



Administrative Policy
HYBRID-TELEWORK PROGRAM

A.P. No.

A.P. 3-36

Effective Date:

5/1/2023

1. POLICY STATEMENT

The City of Houston (COH) recognizes the opportunities that a flexible work arrangement such as a hybrid-telework program can present. In keeping with our goal of being a workplace of choice, this policy will assist in meeting both business and sustainable development objectives while satisfying the growing needs of our employees.

2. POLICY PURPOSE

2.1. This policy shall establish a uniform hybrid-telework program for the City departments to implement hybrid-telework arrangements where it is economically and operationally feasible to do so in a fair, equitable and transparent manner.

2.2. Telework is a cooperative arrangement between employees, supervisors, and employing departments which allows City employees to work in a telework site instead of their official worksite.

2.3. Telework offers benefits to employees, departments, and the community. Benefits include but are not limited to:

2.3.1. A more satisfying work environment;

2.3.2. Reduced levels of employee stress and conflict;

2.3.3. Continuity of operations, especially during weather related emergencies and/or a medical epidemic or pandemic, when the official worksite is inaccessible or not available for use;

2.3.4. Efficient use of City resources, including office space;

2.3.5. Competitive edge for attracting and retaining highly skilled and qualified individuals;

2.3.6. Higher levels of employee satisfaction and motivation;

2.3.7. Reduced employee absenteeism;

2.3.8. Opportunities for reducing traffic congestion and air pollution; and

2.3.9. Reduced employee commute time and costs.

3. SCOPE

3.1. This policy shall establish a uniform hybrid-telework program for the City departments to implement hybrid-telework arrangements where it is economically and operationally feasible to do so in a fair, equitable and transparent manner.

3.2. This policy applies to all City departments, where the department director has elected to participate in the telework program and the Mayor has approved the election.

Approved:

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Date Approved:

04/27/2023

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3.3. The scope of this policy also applies to city owned devices.

4. DEFINITIONS

Administration and Regulatory Affairs Director: The department director of the Administration and Regulatory Affairs Department (ARA) or their designee.

Chief Information Officer (CIO): The department director of the Houston Information Technology Services Department (HITS) or their designee.

Ad Hoc Telework: A telework schedule that is not set and may vary from week to week but does not exceed three days per week.

Department Telework Coordinator: A person designated by the department director to assist with ensuring their respective department's Telework Employees are compliant with this policy.

Designated Work Area: A readily identifiable and separate area within the telework site whose primary purpose is to efficiently facilitate City business while teleworking (e.g., home office, home study).

Human Resources Director: The department director of the Human Resources Department (HR) or their designee.

KRONOS: The City's electronic timekeeping system.

Official Worksite: The worksite the employee would normally report to if they were not approved for the hybrid-telework program.

Telework: A flexible work arrangement whereby employees have approval to carry out their assigned job duties, roles and responsibilities at a Telework Site.

Telework Employee: Employee approved to participate in the hybrid-telework program.

Telework Site: An alternate location where the employee is permitted to carry out the work otherwise performed at or from their official worksite. Generally speaking, this is typically the employee's residence. The telework site should not be a public location (i.e., coffee shop, public library, etc.)

5. POLICY DETAILS

5.1. General

5.1.1. Employees may voluntarily participate in the hybrid-telework program; however, department director's approval is required.

5.1.2. Telework is not suitable for all jobs or every employee.

5.1.3. In most cases, telework shall be limited to no more than three (3) scheduled working days per workweek.

5.1.4. The telework authorization may be temporarily suspended or terminated at any time, with reasonable written notice by the Department Director or their designee to the telework employee.

5.1.4.1. Notice should be in writing with at least twenty-four (24) hours' notice, when possible.

5.1.5. Telework employees shall reside in a geographical area, as referenced in section 5.5. of this

policy, conducive to meeting the requirements of their job duties and responsibilities.

