

**Moving Forward:
Telecommuting Under ‘Normal’ Circumstances Versus Remote Work During a Pandemic**

When this article was first written shortly after the 2020 Covid pandemic began, Emory University had just rapidly moved its workforce from a rather traditional work environment (9-5 Mon-Fri on campus) with pockets of flexibility, to a largely necessitated remote workforce. Prior to the pandemic, campus-wide flexibility surveys indicated that over half of Emory’s staff had some degree of flexibility in their jobs, with roughly a third telecommuting either regularly (an average of once per week) or ad-hoc. Some divisions and departments had policies on flexible work practices and had trained their teams to work most effectively in a flexible work environment. Today, post pandemic, staff find themselves working in a hybrid work environment with a significant increase in all forms of flexibility including more frequent telecommuting and a good portion of staff working remotely altogether. All divisions at the University now have their own policy on flexible work, but many managers and staff have had no formal training on working in a flexible/hybrid work environment beyond what they figured out largely on their own during the pandemic.

Despite the significant increase in flexibility on Emory’s campus since the pandemic and the workforce’s dramatic reliance on cloud-based communication and collaboration technologies, there is still a lack of knowledge about how to maximize use of these technologies and shift from pandemic-mode to a more “normal” way of working in a hybrid work environment. Referring to when this article was first published and recalling the differences between “Telecommuting Under Normal Circumstances Versus Remote Work During a Pandemic” is necessary. Doing so will remind us of how different our circumstances are now and illuminate essential work activities that we overlooked or worked around because of the pandemic that we need to address again (but possibly in new ways) now that we are living in more stable times.

Telecommuting Under ‘Normal’ Circumstances	Working Remotely During a Pandemic
Approval based on job suitability and work performance	Instructed to work remotely based on job suitability and safety
Number of telecommuting days per week or working remote	Working remotely 100%
Most likely piloted and tested to work out issues	Unexpected and unplanned
Work is not redirected to others to make telecommuting possible	Reprioritizing essential work and optimizing and who does it
Implementation of programs to meet the needs of our community	Rescheduling activities that can’t be executed, even imperfectly, virtually
Managers and staff have flex training	Working out issues as you go
Technology set up and tested in advance	Managers and staff are not trained
Policy and practices established for you	Scramble to set up technology, communication and collaboration is disorganized and not seamless
Increased productivity	Delays and stress likely
Increased engagement	Initial productivity loss, but improves
Business continuity/emergency preparedness	No policy or clarity needed
Remote office with limited distractions	Remote office may or may not be possible
Work arrangement continues pending job performance and departmental fit	Kids or adult caregiving issues present

Goal to work towards seamlessness, efficiency and maximum productivity	Personal distractions present
Drivers include many strategic business needs: continuity, talent management, diversity, sustainability, parking/commute, space utilization, work- life/wellness, etc.	Expect and embrace imperfect
Meetings in person can take place for enhance collaboration, training, networking and/or connection & engagement	Work arrangement continues pending pandemic
Connection maintained with colleagues is possible virtually and in-person though being intentional	Cannot meet in person under any circumstance
	Connection with colleagues is challenging but done creatively and most likely virtually