

## **Resources for Telecommuting and Remote Work**

- Best Practices for Remote Work
- Getting Started with Telecommuting and Remote Work
- Managing the Balance of On-site Presence & Remote Work
- Helpful Information for the Supervisor of Telecommuters

# Best Practices for Remote Work

To ensure an excellent customer service experience and seamless internal collaboration, the Remote Work Group recommends the following best practices:

## I. Phone

### A. Jabber

1. All external-facing departments should have Jabber set up to be able to receive calls. Jabber is a virtual phone application that allows employees to use their computer to make/receive calls using their assigned EMU phone number without using their personal phone. [Learn more and request access here.](#)
2. Any employee may request Jabber access for access to their direct line. Note that Jabber requires that the employee has [VPN access](#).

### B. Voicemails

1. Employees can request that any voicemail received on a university phone number be forwarded to their email as a voice file. [Request voicemail delivery via email](#). This option allows employees and offices to better manage and track voicemails when not connected to Jabber.
2. Voicemail Messages
  - a) For employees/offices without Jabber access, the outgoing greeting should note that there is no live access to the line but voicemails are being checked regularly and their call will be returned. Outgoing greetings can also include information on alternate methods of contact.
  - b) Outgoing messages should NOT state that the University or Office/Department is closed. Additionally, staff should avoid referencing workshare or furlough. See Section 6A for suggested templates.
  - c) Supervisors should discuss with employees the expected turnaround time for voicemail messages. The Remote Work Group recommends 1 business day. If the turnaround time is more than 1 business day, it is recommended that an approximate timeline is recorded as part of the outgoing greeting.
  - d) See [Voice Message Options](#) for instructions on setting outgoing greetings, temporary greetings, checking messages from an external number, and more.

## II. Email

### A. Email Signature

1. The following are recommended for inclusion in an email signature:  
Name, Title, Department, Phone Number (if applicable), Website  
(Department or University)
2. Additional information to include
  - a) Information about in-person or remote services.
    - (1) Example: *“Please note that during this time, in-person advising is not available at Service EMU. Please use the following contact information for Financial Aid, Student Business Services, and Records & Registration. Service EMU is open via e-mail or telephone as outlined below.”*
  - b) Information about work schedules.
    - (1) Example: *“Please note: My work schedule has changed. I now work Tuesday-Friday. I will respond to most communications during my regular work schedule. If you need immediate assistance on a Monday, please contact [alternate email address or contact].”*

### B. Auto-reply/Out of Office

1. Offices/Departments
  - a) It is recommended that Offices/Departments have auto-reply if expected turnaround time is more than 2 business days OR relevant information can be included in the reply. See Section 7B for templates and examples.
  - b) If the email will be responded to within a timely manner, there is no need for an auto-reply.
  - c) Auto-reply messages should NOT state that the University or Office/Department is closed.
2. Individual Employees
  - a) Individuals should have an auto-reply in place under the following circumstances:
    - (1) Annual Leave / Sick Time
      - (a) Replies include effective dates for leave
    - (2) Alternate Work Schedule (including Work Share); Replies should NOT directly mention Work Share or furlough.
      - (a) Example: *“I am out of the office today but will return tomorrow. Please direct any urgent requests to [alternate email address]. Thank you.”*

(3) If the employee does not have regular access to email.  
Examples may include a full day of meetings or attending conferences.

b) Template - See Section 7C for full templates.

(1) All auto-replies should include an alternate email address for immediate and urgent matters.

### III. Calendar

A. It is recommended that all EMU employees utilize [Google Calendar](#) to indicate availability and days out.

1. When an employee is out of office, as defined in 2B above, they should mark availability on their calendar.
2. Employees should consider making their calendar accessible (Free/Busy information only) to anyone with an @emich.edu address. [Learn more here.](#)

### IV. Web

A. Main contact page

1. The Remote Work Group recommends that a list of frequently contacted departments be posted on the FAQ of the [COVID-19 website](#).

a) Note: [This existing list](#) can serve as a starting template.

B. Department/Office pages

1. Department/Office pages must not say that the University is closed.
2. Accurate contact information should be listed on each Department/Office page.
3. If relevant, page can acknowledge that the Department/Office is working remotely, or on an adjusted schedule.