- 5.1.6. While teleworking, telework employees may not engage in activities that would not be permitted at their official worksite.
- 5.1.7. Telework does not change the telework employee's job duties, roles and responsibilities, or terms and conditions of City employment.
- 5.1.8. Telework employees shall be in proper work attire when attending meetings while teleworking.
- 5.1.9. Telework is not a replacement for childcare, dependent care, and other household personal tasks; therefore, telework employees are expected to arrange childcare and dependent care away from the designated work area, as well as take care of personal business during unpaid lunch periods and breaks, as they would at their official worksite, or use their available accrued leave.
- 5.1.10. Telework employees shall comply with all applicable City rules, policies and procedures, including policies and procedures regarding the use of computers, security standards and network access.
- 5.1.11. The City will not reimburse telework employees for the costs of using personal equipment (e.g., printers, fax machines, copier, cell phone, internet service, monitors, etc.)
- 5.1.12. The hybrid-telework program is intended to be cost neutral.
- 5.1.13. Any new job vacancies advertised shall include whether or not the roles and responsibilities of the vacant position is eligible to participate in the hybrid-telework program.
- 5.1.14. Employees approved to participate in the hybrid-telework program may be required to bring city-owned equipment to the official worksite for inspection, technology updates, or any other business-related reason, at any time.
- 5.1.15. The City is not responsible for determining or validating a telework site for income tax purposes.
- 5.1.16. All approved Hybrid-Telework Applications shall be maintained in the employee's personnel file maintained by the department.
- 5.1.17. All approved authorizations to participate in the hybrid-telework program shall be maintained in the employee's official personnel file maintained by the HR Records Management Division.
- 5.1.18. Telework employees are required to complete any required training determined by the HR Director prior to beginning to telework.
- 5.1.19. Telework employees, supervisors and managers may be required to attend additional trainings, if required by their Department Director or the HR Director.
- 5.1.20. Any new or newly promoted supervisor or manager who supervises or manages a telework employee, shall complete any required telework training(s) for supervisors and managers within sixty (60) days from the date of hire or being newly promoted.
- 5.1.21. Telework employees who fail any phishing attempts to gain access to the City networks shall have their telework authorization rescinded until the Telework Employee has again completed Cybersecurity Awareness Training as determined by the CIO.
- 5.1.22. The use of personal computing devices (which means a desktop computer, laptop, iPad or tablet) for the purposes of telework is not allowed.

- 5.1.23. Any employee who fails to comply with the rules and procedures established by this policy may result in the immediate termination of the telework authorization and/or corrective action up to and including an indefinite suspension or termination.
- 5.1.24. Department directors may implement hybrid-telework by adhering to the citywide telework rollout schedule located on Appendix A.
- 5.1.25. Employees who were approved to participate in the Pilot Hybrid-Telework Program are required to resubmit Hybrid-Telework Ergonomics & Safety Checklist and resubmit for approval the Hybrid-Telework Application and the Hybrid-Telework Authorization no later than thirty (30) calendars from the effective date of this policy to continue to participate in the Hybrid-Telework Program.

5.2. Eligibility

- 5.2.1. An employee is eligible to participate in the hybrid-telework program only if he or she:
 - 5.2.1.1. is a full-time employee;
 - 5.2.1.2. works in a position for which telework is suitable and appropriate;
 - 5.2.1.3. has an activated HEAR Plan for the current HEAR cycle and if applicable, an employee performance overall rating of at least 3.0 from the previous HEAR cycle;
 - 5.2.1.4. does not have any active formal positive corrective action;
 - 5.2.1.5. has not received a temporary suspension within in the last 12 months;
 - 5.2.1.6. is not in violation of the sick leave regulations for the current benefit year;
 - 5.2.1.7. has an acceptable Designated Work Area with sufficient high-speed internet service;
 - 5.2.1.8. has completed the new employee, as applicable, and subsequent annual Cybersecurity Awareness training;
 - 5.2.1.9. has successfully completed any web based and/or in person required telework trainings; and
 - 5.2.1.10. has written approval from their department director or designee.
- 5.2.2. Prior to seeking the department director's approval, eligible employees and their manager or supervisor, shall complete any training established by the HR Director.
- 5.2.3. Notwithstanding Section 5.2.1.1. or 5.2.1.3, new hires, probationary, part-time, temporary, contract or interns may be allowed to participate in the hybrid-telework program at the department director's or designee's discretion.

