TASSCUBO
Texas Association of State Senior College & University Business Officers

Remote Work
A Survey of Higher Education Institutions in Texas

September 15, 2022

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Executive Summary

Throughout Texas Higher Education, there is a wide variety of jobs performed and while not all of them are suitable for remote work, there are plenty of support functions that are conducive to remote work under the right conditions. In performing this research, we identified institutions with clearly established programs, institutions who have only recently adopted a formal program, and some who have not yet considered or adopted any remote work guidelines. The global pandemic forced many organizations to reconsider the use of such programs and to adopt technology and controls to make such work happen for the safety and retention of staff, faculty, and students.

There are many variables when instituting a remote work program that need to be considered and accounted for to make the program successful for both employees and managers. While technology and taxation challenges are among the most challenging aspects to consider, there are also managerial changes that may need to take place to ensure a smooth transition for any institutions contemplating a plan or looking to bolster and enhance their program. However, the opportunity to retain valuable employees, recruit new talent, increase productivity, decrease overhead, and increase morale is worth exploring what a remote work program can do for the institution.

Introduction

In the winter TASSCUBO meeting of 2021, a work group was established to look at remote work for employees eligible at institutions of higher education in the State of Texas and what kinds of programs and policies are in place to facilitate such an arrangement. Within the last few years, an unprecedented global pandemic forced many industries to look at alternate forms of work, including remote work. During 2020, the number of employed persons who worked at home, or from an alternate location almost doubled, rising to forty-two percent.[1] Many institutions of higher education faced a similar challenge needing to balance employee and student safety while continuing to offer world-class education in a new and innovative way.

The work group established by TASSCUBO surveyed institutions and agencies within higher education in the State of Texas to analyze current practices and determine what could be considered "best practice" to disseminate how institutions of higher education can continue to deliver on our mission to the citizens of the State of Texas, the United States, and the world at-large. The practices, policies, and challenges of institutions all over the state were gathered and analyzed by the work group and a survey was developed to gauge the various aspects of any current remote work programs in place. These programs are broadly defined and may include flexible schedules and hybrid work arrangements (in the office some days and remote other days).

Charge

The charge given to the work group was to:

- analyze current practices at member institutions;
- conduct an environmental scan to gather best practices;
- put forward recommendations for remote work including model policies, processes, and practices; and
- identify need(s) for policy, practice, or legislative changes.

Scope

To facilitate this charge, the group decided on a series of actions taken by subcommittees to methodically gather and analyze the necessary information. These steps were to:

- create a Qualtrics survey to gather information on current practices from member institutions;
- identify the target audience for the survey;
- analyze survey results and facilitate discussion groups;
- assemble recommendations into report format; and
- deliver presentation and findings.

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[1] Bureau of Labor Statistics – American Time Use Survey – May to December 2019 and 2020 Results (https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/atus.pdf)

Literature Review

In as early as 2010, the advantages of remote work were recognized by the Federal government in the adoption of the Telework Enhancement Act[2] in which each agency was required to establish telework policies to help improve work-life balance, decrease overhead costs, reduce carbon emissions, and increase productivity. Remote work is a practice on the rise and there are many advantages a remote work program can offer an institution, when implemented with thought, planning, and a thorough understanding of the advantages (and how to leverage them) and the challenges associated with such a program.

Advantages

The labor pool is a competitive marketplace and the skills possessed by our employees are easily transferable and valuable to other industries. Remote work can provide several advantages for both employees and the organization as a whole:

- Advantages for the Employee
    - Reduced commute time and associated costs
    - Better work-life wellness[3]
    - Working from a comfortable environment of their choice
    - Increased flexibility
    - Increased employee safety (commute, communicability of diseases, etc.)
- Advantages for the Organization
    - Increased productivity[4]
    - Decreased absenteeism[5]
    - Increases recruiting effectiveness by expanding the available talent pool by not requiring relocation to within a commute distance
    - Decreases costs associated with power consumption, cleaning, printing, parking, overhead, space requirements, and other miscellaneous costs
    - Helps valuable employees remain with the organization instead of seeking employment with companies who offer a more flexible work arrangement

Why limit the talent pool to a commuting radius?

