

Telework Best Practices Report



August 2020

OFFICE OF PERFORMANCE AND ANALYSIS

Dakota
COUNTY



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“Bridging today and tomorrow with planning and analysis to improve residents’ lives and their government.”

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TOPICS AND OBSERVATIONS

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in approximately 80% of Dakota County employees beginning to work within a remote setting. As Dakota County plans for the future and the possibility of some employees participating in a mixed office setting, the following topics and observations will need policy consideration.¹

Scheduling

- 1) *Position Characteristics* – How best to determine which positions should be eligible to telework?

When determining positions best suited for telework, it is important to consider position characteristics, such as the position being knowledge based and lending itself to measurable deliverables. It was observed that the use of position characteristics to determine telework eligible positions is common within peer policies.

- 2) *Eligible Employees* – How best to consider which employees should be eligible to telework?

Some employees have characteristics that make them better suited for telework, such as strong time management skills and the ability to meet deadlines. These employees are frequently long tenured, have a strong base of general knowledge, and do not require supervision.

- 3) *Work-Related Meetings* – When would remote employees be required to return onsite?

Teleworking employees may be required to return onsite for business purposes, as determined by their supervisor. Some examples of businesses purposes that require an employee's return onsite include meetings with an employee's supervisor, staff meetings, scheduled days onsite, and document management activities, such as printing or shredding. Conveying an expectation of what business purposes would require onsite presence, as well as what notice will be provided, will be important in establishing returns onsite. It was observed that there was a lack of consistent guidance within peer organizations and that the need to return onsite for business purposes was frequently left to the discretion of an employee's supervisor.

- 4) *Remote Supervision of Staff* – What are the best approaches for the remote supervision of staff?

The effective remote supervision of staff involves a consistent approach, regardless of an onsite or remote work location. Communication through regularly scheduled check-ins, as well as reporting on daily activities and project statuses, are common approaches. For project-based employees, the regular reporting of project status and challenges is useful. It was also observed that an increased frequency of check-ins can assist with the supervision of newer employees.

- 5) *Expectations for Remote Work* – What are the expectations for remote work?

A Results Only Work Environment (ROWE) approach can experience difficulties when applied to a public sector setting. Public sector expectations associated with employee availability during traditional hours of operation, as well as expectations for a standard number of hours worked per day, require modification of a pure ROWE emphasis on quality of work over work schedule. Providing supervisors with discretion to allow employees to work within established parameters will be critical in the creation of a successful remote work environment.²

¹ Note that the observations contained within this report may have long-term applicability beyond Autumn 2020.

² Dakota County's Telework Policy (Policy 3182) also requires that remote locations for telework receive approval (home or other approved location) and include a designated work space agreed to by the supervisor and maintained by the employee.

Spacing

- 6) *Spacing Considerations upon Return Onsite* – How best to review workspaces, prior to a return onsite?

The County's 8'x8' cubicles would enable certain employees to return onsite. This ability to return onsite would be impacted however by items such as desk orientation and spacing considerations. In order to effectively review each area for a potential return onsite, Facilities staff requests coordinated submissions from departmental contacts, rather than individuals.

Another consideration is cubicle panel height, which need to be a minimum of 67-inches tall to enable appropriate social distancing. As a result, some cubicles with lower panels may need glass extension panels or higher panels to reach the 67-inch height.

- 7) *Approaches toward Onsite Presence* – How best to consider various approaches toward the shared use of cubes, if at all?

The shared use of cubes, such as Hoteling (reserving a vacant cube on an as needed basis) and Desk Sharing (prearranged sharing of a workspace at staggered times), would require a review by Facilities for spacing and panel height, as well as work space cleaning, considerations.

Equipment

- 8) *Multiple Employee Workstations* – For employees working within a mixed office setting (onsite and remote), what equipment considerations are essential in each location?

Risk Management has indicated that the primary ergonomic consideration should be the height of office chairs and desks. Dakota County's COVID response, which allows for employees to utilize their office chairs in a remote setting has helped address this challenge. The availability of adjustable desks onsite will help address this issue, if shared cube space is pursued. After chair and desk height, the next ergonomic consideration should be the proper placement of keyboards.

An important ergonomic consideration should be the pairing of County-owned equipment, when they are first issued. For example, ergonomic considerations are addressed when a laptop, along with a laptop stand and keyboard are all issued together as a package. Likewise, laptop docking stations are best coupled with two monitors and a keyboard. By considering equipment packages, ergonomics can be addressed regardless of the work setting.

Another factor that can help address the challenge of two equipped office spaces is IT's pursuit of additional County owned devices and an expanded loaner program, which would enable progress toward universal laptops and docking stations.

- 9) *Equipment Provision* – What equipment should the County provide within a remote work setting?

There is also a need to clarify what equipment the County should provide to remote workstations. When reviewing pre-March 2020 telework policies from peer counties, there was little consistency, other than employees providing internet access and equipment being provided at the county's discretion.³

³ Dakota County's Telework Policy (Policy 3182) also provides for County discretion with regard to equipment. The policy states, "Dakota County, at its sole discretion, may choose to provide equipment and related supplies for use by the teleworker or permit the use of employee-owned equipment."

Technology

10) *County Owned Devices and Support* – What approach is being utilized to provide consistency among remote employees?

In Autumn 2020, IT plans on pursuing Phase 3 of their pandemic response. Phase 3 will feature an emphasis on County issued IT equipment, more effective computer hardware management, new IT Equipment Loaner Program options, expanded use of videoconferencing, and end user training.

Lessons Learned

11) *Lessons Learned* – What additional policy decisions can be developed from lessons learned by Dakota County divisions?

Since March 2020, Dakota County divisions have gained valuable insight into managing telework staff. During the creation of this report, divisions were interviewed and summaries of their feedback have been included within Appendix D. That feedback may be useful in future decision making.

Three topics were covered during the divisional interviews: supplemental telework policies; lessons learned; and division specific equipment and technology needs.

SCHEDULING

For the purposes of this report, the topic of scheduling includes a variety of issues related to an employee's presence, while working either onsite or remote. Issues include eligibility considerations for telework, reasons for a teleworking employee to return onsite, office space considerations when a teleworker does return onsite, supervision of a teleworker, and remote work schedules.

Position Characteristics

Policies frequently identify the characteristics for positions best suited for telework. Common themes include the following.⁴

- Independent in nature.
- Primarily knowledge-based.
- Lend themselves to measurable deliverables.
- Do not require frequent interaction at the regular worksite with supervisors, colleagues, clients, or the public, in person or by phone.
- Do not require the employee's immediate presence at the regular worksite to address unscheduled events.
- Not essential to the management of on-site workflow.
- Does not provide onsite customer service.