5.3. Technology and Equipment

- 5.3.1. Telework employees shall use City-owned equipment to access the City's network.
- 5.3.2. Telework employees shall have broadband internet service of at least 100 Mbps for uploads and downloads available for use at the telework site.

5.3.2.1. Telework employees may be required to show proof of broadband internet service's Mbps.

5.3.3. If a telework employee uses their personal equipment (such as printer, scanners, fax machines, telephone, internet and/or wi-fi router, etc.), the telework employee shall be solely responsible for maintenance and repair of equipment even though it is being used for work-related purposes.

5.4. Telework Schedule

5.4.1. Telework employees are expected to be available for work during the times on their approved telework application or as otherwise approved by their supervisor.

5.4.1.1. Telework employees are required to submit leave requests, in compliance with City/department policy, when they are not available for work during their scheduled work hours.

5.4.1.2. Telework employees may be required to work an alternate schedule or an Ad Hoc Schedule for operational needs.

5.4.2. Telework employees who are not exempted from the overtime requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act, shall be required to accurately record all hours worked using KRONOS or other process approved by the ARA Director.

5.4.3. Hours worked in excess of those scheduled per day and per workweek require advance approval of the employee's supervisor for non-exempt telework employees.

5.4.3.1. Failure to comply with this requirement may result in the immediate termination of the telework authorization and/or corrective action up to an including an indefinite suspension or termination.

5.4.4. Telework employees who wish to rescind their telework authorization may do so with at least two weeks' notice to their department director or designee.

5.5. Telework Site

5.5.1. The telework site shall be in the Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land metropolitan statistical area unless written approval is obtained from the HR Director.

5.5.1.1. The Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land Metropolitan Statistical Area consists of the following nine counties: Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Montgomery and Waller.

5.5.2. The City is not required to provide telework employees with materials or supplies needed to establish a telework site (i.e., desk, chair, monitors, internet service, hotspot, telephone, cell phone, fax machine, copier, etc.) and assumes no responsibility for set-up or operating costs associated with telework.

5.6. Designated Work Area

5.6.1. Telework employees must have a designated work area that is separate and distinct in the telework site and conducive to efficiently performing all roles and responsibility of their job duties.

5.6.1.1. Requirements for the designated work area will vary depending on the nature of the work and the equipment needed and shall be determined by the department director

or designee.

- 5.6.2. The area must be free of all potential occupational hazards and must allow the employee to perform their work to mitigate risk to their health and safety.
- 5.6.3. The department director or designee may request photographs of the telework employee's designated work area.
- 5.6.4. The designated work area must comply with the Telework Site Safety Standard as identified in Appendix B of this policy.

5.7. Health and Safety

- 5.7.1. Telework employees shall adhere to all applicable City Health and Safety requirements while teleworking and perform all telework in a manner that eliminates occupational risks.
- 5.7.2. Telework employees shall allow City safety personnel or the department director, or their designee, to visit the telework site, if necessary, to inspect the designate work area during normal work hours to ensure that it is safe from hazards and sufficient to conduct City business in compliance with this policy.
- 5.7.3. An injury that occurs in a telework employee's designated work area, during their scheduled telework hours, may be considered an occupational injury, subject to applicable Texas Workers' Compensation laws.

5.8. Workers' Compensation

- 5.8.1. Workers' compensation claims will not apply to non-telework related injuries that occur for telework employees.
- 5.8.2. To the extent allowed by law, the City assumes no liability for and shall not be liable for injuries occurring:
 - 5.8.2.1. Outside of the telework employee's designated work area;
 - 5.8.2.2. Outside of scheduled working hours on the day the employee is scheduled to telework;
or
 - 5.8.2.3. To third parties and/or members of an employee's family located at their telework site.

5.9. Security and Confidential Information

- 5.9.1. All files, records, papers, and/or other materials created while teleworking is City property.
- 5.9.2. Teleworking employees and their immediate supervisor shall identify any confidential, private, personal information, and/or records to be accessed and ensure appropriate safeguards are used to protect them.
- 5.9.3. Teleworking employees are required to work in private locations within their designated work area when handling confidential and/or sensitive information.
- 5.9.4. Teleworking employees may not disclose confidential files, records, materials, or information and may not allow access to any City equipment, network, or databases to anyone who is not authorized to have access.
- 5.9.5. Any confidentiality and/or cybersecurity breaches caused by or attributed to the telework

employee may result in corrective action up to and including indefinite suspension or termination.