### V. Templates

A. Outgoing Voicemail Messages

1. Department/Office

*Thank you for calling the [Office/Department]. We are sorry we missed your call. Please leave a message including your name, phone number, and reason for calling and we will call you back. You can also email [email address].*

2. Individuals with Phone Access

*Thank you for calling Eastern Michigan University. You have reached the voicemail of [Name]. I am sorry I missed your call. Please leave a message and I will call you back at my earliest convenience.*

3. Individuals without Phone Access

*Thank you for calling Eastern Michigan University. You have reached the voicemail of [Name]. As I am working remotely, I do not have access to this phone number, but I will be checking voicemail regularly. Please*

*leave a message with your name and phone number or email address and I will get back with you at my earliest convenience.*

**B. Auto-Reply for Department/Office email**

**1. Auto-reply with relevant information**

- a) *“Thank you for your email! We look forward to connecting with you soon.*

*If you are interested in checking availability for future events, please contact the office staff by email using our [inquiry form](#).*

*Students - The process in which to reserve weekly meeting reservations and Sunday multi-date meetings for the fall are still being determined. Stay tuned as we navigate our return to campus.*

*Please visit <https://www.emich.edu/uhs/coronavirus/index.php> for current information regarding events and classes at EMU.”*

**2. Auto-reply for emails turnaround time longer than 2 business days**

- a) *“Thank you for your email! This is a busy time for [OFFICE] and your message is important to us. Please allow up to 3 business days for a response.”*

**C. Auto-Reply/Out of Office emails for individuals**

- 1.** *Thank you for your email. I am out of the office beginning [DATE] and will return on [DATE]. I will reply to your email upon my return.*

*If you need immediate assistance, please email [alternate email address]. You can also call the main office at [PHONE NUMBER].*

- 2.** *If relevant, an out of office/auto-reply can include information that might help the sender.*

- a) *“If you'd like to schedule a meeting with an admissions advisor or learn more about Eastern Michigan University, visit [emich.edu/onlinevisit](http://emich.edu/onlinevisit). I hope to connect with you soon.”*

# **Getting Started with Telecommuting and Remote Work – Everyone has a Role...**

**Self-Assessment Questions for Potential Telecommuters – Note that telecommuting does not suit everyone. Ask yourself the following questions:**

- Are you self-motivated and a solid performer in your job?
- Do you take pride in being able to get things done without being checked on?
- Does working in isolation bother you?
- Are you organized with good time management skills?
- Do you believe you have a good hold on needed job skills and knowledge?
- Are you enthusiastic about telecommuting potentially?

**Self-Assessment Questions for a Supervisor of Telecommuters – Telecommuting does not work readily with every management style. Ask yourself the following questions to see how comfortable you are with telecommuting issues – or if you need some support or training:**

- Are you open generally to alternative or creative ways of getting work accomplished?
- Would you assess your communication and coaching skills as strong, able to use them from a distance?
- Are you empathetic with the needs of telecommuters and their families?
- Are you willing to adjust your management style if needed?
- Can you work to foster a working relationship built on trust, though at a distance?
- Can you design steps to take to maintain group cohesiveness with people in different locations?
- Are you honestly willing to positively consider a telecommuting relationship that is longer-term?
- Can you provide honest and clear feedback to your employees?

**Assessment of the impact on the rest of the team/department etc. – Seeking input from the whole team is important as various and different work arrangements affect them all:**

- What are the limits of telecommuting for the solid operation of your department?
- Are you prepared to explain why telecommuting may work for some roles and not for others?
- What are the motivators and things that discourage your team members?
- How would telecommuting arrangements impact other schedules or create overtime considerations, if at all?
- Do your team members support the telecommuting arrangement? If not, what can be done to earn their support?
- Will the telecommuting arrangements help, hurt or have no impact on work relationships and outcomes?

**Consider the Work and whether it lends itself (or which duties do or do not) lend themselves to being done in alternate work locations or home:**

- Are there tasks that can or should be done without interruptions?
- Are there tasks that do not require face-to-face input or information from others?
- Can the technology needs of the position be met at alternate worksites?
- What will be the impact on the social/team interactions – will they suffer? Are there ways to assure positive interactions and cohesion?
- Will the work suffer if there are delays or bottlenecks in information sharing?