Eligible Employees

Employees best suited for telework exhibit characteristics frequently noted within policies. The following are common themes.⁵

- Strong organizational and time management skills.
- Ability to set and meet deadlines and maintain regular work routines at home.
- Adequate experience to understand job requirements, as well as department policies and procedures.
- Knowledge of who to call for information or advice.
- Maintain a schedule that meets both professional and personal responsibilities.
- Motivated and self-disciplined.
- Availability of high-speed internet service.

Note that Dakota County's Telework Policy (Policy 3182) requires that teleworking employees enter into an agreement, which clarifies their specific telework arrangement. The policy reads as follows, "All long-term telework arrangements must be documented and approved by a Division Director, Deputy Division Director, Department Director, Deputy Department Director or similar. All Temporary and Intermittent Telework arrangements must be documented and approved in accordance with the procedures of the employee's division or department."

Business Purposes to Return Onsite

Employees who work in a remote setting may be asked to return onsite for a business purpose. Although supervisors determine the business purpose for an employee to be onsite, common reasons for a return onsite include in-person meetings with customers,⁶ work-related meetings, and staff meetings. Dakota County divisions indicated that employees

⁴ City and County of San Francisco (CA) Telecommuting Program Policy, www.sfdhr.org; Sherburne County (MN) Telework Policy; Ramsey County (MN) Telework Policy.

⁵ City and County of San Francisco (CA) Telecommuting Program Policy, www.sfdhr.org; City of San Jose (CA) Flexible Workplace Policy; Anoka County (MN) Telework Policy.

⁶ Sherburne County (MN) Telework Policy; Montgomery County (MD) Telework Program.

frequently return onsite for document management activities, such as printing or shredding. Required onsite attendance for business purposes can be scheduled during an employee's scheduled day for working offsite and may require employee flexibility, in order to report onsite with short notice. Washington County requires supervisors to notify employees 24-hours in advance for onsite attendance. Even though Washington County provides 24-hour notice for required onsite meetings, employee travel to and from onsite is not considered for either compensable hours or reimbursable mileage.⁷

Onsite Workspaces

In instances where teleworkers need to return onsite, advance supervisor notice is frequently provided. This advance notice is needed in part to schedule a suitable onsite workspace. Several concepts for onsite workspaces are listed below.

- *Hoteling* – Hoteling is an option for sharing office space that refers to work arrangements in which an employee uses or reserves the use of a vacant workstation on an as-needed and space-available basis.
- *Desk Sharing* – Desk Sharing is another option that refers to a work arrangement in which two or more employees share the same workstation in a typically prearranged manner that allows each of the employees to have sole access to the specified workstation on given days while the others involved in the sharing arrangement work elsewhere.
- *Personal Office/Cubical* – Personal Office/Cubical refers to making sure the supervisor is aware that the employee onsite within their designated workspace.

In order to create a safe onsite work environment, Dakota County Facilities review employee workspaces to ensure that cubicles have the proper orientation and are six feet apart. The County's current 8'x8' cube configuration allows for the required six feet distancing, while older or non-standard configurations require a review by Facilities. Facemasks are also required, when employees leave their cubicles. If cube heights are lower than 67-inches tall, face masks need to be worn by employees in those cubicles. Most office configurations allow for supervisors to meeting with staff one-on-one, while maintaining six feet distancing. Conference room occupancy limits can be readjusted and chairs removed.

Remote Supervision of Staff

In June 2020, OPA and IT completed a "Telework Productivity Tools and Software Review" report, which looked at best practices for managing employee expectations and productivity tracking. Although the report's initial focus was on software tools to assist with the tracking of expectations and remote employee productivity, the majority of the contributor feedback focused on strategies for the effective supervision of employees within a telework setting. The following themes concerning staff supervision were identified within the report.

- *Consistency* – Approaches toward staff supervision should be consistent, regardless of the setting (remote or onsite). It was however noted that an increased frequency of communication is helpful in a telework environment.
- *Communication* – The need for effective communication was highlighted by management throughout Dakota County. Frequent approaches included scheduled Skype check-ins, as well as reporting on daily activities and projects.
- *Project Management* – For employees that perform project-based work, the regular reporting of project status and challenges was viewed as critical in a remote work setting.

It is also worth noting that Dakota County managers, as well as peer organizations, did not express an interest in utilizing software that monitors employee computer activity. Again, the emphasis was in a consistent supervisory approach

⁷ Washington County (MN) Telework Request Form.

regardless of the setting (remote or onsite). As a result, additional computer monitoring for teleworking employees may impact levels of trust.

Work Schedules

The most effective scheduling is frequently arranged between an employee and their supervisor.⁸ A weekly schedule should be established for what days an employee will be working from home and what days they need to be in the office.⁹ This advance planning enables the creation of alternating schedules with coworkers.

Peer Counties

In Sherburne County, teleworking employees and their supervisor determine a work schedule. The schedule identifies the employee's normal workday hours for telework. Over the course of a week, the teleworking employee's hours total the number of hours per week that the employee would normally be onsite. Teleworkers must keep their supervisor informed of their work location via EIO (Electronic In/Out Board) for contacting and safety reasons. Work hours, overtime compensation, and paid time off for teleworking employees all conform to Sherburne County policy.

In Washington County, teleworking employees and their supervisor mutually agree on an employee's work schedule, including teleworking workdays and work hours. These details are placed within a telework request form. Employees are required to adhere with their agreed upon work schedule, in order to assure maximum accessibility. If the employee is unable to work within their scheduled hours, the employee agrees to use paid time off.

Washington County utilize a GIS application to help schedule staff onsite. The application shows if an onsite workspace is either available or reserved for use in real time. The application also ensures safe employee distancing by indicating which workstations are not reservable. Employees can complete an online request for a workspace, which is emailed to their supervisor for approval.

In Ramsey County, teleworkers must be available by phone, video-conferencing, or other supervisor approved methods. Teleworkers must also maintain a supervisor-approved work schedule. Work calendars are shared with supervisors, in order to ensure accurate time reporting.

ROWE

Results Only Work Environment (ROWE) is a management philosophy that prioritizes flexibility and employee autonomy. The core tenet of ROWE is that employees do not necessarily need to be in the office from 9-5 to do their best work. In a pure ROWE environment, employees are allowed to work offsite at hours most convenient for them, while the employer places a value on quality and timely work, rather than how many hours an employee works.¹⁰

ROWE was originally proposed and implemented by executives at Best Buy in 2003. Since then, it has been adopted by hundreds of organizations in the private, public, and non-profit sectors.¹¹

Best Buy and ROWE

⁸ Telework 360: A Best Practices Digest and Guide to Getting Telework Right in the Public Sector.

⁹ Prior to March 2020, this approach toward developing a weekly schedule for teleworking employees (i.e. establishing a mixed office setting) was frequently utilized by Dakota County.

