For Supervisors & Employees:  
How to Set Up Telecommuting during the Coronavirus Outbreak

Due to coronavirus/COVID-19, Lamar University allows telecommuting for employees whose work can be performed remotely and who may not be needed to staff offices and functions on campus. This group may include staff, faculty, and student workers. During this period of pandemic health concerns, we would encourage those who typically meet students and others face-to-face to move their activities online as feasible. To provide critical services for our primary mission of educating students, the university must remain open and critical services must continue with appropriate on campus staffing levels. All offices must remain open at this time.

1. The Need for Telecommuting to Reduce Coronavirus’ Spread

Employees must have their supervisor approve telecommuting. However, supervisors are reminded that the university strongly supports remote work at this time: “Supervisors are highly encouraged to allow their staff to telecommute from home if job duties allow on a case-by-case basis through May 31. Student workers should also follow guidance from their supervisors” (Letter from President Evans, 3/19/2020).

Social distancing is critical to minimizing the spread of coronavirus. Supervisors should be open to telecommuting for any employee whose job duties can be performed off-campus. Essential functions must continue to be provided on campus and therefore some employees must continue to report in person.

Note. For employees who cannot perform their job duties remotely, or for essential employees, supervisors must follow best practices to protect employee health. For assistance in setting up safer workplaces, supervisors should contact LU Human Resources and Environmental Health & Safety (EHS). Information can also be found on the university’s Coronavirus/COVID-19 page.

The university has established the following recommended practices to help supervisors and remote-eligible employees set up productive telecommuting. These are not mandates or strict requirements. These are recommended practices to help employees and supervisors support effective remote work.

2. Create a Remote Work Plan

First, the supervisor and employee should create and maintain a Remote Work Plan. This plan should be in writing (email between employee and supervisor) and include the following:

- Priorities, expected work outcomes, and progress for the day and/or week.
- Methods of check-in (phone, email, Zoom/Skype, etc.) and frequency (every morning, twice a week, etc.).
• Daily work hours:
  o Employees should maintain their normal campus working hours and be available by phone and email during these hours. This practice creates continuity and consistency for LU.
  o Supervisors may agree to a change in the employee’s work hours, but the new hours should be listed in the work plan with an explanation of why this change is necessary. When possible, supervisors should work with employees who may need flexible schedules. For example, if an employee needs to work earlier or later in the day for family reasons, this should be taken into consideration.
• Expectations for work-related emails and voicemail. When possible, work emails and voicemails should be checked as frequently as on a normal workday and, when necessary, responded to within one business day. Faster response times are encouraged.


• Supervisors and employees are discouraged from “micro-managing” the remote work experience. It is not reasonable or possible for employees to account for every minute they spend working remotely. Be flexible and revise the Remote Work Plan as needed. However, every full-time employee must also be able to account for at least 40 hours per week of productive work time to benefit the university or take appropriate leave. In addition to regular duties, options for tasks during a remote 40-hour work week may include a long-delayed project or task, training, or other projects that benefit the employee and university. Employees can discuss these options with their supervisors.

4. Prepare the Technology

• See Lamar’s coronavirus FAQ page for information on preparing a remote office.

5. Telecommute Effectively

• Employees should work in a space as free from distractions as possible. Ideally, the space will be comfortable and have a desk, office chair, proper lighting, and any other elements found in a normal office.
• Meetings should continue via conference call or Zoom, Skype, or a similar service.
• Employees approved for full-time remote work should come to campus only when necessary (e.g., to exchange completed assignments for new work, to use special equipment in the office). These campus visits should be limited and coordinated beforehand with the supervisor or designee. Regularly scheduled campus visits should be listed in the Remote Work Plan.

6. Complete & Submit Weekly Summaries

• Employees should complete the Remote Work Weekly Summary to track their daily tasks.
• The weekly summary enables employees to indicate their progress on their Remote Work Plan.
• Each employee should submit a weekly summary to the supervisor at the end of each work week (for most employees, Friday 5pm).
• Supervisors should maintain a copy of each employee's weekly summary.

**Be Accountable but Flexible!** The Remote Work Weekly Summary is not a strict record of employees’ remote work time. Instead, the summary helps employees and supervisors track the progress, priorities, and outcomes listed in the Remote Work Plan. Weekly summaries also help employees and supervisors remain accountable to the university, state, and public for time spent telecommuting.

Questions?

Contact **Human Resources** at (409) 880-8375.