This is a modified version of <https://worklife.msu.edu/workplace-assistance/flexible-work/telecommuting/getting-started>. It was converted to questions to help the various parties assess their capabilities regarding remote work.

# Managing the Balance of On-site Presence & Remote Work

## Options for Managing On-Campus Presence & Remote Work

In this next phase of returning to work on campus, departments must sustain very low population density within buildings and workspaces and enable required social distancing measures. These strategies should be tailored to the relevant group, as described below.

### **A - Office in which Primarily On-Campus Work is Needed**

This group is generally composed of roles that require presence on campus because they work in place-specific functions (e.g., research laboratories), use onsite resources (such as physical plant/resources, equipment, library collections), and/or provide service to people onsite, face-to-face. Attached is a **template to analyze** why certain jobs may or may not need to be performed on campus, and to help supervisors and managers think through the implications. To keep this group safe, units should be guided by the Public Safety Committee Guidelines and address the issues below:

- ♦ **Ensure that the role dictates that this person must be primarily on campus** - Limiting the number of people on campus reduces potential exposure for those who must be there. Ensure they take required COVID-19 safety training before returning to on-campus work.
- ♦ **Communicate workplace health and safety guidelines**, as well as **space restrictions**. Remind employees to stay home when they feel unwell, and that EMU's **medical plans** and **leave policies** cover COVID incidences.
- ♦ **Reconsider the workday and the workweek** - The beginning and end of the workday typically bring many people together at common entry/exit points of buildings, as well as on public transportation. Staggering arrival and departure times will reduce traffic in common areas to meet social distancing requirements. Consider lengthening the day and adding shifts to decrease simultaneous occupancy or use remote sites for some employees to decrease density.
- ♦ **Consider keeping workers in the same pairs/small teams** - To minimize the potential for transmission, consider keeping on-campus working teams as small



as possible. In some cases, this might mean altering the base of operations for some members of a team, so that they do not congregate at a common "home base" if there is insufficient space for adequate physical distancing. Consider developing separate A and B pairs/teams for coverage in case of illness.

- ♦ **Ban or severely limit in-person meetings and gatherings** – Even for those working onsite, meetings should be held by telephone or via EMU-supported **online collaboration tools**, whenever possible. No more than 10 people should convene in-person. Those meeting should consider doing so outdoors, weather permitting. In any meeting setting, employees must follow current infection control preventive measures, which include maintaining a minimum of six feet of distance and wearing a cloth face covering or a mask, as mandated/recommended by the **CDC**, the **State of Michigan**, and **EMU**.
  - ♦ **Employ new cleaning and infection control methods** – Identify common and shared surfaces and equipment and follow cleaning and disinfecting protocols as recommended by the Public Safety and Health Committee.

### **B - Offices best served with Hybrid Remote and On-campus work**

This group includes people who must be on campus for some projects and some amount of time either on a regular basis or periodically but can also perform some portion of their work remotely. Departments and units should designate an administrator to schedule and coordinate onsite visits and work time to reduce overlap, and also consider:

- ♦ **Moderate-effort/low-cost process re-engineering** – Some campus activities that are done in person out of convenience or habit could be made accessible remotely with small and low- cost modifications. Where this is the case, units and departments are encouraged to create online/remote options. Resources include local HR.
- ♦ **Dedicated space, alternating days/weeks** – Some staff will need to be on campus on a regular basis on specific days. In order to limit the number of individuals and face-to-face interactions between them, departments should consider scheduling partial staffing on alternating days. Such schedules will help

enable social distancing, especially in areas with large common workspaces. Alternatively, staff may find it effective to alternate work on campus by the week. Creative approaches are encouraged that promote high quality work and schedules that work for employees.

