**What is a remote work policy?**

A remote work policy — also known as a work from home policy or telecommuting policy — is a set of guidelines that outlines how and when it’s appropriate for employees to work outside the office. These policies often cover who is eligible to work remotely, communication expectations, time-tracking processes, data security rules, legal considerations and more.

Remote work policies can be temporary or permanent, and can apply to both employees working remotely on a full-time basis and those who work only occasionally from home.

**What to include in your remote work policy**

Not having a formal remote work policy in place can lead to confusion, miscommunication and poor productivity. That’s why it’s important to create a work from home policy that sets expectations for your employees, keeps them on track while working from home and helps mitigate any potential legal problems.

Here are 11 ground rules, guidelines and expectations to consider including in your remote work policy:

**1. Purpose and scope**

Start by explaining why you created the policy and who it applies to. For example, you may want to clarify whether the policy is in effect only temporarily due to COVID-19 or if your business has decided to go remote permanently.

Additionally, are contractors, part-time employees, interns and new hires covered by the policy, or does it apply only to full-time employees who have been with your company for a certain amount of time?

**2. Eligible positions and employees**

Even if your business is entirely remote, there may be some eligibility criteria you’ll want to include in your policy. For example, will employees need to live in the same city or state where your business is located, or can they move anywhere in the world?

If your business is partially remote, outline who is working from home and when. Your remote work policy may state that people in sales or client-facing roles can only work from home two days per week, for instance. You can also create other criteria rules, like only employees who’ve worked at your company for at least three months are eligible to work from home, or only those who don’t have [active disciplinary actions](https://www.indeed.com/hire/c/info/disciplinary-action?hl=en&co=US) on file can work remotely.

Some positions may not be suited for remote work, including jobs that require employees to use certain equipment that can’t be replicated at home, access documents available only in the workplace or regularly interact in person with customers and clients. If there are broad categories of positions that are not eligible for remote work, consider listing them in your policy.

Finally, explain how eligible employees can request to work remotely, including the steps in the approval process (e.g., written request, meeting with supervisor and HR, formal agreement).

**3. Remote work expectations**

More than three-quarters of HR leaders said the [top complaint at the start of COVID-19](https://www.gartner.com/en/documents/3981830/coronavirus-in-mind-make-remote-work-successful-) was “concerns from managers about the productivity or engagement of their teams when remote.” Setting team norms and expectations upfront can provide more transparency around employee productivity, prevent any confusion and set your remote employees (and their managers) up for success.

Here are a few communication and collaboration expectations to consider putting in writing:

**Availability:** Can remote employees choose their own hours or do you expect them to be available online from 9 to 5? Consider being flexible if possible, especially during COVID-19. For instance, some companies allow their remote employees to work eight hours within a certain window, such as between 7am and 7pm, or be reachable during specified “core hours” based on your business’s headquarters (e.g., 9am-11am CST Monday to Friday).

**Responsiveness:** Set expectations around response times to emails and pings. Make sure to consider time zones and workload, as even the most accessible employees may have a delayed response from time to time. You can put a number on this (i.e., within 1-2 hours for important emails) or keep it more general by including a phrase like “as quickly as possible.”

**How often to stay in touch:** [Studies show](https://slack.com/blog/collaboration/remote-workers-employee-engagement) that nearly half (46%) of remote workers believe the best managers are the ones who excel at frequent and consistent communication. Consider addressing this in your telecommuting policy. For example, you could include a statement in your remote work policy that managers should establish daily check-in calls with their team.

**Communication tools:** Consider setting guidelines for when to instant message, when to email and when to meet on video. Chatting on a messaging platform like Slack, for example, can be great for continuous communication through the day and asking one-off questions, while team meetings often require screen sharing and face-to-face interaction via video call. Another thing to consider is whether you’ll require remote employees to turn their cameras on during video calls, or if you’ll leave this up to individual teams.

**4. Legal considerations for hourly remote employees**

Under the [Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)](https://www.indeed.com/hire/c/info/the-fair-labor-standards-act?hl=en&co=US), non-exempt employees typically must be paid overtime if they work more than 40 hours per week. To mitigate legal risk and avoid high overtime costs, make sure remote hourly employees know the number of hours they’re allowed to work, any meal and rest breaks they’re required to take according to state law and what to do if they need to work overtime.

Set up a process for them to “clock in” and “clock out,” and include details about it in your work from home policy. As for overtime, consider including a statement that remote hourly workers should get advance permission in writing from their supervisor before working any extra hours.

**5. Remote tools, equipment and supplies**

Who pays for remote equipment and resources is generally up to you, but your remote work policy should be clear about what tools you’ll provide, any equipment employees must purchase themselves and what expenses qualify for reimbursement.