¹⁰ Vassel, Kathryn. "These employers don't care where you work." October 18, 2019. CNN. www.cnn.com.

¹¹ "The Results Only Work Environment." GoRowe.com. www.gorowe.com.

While it was originally conceived at Best Buy, the company discontinued ROWE in 2013.¹² This decision came at turbulent time for the company, when its revenue experienced a 4.7 percent decline from the previous year¹³ and its stock price declined 40 percent.¹⁴ While these losses could not be attributed to ROWE, management strongly believed that the company's culture needed to change.

Best Buy CEO Hubert Joly described ROWE as "fundamentally flawed from a leadership standpoint" and that it was "based on the premise that the right leadership style is always delegation."¹⁵ Joly believed that delegating was not always the best strategy and certain situations call for a more hands-on approach from management. As Joly described it, "Depending on the skill and will of the individual, the right leadership style may be coaching, motivating or directing rather than delegating..."¹⁶

It should be noted that Best Buy did not eliminate ROWE, but rather provided managers more authority to determine when it was appropriate for employees to telework or work off-hours.¹⁷ Employees at Best Buy no longer have complete autonomy to set their own hours and location, but they can still telework with manager approval.

Elements of Remote Work Success

- *Experience/Familiarity* – In interviews with Dakota County managers, OPA consistently found that teams that have worked together for years had a relatively easy transition to remote work. Co-workers that are familiar with one another require less communication, so in-person meetings are not as essential. Conversely, many Dakota County managers indicated that it is harder to get new employees up to speed while teleworking, since they often need more guidance and coaching.
- *Trust* – Research has shown that employees are both less happy and less productive if they believe that their employer is virtually monitoring them.^{18, 19}
- *Flexibility* – ROWE's challenges at Best Buy illustrate the difficulties that can be associated with a completely unstructured work environment. Many employees can however be provided with an option to work offsite, within established parameters.
- *Expectations* – Since employees may not be immediately accessible while working offsite, it is critical to establish clear expectations, including well defined goals and deadlines.

ROWE in Public Sector

One of the core tenets of ROWE is that employees can complete their work during hours that are convenient for them, but there are questions as to how well this can translate within government institutions. Public agencies have an obligation to consider issues of accessibility to citizens at reasonable hours, which may place limits on scheduling flexibility.

Challenges in Office Culture

¹² Nilsen, Max. "The End of Working from Home: Best Buy Kills Flexible Work Program." *Business Insider*. March 5, 2013. www.businessinsider.com.

¹³ "Best Buy Confirms Significant Decline in Fiscal Third Quarter 2013 Earnings." Best Buy Investor Relations. November 20, 2012. investors.bestbuy.com.

¹⁴ Downes, Larry. "Why Best Buy is Going out of Business... Gradually." www.forbes.com.

¹⁵ Schafer, Lee. "Schafer: Pitching in is the new rule at Best Buy." *Star Tribune*. February 16, 2013. www.startribune.com.

¹⁶ Joly, Hubert. "Best Buy CEO on leadership: A comment I made was misconstrued" *Star Tribune*. March 17, 2013. www.startribune.com.

¹⁷ Fiegerman, Seth. "Best Buy Cracks Down on Employees Working from Home." *Mashable*. March 3, 2013. mashable.com.

¹⁸ McParland, et al. "Employee Monitoring in the Digital Era: Managing the Impact of Innovation." ENTRENOVA (ENTerprise REsearch INNOVation) Conference. September 2019. Pages 548-557. ideas.repec.org.

¹⁹ Baruch-Feldman. "Sources of social support and burnout, job satisfaction, and productivity." *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*. Vol. 7. January 2020. Pages 84-93. psycnet.apa.org.

The creators of ROWE identified an implementation challenge that they refer to as “Sludge.”²⁰ Sludge is when onsite co-workers make derogatory comments about the productivity of employees teleworking within ROWE’s flexible hours structure. These comments can make ROWE workers less likely to continue utilizing the benefit.²¹ This challenge may possibly be addressed within a post-COVID work environment, as onsite employees are used to co-workers being remote, but managers should be aware of this potential challenge.

Peer Feedback

Hennepin and Olmsted Counties have successfully implemented their own modified versions of ROWE. Unlike Best Buy, these counties gave managers the authority to set teleworking hours at the very outset of the policy.

While it varies by department, new employees at Hennepin County are typically not allowed to telework at all during their first few months. Once an employee gains more tenure, the manager often allows telework one day every two weeks. If the manager determines that the employee is productive, there can be a gradual increase in the amount of time that the employee can telework. In certain Hennepin County departments, it is not uncommon for employees to telework two to three days a week.²² Moreover, non-public facing teleworking employees are permitted to complete work during evening hours.

While teleworking, Hennepin County employees are asked to make meetings with clients and stakeholders in-person whenever possible. Staff meetings, project team meetings, and reports to supervisors are also typically attended in person. In these instances, the supervisor has discretion to allow team members to call or Skype into the meeting.

Olmsted County has a similar policy and permits some employees to work from home permanently.²³ Olmsted indicated that their approach toward telework has permitted them to hire individuals living in the Twin Cities metro area to fill remote position vacancies.

Liability Concerns

An employee working from home has the same worker compensation rights as they would working onsite.²⁴ This presents challenges, as an employee’s remote office is not as controlled of an environment. If not managed properly, some employees could potentially injure themselves, while working remotely. For example, employees may forego recommended breaks and develop injuries associated with physical fatigue and bad posture.²⁵ As a safe guard, some organizations inspect remote offices to ensure that they are ergonomically sound, have proper lighting, and appropriate ventilation.²⁶

²⁰ Thompson, Jodi and Cali Ressler. “Why Work Sucks and How to Fix It.” Page 18. 2008.

²¹ Thompson, Jodi and Cali Ressler. “Why Work Sucks and How to Fix It.” Page 130. 2008.

²² Rodgers, Bill. Hennepin County (MN). Interview.

²³ Olmsted County (MN). Interview.

²⁴ “Legal Implications for Telecommuting / Working from Home in Response to the Coronavirus.” *National Law Review*. Volume X, Number 78. March 18, 2020. www.natlawreview.com.

²⁵ Grzadkowska, Alicja. “Workers’ comp liabilities facing work from home employees.” *Insurance Business America*. May 14, 2020. www.insurancebusinessmag.com.

²⁶ “Liabilities of Letting Employees Work from Home.” *The Hartford*. Accessed August 21, 2020. www.thehartford.com.

SPACING

The COVID pandemic has forced many organizations to more heavily rely on technology to bring groups together to share information and work collaboratively on projects. Old notions of managers having to be proximate to the people they manage have shifted. Our ability to work within a paperless environment has increased, along with electronic document signatures and fully electronic case files. At the same time, health concerns have pushed us apart in the physical workspace. As employees return onsite or work within a mixed office setting, employees may no longer need a dedicated workstation.

