

Attachment B. Alternative Work Week Schedule and Telework Interview Summary

Background

As part of a County Sustainability Committee evaluation of employer commuter benefit enhancements, Sustainability Division staff interviewed supervisors from across the County organization to understand challenges and opportunities to the use of telework and alternative work week schedule's (AWWS). The interviews were conducted in Fall/Winter 2018 with the following departments: Agricultural Commissioner's Office, Child Support Services, County Counsel, Housing and Community Development, Planning and Development, Probation, Public Health, Public Works, Social Services, and the Treasurer-Tax Collector-Public Administrator.

This current review follows a similar review from 2008 to 2012 (see [September 2012 Teleworking/Flex Schedule Report](#)). No updated reporting has been found for the period from 2012 to present.

Alternative Work Week Schedules

The [County AWWS Policy](#) allows employees to work a schedule that differs from the standard Monday through Friday (or Sunday, depending on position) work week. Using an AWWS does not change the total number of hours worked within a pay period. A common AWWS is the "9/80" schedule in which an employee works eight 9-hour days and one 8-hour day in a two-week period, with one day off every other week that corresponds with the 8-hour day (typically a Friday or Monday) for a total of 80 hours. Some local employers (e.g. City of Santa Barbara) employ a standard "9/80" schedule for all non-essential employees. The City has successfully offered longer daily customer service hours while minimizing any reduction in accessibility through effective public outreach. The "4/10" schedule AWWS option allows employees to work four ten-hour days each work week with the traditional fifth day off. The City of Goleta uses a variation of the "4/10" schedule in which all non-essential City offices are closed each Friday afternoon.

The County employee commuter survey (summarized in Attachment A) conducted by the Sustainability Division and Traffic Solutions in September 2018 found that around half (35%) of respondents work an AWWS. Currently, there is no way to determine the actual number of employees using an AWWS because participation is dispersedly tracked. Centralizing AWWS participation in one location could facilitate future reporting and possible program enhancements.

From the interviews and survey, staff learned that AWWS are generally well supported for eligible employees. Managers and staff value flexibility as a useful benefit and commute reduction tool. Employees say AWWS contribute to their overall well-being, job satisfaction, and retention. Employees noted that AWWS allows them to better manage personal obligations during their regular time off, rather than using other paid time off (i.e. sick or vacation time). Employees also appreciate the adjusted hours, which can help them avoid traffic and eliminate a regular work commute altogether. While many employees utilize and enjoy AWWS, some reported conflicts with childcare and transportation obligations.

AWWS may be more conducive to employees who work in field locations or where duties may benefit from longer shift times (e.g., probation officers at Juvenile Hall, firefighters, Sheriff's officers, inspectors). Longer daily shift times may allow for a greater provision of services while on site or in the field. In some cases, the ability to offer longer shifts to handle an increased workloads is a useful tool (e.g., rapid implementation of new policies such as the Affordable Care Act).

The use of AWWs is not well suited to positions that provide direct public or County services at regular times (e.g., permit counter staff, attorneys, court staff, and case workers) or in situations where there is not staff available to provide sufficient coverage when employees have their regular day off (e.g., road crews where a minimum number of persons is required by law for safe operation). Managers and supervisors may be required to always be available for their staff during standard business hours.

Per the County policy, department directors have discretion to allow employees to work AWWs. Even though a department may be supportive, managers have the right to approve the use of AWWs for their staff, which may create discrepancies within in a single department.

Overall, AWWs are widespread in use. There is still room to expand to more eligible employees. AWWs are a low-cost benefit to support employee well-being, satisfaction, hiring, and retention, especially when employees may be otherwise capped out at their current job classification.

Teleworking

The [County Teleworking Policy](#) allows employees to work at an alternative work site (e.g., an employee's home or other County office campus) for portion of a work week. The policy set a goal to increase the number of employees who telework by five percent per year, beginning in 2011. Staff is not aware of recent reports on employee teleworking participation since 2011 – 2012.

Telework support remains limited compared to AWWs. The number of telework-eligible employees is smaller than AWWs-eligible employees due to on-site job responsibilities, (i.e. maintenance staff or permit desk staff). Where support exists, teleworking is an as-needed tool rather than a regularly scheduled occurrence. Currently, low telework utilization means that associated greenhouse gas and traffic congestion benefits have been unrealized and leave room for improvement.

Despite limited use, the County's policy sufficiently addresses responsibilities and liabilities. Further creating department specific policies, comprehensive employee proposals, clear performance measures and deliverables, and encouraging trial periods for telework can help increase utilization.

The nature of a department or an employee's work is the most important consideration when approving telework. Depending on the work, certain job classifications are not conducive to telework. In some cases, managers and supervisors are the only positions allowed to telework. In other cases, managers and supervisors cannot telework due to obligations to their staff. Some departments simply cannot support teleworking due to physical services provided and interdependence on the schedules of the public, other departments, or other organizations. The internal evaluation and development of department specific policies can help determine which positions are eligible to telework based on responsibilities and needs.

