

**TELECOMMUTING /  
WORK FROM HOME POLICY  
for  
THE BELIZE PUBLIC SERVICE**

## **1.0. Introduction**

The Ministry of the Public Service (MPS) seeks to establish a policy on telecommuting/teleworking, which means working away from the office. Government Offices are required to establish the capability for selected public officers to work at home or away from the office to maintain continuous service in the case of events or situations which makes it impossible, unsafe, inconvenient or otherwise for Public officer/s to report to designated place of work. As is expected, any system must have structures for its proper administration and implementation. This Policy therefore seeks to establish the processes for its implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Telecommuting/Teleworking.

## **2.0. Scope**

This policy applies to all public officers. It should be read in collaboration with pertinent parts of the HR manual and the prevailing Public Service Regulations.

## **3.0. Policy Purpose**

The purpose of the policy is:

- a) To establish the Belize Public Service's approach to telecommuting or work from home, when approved, and *during a pandemics or natural disasters as declared by the National Emergency Organization (NEMO)*.
- b) To explain the details about telecommuting procedures required for requesting, approving and effectively implementing telecommuting which is available to eligible staff.
- c) To enable effective, equitable, transparent and mutually beneficial telecommuting work arrangements.

## **4.0. Objective**

- a) The Belize Public Service strives to offer alternative/flexible work arrangements (FWA) for staff. A variety of alternative work arrangements may be applied based on the specific needs of the service and the needs of the individual public officer.
- b) Some of the programmes in alternate/flexible working arrangements that can be offered include:
  - i. Telecommuting/Work from home
  - ii. alternate and reduced work schedules,
  - iii. compressed work week
  - iv. flexitime,

## 5.0. Definition

- a) Telecommuting is a work arrangement in which employees do not commute or travel to the workplace but instead are allowed to work at some other off- site location for all or part of their regularly scheduled work hours or workweek.
- b) Locations include:
  - i. on the road/mobile
  - ii. in a satellite office
  - iii. remote location
  - iv. at home
- c) Employees may work from home:
  - i. full time
  - ii. on certain days (alternating)
  - iii. for specific period
- d) Work from home arrangements can be occasional, temporary or permanent. It can provide a mutually beneficial option for both the employer and employees. There can also be community benefits (e.g. during a pandemic) which would allow for slowing down or stopping the spread of a disease.
- e) Telecommuting is considered to be a viable, flexible work option when both the employee and the Service are suited to such an arrangement and may be appropriate for some employees and jobs but not for others.
- f) Reasons that could demand telecommuting include but are not limited to:
  - i. Pandemic disease outbreak,
  - ii. Carer responsibilities (e.g. Parenting, caring for elderly parents etc.),
  - iii. Extreme weather,
  - iv. National Disasters,
  - v. Emergencies,
  - vi. Medical reasons,
  - vii. Work-life balance,
  - viii. Long distance commute,
- g) Telecommuting and other FWAs are not entitlements but based on specific provisions which may be agreed between the employer and employee, and it in no way changes the terms and conditions of employment.

## 6.0. Procedures

- a) Either a public officer or a supervisor can suggest telecommuting as a possible work arrangement.

- b) Any telecommuting arrangement made will be on a trial basis for a specified short period and may be discontinued at will and at any time at the request of either the telecommuter or the Ministry/Department. Where telecommuting is the only option for business continuity for whatever reason, the employer may request the employee to so work.
- c) Every effort will be made to provide adequate notice in writing by either party for the request/decision for the commencement and termination of a telecommuting arrangement to allow for any necessary arrangements to be made to ensure the smooth transition. There may be instances, however, when only limited notice is possible.

## **7.0. Public Officer Eligibility**

- a) Officers who are eligible include: permanent, full-time Officers, fixed term contract officers (short or long term).
- b) Officers requesting formal telecommuting arrangements must:
  - i. have been in the employment of the Public Service for a minimum period of one-year continuous, regular employment,
  - ii. possess good time-management and organizational skills,
  - iii. be self-motivated, self-reliant, and disciplined and
  - iv. have a satisfactory performance record.