Peer Organizations

According to the CDC, before resuming business operations, employers need to make sure the building is ready for occupancy. CDC recommends making sure the ventilation systems are operating properly and that there is the ability to increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible.²⁷

The State of Tennessee utilizes the following guidelines for their local governments.²⁸

- Limit meeting room capacity to facilitate six feet of separation between attendees and encourage as many attendees as possible to join via video conference. Consideration of alternative open spaces for meetings is also recommended.
- Implement workplace cleaning and disinfection practices, according to CDC and OSHA guidelines, with regular sanitization of high-touch surfaces.
- Place hand sanitizer stations in common areas.
- Use a clearly designated entrance and a separate clearly designated exit to maintain social distancing, if possible, in high-traffic buildings.
- Use plastic shields or barriers between adjacent or open workstations and clean such shields or barriers frequently.²⁹
- Consider technology to facilitate working remotely.
- Postpone large gatherings, such as group trainings or team gatherings, or hold these gatherings virtually until larger gatherings are advisable according to the CDC.

The common trends for office space include the following.³⁰

- Limiting capacity to ensure appropriate social distancing.
- Installation of barriers.³¹
- Strict cleaning protocols.³²
- Consideration of more technological innovations to reduce the amount of in-person interactions.

Dakota County's Approach

Dakota County Facilities staff have been actively making improvements to assist with office spacing concerns. Efforts have included the following.

- Review of return-to-work activities to ensure six-foot distancing.
- Installation of plexiglass at front desks and the placement of dots on the floor to help with social distancing.
- Eliminating furniture and installing stanchions to promote social distancing.

²⁷ www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/office-buildings.html.

²⁸ www.tn.gov/governor/covid-19/economic-recovery/office-guidelines.html.

²⁹ Dakota County Risk Management does not recommend use of these plastic shields.

³⁰ [Cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov); www.tn.gov; www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/.

³¹ Dakota County Risk Management recommends ensuring appropriate cubical height, as priority over barriers, which are less effective.

³² In addition to cleaning protocols, Dakota County Risk Management emphasizes the promotion of appropriate hand washing.

- The standard County cubes are 8'x8' and have an adequate height to enable social distancing. The placement of adjustable height desks must however be reviewed to ensure the correct orientation.

Dakota County Cleaning Protocols

County staff have posted cleaning protocols in conference rooms that were identified for use, prior to reopening County buildings to the public. Cleaning protocols clarify that users must clean surfaces after each use. Similar protocols are in place for service counters, election voting booths, and jail visitation kiosks.

General cleaning in the buildings by the custodial contractor has been increased to two times per day. Staff are also wiping down frequent touch points such as door handles. Since most staff have not returned to work, Dakota County has not yet issued cleaning protocols for workstations or hoteling stations.

Dakota County Review of Protective Measures

Dakota County Facilities looked in depth at protective measures for all County public and interactive spaces. Public spaces within all three service centers were reviewed and proposals were made as to how to make the spaces safe for both staff and members of the public. Facilities ranked each space based on frequency and type of interaction. Common themes included the following.

- Signs indicating waiting areas.
- Adequate spacing between chairs.
- Installation of barriers, in addition to other techniques, such as tables placed in front of counters and the installation of stanchions.
- Limits placed on the number of people within specified areas.

Facilities provides adequate barriers and spacing requirements for each piece of equipment through specified measurements and sizing.

Next Steps

Dakota County Facilities will continue their review of a variety of issues, including the following.

- *Hoteling* – As discussions continue regarding the return of staff onsite, Facilities will continue to explore the concept of hoteling and associated options.³³
- *Conference Rooms* – Possible alternatives include using conference rooms at half capacity to comply with social distancing requirements. It has been noted that this capacity reduction could create spacing challenges, especially in the case of smaller conference rooms.
- *Hotspots* – There are several hotspots, such as copiers, kitchens, and hallways, that would need to be self-managed. Strategies include having staff wait at a safe distance to utilize a copier or the kitchen area. In hallways, Facilities is exploring the creation of one-way aisles in narrower hallways and the installation of dots to ensure six-foot distancing.

The largest challenge facing Dakota County Facilities is the source of requests for workspace review. Currently, Facilities receives a variety of requests from individual staff members and work units. In order to efficiently review the large number of work areas in the County, it is crucial that departments and divisions coordinate their requests to Facilities.

³³ Additional options mentioned by Dakota County Risk Management include possible shift rotations or sign up times to work onsite.

EQUIPMENT

Ergonomics of Telework

Dakota County has made the health and safety of its employees a top priority, which is why it has made significant investments into ergonomically correct workstations. The County has created extensive ergonomic guidelines that recommend proper chair, desk, and monitor heights. These upfront expenditures for proper office equipment have potentially reduced long-term costs associated with employee injuries.

As COVID-19 has forced a large number of Dakota County employees to work from home, Risk Management has been considering the ergonomic implications for employees working in home offices. While it is recognized that it may not be feasible to re-create the exact same office experience at home, Dakota County is considering strategies for improving employee health and job satisfaction in a home office setting. As a result, Risk Management has identified suitable office chairs, desks that are the proper height, and multiple monitors as top priorities in home offices.

Another important ergonomic consideration should be pairing County-owned equipment, when it is first issued. For example, ergonomic considerations are addressed when a laptop, laptop stand, and keyboard are issued together as a package. Likewise, laptop docking stations are best coupled with two monitors and a keyboard. Utilizing this approach toward packaging equipment can help address ergonomics regardless of the work setting.

Equipment Needs Survey Results and Division Interviews

In the Spring of 2020, over 1,200 Dakota County staff members completed surveys that requested information regarding their satisfaction with current working conditions.³⁴ Staff who completed the surveys were from four divisions and one elected office: Physical Development (PDD); Operations, Management, and Budget, including County Administration (OMB/ADMIN); Community Services (CSD); Public Services and Revenue (PSR); and the County Attorney's Office (CAO). It should be noted that while similar surveys were used, each division or elected office conducted their own survey and used slightly modified questions for their needs. Given these changes, there are limitations when comparing survey results across areas.

While the language varied slightly across surveys, respondents were generally asked a question about whether they had the equipment they needed to work from home. Overall, about 75% of staff agreed that they have the necessary equipment to work effectively from home. Appendix B provides additional details regarding the how question responses varied among divisions.

When asked what equipment they needed while working from home, employees from all divisions indicated an interest in additional monitors; ergonomically correct desks and chairs; printers, and scanners.³⁵

During interviews with Dakota County divisions, managers frequently mentioned an interest in access to additional monitors for employees working offsite. There was also an interest in supplying printers to employees who need to correspond by mail with clients.

