

Title VII – Department Procedures

Section 1500 - Remote Work Policy

A. PURPOSE

In January 2021, the Board of Supervisors approved the County's first ever Remote Work Policy, which was developed by the County Executive Office in concert with County Departments, Human Resources and the bargaining units to establish a more adaptive work environment to better meet the needs of the County and its constituents during both regular and emergency operations.

While the original version of this Policy arose out of necessity in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the County will continue to offer remote work as an option for those employees for whom this work arrangement is appropriate based on their job duties.

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance on the current phase of the County's hybrid work environment, which allows for a combination of a minimum three-day per week on-site and remote work. A hybrid work arrangement offers departments and employees flexibility in determining the best way to meet operational needs. While hybrid remote/on-site work at the County is not a condition of employment, it can be requested by employees on a voluntary basis. Remote Work requests require a Remote Work Agreement, which must be completed and signed annually by both the employee and the employee's supervisor.

Remote Work Benefits

A hybrid work arrangement benefits County workers by reducing drive times and commutes. When fewer employees travel to work, traffic decreases, and parking constraints are removed, which benefits not only the County but all constituents and visitors to the County. The decreased traffic also reduces emissions, creating a cleaner environment and thus benefiting the world beyond the County of Santa Cruz. These are but a few of the benefits of remote work.

Hybrid Work Expectation

Employees who are approved for remote work are expected to work a "hybrid" schedule which includes work on-site at their County work location at least three days per week (or more, based on operational needs) in addition to off-site remote work. Requests to work remotely 100% of the time require Department Head and County Executive Officer approval. Approval of such requests is very rare and will be made only under exceptional circumstances.

Guiding Principles

All remote work must comply with the County Executive Officer's Guiding Principles, included in the Appendix to this policy.

B. DEFINITIONS

Remote Work

An arrangement that allows an employee to perform County work at an approved alternate worksite, which is typically the employee's home. Even when approved to work remotely, employees must retain the ability to report to the County worksite as needed for meetings, coverage, emergencies, or other operational reasons unless otherwise approved by the Department Head and County Executive Officer.

Additionally, under California law all County employees are required to serve as Disaster Service Workers should the need arise, and employees must comply with this obligation regardless of their remote work status. Remote work outcomes and performance should not differ from in office work in terms of productivity. The job is the same; the location where it is performed is different.

C. ELIGIBILITY

Not every County position nor every County employee will be eligible to work remotely. The business needs of the department will determine eligibility. Even if a particular position can be performed remotely, not every employee in that position may be eligible to work remotely. Individual eligibility is at the discretion of the department. Departments will determine which employees are eligible for remote work based upon job duties and business needs. Should a department deny a request for remote work, they will provide the employee with an explanation of the legitimate business reasons for that denial. Employees eligible for remote work must remain in good standing, meet job performance expectations and comply with the terms of the Remote Work Agreement they make with their supervisor.

At times, employees may also be required to return to work at the County site on their scheduled remote work days for meetings, covering for other employee absences, or other operational reasons.

1. Department Needs

The business needs of the department will be foremost in determining eligibility. Some jobs are not practical or possible to perform remotely. Each department will determine which positions and which employees are eligible for remote work.

a. Examples of work that can be done remotely

- Electronic correspondence
- Writing reports
- Conducting meetings that do not require in person interaction
- Doing department business while accessing online system

b. Examples of work that needs to be done on site

- Staffing reception desks
- Filing, distributing mail and certain other clerical functions
- Custodial or building maintenance tasks
- Warehouse work
- Configuring or deploying computers or other equipment
- In-person services requiring customer contact, like some health services
- Performance evaluations, discipline and grievance meetings

2. Appropriate Remote Workspace

Working remotely means having the appropriate space to work and the appropriate equipment and infrastructure. The department and the employee will work together to assess the employee's environment, infrastructure, and tools for a successful remote work experience.

3. Geographic Work Location

The expectation is that employees who perform remote work will do so from their personal residence. This best ensures that the employee will be available to meet the County's operational needs (including reporting to the County work site if needed) as well as to perform their duties as a Disaster Service Worker should that need arise.

a. Out of State Remote Work

Out of State remote work presents numerous challenges such as different tax laws, health insurance plan availability, labor laws and more, and makes it impossible for employees to report to work quickly if required to do so to meet operational needs or perform their duties as Disaster Service Workers. For these reasons out of state work options are not permitted.

b. Remote Work Coupled with Vacation or Other Absence

Remote work should not be combined with vacation or other absence from work without the advance approval of the Department Head and the County Executive Officer. Approval will only be granted under very limited circumstances.