## **8.0. Position Eligibility**

- a) Not all jobs can be performed from off-site locations. In general, positions requiring face-to-face interaction with customers and office personnel are not suitable for telecommuting arrangements.
- b) Before entering into any telecommuting agreement, supervisors together with the Human Resource personnel, utilising the official information available, will evaluate the suitability of or the need for such an arrangement, reviewing the following areas:
  - i. Officer suitability: The public officer and supervisor will assess the needs and work habits of the officer, compared to traits customarily recognized as appropriate for successful telecommuters.
  - ii. Job responsibilities: The public officer and supervisor will discuss the job responsibilities and determine if the job is appropriate for a telecommuting arrangement.
  - iii. Equipment needs, workspace design considerations and scheduling issues: The public officer and supervisor may review the physical workspace, needs and the appropriate location and work schedule for the telework, if considered necessary.

- iv. Legal implications: The supervisor along with the public officer will determine any legal implications under the Public Service Regulations and governing labour laws in Belize including confidentiality and/or restrictions on working out of a home-based office. The officer is responsible for fulfilling all obligations under the agreement and must immediately inform the Ministry/Department in writing of anything or reason that may prevent the fulfilment such obligation.
- v. The Public Service recognises that telecommuting is not a barrier to promotion or management responsibilities.

## **9.0 Basic Requirements**

While public officers and supervisors have the freedom to develop arrangements tailored to officer and departmental needs, the following basic requirements must be met:

- a) Public officers must be able to carry out the same or most of the same duties, assignments, and other work obligations at their home office as they do when working at the employment offices.
- b) A review of work processes and approvals for online applicability.
- c) Adherence to the agreed workweek or provisions establish in prevailing laws and regulations for the category of worker.
- d) It is also possible to utilise a compressed workweek arrangement, however, the work hours must be agreed prior to any such arrangements.
- e) Public officers must be available to their supervisors or co-workers during normal work hours.
- f) Public officers must be available to attend scheduled meetings (in person or virtual) and participate in other required office activities at the home office as needed. Except for extraordinary circumstances, the Public Service will normally provide at least 24 hours' notice for such events.
- g) Telecommuting public officers will be required to accurately record all hours worked using the Public Service's time-keeping system where required.
- h) Hours worked in excess of those scheduled per day and per workweek requires the advance approval of the telecommuter's supervisor. Failure to comply with this requirement will not result in any overtime remuneration, where overtime is applicable.
- i) Telecommuting is not designed to be a replacement for appropriate child care.
- j) Although an individual public officer's schedule may be modified to accommodate child care needs, the focus of the arrangement must remain on job performance and meeting the demand of the public service.

## **10. Request Process/Approval**

- a) Telecommuting arrangements are approved by CEOs or HODs and in concurrence with the MPS on a case-by-case basis.

- b) During a pandemic or natural disaster, supervisors may request that designated staff work from home/telecommute providing adequate guide to CEO or HOD in the consideration of such request for approval.
- c) Public officers identifying the need for telecommuting arrangements should discuss the matter with their supervisors and complete a Telecommuting Request and Evaluation Form.
- d) If the public officer and CEO/HOD agree, and the CEO, MPS concurs, a draft telecommuting agreement will be prepared and signed by all parties, and a specific trial period will commence where applicable.
- e) At the end of a pandemic-related absence, public officers will be required to provide medical clearance certificate for return to work and in the event of a national disaster Public Officers are expected to return to work after the all clear is given by NEMO,
- f) An appropriate level of communication between the public officer and supervisor will be agreed to as part of the discussion process during trial period and after the trial period.
- g) Prospective telecommuters are encouraged to discuss expectations of telecommuting with family members prior to entering a trial period.