Optimal Equipment Level

When considering the provision of equipment to teleworking employees, divisions mentioned the benefits associated with optimal equipment levels, in addition to minimum equipment levels. For instance, an employee may be able to perform the majority of their remote work functions without access to a printer, but the occasional use of a printer may require their physical presence onsite. In this case, a printer may not be considered as being included within an

³⁴ A summary of select equipment and technology related survey results is located in Appendix B.

³⁵ Note that these answers were provided in response to an open-ended question and as a result do not indicate the number of employees interested in this equipment. These items were however mentioned by at least one employee within each division.

employee's minimum level of equipment, but the printer could be considered as a piece of equipment that would provide optimal performance within a remote work setting.

Given differing employee equipment needs, it will be important to communicate to supervisors and staff regarding what types of County-owned equipment can be utilized within remote work settings.

Peer Counties

Dakota County's approach regarding at-home office equipment are in-line with peer counties. In July 2020, twelve peer counties³⁶ were contacted regarding their approaches toward the use of county-owned equipment during telework.³⁷ None of these counties were paying for new equipment for home use. Peer counties were also encouraging staff to use existing equipment, such as county-issued laptops. While some counties, including Dakota, are allowing employees to bring home monitors from their office, no county is currently considering purchasing new monitors, desks, or chairs for employees to use at home.

Office Space Considerations

Dakota County Facilities is currently reviewing approaches toward office space, such as hoteling. The hoteling approach can be made more effective through the adoption of uniform standards for laptops, which would enable common docking stations, and adjustable height desks and chairs.

Another consideration is the provision of equipment for employees within a mixed office setting, both onsite and remote. Risk Management has indicated that chair and desk height are the most important ergonomic office considerations, followed by the proper placement of keyboards. As a result, one policy consideration is the extent to which an employee should be provided County-owned ergonomic equipment within their remote work setting, as well as what equipment should be available onsite.

Equipment considerations within mixed office settings could also be impacted when one area, either remote or onsite, is considered as an employee's primary workspace. In such instances, the other secondary site could potentially receive only minimal equipment considerations.

³⁶ Benton, Blue Earth, Carver, Hennepin, Olmsted, Otter Tail, Ramsey, St. Louis, Scott, Stearns, Washington, and Winona Counties.

³⁷ A full set of survey results is located within Appendix C.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology Needs Survey Results

The previously mentioned employee survey also asked about technology and telework. Employees responded favorably, when asked about their ability to accomplish work, while teleworking.

All or most work is able to be accomplished while teleworking	
PDD	100%
OMB/ADMIN	98%
CAO	93%
CSD	77%
PSR	76%

CAO, PDD, PSR, and OMB/ADMIN indicated communication with co-workers as an issue. In some cases, this issue might be technology related as some staff also indicate a need for equipment associated with virtual meetings.

Communication with co-workers is a challenge	
CAO	40%
PDD	34%
PSR	30%
OMB/ADMIN	29%

When asked what technology was needed, common answers across divisions included printers and scanners; additional monitors; computer peripherals (mouse, keyboard, headsets); internet (wi-fi) connectivity; and County issued devices such as laptops.³⁸

Phase 3

Early in March, when the COOP Team and EOC were activated, IT had to respond rapidly. Due to the fluidity of the situation, IT defined its response into 90-day phases: Phase 1, March through May; Phase 2, June through August; and Phase 3, September through November.

Phase 1's goal was to ensure that staff had the technology and infrastructure they needed to telework. This included expanding the County's VPN environment, implementing the IT Equipment Loaner Program, and deploying Zoom videoconferencing for select needs. It also involved the purchase of available portable computer equipment and utilizing available equipment, including older laptops well beyond their life expectancy. Printers were also relocated into the atriums at the ADC, NSC, and WSC so teleworkers could safely visit to print out hardcopy documents.

³⁸ A summary of select equipment and technology related survey results is located in Appendix B.

Phase 2 has centered around maintaining a mixed telework setting workforce and supporting divisions in their efforts to safely reopen services to the public. New laptops were purchased to replace the older models that were now being utilized. Mobile phone “kiosks”, greeter station phones, and makeshift telepresence computers were placed in several buildings for walk-up visitors.

Phase 3, which will begin in the fall, will focus on enabling staff to continue teleworking through the end of the year or beyond.

County Owned Equipment

The top priority of Phase 3 is to tighten up the County’s computer standards and ensure that as many staff teleworking staff as possible are using standard County issued equipment. Standard County computers have been tested, approved, and certified by IT. Since IT technicians are trained on, and have experience working with standard County computers, IT support can also provide faster and more advanced technical support than they can with non-standard or personally-owned computers.³⁹

Consolidated Computer Hardware Management

IT is aware of associated challenges in standardizing the County’s fleet of computers, including significant up-front costs and the difficulties of tracking the inventory. One approach is to centralize all computer purchases, tracking, and disposition within IT. Currently, each individual department works directly with Finance to order new computers. Even with a list of standard computers, departments must determine which device will suit their needs. Although the intended process has IT reviewing and approving each purchase, this step is often missed. Tracking computers as fixed assets from one department to another is also haphazard, since older laptops are frequently utilized for several years after new ones have been purchased to replace them. The intent of centralizing computer purchases, tracking, and dispositions within IT would be to obtain the proper hardware for staff, better track assets, and reduce hardware costs.

IT will also simplify the number of supported makes and models of computers, replace all older computers with newer standard computers, and accelerate the phasing out non-standard computers. As desktop computers come due for replacement, IT will work to replace them with laptops where appropriate. Laptop computers would then become the computer-of-choice for most staff.

IT Equipment Loaner Program

To help prevent the issue of too much duplicate equipment being issued, IT is looking to expand the amount and types of hardware available in the IT Equipment Loaner Program. This would prevent departments from purchasing unnecessary or new equipment to meet a temporary need. Equipment that is currently available in the IT Equipment Loaner Program includes laptops, wi-fi hotspots, mobile phones, headsets, and docking stations. IT will add display monitors, PC cameras, and possibly sit-stand lift stations for remote use.

Expanded Use of Videoconferencing

Videoconferencing will expand as IT assigns Zoom videoconferencing accounts to all users. While most users will only have Zoom basic accounts, which are limited to 40-minute meetings, others will have Zoom enterprise accounts without meeting time limits.

Training

Another critical component of maintaining telework is to ensure that staff are properly trained to use the various hardware and software necessary for successful telework. As a result, IT is looking to provide better training and

³⁹ Note that Dakota County only provides limited Help Desk support for personal equipment within a telework setting.

instructional material for end users regarding Virtual Private Network (VPN); videoconferencing (Skype and Zoom); use of the IT Equipment Loaner Program; laptops and other telework computing hardware.