- ♦ **Non-dedicated space/hoteling by reservation** – Some staff members may need to be on campus occasionally either because they are using campus resources (e.g., equipment, materials) or because they are unable to work productively from home every day due to household circumstances (e.g., noise, crowding, lack of a workspace, lack of internet). People who need a short-term workspace should be able to reserve a workstation for certain days and times and know with confidence that it has been disinfected before and after use.
  - **Accessibility** – One or two stations per area should be fully adjustable (desk height, chairs, monitors) and should be placed in areas with the square footage needed to conform to ADA design standards.
  
- ♦ **On-campus resources by appointment** – Some positions require the use of specific on- campus resources (specialized equipment, paper files, specialized software, reference material, etc.) some of the time, but can otherwise be carried out remotely.
  - **Equipment** – Specific items should be made available by reservation/appointment so that users will not overlap. A designated administrator should coordinate onsite visits, that may include building on existing reservation systems, or creating a simple online calendar.
  - **Files** – Some staff members may need access to paper files stored in their offices or on campus. Staff should be encouraged to access onsite materials only as needed, and to schedule and coordinate visits to avoid contact with others. Staff who are already accessing files could consider scanning and electronically storing documents for future reference.
  - **Disinfecting** – Shared workstations and equipment should be identified and professionally cleaned by the custodial-services provider each evening according to EMU’s guidelines, and in consultation with the service provider. High-touch surfaces in the immediate workspace (desk, cubicle, office) should be cleaned with disinfectant wipes at the beginning and end of each workday by each user. Staff for whom this activity is physically impossible or inadvisable should seek advice from local HR.

### **C - Offices that can Effectively be Operated with Primarily Remote Work**

Employees who can work remotely may continue to do so indefinitely, unless called back for on-campus work. Support for managing telework challenges is available from local HR.

Getting aligned on where, when and how employees work

As EMU transitioned rapidly to remote work for most faculty and staff in March, it did not require staff to complete flex work proposals, instead encouraging employees and managers to focus on adjusting to these new circumstances and to creating workable day-to-day plans. Now, we ask that staff and managers in categories B (Hybrid) or C (Primarily remote) think through and explicitly discuss "ground rules" for where, when and how work will be done in the months ahead, including the impact of any **voluntary time reductions or planned use of vacation time**.

These should be captured in writing and should figure into day-to-day work and periodic check-ins.

Please see the EMU Remote Work Policy for more specifics guidance.

Please note: This document is based in large part on "Managing Onsite Presence" on Harvard University's website at <https://hr.harvard.edu/corona-virus-workplace-policies/managing-onsite-presence>

## Helpful Information for the Supervisor of Telecommuters

- **Be educated** – if you are uncomfortable or inexperienced with telecommuting arrangements, take the time you need to become informed. Don't feel rushed to make a decision before you are ready. Talk to HR.
- **Give the request fair consideration** – that's all that you have to do. Ask questions, stretch beyond your comfort zone if you can, seek a win-win, look for creative solutions, but don't feel pressured to accept an alternative that doesn't support your departmental mission or would hurt the quality of work.
- **Address concerns** – whenever they arise, in the planning process or during the telecommuting arrangement, be sure to make any concerns known quickly, so that they don't magnify and interfere with the telecommuting arrangement unnecessarily.
- **Pick up the phone** – don't fall into the trap of using email for all of your communications. Beyond basic communication, calling a telecommuter allows you to assess his/her mood, including being able to identify any stressors that could impact his/her work performance and work satisfaction. Remember, you may be the only person he/she has had a chance to talk to that day. Help him/her feel connected to the outside world and to the department.
- **Initiate communication** – be proactive and reach out to telecommuters rather than expecting them to initiate contact. Like direct phone calls, initiating contact on your timeline helps keep telecommuters oriented to the workplace routine and deadlines.
- **Encourage inclusion** – is it time for birthday treats, or the office luncheon? Did a colleague just make a big announcement? Make sure to share the news with your telecommuters.
- **Schedule face-to-face time** – make sure you are meeting together on a regular basis. If you know telecommuters are coming into the office, do what you can to set aside time on your calendar to meet - even if you don't have a formal agenda. Ask the telecommuters to let you know in advance if they are going to stop into the office so you (and others) can be there to reconnect.

This was originally posted at <https://worklife.msu.edu/workplace-assistance/flexible-work/telecommuting/supervisor-information>