleworking guide to best practices.* https://www.vita.virginia.gov/media/vitavirginiagov/resources/presentations/pdf/COTSMobileWorkforceWorkgroup_TeleworkingGuide.pdf.