Other Changes and Improvements

One operational change being evaluated by IT is the centralization of desktop computer support staff. The pandemic has revealed issues related to desktop support being done out of specification, policy, or process by non-IT support staff. The goal would be to alleviate many of these issues by centralizing these activities into the IT Department.

Other Technology Considerations

In 2019, Social Services conducted a Mobile Technology Assessment. Predating the onset of the pandemic, the assessment outline's mobile technology and other tools that would allow Social Services to better serve clients in the field. Some of these technologies or other innovations could likely be applied elsewhere in the County. The assessment found that hot spots, mobile scanning applications, secure texting capabilities, automated mailing tools, and electronic signatures could all increase the productivity of field staff.

Based on interviews with various County Divisions, in some cases e-signature solutions such as DocuSign have been able to gain efficiencies. Some of the efficiencies that have been gained by the utilization of e-signatures is that contracts can be more quickly moved between signatories. There is also less demand for paper versions of documents, which eliminates the costs of printing and in some teleworking situations reduces the demand for in home printing or scanning.

OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Other Governmental Agencies

The teleworking efforts of other governments can help illustrate options, as Dakota County considers its future in telework. In Ramsey County, employees are required to be available by phone, video-conferencing, or other methods established by their supervisor. They must maintain a set work schedule that is agreed by their supervisor and share their calendars. The teleworking experiences of Hennepin County are further detailed within the ROWE section of this report. Carver County is very similar to Ramsey in that it requires employees to establish a schedule with their supervisor. In most cases it is an agreed upon typical eight-hour day, 40-hour week, but it can vary depending on schedules.

Technology and Equipment Needs

The following table provides a summary of technology and equipment provided by select Minnesota counties and their teleworking employees, prior to March 2020 (pre-COVID) and post-COVID.

	Pre-COVID – County Provides / May Consider	Post-COVID – County Provides	Employee Provides
Anoka	<u>Provides</u> - County issued computer/laptop - One phone line - Lockable two-drawer file cabinet (if needed for data security) - Office supplies - Chair and table, if requested	<u>Provides</u> ⁴⁰ - Same as pre-COVID	- Internet connection
Carver	<u>Provides</u> - Appropriate equipment on a case-by-case basis, as determined by Carver County	<u>Provides</u> ⁴¹ - County issued computers, monitors, keyboard, and mice - Ergo Tips are available to staff on the internal intranet	- Internet connection - Desk and seating
Ramsey	<u>Provides</u> - Supplies <u>May consider providing</u> - Ergonomic or other office furniture - Dedicated phone line - Personal computer - Other necessary equipment	<u>Provides</u> ⁴² - Monitors, docking stations, keyboards, and mice - Laptop use guidelines - IT department requested that all technology be county owned	- Internet connection
Scott	<u>May consider providing</u> - Equipment (not including furniture)	<u>Provides</u> ⁴³ - Laptops, monitors, printers	- Internet connection - Furniture

⁴⁰ Anoka County Personnel Rules and Regulations. July 20, 2020.

⁴¹ Appendix C: COVID-19 Peer County Ergonomic Survey (Carver County). June 13, 2020.

⁴² Appendix C: COVID-19 Peer County Ergonomic Survey (Ramsey County). April 13, 2020.

⁴³ Appendix C: COVID-19 Peer County Ergonomic Survey (Scott County). June 13, 2020.

	Pre-COVID – County Provides / May Consider	Post-COVID – County Provides	Employee Provides
Sherburne	<u>Provides, as deemed necessary</u> - Equipment "to do their job"	No response ⁴⁴	- Internet connection
Wright	<u>May consider providing</u> - Computer - Cell Phone - Other (as identified by employee)	<u>Provides⁴⁵</u> - Computer, monitor, and cell phone - Employees are required to sign an IT waiver stating that they are responsible for any costs associated with equipment that is broken or lost - County attempts to minimize the amount of equipment that is being brought home by employees	- Internet connection - Furnishings

Common Business Needs for Going Onsite

The most common reason for an employee to return onsite is to meet with a client. Most peer policies clarify that employees shall not meet with clients or co-workers in the staff person’s home for work purposes. Anoka County illustrates another common theme, where they require teleworkers to attend any on-site meetings and events that are required by their supervisor.

Addressing Shared Onsite Workspaces

In Ramsey County, when a teleworking employee needs to come into the office for a business purpose, they may be required to share workspaces. Montgomery County, Maryland, utilizes established hoteling stations for teleworking employees. In this arrangement, an employee uses a non-dedicated and non-permanent workspace assigned for use by reservation on an as-needed basis.

Evaluation of Performance

A review of other government telework policies and approaches did not provide extensive information regarding the evaluation of teleworking employee performance. An approach was however identified in Ramsey County, where supervisors establish expectations for the teleworker. The teleworker is then monitored and has their performance reviewed on a regular basis.

⁴⁴ As of August 28, 2020, no response regarding the question of a post-COVID employee equipment policy has been received from Sherburne County (MN).

⁴⁵ Wright County (MN) Human Resources Director. August 21, 2020.

Private Sector

It is important to note that finding telework policies from the private sector can be challenging and the information provided is often very high-level points from other sources. The most commonly noted private sector teleworking best practices are as follows.⁴⁶

- *Virtual Presence* – Instant messaging systems can be used for morning check-ins, as well as availability updates.
- *Customer Service* – If team members interact with customers, service-level support requirements for communication with customers should be clearly defined. All team members need to agree to meet the same service levels to ensure transparency to the customer. An acceptable response period for email inquiries or phone calls should also be communicated.
- *IT Support* – A common reason for teleworking dissatisfaction is computer difficulties. Efforts should be made to ensure that technology is effective, efficient, and operates consistently. A crucial component to ensuring this success is effective IT support.
- *Trust* – Managers should utilize telework as an opportunity to foster trust between employees and management. Established daily check-ins can be useful, while the micro-monitoring of daily activities can create an environment of distrust.
- *Office Space Options* – In some organizations, teleworkers are encouraged to share onsite workspaces and relinquish onsite space when teleworking. This requires coordination with other employees and often the development of shared space protocols. Hoteling software can help coordinate the booking and scheduling of shared space.
- *Manage by Results* – Worker activity should not be confused with productivity. It is important to establish clear objectives and performance indicators to help track productivity. Major companies such as Facebook and Twitter allow employees to permanently telework if they are experienced and have a strong job performance.⁴⁷ When managing by results, the most important factor is effective communication with all interested parties.

⁴⁶ www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/employee-relations/pages/how-to-create-an-effective-teleworking-program.aspx.

⁴⁷ www.cnet.com/news/.

DIVISION FEEDBACK

As part of this report, feedback was received from divisions regarding three telework issues.