Challenges

Along with the advantages, there are certainly challenges associated with a remote work program. These challenges should not deter an institution from exploring a remote work

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[2] Public Law 111-292, Telework Enhancement Act of 2010, December 9, 2010

[3] Como, R., Hambley, L., Domene, J., "An Exploration of Work-Life Wellness and Remote Work During and Beyond COVID-19", Canadian Journal of Career Development

[4] Bloom, N., Liang, J., Roberts, J., Jenny Ying, Z., "Does Working from Home Work? Evidence from a Chinese Experiment", The quarterly Journal of Economics

[5] Wright, A., Study: Teleworkers More Productive-Even When Sick", SHRM

program, but awareness of these challenges can help with crafting solutions ahead of time and plan for some of the pitfalls that some programs face[6]:

- Even high performers sometimes experience declines in job performance and engagement during remote work, especially during times of crisis when no advance preparation or training has been created.
- Supervisors worry that employees will not work as effectively because they don't see them sitting in an office or a cubicle.
- Employees struggle when there is reduced communication and access to manager support, often feeling that managers are "out of touch" with their needs and are unsupportive.
- Remote workers may have to wait for answers to questions before they can complete simple tasks.
- Extroverts crave the social interaction of an office and feel a sense of loss and diminished feeling belonging to their employer when working remotely for extended periods.
- There are payroll, labor law, and tax considerations for employees working out-of-state.
- Remote workers will need to access the systems and files they would normally access in the office and technology needs to accommodate this access on both ends of the transaction.
- Because work is now at home, there can be a blurred line about when employees are expected to be available.
- Senior institutional leaders can be viewed as a major obstacle to remote work.[7]
  - "We still have some senior leaders who believe that butts must be in seats on campus in order to ensure work gets done. We survived and thrived during the complete shutdown in a remote environment. You have to trust that people will do their jobs, and you have to manage by results, not by physically seeing someone onsite."
  - "Institutional leaders have openly stated their personal preferences against remote work, regardless of the fact that we work in a small university town with a limited local hiring pool."
  - "Our institution has telework policies in place but does not actively encourage them."
  - "At the institutional leadership level, there is an overall desire to maintain the 'old culture'. I think we have been slow to realize that 'old' culture has changed, morphed into something new during the pandemic. Now it is a question of wrapping our arms around what our new culture will become as we push into the future."

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[6] Ferreira, R.; Pereira, R.; Bianchi, I.; Mira de Silva, M., "*Decision Factors for Remote Work Adoption: Advantages, Disadvantages, Driving Forces and Challenges*", Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity
[7] Brooks, C.; Bichsel, J. "EDUCAUSE and CUPA-HR QuickPoll Results: The Misalignment of Preferences and Realities for Remote Work

Types of Remote Work

Types of Remote Work[8]	
Completely onsite	Work is performed onsite due to nature of the business or leadership philosophy
Mostly onsite	An office-first philosophy which allows for some remote time (optional one day per week), remote exceptions (different locations), or remote days (entire department works remotely at same time/day)
Hybrid	Model in which some employees work some days in the office and some from an alternate location
Mostly remote	Employees mostly work remote; office is available and is designed with flexible workstations instead of individual offices
Completely remote	No physical office space; work across time zones