## **11. Performance Evaluation**

- a) Evaluation of the public officer's performance during the trial period will include the submission of deliverables. Interaction by phone and e-mail with immediate supervisor, weekly virtual face-to-face/online meetings to discuss work progress and/or problems will also form basis for evaluation.
- b) At the end of the trial period, the public officer and supervisor will each complete an evaluation of the arrangement and make recommendations for continuance or modifications.
- c) A performance evaluation of the officer's / telecommuter's performance beyond the trial period will be consistent with that received by the officers working at the office in both content and frequency but will focus more on satisfactory work output and achievement of task/objectives rather than on time-based performance.

## **12. Equipment**

- a) On a case-by-case basis, the CEO/HOD will determine, with information supplied by the officer and/or the supervisor, the appropriate equipment needs (including hardware, software, modems, phone and data lines and other office equipment) for each telecommuting arrangement.
- b) The information system departments/Units of the specific Ministry will serve as resources in this matter. Equipment supplied by the ministry/department will be maintained by the ministry/department and in keeping with the relevant regulations. Equipment supplied by the officer, if deemed appropriate by the Ministry/Department, will be maintained by the officer.
- c) The Public Service accepts no responsibility for damage or repairs to private-owned equipment. Ministry/department reserves the right to make determinations as to appropriate equipment, subject to change at any time.

- d) Equipment supplied by the ministry/department is to be used for official purposes only. The telecommuter must sign an inventory of all public service's property received and agree to take appropriate action to protect the items from damage or theft. Upon termination of telecommuting arrangement / employment, all Public Service's property must be returned, unless other formal arrangements have been made.
- e) Ministry/Department will supply a public officer with appropriate office supplies (pens, paper, etc.) as deemed necessary. Ministry / department will also reimburse a public officer for approved business-related expenses, such as phone calls and shipping costs that are reasonably incurred in carrying out the job, in accordance with the prevailing laws or regulations.
- f) The public officer will establish an appropriate work environment within his or her home for work purposes. Ministry / Department will not be responsible for any costs associated with the setup of an officer's home office

### **13. Data Protection & Security**

- a) Ministry / departments, in collaboration with CITO will carry out the risk assessment of the data protection implications of work from home.
- b) Consistent with the Public Service's expectations of information security for public officers working at the office, telecommuting public officers will be expected to ensure the protection of official information accessible from their home office in accordance with the provisions of the prevailing Public Service Regulations (PSR).
- c) Steps include the use of locked file cabinets and desks, regular password maintenance, and any other measures appropriate for the job and the environment is to be taken.

### **14. Health and Safety**

- a) Public officers with pre-existing health conditions will be considered on a priority basis when activating the work from home policy in the situation of a pandemic.
- b) Public officers are expected to maintain their home workspace in a safe manner, free from safety hazards. The ministry / department may provide each telecommuter with a safety checklist that must be completed at least twice per year.
- c) Injuries sustained by a public officer in a ministry/department -initiated home office or location and in conjunction with his or her regular work duties are normally covered by the HR policy manual and the prevailing PSR.
- d) Where work-from-home is mandated by regulation during a pandemic, the ministry/department is not responsible for any injuries in the home office.
- e) Telecommuting public officers are responsible for notifying their ministry / department of such injuries as soon as practicable.
- f) The public officer is liable for any injuries sustained by visitors to his or her home worksite.

## **15. Ad Hoc Arrangements**

- a) Temporary telecommuting arrangements may be approved on an ad-hoc basis for circumstances such as inclement weather, special projects or business travel. These arrangements are approved on an as-needed basis only, with no expectation of ongoing continuance.
- b) Other informal, short-term arrangements may be made for public officers on family or medical reasons to the extent practical for the officer and the public service and with the consent of the officer's health care provider, if appropriate.
- c) All informal telecommuting arrangements are made on a case-by-case basis, focusing first on the needs of the Public Service. The MPS has the right to cancel or suspend a public officer's telecommuting privileges at any time, for whatever reason.

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