- *Supplemental Policies* – What approaches toward telework have been utilized in your division, including any supplemental policies and procedures?
- *Lessons Learned* – What have you learned during the past several months of telework?
- *Equipment and Technology Needs* – What telework-related equipment and technology needs are present in your division?

Four divisions and two elected offices were interviewed to receive feedback. Due to the size of the Community Services division, five additional interviews were requested of department managers.

Listed below are some select observations, which were frequently mentioned during interviews. A complete set of feedback is provided in Appendix D.

Supplemental Policies

- *Use of Procedures* – Although a limited number of supplemental telework policies were used in Dakota County prior to COVID-19, the vast majority of the feedback pertained to procedures that were pursued as a result of the pandemic.
- *Supervisor Empowerment* – An emphasis has been placed on empowering supervisors to assist employees, while maintaining customer service.
- *Expanded Use of DocuSign* – It was repeatedly stressed how the expanded use of DocuSign has been critical for maintaining service levels within a remote work environment.
- *Away-from-Home Remote Work* – Consideration may be needed to determine when it is appropriate for staff to telework from locations other than their homes (e.g. teleworking while on vacation). Challenges while teleworking away from home include only being periodically available, poor connectivity, and privacy concerns.

Lessons Learned

- *Return Onsite and a Balancing of Staff Needs* – One of the main points of concern about a return onsite was the upcoming need to balance individual employee concerns with overall team scheduling.
- *Communications* – Divisions found frequently scheduled check-ins to be useful in maintaining communication between supervisors and teleworking staff.
- *Social Interaction* – Divisions noted the importance of trying to maintain social interactions between employees within a telework setting.
- *Dedicated Remote Workspace* – Several interviews stressed the importance of having teleworkers designate a workspace within their home.

Equipment and Technology Needs

- *Laptops* – Laptops were stressed as being the most essential tool for telework.
- *Equipment Needs* – The most commonly expressed need was multiple monitors and offsite access to printers. Frequently, the need to utilize printers was associated with client communications. There was mention of a concept where printers could be addressed through reimbursements, similar to the approach utilized for cell phones. It was also noted that cell phones could be utilized to address some scanning needs.

- *Mixed Office Environment Equipment Needs* – Another equipment related item was the need to consider what equipment would be provided in a mixed office environment, with individual employees spending a split amount of time teleworking and onsite.

APPENDIX A: PROJECT SCOPE



07/14/20

Telework Best Practices

Project Scope Statement

Prepared by: OPA

Project Background (WHY)

History

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated Dakota County's rapid response to public health concerns. One area impacted was the physical work location of County employees, as approximately 80% of employees began remote work. As Dakota County is considering the further transition of employees back into the workplace in autumn 2020, managers must consider what tools, policies, and work environments are necessary for its teleworking employees.

OPA is charged with the research and identification of best practices related to a mixed office environment.⁴⁸ These considerations include employee scheduling and expectations; onsite spacing considerations; and minimum equipment and technology needs while an employee works remotely within a mixed office environment.

Purpose/Deliverables/Outcomes (WHAT)

Statement of Purpose

As Dakota County prepares for some employees returning to the workplace in autumn 2020, identify and summarize telework issues and observations that are appropriate for consideration.

Deliverables and format

OPA will prepare a brief report summarizing telework issues for consideration related to scheduling, onsite spacing considerations, minimum equipment, and minimum technology considerations, during autumn 2020.

⁴⁸ For the purposes of this scope, the term "mixed office environment" refers to a setting in which employees split portions of their work time between onsite and remote locations.

Parameters - Inclusions

- 1) Identify telework scheduling and presence considerations, including position characteristics (e.g. business need for onsite presence); time scheduled onsite or remote; manager flexibility to balance employee work and personal needs; and expectations for onsite presence.
Research will be performed in coordination with ER.
- 2) Summarize the Results Only Work Environment (ROWE) concept and forms of utilization.
Research will be performed in coordination with ER.
- 3) Conduct and summarize best practices research for the remote supervision of employees.
Research will be performed in coordination with ER.
- 4) Identify onsite space concepts and considerations (e.g. hoteling and conference room use), as well as how they impact the number of employees working onsite.
Research will be performed in coordination with Facilities.
- 5) Review and summarize Dakota County's existing peer inventory and survey responses related to minimum remote equipment and technology needs.
Research will be performed in coordination with IT and Risk Management.
- 6) Summarize Dakota County's existing practices regarding minimum remote equipment and technology needs.
Research will be performed in coordination with IT and Risk Management.
- 7) As needed, perform additional research regarding minimum remote telework equipment, ergonomic considerations, technology needs, and training considerations.
Research will be performed in coordination with IT and Risk Management.
- 8) Summarize division approaches, including supplemental policies and procedures, toward telework and how those approaches fit within Dakota County's existing Telework Policy (#3182).
- 9) Review how existing telework approaches differ between divisions.
- 10) Summarize division lessons learned regarding approaches toward telework with a focus on scheduling, productivity, equipment, and technology.
- 11) Review minimum needs for remote equipment and technology, as identified by divisions.
Research will be performed in coordination with IT and Risk Management.

Parameters - Exclusions

- 1) Immediate employee telework needs, prior to autumn 2020
- 2) Identify permanent arrangements for telework in Dakota County⁴⁹
- 3) Alterations to Dakota County Telework Policy (#3182)
- 4) Review of telework needs by employee classification
- 5) Potential impact of changing customer service expectations on Dakota County's approach toward telework
- 6) Review of client technology needs

Constraints

- 1) Limited availability of internal and external contacts and subject matter experts
- 2) Limited availability of information regarding peer telework approaches
- 3) Limited availability of literature providing evaluations of COVID-19 telework models
- 4) Uncertainty regarding number of Dakota County employees that will telework in a post-COVID environment
- 5) Budgetary constraints related to telework needs
- 6) Uncertainty involving influencing factors, such as school calendar revisions and a potential pandemic second wave

⁴⁹ It is however noted that this report's identified topics and observations will inform future telework arrangements.

Ultimate Project Goal

Provide Dakota County leadership with topics and related observations to consider as some employees transition back into the workplace, during autumn 2020.

Process/Methodology/Resources (HOW)

Guiding questions

- 1) What work activities (i.e. meetings, trainings, customer service, etc.) can and cannot be done effectively via telework?
- 2) What type of mixed office setting would be required to satisfy situations requiring an onsite presence?
- 3) How are the expectations for an employee's onsite presence conveyed to employees within a mixed office setting?
- 4) What ergonomic considerations are needed in a remote telework setting? What barriers exist?
- 5) What approaches have been utilized elsewhere to address telework scheduling and space considerations within a mixed office setting? What reviews have been performed regarding effectiveness?
- 6) How are peer communities addressing telework scheduling and space considerations within a mixed office setting?

