



Make telecommuting work for your nonprofit

Like their for-profit counterparts, not-for-profits are increasingly allowing employees to telecommute. Done right, work-at-home arrangements, either full time or on an occasional basis, can pay off for both employers and employees. But you'll need to be proactive to avoid some pitfalls.

Bevy of benefits

Primary among the advantages of telecommuting is cost containment. An employee who doesn't need to go into the office spends less money on things like commuting, work clothes, dry cleaning or going out to lunch. And the organization might be able to downsize its space needs, resulting in rent and other overhead savings.

Your organization is also likely to enjoy reduced recruiting expenses by landing top candidates regardless of where they live — and retaining them. Productivity may climb, too. Some employers worry about telecommuters slacking off. But research has suggested the opposite is true and that these workers put in more hours per week than their office-based counterparts.

Essential considerations

Effective telecommuting arrangements require careful planning and management. Tackle these issues first:

Policy. Develop policies with a team of human resources staff, managers and employees. You'll need your telecommuting policy to address — among other things — eligibility, home office requirements, training, communication, work hours, performance evaluations, and technology

security. Employees approved for telecommuting should sign an agreement acknowledging the policy and expectations.

Communications. Both managers and employees must be proactive in their communications. You might find it helpful to establish standards for how promptly staffers should respond to email, the times when managers or employees will be available and similar matters. And because employees who aren't in the office can sometimes miss out on information that spreads through the workplace, managers should schedule regular one-on-ones.

Fairness. Resentment can develop if workers in the office question whether their telecommuting colleagues are truly pulling their weight. It's not unusual for an "us vs. them" mentality to develop. Managers can keep a lid on ill will by using team meetings to publicly praise both telecommuters and in-office employees and explicitly acknowledge their contributions to the organization.

Get advice

When first dipping your toes in the telecommuting waters, you'd be wise to seek legal advice. Telecommuting puts a twist on a range of compliance, from confidentiality to wage and hour laws, and raises critical questions related to use of company property. Contact us for more information.

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