For example, you may provide employees with a company laptop and various remote collaboration software tools (e.g., video conferencing software, live chat apps), but require employees to pay for their own internet and phone service. You may also choose to ask employees to purchase necessary equipment upfront and and reimburse them later, or establish a [bring your own device (BYOD) policy](https://www.indeed.com/hire/c/info/bring-your-own-device-policies?hl=en&co=US).

Additionally, if you offer any work from home stipends to help pay for remote working expenses such as internet, phone bill or electricity, include it in your policy.

**6. Technical support options**

Specify what action remote employees need to take if they experience technical difficulties and what IT support options are available to them (e.g., virtual help desk via Zoom, 24/7 emergency IT hotline).

**7. Guidelines for setting up employee work environments**

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), [employers are responsible for their workers’ health and safety](https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/oshact/completeoshact) — including remote employees. That means a remote worker could make a claim for workers’ compensation benefits if they get hurt while working from home under certain circumstances.

While [OSHA has stated](https://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=directives&p_id=2254) that it will not hold employers liable for employees’ home offices and does not expect employers to inspect them, it’s good practice to provide a home office safety checklist or list of guidelines in your remote work policy. General guidelines could include [how to set up an ergonomic workstation](https://www.indeed.com/hire/c/info/improve-office-ergonomics?hl=en&co=US) and ways to avoid injury while working from home (e.g., keeping walkways clear of clutter, how to avoid overloading home electrical circuits).

To ensure compliance with health and safety guidelines, some companies require their employees to submit photos, videos or floor plans of their remote workspace. If you require remote workspace approval, include details about this process in your work from home policy.

**8. Security and confidentiality rules**

From shoulder surfing to physical theft to unsecured networks, working remotely (or from public places like a coffee shop) can present significant data security risks. In fact, a [2018 information security report](https://www.shredit.com/getmedia/b5de58fd-7e17-4d18-b718-9eca8d0665a6/Shred-it-2018-North-America-State-of-the-Industry.aspx) found that 86% of C-level executives believe that there’s a higher risk of a data breach when employees work remotely.

In your remote work policy, make your employees aware of these risks and offer guidance on avoiding them. For example, consider instructing employees to lock their laptop screen when they step away from their workspace, password-protect all business devices and use two-factor or multi-factor authentication. If you have specific requests, such as requiring the use of a VPN (virtual private network) when using public Wi-Fi, state it in your policy.

Similarly, outline best practices for securing confidential information. For instance, employees should be reminded not to discuss or share any sensitive information when taking client calls in public places.

**9. Any required travel**

What company-related activities will happen in person, if any? Some businesses require their remote employees to meet every few months for in-person meetings or to attend annual company retreats. Other companies don’t require any travel.

If travel is required, how will employees be reimbursed for their travel expenses (e.g., [per diem](https://www.indeed.com/hire/c/info/per-diem?hl=en&co=US))? You may choose to outline more specific details in a [separate travel policy](https://www.indeed.com/hire/c/info/travel-policy?hl=en&co=US).

**10. Salary and pay**

If remote employees move to a new city or state with a higher or lower cost of living, will their compensation be adjusted? Consider including this information in your remote work policy for full transparency.

**11. Consequences**

Outline the consequences remote employees may face if they violate any of the rules in your remote work policy or fail to meet productivity standards. You may follow the same disciplinary action process you normally follow for violations of HR policies.

**Remote work policy template**

Now let’s put it all together in a remote work policy template you can use to create your own:

**Purpose**

This remote work policy establishes guidelines for employees who work from a location other than our [*office, building, worksite, etc.*].

Remote work can [*list of benefits remote work will bring to your business — e.g., improve productivity, reduce office and parking space, reduce traffic congestion, enhance work/life balance, protect the health and safety of employees during COVID-19*].

**[Optional]** This remote work policy is in effect due to COVID-19 and public health guidelines recommending remote work when possible. This policy is subject to change and may be discontinued at will and at any time as public health guidelines or business needs evolve.

**Scope**

This remote work policy applies to [*all full-time and part-time eligible employees, all U.S.-based employees who have worked at the company for at least three months, etc.*]. It does not apply to [*contractors, part-time employees, interns, temporary employees, etc.*].

**Eligibility requirements**

**[Option 1: If your business is fully remote]**

All employees are required to work remotely on a [*temporary or permanent*] basis.

Employees [*can work anywhere in the world, must remain in a certain city or state, must request approval before relocating, etc.*].

**[Option 2: If your business is partially remote]**

Not all positions are appropriate for remote work.