Current Practices: The Spectrum of Program Maturity

Throughout the various policies for different institutions and university systems, each program is centered around creating a flexible and supportive program for employees but emphasize that the operational requirements of the organization take precedence. In analyzing the information from the participating institutions, there was a spectrum of adoption throughout the state ranging from fully implemented programs established more than five years ago to programs implemented less than a year ago or just now being contemplated. Below, the different categories along the spectrum will be discussed and some example language will be provided as well as some best practices for moving further along the spectrum to program maturity.
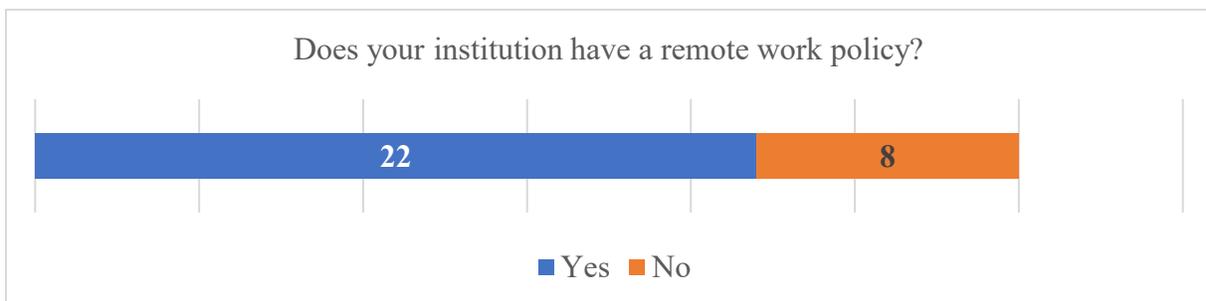

Figure 1: Number of Institutions with Remote Work Policies

Contemplative

There are several institutions that responded to the survey and recognized the benefit of a remote work program but have not yet implemented anything formal. While remote work may be happening in isolated cases as an informal arrangement, there is no broad program or policy that would institutionalize such a program. For institutions contemplating a formal program, there are important considerations for such a plan that should be considered prior to a broad offering.

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[8] CUPA-HR Providing Remote Work Opportunities Will Aid Your Retention Efforts
about.gitlab.com/company/culture/all-remote/stages

- **People**
  - Are there positions where a full-time presence on campus is not required and could benefit from such a program?
  - Do managers support and feel equipped to manage workers offsite?
- **Information Technology**
  - Is the technology in place to allow remote access to critical systems (student information systems, financial systems, repositories, etc.) for working offsite?
  - Is the infrastructure in place to securely connect to those systems, either through a virtual private network (VPN) or secure logins and dual authentication?
  - Is the institution in compliance with all applicable information technology standards from the Information Resources Management Act[9]?
  - Are there tools available to communicate and meet with peers (Email, Instant Messenger, Video Meetings, etc.)?
  - Is there adequate internet access in the local area to support this initiative?

When establishing a new program, some of the basic questions of access and capability should be addressed and discussed with the necessary departments on campus, such as information technology, human resources, finance, and student affairs. These stakeholders will help troubleshoot and identify institution specific challenges to working off campus.

Emerging

The global pandemic had a dramatic effect on how people interacted with each other, especially in enclosed spaces like classrooms and offices. Because of this, organizations, including those within higher education, transitioned to an interaction model that facilitated work and communication without necessarily requiring being in someone else's presence. To accommodate this, many organizations adopted some form of remote work policy or expanded a newly implemented program and even though the emergency has largely passed, the glimpse into the benefits of remote work are hard to ignore. As these programs are shifted to be more permanent, certain considerations should be given to the formalized, official program.

- **Process**
  - Is there a formal and fair process for employees to request an alternate work location that is reviewed by the appropriate level of the organization[10]?
  - Is there an official document that explains who is eligible for such a program and describe some institutional controls based on roles, responsibilities, location, and mission?
  - Will a new approval be required? If so, at what interval?
- **Information Technology**
  - Are information technology systems transparent (or allow a level of transparency) for supervisors and management to assign, track, or monitor employee productivity?
  - Who will be responsible for procuring, issuing, tracking, and shipping of equipment necessary for job performance?
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[9] Texas Government Code §2054
[10] Texas Government Code §658.010

- **Regulatory**
    - Does the financial system(s) accommodate remote work locations from other states where tax rates, unemployment insurance, and other financial considerations will differ from Texas?
    - Will the increase in overhead costs for registering, filing returns, and compliance considerations for other states be worth the arrangement to the institution?
    - Institutions may be responsible for job-related injuries or occupational illness or disease in alternate work locations via worker's compensation responsibilities.