4. Job Offers

Job offers may not be extended with a commitment of ongoing remote work, as departments' operational needs change and flexibility is paramount in determining where employees are needed.

D. EVALUATION AND EXPECTATIONS

Overall, the same productivity standards, performance expectations and other County policies shall apply to employees when working remotely as when working in a County facility.

1. Performance Measurements

Just as they do for employees who work exclusively in County locations, supervisors must clearly communicate their performance expectations to employees who work remotely, and document and evaluate employees' compliance with those expectations. The supervisor should ensure the work is completed correctly and in a timely manner, and that the employee receives the appropriate training, guidance, and feedback. Performance evaluations, both annual and probationary should be presented to the employee in person.

2. Communication

Employees who are working remotely and their supervisor will define communication standards and expectations and establish what status updates or check ins are required. The employee and the supervisor should discuss the items listed in the sections below and document their agreement. This policy includes a Remote Work Agreement that could be used to guide the conversation. It can also be modified to match the business needs of the department.

- a. Schedules. The employee and the supervisor must establish a schedule that clearly specifies when the employee will be working remotely and when they will be working from a County facility. The supervisor should clearly communicate the expectations and requirements for any changes to that schedule, the protocols for requesting time off, and reporting absences or tardiness. It is the employee's responsibility to comply with those guidelines.
- b. County business. Employees should be focused on and engaged in County business during their scheduled work time, regardless of where they perform that work. Just as when they are working in County facilities, if employees who are working remotely need to conduct personal business during their scheduled work hours, they must do so during their meal and rest breaks or else make advance arrangements with their supervisor to adjust their work schedule to allow for the personal activities.
- c. Work product / deliverables. The supervisor and the employee must develop a plan for what work the employee will be performing while they are working remotely and specify how and when that work must be completed. It shall be the supervisor's responsibility to ensure that the

employee clearly understands what is expected of them and the employee's responsibility to fulfill those expectations.

- d. Feedback. Supervisors should conduct 1:1 and team meetings with employees who are working remotely with at least the same frequency as they conduct such meetings with on-site employees. These meetings may occur via Teams, teleconference, or other remote means. In addition to these formal check-ins, supervisors should have regular brief check-ins with employees who are working remotely, just as they would with on-site employees.

3. Remote Work Agreement

Every employee who works remotely must meet with their supervisor and together complete a written annual Remote Work Agreement which includes details such as the employee's remote work location, work schedule (including details specifying when the employee will work remotely and which days they will work on-site in a County facility), and the expectations that will apply while the employee is working remotely. The Appendix to this policy includes a Remote Work Agreement that may be used to guide this conversation. That Agreement may be modified to match the business needs of the department. The employee and their supervisor must complete and sign a new Remote Work Agreement annually.

E. IT EQUIPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Most employees working remotely will require internet access, a computer, and a phone; other equipment may also be necessary. Currently, a variety of solutions have been implemented to facilitate remote work. Some employees are using County equipment for remote work and some are using their personal equipment. Departments will work with employees to determine which solution works for the department and the employee. As the County determines the appropriate standard configuration, the policy will be updated.

1. Internet access

Employees who will be accessing electronic tools, the County network and online County business applications will require reliable internet access that will allow them to perform the job duties required. Employees will need to obtain, maintain, support and pay for their own internet access.

2. Other equipment and infrastructure

For most remote workers, computers, laptops, tablets, and other devices might be required. Monitors, printers, webcams, headsets and scanners are examples of other devices that might be required. The County department and the employee will work together to define the required tools and how they will

be provided. This policy allows for County as well as personal equipment to be used by the remote worker. When using personal equipment, current virus protection software will be required to access the County network via VPN. Questions about versions of operating systems, browsers and the like should be referred to the Information Services Department.

3. County IT Support

County IT Support staff will support remote staff. Documentation and phone or email support are available to remote staff. There are a few areas where County IT Support is not available. County IT staff is unable to provide services at the home of remote workers. County IT Staff is unable to support personal devices or other personal equipment, internet services or other non-County IT infrastructure used by the remote worker.