5.10. Emergency Telework

5.10.1. If AP 2-3: Severe Weather and Other Emergency Conditions is activated, the Mayor may temporarily suspend the requirements of this policy and allow employees to telework during the activation of AP 2-3 and/or require authorized telework employees to report to an alternate worksite.

5.10.2. When AP 2-3 is deactivated or the severe weather or other emergency condition has subsided, all provisions of this policy shall be enforced.

6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

6.1. The department director shall be responsible for:

6.1.1. Deciding whether their respective department will participate in the hybrid-telework program.

6.1.2. Designating one or more department employees as the Department's Telework Coordinator.

6.1.3. Approving, disapproving, or modifying telework authorizations submitted by their respective department employees.

6.1.4. Periodically evaluating the implementation of the hybrid-telework program within their respective department to ensure it contributes to the overall mission of their department and the City.

6.1.5. Providing and maintaining a list of telework eligible positions within their respective department to the HR Director within thirty (30) calendar days of this policy or thirty (30) calendar days prior department's implementation date on Appendix A and then the list of telework eligible positions shall be provided bi-annually during the months of June and December of each year in a format approved by the HR Director.

6.1.5.1. The list shall contain at least the department number, department name, division name, cost center, fund, job classification, position number, incumbent's name, and the incumbent's employee number (or vacant if no incumbent.)

6.1.6. Approving request to relocate non-portable technology equipment such as desktop computers, monitors, laptops, printers, scanners, etc. to the telework site.

6.1.6.1. Department directors shall notify the CIO, in writing, of the change of any City technology asset location.

6.1.6.2. Notification shall include at least the City asset tag number, asset description (make, model, quantity), employee name, the contact number of the employee who will have possession of the equipment, and the physical location of the equipment.

6.1.7. Ensuring that operational needs of the department are met and that neither productivity nor costs are negatively impacted by the application of this policy.

6.1.8. Developing employee engagement sessions to be inclusive of both onsite employees and telework employees (e.g., department recognition and awards ceremonies, townhall meetings, etc.)

6.1.9. Administering corrective action, up to and including an indefinite suspension or termination for non-compliance with this policy.

6.1.10. Prior to approving any telework authorization, completing any required training on telework as determined by the HR Director.

6.2. The Department's Telework Coordinator shall be responsible for:

6.2.1. Assisting the department director with ensuring their respective department's Telework Employees are compliant with this policy;

6.2.2. Ensuring department employees are aware of status regarding eligibility to telework; and

6.2.3. Electronically submitting the Hybrid-Telework Authorization to the HR Department's Records Management Division.

6.3. Managers and supervisors shall be responsible for:

6.3.1. Ensuring that the operational needs of the department are met and that neither productivity nor costs are negatively impacted by the application of this policy.

6.3.2. Ensuring that employees have an activated HEAR Plan for the current HEAR cycle and if applicable, an employee performance overall rating of at least meets expectation or 3.0 from the previous HEAR cycle;

6.3.3. Delineating and documenting expectations, including productivity standards, for Telework Employees.

6.3.4. Determining if the nature of the work to be performed at the telework site is operationally feasible.

6.3.5. Communicating with the Telework Employee as consistently as employees who are continuing to work at their official worksite in both content and frequency.

6.3.6. Ensuring employees who will be teleworking, and their colleagues, understand the impacts and practical considerations of the telework situation.

6.3.7. Hosting group huddles, video meetings, and other work-related gatherings that facilitate employee interaction amongst onsite and telework employees.

6.3.8. Promptly documenting scheduled changes that deviate from a telework employee's approved telework schedule.

6.3.9. Administering and/or recommending corrective action, up to and including an indefinite suspension or termination for non-compliance with this policy.

6.3.10. Prior to approving any telework applications, complete any required training on telework as determined by the HR Director.