Developing

Some institutions implemented a flexible work location policy before the pandemic. The flexibility modern technology provides allows certain functions to be performed from an offsite location. From the survey, thirteen of the twenty-eight respondents (46%) have had a program in place longer than three years. From this, we can infer that remote work policies were being reviewed and developed prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 by almost half of the respondents. These programs have been in place and practiced at these institutions through several years and many of the initial, technical challenges have been overcome. However, there are some additional areas to consider with regard to enhancing the program and delivering on the promised benefits of remote work for the organization.

- **Leadership**
    - Do employees feel that remote workers are valued the same as onsite employees?
    - Do employees feel engaged with their team, and feel they are contributing to the success of the department and the organization?
    - Are expectations for communication, quality, and productivity understood by both managers and employees?
- **Technology**
    - Do the systems in use have robust reporting capabilities to allow management visibility into workloads and productivity?

Mature

Eleven of the respondents provided information on their programs that were established over five years ago and have been periodically updated. These programs can and should be used as benchmarks for language, setup, and communication best practices. Through trial and error, these institutions have navigated the challenges associated with a remote work policy and have balanced the needs and preferences of employees with what is in the best interests of the institution.
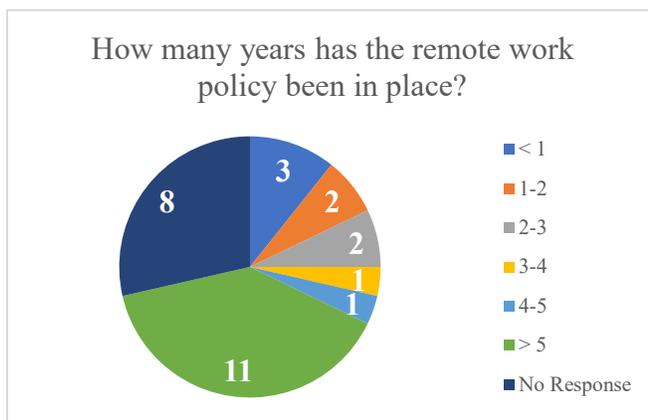

Figure 2: How Long Policies Have Been In Place

To help facilitate the development and adoption of such programs, below is an alphabetical list of some of the more established programs within the state. While not an exhaustive list, these programs stood out for establishing

clear eligibility requirements, additional training for both employee and manager, as well as tackling some of the small challenges that may occur in some arrangements.

- Texas A&M University
- Texas State University
- Texas Tech University
- University of Houston
- University of North Texas
- University of Texas

Best Practices for Managers

Managers within the organizations may need to adapt to a new paradigm of interactions with employees or rethink some long-held assumptions about managing people within the workplace. While it is important to establish an organization-wide philosophy on remote work, the success or failure of a remote work arrangement will most likely come down to the individual manager-employee relationship. Additional training for managing remote employees (even part-time remote employees) is highly encouraged and often cited as a best practice within the survey responses for this study.

Within the various trainings for managing remote employees, some of the basic recommendations and best practices include:

- Managers must set the expectations of what employees should do.
- Managers should let employees know when or what time of the day is best to reach them.
- Agree on the basics of office hours, lunch breaks, and availability
- Maintain the same goals for office and remote employees
- Check in regularly on progress
- Agree on response expectations
- Utilize instant messenger and online collaboration tools
- Understand and be receptive to the perception of remote employees
- Involve everyone in team projects
- Inform the whole team of the big picture and strategic outlook
- Help remote employees understand how they contribute value to the team and the organization
- Implement regular teambuilding opportunities to connect remote and onsite employees to foster employee engagement and connection as one team
- Transparent discussion with employees regarding decision-making process related to remote work requests
- Evaluate other flexibility options for employees whose jobs require a fully onsite presence

To accommodate these goals, a short list of "Do's" and "Don'ts" has been developed to serve as a foundation for any in-house training for managers new to managing remote employees or those being promoted into managerial roles that could have remote employees reporting to them.