F. WORKSPACE AND REMOTE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Employees working remotely must have a private, safe location to work. All standards for maintaining the confidentiality of information, such as HIPAA or Personally Identifiable Information (PII) –must be in place. The policies that pertain to work environment at the County work site apply to the Remote Work site as well.

1. Confidential and PII Information

It is the duty of the employee to safeguard sensitive information, including PII, while in the office and while working remotely. PII refers to information that can be used to distinguish or trace an individual's identity, either alone or when combined with other personal or identifying information that is linked or linkable to a specific individual.

Examples of PII that are sensitive include:

- full or truncated Social Security numbers
- dates of birth
- addresses
- phone numbers
- email addresses
- credit card numbers
- financial information
- mother's maiden name
- biometric identifiers
- medical information
- passport number
- driver's license number
- performance ratings

You should also consider context as non-sensitive PII can become sensitive when combined with other information.

2. Documents

Work with your supervisor to determine what types of documents are appropriate to take home and what documents should stay secured within the County workspace. Know the sensitivity of your documents, and make sure they are appropriately marked to help mitigate the risk of unauthorized disclosure. You and your supervisor must ensure that adequate safeguards are in place to protect the records from unauthorized disclosure. Records cannot be left exposed or unattended without proper safeguards. Friends and family should not handle County records, so do not leave them on your home desk where your family can view or access them. Inventory your documents before working remotely, and ensure all documents are returned to the office.

3. Equipment

Always secure your County equipment and information, including while transporting information home or while traveling. If you must leave equipment or documents unattended for a short period of time, always secure them.

When possible, utilize computer access protection practices such as locking your computer screen if you walk away from your computer, protection screens to limit exposure, and conduct client-facing or PII exposing work in a private setting if there are other people in the remote work area. Any potential loss, theft, or compromise of PII or sensitive data, whether suspected or confirmed, or loss of County equipment, must be reported immediately to your supervisor.

4. Communication

If other people are present at your remote work location, then in addition to securing your computer and physical documents, you must also ensure that no one can overhear you when you are discussing confidential work matters over the telephone or in virtual meetings.

5. Ergonomics

The County will not set up or inspect the employee's remote workspace, and it shall be the employee's responsibility to configure that space in a manner which allows them to perform their job duties safely and comfortably. Employees are encouraged to use the ergonomic checklist provided in the Appendix to ensure that the remote work site is ergonomically appropriate for them. It may be possible in some instances for a department to provide an employee with equipment or furniture to assist with their ergonomic set up, but this is not guaranteed. If an

employee is unable to set up their remote workspace in a manner which allows them to perform their work in a safe and ergonomically correct manner, remote work may not be appropriate for this employee.

G. COMPENSATION

Remote work is optional and working remotely does not change employee compensation. There is no differential for remote work. Employees working remotely who need to return to the County work location will not be compensated for travel, gas or lodging.

H. REVOCATION OF REMOTE WORK

The department may determine that remote work is no longer appropriate for the position or that the employee is no longer meeting the eligibility requirements for remote work. This can be due to changes affecting or altering the employee's remote work site, employee performance issues, or other concerns. The responsibilities of the position may change making remote work no longer appropriate. In this situation, the employee would be required to resume working exclusively at the County location. This decision is entirely within the discretion of the department's management.

Appendix

A. Guiding Principles of Remote Work at the County

Separate Documents

A. [Remote Work Agreement](#)

B. [Ergonomic Checklist](#)

Guiding Principles for Remote Work at the County

1. Protecting the health and safety of the public and our employees is a priority.
2. We will strive to create an environment that supports remote work for employees.
3. We will equitably review all requests for remote work consideration.
4. Understanding that not all work lends itself to a remote option we will consider options to changing work processes or procedures that could support a remote work option.
5. Recognizing that a strong social fabric contributes to our organizational effectiveness, we will create opportunities for remote workers to engage on a regular basis with management and colleagues.
6. Department Heads shall establish department standards around remote work based on the operational needs including minimum in person expectations.
7. 100% remote work positions are rare and must be approved by both the department head and the CEO office.
8. Managers will schedule regular check-ins with remote workers to offer appropriate support and management oversight of employee work.
9. Remote workers must maintain functional internet, responsiveness to calls and emails and other productivity standards in order to continue to work remotely.
10. Signed remote work agreements shall be completed annually for employees who are approved for remote work.
11. Remote work shall not impede the department's ability to serve the public.
12. Remote work will not require you to hire additional incremental staff.