6.4. Telework Employees shall be responsible for:

6.4.1. Reviewing this policy, prior to submitting the hybrid-telework safety check list and application through the approval process.

6.4.2. Completing and submitting ergonomics & safety checklist at the time the Hybrid-Telework Application is submitted for approval, and on or about June 30th, and December 31st of each year of the approved Hybrid-Telework Authorization.

6.4.3. Ensuring that operational needs of the department are met and that neither productivity nor costs are negatively impacted by approval to telework.

- 6.4.4. Maintaining their telework location in a safe manner, free from safety hazards.
 - 6.4.4.1. Employees shall consent to periodic safety inspections of their telework site, which may be scheduled or unscheduled, by the department's designated HR safety representative or department director, or their designee.
- 6.4.5. Bearing the sole costs associated with establishing and operating their telework site.
- 6.4.6. Ensuring the hybrid-telework arrangement is in accordance with any applicable legal or contractual regulations pertaining to the telework site (e.g., zoning, deed restrictions, the employee's residential lease or insurance, etc.).
- 6.4.7. Before beginning to telework, completing any required trainings on telework as determined by the HR Director.
- 6.5. The CIO shall be responsible for exploring and, if feasible, leveraging technology (e.g., softphone, etc.) for telework employees.
- 6.6. The HR Director or designee shall be responsible for:
 - 6.6.1. Developing required training for all department directors, managers, and supervisors, and telework employees on this policy; and
 - 6.6.2. Establishing required training, forms, processes, and procedures for the administration of this policy.

7. PROCEDURES

- 7.1. Employees who would like to participate in the hybrid-telework program shall use the following process for approval:
 - 7.1.1. Employees shall confirm their position is eligible to telework.
 - 7.1.2. Provided the employee's position is eligible to telework, the employee shall:
 - 7.1.2.1. Express their interest to telework to their supervisor and gain initial support to learn more about the Hybrid-Telework Program;
 - 7.1.2.1.1. Employees who have expressed an interest in participating in the Hybrid-Telework Program may attend an optional informational session prior to complying with section 7.1.2.2;
 - 7.1.2.2. After learning more about the Hybrid-Telework Program, submit a completed Hybrid-Telework Ergonomics & Safety Checklist and Hybrid-Telework Application to their immediate supervisor and another manager in the employee's chain of command for approval or denial to participate in the Hybrid-Telework Program.
 - 7.1.2.3. Provided the employee's Hybrid-Telework Application is approved as described in section 7.1.2.2., the employee and the immediate supervisor shall register for any policy and process-based training through the Talent Management System (TMS).
 - 7.1.2.4. Provided the employee and the immediate supervisor complete the policy and process-based training, the employee and the supervisor shall register for the required in-person training in TMS.
 - 7.1.2.5. Provided the employee and the immediate supervisor completes all required training,

the employee may submit the Hybrid-Telework Authorization to their immediate supervisor, another manager in the employee's chain of command, and the Department Director for approval or denial to participate in the hybrid-telework program.

7.1.2.5.1. A representative from HR's Office of Talent & Organizational Development shall confirm completion of any required training prior to the department director's approval or denial of the Hybrid-Telework Authorization.

7.1.3. Each approved Hybrid-Telework Authorization shall be electronically submitted to the HR Department's Records Management Division to be maintained in the employee's official personnel file by the Department's Telework Coordinator.

7.2. An employee who believes their eligibility or Hybrid-Telework Authorization has been denied for arbitrary or capricious reasons may submit a written request to their department director or designee for reconsideration.

7.2.1. The decision by the department director on such a written request shall be final.

7.3. Telework employees who change jobs or their job duties, responsibilities, or role change shall submit a new Hybrid-Telework Ergonomics & Safety Checklist, new Hybrid-Telework Application, and new Hybrid-Telework Authorization in accordance with the process as described in 7.1. of this policy.

7.3.1. Employees, managers and supervisors who previously completed all the required training described in 7.1. of this policy are not required to complete additional training, unless required by their department director or the HR Director.

8. CONFLICT AND REPEAL

This administrative policy supersedes Administrative Procedure 3-36: Pilot Hybrid-Telework Program effective July 1, 2022.