DO:

- Acknowledge the stress the team faces
- Build rapport with the team utilizing informal chat during calls
- Establish regular communication
- Use video calls when possible (seeing each other may help to ease the isolation and loneliness that can be associated with remote work)
- Unite the team with a common goal aligned with the organization's mission
- Create a culture of trust and transparency
- Use metrics/KPIs as much as possible
- Leverage technology and resources to automate repetitive tasks
- Dialog with employees to determine elements of remote work arrangements that are working well and opportunities for improvement on a routine basis

DON'T:

- Forget to acknowledge the work of the remote team
- Ignore remote team members because they are not seen
- Allow silos to make remote employees feel left out
- Worry about remote team members not working
- Let your remote team work too much since the line between office/home is blurred
- Require exhaustive daily reports or emails of everything accomplished

Recommendations

Based on current work trends, there is a strong desire by employees to have the flexibility to work in alternate locations. Higher Education, as an industry, is experiencing the same pressures from employees to offer the ability to work remote part of the time or even full time. Since the labor pool universities and other institutions of higher education depend upon is shared across many industries, several respondents have reported in this survey that they are experiencing a talent drain as employees opt to leave for the opportunity to work remotely, even taking a pay cut to do so.

Explore the opportunity to adopt a formal remote work policy.

The recommendation from this work group is that institutions of higher education in Texas should explore the opportunity to adopt a formal remote work policy, but allowing individual department needs to drive the adoption depending on eligibility, job responsibilities, student/customer service expectations, and the overall mission of the organization. While an institutionalized framework can provide consistency and fairness across the organization, each employee performs a different role for the organization and the official policy should acknowledge this difference and emphasize the needs of the organization drive the decision-making process for eligibility.

Another recommendation is to reach out to universities with formal programs that have been in place for a longer period to learn common pitfalls, what worked for their institution and what lessons were learned in the process. Programs and forms could be shared and serve as

templates to begin the process of customizing a bespoke program designed to meet the needs of the institution. The option to have a program could help with retaining valuable employees, give an advantage in recruiting new talent, increase productivity, decrease overhead, and increase morale.

Conclusion

Remote work is here to stay. Employees now expect a flexible work schedule and are taking into consideration remote work arrangements when evaluating their employment options. As seen across many responses to the survey, recruitment and retention are directly impacted by the availability and adoption of these programs. Employers need to account for a variety of factors regarding remote work; factors include legal compliance, financial resources, available technology, managerial capabilities, and cultural fit. Organizations that can clearly articulate their remote work policies and procedures will have the most success in recruiting and retaining their most valuable resource, human capital.

Appendix A – TASSCUBO Charge

Charge

- Analyze current practices at member institutions;
- Conduct an environmental scan to gather best practices;
- Put forward recommendations for remote work including model policies, processes, and practices; and
- Identify need(s) for policy, practice, or legislative changes.

Scope

- Create a Qualtrics survey to gather information on current practices from member institutions.
- Identify the target audience for the survey.
- Analyze survey results and facilitate discussion groups.
- Assemble recommendations into report format.
- Deliver presentation and findings.

Appendix B – Timeline

Task	Date
Formation of Work Group	February 2022
Commence Work Group Meetings	March 2022
Send Survey	May 20, 2022
Analyze Responses	June 2022
Draft Report	June 2022
Deliver Preliminary Findings	June 2022
Deliver Final Report	October 2022

Appendix C – Committee Members

Name	Title	Institution
Amy Hall	Executive Director of Human Resources	Texas Women's University
Dr. Brian McGinley	Section Chief, Finance & Administration	Texas Division of Emergency Management
Carole Clerie	AVP for Human Resources	Texas State University
Cherie Keplinger	Director of Human Resources	University of Texas at Arlington
Cheryl Greene	Executive Director, Human Resources	Prairie View A&M University
Chris Loeffler	Human Resources Project Manager	MD Anderson
Connie Kemp	Executive Director, Human Resources Services	University of Houston
Dr. Cynthia Carter-Horn	Chief Financial Officer	Prairie View A&M University
David Mondt	Director of Budgets	Texas Tech University System
Dawn Fisher	Human Resources Director	Midwestern State University
Devona Smith	Human Resources Senior Director	Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center
Eva Lopez	AVP for Employee Services	Tarleton State University
Gracy Buentello	AVP for Human Resources	University of Texas at Tyler Health Sciences Center
James Webb	AVP for Finance and Controller	Texas State University System
Jamie Ortiz	Controller	Lamar State College Orange
Jodie Billingsley	AVP for Human Resources	Texas Tech University
John Wyatt	Interim Director of Human Resources	Stephen F. Austin University
Kathy Rice	Payroll Director	Midwestern State University
Katy Madden	Senior Manager, HR Business Partner	University of Texas at San Antonio
Katy McDaniel	Chief Human Resources Officer	University of North Texas
Kurtis Neal	Director of Human Resources	Angelo State University
Leanna Odom	Controller	Lamar State College – Port Arthur
Linda Cruz Flores	Project Manager, Vice President of Finance and Administration	Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
Marsha Worthy	Associate Director, Human Resources and Talent Management	Lamar University
Mary Schubert	Director, Continuous Improvement & Service Quality	Texas A&M University
Michael Mueller	Senior Vice President for Finance & Planning	The University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley

Pamela Mayfield	Associate Vice Chancellor of Human Resources	Texas State Technical College
Rhonda Beassie	AVP for Human Resources & Diversity	Sam Houston State University
Ron Appling	Director of Human Resources	University of Texas – Permian Basin
Shelly McCune	Budget Director	West Texas A&M University
Tammi Thompson	Interim Director of Human Resources	Texas A&M University-Commerce
Tina Flores-Nevarez	Executive Director for Human Resources & Payroll	Texas A&M University-Central Texas
Toni Neeren	Associate Director for Human Resources	Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
Tricia Landers	Director of HR Services	Texas A&M Health Science Center
Venus Lillis	Director of Academic Advising	Texas A&M University-Texarkana
Yolanda Edmond	Senior AVP for HR & Payroll Services	Texas Southern University

Appendix D – Responding Institutions

Institution Name	Institution Contact Name	Institutional Contact Title
Lamar State College Orange	Mary Wickland	EVP for Finance and Operations
Lamar State College Port Arthur	Mary Wickland	EVP for Finance and Operations
Lamar University	Tony Sanchez	Associate VP, Human Resources and Talent Management
Prairie View A&M University	Cheryl Greene	Executive Director, Human Resources
Sam Houston State University	Rhonda Beassie	Associate Vice President for Human Resources
Tarleton State University	DawnAnn Wilson	Assoc. Director, Employee Services
Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station	Nicole Pottberg	Executive Director, Engineering Human Resources & Payroll
Texas A&M International University	Jan Aspelund	Director of Human Resources
Texas A&M University	Andy Barna	Director, Employee Relations
Texas A&M University - San Antonio	Martha Gonzalez	Chief Human Resources Officer
Texas A&M University-Central Texas	Tina Flores-Nevarez	Executive Director, Human Resources & Payroll
Texas A&M University-Commerce	Tammi Thompson	Interim Director Human Resources
Texas A&M University-Texarkana	Jeff Hinton	CFO / Executive Vice President for Finance & Administration
Texas A&M University-Texarkana	Charlotte Banks	Director, Human Resources
Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi	Jaclyn Mahlmann	Vice President of Finance and Administration
Texas Division of Emergency Management	Maggie Freeman	Chief Human Resources Officer
Texas State Technical College	Pamela Mayfield	Associate Vice Chancellor, Head of Human Resources
Texas State University	Carole Clerie	AVPHR
Texas Tech University	Jodie Billingsley	Associate Vice President, Human Resources
Texas Woman's University	Amy Hall	Executive Director, Human Resources
University of Houston (Main Campus)	Gaston Reinoso	Associate Vice Chancellor/Vice President, Human Resources
University of North Texas	Katy McDaniel	Assistant Vice Chancellor and CHRO

University of North Texas at Dallas	Keeshala Henderson	Sr. Human Resources Business Partner
University of North Texas, Health Science Center	Renetta Nail	Employee Relations Manager
University of Texas at Arlington	Jewel Washington	Chief Human Resources Officer
University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center	Christopher Loeffler	Project Manager, Human Resources
UNT System Administration	Angela Bennett-Engele	Associate Director of HR
UT Southwestern Medical Center	Holly Crawford	EVP, Business Affairs
West Texas A&M University	Warren Pitt	Assistant Vice President, Human Resources