# How can I prepare for flexible work?

As a supervisor, you know the work of your team best and are well-positioned to make informed decisions about working with flexibility that align with local department, college, or unit guidance. Before you make any decisions, it's important to understand and reflect on the factors that will affect your team as well as any adjustments you may need to make to effective flexible work arrangements (FWAs). Use this preparation worksheet to record your thoughts and key takeaways as you make decisions about flexible work.

While not every position can have flexibility around **space**, you can consider what you and your department can do for those who must continue to have a presence on-campus. Here are some examples of different types of flexibility:

- **Flexible time:** Is there room for flexibility around when an employee begins or stops working? (e.g., 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., etc.)

- **In-person space:** What kind of working environment can you offer them? Can they get a working space that's more conducive to them doing their best work?

- **University/Divisional support:** Are my considerations consistent with the University's framework? What guidelines and expectations have been set by your divisional leader?

# Before you begin

## Check with local leaders

### Why it's important

To achieve our mission at the University, there is a wide variety of work that we need to do. The University has many different divisions, departments, and units, all with different needs and priorities. Because of this, departments and units may have different positions and guidance around flexible work. Consider the following questions and get in touch with your local Human Resources department and other leaders to find out more:

### Self-reflection questions

- What guidance has my divisional leader provided on flexible work arrangements?

- What departmental support can I expect for my team?

- What kind of space will be available to my team if some still work in-person full time or part time?

- What specific guidance is there for different employee groups I supervise (labor represented, NBF staff, ECs, etc.)?

Adapted from resources originally developed by the University of Minnesota- https://humanresources.umn.edu/ home/flex-work

# Preparing for Flexible Work Arrangements – Worksheet

**E**

## Commit to Equity and Understand Your Bias

### Why it's important

As a supervisor, you must consider equity and bias in your flexible work decisions. Implicit bias left unexamined leads to unproductive and often harmful consequences for the people you supervise and the mission of the University. You can make a difference by challenging status-quo ideas around work, being a part of a culture shift, and addressing inequities.

Here are common types of bias that can show up in working with flexibility:

- **Affinity bias** is when you give preferential treatment to someone because they share similar experiences as you or remind you of someone you know and like.
- **Recency bias** is when recent events or information are given more weight and importance than older ones.
- **Confirmation bias** is seeking or taking in new information to confirm your own beliefs.
- **Consensus bias** is when people see their own thoughts, choices, and judgements as common and shared with others.

### Self-reflection questions

Raise awareness of your own bias and put intentional effort and procedures in place to break the link between bias and behavior.

- How will I make sure **affinity bias** is not affecting my decisions? Is how much I like a person driving any of my decisions (e.g., decisions around flexibility, recognition, challenging assignments, etc.)?

- How will I make sure **recency bias** isn't affecting how I treat the people on my team? How can I make sure everyone stays on the same page and that more recent information isn't being given more importance than older information?

- How does **confirmation bias** affect the way I think and make decisions? What information contradicts my beliefs?

- What kind of flexibility can I offer the people I supervise whose position doesn't afford them flexibility around space? How can I get curious and creative about improving their working arrangement?

- How will I reward and recognize the people I supervise? What will I be basing my decisions on? How will I make sure that I don't fall into rewarding only the people I see most often (in-person or online)?

- How will I manage the workload of team members so that it is distributed equitably? How can I invite employee input on workload distribution? How will I make sure meaningful work and opportunities are distributed equitably regardless of an individual's work arrangement?

- How might flexibility around the work help me better recruit people with disabilities or different living circumstances?

# Preparing for Flexible Work Arrangements

## Step 1. Analyze the Nature of the Work

### Why it's important

Not all positions lend themselves to hybrid- or virtual-work arrangements. Similarly, not all aspects of the work for every position need to be done in-person. As a supervisor, you must consider the nature of the work, and let that inform your decisions about where and how work should be done. The nature of the work should be the primary driver in your decisions about flexible work.

### Self-reflection questions

**Begin with the nature of the team's collective work.**

- What is the team responsible for and what parts of the team's work must be done in-person?

- What parts of the team's work can be done virtually?

- What parts of the team's work has always been done in-person? Why? Can I challenge my beliefs about the work and think about how things can be done in different ways?

**Then consider the nature of the position's work. Do this for each position on your team.**

- What parts of this position's work and responsibilities must be done in-person?

- What parts of this position's work can be done virtually?

- What parts of the position's work has always been done in-person? Why? Can I challenge my beliefs about this position's work and think about how things can be done in different ways?

- What kind of flexibility can I offer this position, based on the nature of its work and responsibilities?

**If you're unsure of the nature of the other person's work, have a discussion with them.**

- What drives productivity in your role? (E.g., focus, coordination, collaboration, etc.) What helps you accomplish your highest-impact responsibilities?

- What parts of your responsibilities do you think you need to be in-person to accomplish? What can be done virtually?

## Step 2. Understand Individual Preferences

### Why it's important

After you have decided what kind of flexibility you can offer each position, get in touch with the people you supervise and have a discussion around what their preferences are within those parameters.

### Questions to discuss with the people you supervise

- Given the flexibility your position can have, what are your preferences? (e.g., "Based on this position's work, I can offer this person flexibility around space 4 days a week – but they would prefer to work virtually 2 days a week.")

- What concerns do you have about working with flexibility? What are you excited about? How can I help and support you?

### Self-reflection questions

Managing FWAs can come at the cost of increased supervisory effort, at least at first. Consider these questions about **your own preferences and capacity**:

- What level of time, energy, and support do I need to manage the work of a flexible team?

- What will business and non-business hours look like for the entire team? How do I make sure everyone is on the same page?

- How will I onboard a new employee the next time I hire? What will that look like?

**E**

## Step 3. Plan to Revisit and Re-evaluate

### Why it's important

You may run into some challenges in managing flexible work, and that's okay. Think of your initial flexible work arrangements as "drafts" and plan to revisit them with the other person in the future. Check-in* often and proactively to make sure you and the other person are on the same page about what's working and what could be improved.

### Self-reflection questions

- How will I keep track of how working with flexibility is going with the employee? How often will I check-in?

- How will I hold myself accountable to checking-in with them to find out what is and is not working?

- How can I make sure the voices of the people I supervise are being heard? How will I communicate to them that I'm acting on their feedback?

- How will I give feedback if our shared expectations about the work arrangements aren't being met?