9. RELATED DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATION

- Code of Ordinance, Chapter 14-227, Sick Leave Regulations
- Administrative Procedure 3-7: Positive Corrective Action Program
- Administrative Procedure 3-20: Houston Employee Assessment and Review (HEAR) Process

10. APPENDICES

- Appendix A – Citywide Telework Rollout Schedule
- Appendix B – Telework Site and Designated Work Area Safety Standards

11. POLICY SPONSOR

Department: Human Resources Department and Houston Information Technology Services

Appendix A – Citywide Telework Rollout Schedule

Phase 1: Pilot Telework Departments

Dates: July 2022 – October 2022 and May 2023

Departments: ARA, FIN, HITS, including HAS IT Division, HR, LGL, OBO, & PD

Phase 2: to include Phase 1 and 1st Set of New Departments Employees who did not participate in pilot telework program

Dates: June 2023 – July 2023

Departments: DoN, City Sec, CTR, FMD, MCD, PRD, & HPL

Phase 3: to include Phase 1, Phase 2, remaining last set Departments' Employees who did not participate in pilot telework program

Dates: August 2023 – September 2023

Departments: HCD, HEC, HFD, SWM, HPD, & HHD

Phase 4: to include Phase 1, Phase 2, Phase 3 and remaining departments listed below

Dates: October 2023 and ongoing

Departments: HAS, HPW, or any other department electing to participate not previously listed above

Appendix B - Telework Site and Designate Area Safety Standard

Regardless of your work location, occupational hazards and their accompanying risks exist in every work environment. As your employer, the City of Houston has an ethical, legal, and moral obligation to ensure your safety while performing work for the City. Telework is not an exception to these obligations and thus we have provided the following standard to follow and implement at your Telework Site. These rules are no different than when working at your official worksite and shall be adhered to at all times.

All Telework Employees must abide by this safety standard when teleworking in their Designated Work Area:

Equipment

1. Keep desk drawers, file drawers, and cabinet doors closed when not in use.
2. Keep materials stored on shelves in a manner which will prevent them from falling. Heavy objects should be placed on lower shelves.
3. Any electrical equipment used for teleworking that presents a hazardous condition in any form should be safely isolated and reported to your supervisor.
4. Do not attempt to clean, oil, or adjust any equipment that is powered. If the equipment is not equipped with an on/off switch that can be locked in the "off" position, it should be disconnected from the power source prior to inspection.
5. Common or sharp-pointed pins should not be used for fastening paper together. Use only approved fasteners such as regular staples, paper clips, etc.
6. Use extreme care in opening file cabinet drawers. Opening of over loaded upper drawers may tip over the cabinet. Upper file drawers should be opened one at a time, with one closed before opening another.

Ergonomics

7. Avoid sitting on the edge of chairs. Do not tilt back when sitting in a straight chair.
8. Work only in well-lit areas. Do not work in the dark or dimly lit areas.
9. Use proper lifting techniques (back straight, lift with legs) when moving or carrying items.
10. Use a step stool or step ladder to reach high places. Never stand on boxes, chairs, tables, or desks.
11. Avoid overreaching or reaching into areas with an obstructed view.

Housekeeping

12. Broken glass and other sharp objects should not be placed loosely in wastepaper containers. Items should be wrapped in heavy paper or a rigid container prior to prevent injury.
13. Keep floors free of spills, paper clips, pencils, and other slipping hazards.
14. Keep floors free of tripping hazards such as extension cords, boxes, wires, and household items.
15. Repair carpeting with holes, rips, or tears. Secure carpeting, rugs, mats, and floor coverings against slipping or tripping.
16. Keep outside walkways, parking areas, entrances and exits free of obstructions, slip and tripping hazards.

Behaviors

17. Employees must always maintain situational awareness and avoid running in the designated work area.
18. Doors should be opened slowly to avoid striking anyone on the other side.
19. Pointed objects, such as pencils, knives or scissors should not be carried with the point exposed in the pockets, attached to the clothing or through congested aisles or working areas.
20. Gummed strips of envelopes should be moistened with a suitable device, not with the tongue. Avoid opening envelopes with fingers and sliding hands along edge of paper.