For employees that can telework, the County policy sufficiently addresses concerns and liabilities when working from an alternate location. The County policy lays out employee responsibility for the maintenance of a secure and safe at home work site. This includes the treatment of confidential information, liability for ergonomic issues, costs for equipment, childcare, and a distraction free environment. Even though employees understand the responsibilities, liabilities and costs, it is not always enough to dispel genuine concerns from supervisors when submitting a request. Managers and supervisors may still have questions about the real-world security of confidential data (e.g., personal records, health information), employee injury, and at-home productivity that cannot be dispelled by a static policy.

Helping employees craft comprehensive telework proposals and establishing trial periods with fixed deliverables and performance measures can help address the gap between policy and practice. Actions like providing further documentation (e.g., photo and videos) of a proposed work environment, citing specific steps to ensure the security of confidential information, and demonstrating that child-care is

available can clarify these concerns when requesting telework. In some cases, a physical site visit might be necessary to help gain approval (although this is often difficult to organize). Establishing deliverable outputs can help demonstrate an employee's at-home productivity. To ensure that telework is effective, a brief trial period can be utilized. Testing that these arrangements are practical while building supervisor-employee trust can be essential to address concerns. Some departments have already developed internal teleworking policies in addition to the County teleworking policy. The mentioned actions can help clarify and supplement both County and department policies.

The ability to telework is a significant benefit for attracting qualified talent, retaining experienced employees, supporting employee well-being, and reducing vehicle trips. Many employees who commute from farther distances find telework to be a valuable benefit that can prolong their careers with the County, increase productivity, and reduce absenteeism, and supports County goals (e.g. Renew 2022). When comparing the costs of employee turnover with the costs of implementing telework, the advantages become more apparent.

Telework is also a tool to handle unique circumstance, such as a family emergency or natural disaster. In situations where employees are out for long durations like family emergencies or extended leave, they can still be contacted, or provide their expertise as needed (with employee consent). As well, teleworking can enhance organizational resiliency in the event of extreme events and emergencies. Almost every department interviewed found that having existing teleworking policies and practices in place were helpful during the 2018 fire and mudslide events. Employees with the ability to telework could continue to support department obligations, aid in disaster relief, and continue receiving their pay.

Exploring New Strategies

Organizational interviews affirmed that use of AWWs and telework can increase employee well-being, satisfaction, productivity, hiring, retention, and organizational resiliency. However, because AWWs and telework are position-limited, other commuter benefits should be offered to employees whose duties are not conducive to workplace or schedule flexibility. Other commuter benefits should be offered to incentivize employees to use sustainable transportation options that effectively reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Despite higher barriers to expanding telework support than AWWs, encouraging regular bi-weekly or weekly telework days for high-performing employees could reduce pollution and greenhouse gases, while providing enhanced employee benefits at a low cost.

In some cases, supervisors have implemented other work arrangements to reduce employee commutes. Departments with multiple office locations can allow employees to split their work week between a standard location and an auxiliary office closer to their home. Sharing office space throughout the week allows employees to remain in an office setting, while reducing the amount of time and distance spent commuting.

In departments that provided employees with laptops, the barriers to teleworking were significantly reduced. Laptops help address confidentiality concerns, equipment, mobility, and connectivity issues.

The idea of flexible/shared working spaces within existing County offices were also discussed. A "hot-desking" or "hoteling" arrangement is a setup where employees can utilize a desk in a shared space through a reservation or first-come, first-served basis. Such a space could easily be integrated with Skype and webcams to maintain face-to-face contact with colleagues and supervisors as needed. Flex spaces could be strategically located closer to the longest distance commuters. Furthermore, departments were even receptive to exploring the feasibility of a remote office space within Ventura County to serve the

large number of north-bound commuters. The County could lease such a space or partner with Ventura County to integrate a shared space into an existing facility.

Conclusion

The support and expansion of teleworking and AWWS should be supported where possible. They are valuable employee and organizational benefits that increase employee retention, hiring, and well-being; enhance resiliency; and reduce traffic congestion, parking demand, and air pollution. The existing policies are generally sufficient to outline responsibilities, options, and restrictions. However, department-specific guidance could be helpful.

Despite the many benefits of teleworking and AWWS, they are performance-based tools conditional on an employee's reliability and quality of work. Interviewees reiterated that the operational needs of departments take priority, and employees who take advantage of teleworking and AWWS must be high-performing and flexible in adapting their schedules to accommodate job responsibilities and department missions.

AWWS and teleworking are not universally available to all employees and should be considered tools in a larger portfolio of commuter benefits that ensure equity and effectiveness.