Positions that may be considered for remote work arrangements must meet the following criteria:

* [*Bulleted list of factors used to determine remote work eligibility*
* *…*
* *…*
* *…*]

Positions that are not eligible for remote work include [*list of ineligible positions, either by role titles or broad job categories*].

To request approval for remote work, eligible employees must [*outline steps in the approval process*].

**Work expectations and schedule**

Employees who work remotely are expected to:

* [*List of availability and responsiveness expectations — e.g., have regularly scheduled and approved work hours, be fully accessible during core hours of 9am-11am CST, respond to critical emails within 1-2 hours, etc.*
* *…*
* *…*
* *…*]

Team members and managers should [*frequently meet to discuss progress and results, have weekly 1:1 meetings over Zoom, check in on a daily basis via Slack or email, etc.*].

In accordance with the [Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/flsa), non-exempt employees who work remotely are required to strictly adhere to required rest and lunch breaks, and to accurately track and report their time worked using [*Company Name*]’s time-tracking system. Non-exempt employees must also obtain prior written approval from their supervisor before working any overtime.

**Equipment and supplies**

**[Option 1: If your business provides equipment]** We will provide remote employees with [*list of equipment, tools and supplies — e.g., laptops, headsets, cellphones, paper, printers*] that are essential to their job duties. Equipment supplied by [*Company Name*] is to be used for business purposes only.

**[Option 2: If your business reimburses employees for equipment]** We will reimburse employees for [*list of equipment, tools and supplies — e.g., laptops, headsets, cellphones, paper, printers*] that are essential to their job duties. Employees must submit a request for reimbursement through their manager. Employees may also have the opportunity to use their personal electronic devices for work purposes with prior written approval.

**[Optional]**

* [*Company Name*] is not responsible for expenses associated with working at home, including heat, electricity, internet or phone service.
* [*Company Name*] will grant remote employees a [*dollar amount*] stipend to pay for expenses associated with working at home, including heat, electricity, internet and phone service.

**Technical support**

[*Company Name*] provides [*level of tech support — e.g., 24/7, during business hours*]. Remote employees experiencing technical difficulties should [*submit an IT ticket, call tech support, attend tech support office hours via Zoom, etc.*].

**Workspace safety guidelines**

Remote employees are expected to keep their workspace free of safety hazards. To ensure employee health and safety, we advise our remote employees to:

* [*Bulleted list of guidelines for employees to follow when setting up their workspace — e.g., use surge protectors, keep walkways clear, install sufficient lighting*
* *…*
* *…*
* *…*]

**[Optional]** Employees must have their remote work environment approved prior to working from home. [*Outline workstation approval process — e.g., employees must submit a floor plan, complete a safety checklist, etc.*].

In the event of a work-related illness or injury, remote employees should follow normal incident reporting procedures.

**Security and confidentiality**

Remote employees are expected to take proper measures to ensure the protection of company data, proprietary information and assets. Employees must:

* [*Bulleted list of security and confidentiality measures for remote employees to follow — e.g., use a VPN, password-protect all equipment, keep confidential documents in locked filing cabinets, refrain from using public Wi-Fi*
* *…*
* *…*
* *…*]

**[Optional] Travel requirements**

Remote employees will be required to attend [*annual company retreat, bi-monthly meetings, etc.*] in person. Travel expenses will be reimbursed as outlined in [*Company Name*]’s travel policy.

**Compensation**

**[Option 1: If compensation remains the same when employees relocate]** No changes will be made to an employee’s base compensation if they work remotely, regardless of their location. Remote employees will be eligible for merit raises and promotions based on company policy and performance reviews.

**[Option 2: If compensation may be adjusted when employees relocate]** If an employee relocates, base compensation for remote workers may be adjusted based on [*local cost of living, where employees live, etc.*]. Remote employees will be eligible for merit raises and promotions based on company policy and performance reviews.

**Consequences**

Failure to fulfill work requirements or adhere to policies and procedures while working remotely may result in [*termination of remote work agreement, performance improvement plan (PIP), termination, etc.*].

**Related policies:**

* [Social Media Policy](https://www.indeed.com/hire/c/info/social-media-policy?hl=en&co=US)
* [Travel Policy](https://www.indeed.com/hire/c/info/travel-policy?hl=en&co=US)
* [Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) Policy](https://www.indeed.com/hire/c/info/bring-your-own-device-policies?hl=en&co=US)

COVID-19 has forced many employers to adapt to remote work overnight. You can make the experience of instituting guidelines productive, secure, engaging and legally compliant with a remote work policy that clearly outlines your expectations, important rules and procedures and best practices for employees to follow.