Methodology

- 1) Key Person Interviews and related information gathering (internal and external)
- 2) Inventory of internal and external approaches
- 3) Identification of best practices
- 4) Literature Review
- 5) Review of existing inventory of external approaches and survey responses

Requested resources

OPA Management Analysts

Department provided resources

- 1) Research assistance from Management Fellows assigned to Physical Development.
- 2) Availability of identified internal staff for key person interviews and information gathering.

Project Team and Audience (WHO)

Project Sponsors

Jean Erickson, Deputy County Manager

Steve Mielke, Physical Development Director

Team Members

Alex Jermeland, OPA Management Analyst

Jack Malone, OPA Management Analyst

Dave Paulsen, OPA Management Analyst

Aaron Sather, Physical Development Fellow

Alex Saxe, Management Fellow

Audience (beyond Project Sponsor and Team Members)

COOP Team and Long Term Planning Group

Dakota County Deputies Group

Dakota County Senior Leadership Team

*Individuals who provided narrative contributions and review*⁵⁰

Lauren Baillargeon, Risk Management Loss Control Consultant

Andrew Benish, Employee Relations (ER) Director

Dan Cater, Information Technology (IT) Chief Information Officer

Taud Hoopingarner, Physical Development (PDD) Parks, Facilities, and Fleet Management Director

David Miland, Information Technology (IT) Infrastructure Manager

Individuals who provided project review and approval

Jean Erickson, Deputy County Manager

Steve Mielke, Physical Development Director

Jessie Carlson, OMB Deputy Director

Andy Benish, Employee Relations Director

Erin Stwora, Physical Development Deputy Director

Scott Jara, IT Applications Manager

⁵⁰ The clarification of roles is an addition to the July 14, 2020, scope.

Timeline (WHEN)

Task	Staff	Timeline
Conduct research and information gathering	OPA, Dakota County contacts, peer counties	June 29 – July 16, 2020
Finalize scope	OPA, Project Sponsors	Week of July 6, 2020
Draft report	OPA	July 16 – July 21, 2020
Review working draft and provide feedback	OPA, Project Sponsors	July 21 – July 28, 2020
Incorporate feedback and finalize report	OPA	July 28 – July 31, 2020

 Jean Erickson, Deputy County Manager

 Date

 Steve Mielke, Physical Development Director

 Date

APPENDIX B: SELECT EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESULTS

Equipment Needs to Work from Home

- *OMB/ADMIN* – Do you have all of the equipment you need in order to do your work from home?
80% responded yes
- *CSD* – I have the equipment I need to work from home.
74% strongly agree or agree
- *PSR* – Do you have all the equipment you need in order to do your work from home?
80% responded yes
- *PDD* – Do you have all of the equipment you need in order to do your work from home?
85% responded yes
- *CAO* – I have the equipment I need to work from home.
79% strongly agree or agree

Equipment and Technology Needs to do Job Well Remotely

- *OMB/ADMIN* – What else do you need to do your job well while working remotely? (open-ended)
 - Printer/scanner
 - Additional monitor(s)
 - Desk/chair/ergonomics
 - Equipment: webcam; headset; mouse; keyboard
- *CSD* – Is there anything else you need to do your job well under your current work arrangement? (open-ended)
 - Printer/scanner
 - Ergonomics (chair, desk, ADA, home office, etc.)
 - Equipment: Keyboard/mouse, headset, etc.
 - Mail/fax/print to mail
 - Monitor(s)/HDMI cords
 - DocuSign (signing documents)/Mobile signing capability for clients
 - VPN/connectivity (slow with some programs, such as OnBase)
 - Skype/Zoom issues (camera, no audio, etc.)
 - Wi-fi connection
 - Laptop (new/update or switch from desktop)
- *PSR* – Do you have all the equipment and/or technology you need in order to do your work from home? If not, what technology or equipment (software, hardware, monitors, wifi) are you missing to do your job well while working remotely?
 - Monitor(s)/docking station
 - Ergonomics (desk, chair)
 - Printer/scanner
 - Wi-fi connection
 - Headset/webcam
 - Mail

- *PDD* – What else do you need from us to do your job well while working remotely? (open-ended)
 - Printer/scanner (11x17 capability, paper)
Monitor(s)
 - Internet connectivity
 - Headset/phone access
 - Webcam
 - Laptop (updated/new)
 - Desktop for working at home
- *CAO* – Is there anything else you need to do your job well under your current work arrangement? (open-ended)
 - Equipment (monitors, printers, phones)
 - Technology (Skype and Zoom)
 - Ergonomics (materials from their onsite desk/office)
 - Office supplies

APPENDIX C: COVID-19 PEER COUNTY ERGONOMIC SURVEY

County	Surveyed 4-13-2020	Surveyed 6-13-2020
All Counties	No county is paying for new equipment for home use. They are all promoting the reuse of equipment that is already been provided to the employee in their county office space.	Same
Dakota County	Employees, if request, can take home their office equipment such as keyboards, monitors, ergonomic mouse, and chairs. No Printers were allowed. Employees were told not to print at home for security reasons. Some staff have their own computers and some county owned.	Have provided guides for teleworking and for use of laptop computers.
Ramsey	Employees can take home monitors, docking stations, keyboards and mice. They have provided laptop use guidelines to staff using a laptop at home workstation. IT department requested that all technology be county owned.	
Otter Tail	Have not allowed employees to take home furniture and have not purchased any additional items for telework. Require employees to use county owned technology.	
Olmsted	Employees can take home a monitor so they can use 2 screens or other equipment if they have special needs. Work with IT on technology.	300 staff teleworked prior to COVID19, 720 are now telecommuting. Of these 90% had laptops and did not need a lot of IT support. They are allowed to take home monitors, printers and other office supplies but NO furniture.
Benton	Employee is responsible for office furniture. They are allowed to take home any of their current office if needed. Require employees to use county owned technology.	
Washington	Employees can take home their keyboards, monitors and chairs.	
Stearns	Employees can take home their chair if they have an accommodation request already or if it was bought because of a workstation evaluation.	Can take monitors, computers, and normal office equipment. No desks and no chairs. They are only letting staff bring home chairs if they have an ADA accommodation.

County	Surveyed 4-13-2020	Surveyed 6-13-2020
Carver		Carver County employees use a mix of County owned computers, monitors, keyboard, mice as well as using their own personal equipment. No desks or chairs are taken home. Ergo Tips are available to staff on the internal intranet.
Hennepin		Workplace Safety has recommended Staff use existing equipment from their office set up. The department is should be tracking their inventory. It has been recommended that they be allowed to take home basically anything from there office laptops, docking station, monitors, printers, plastic mats, ergonomic mice, keyboards, and chairs but No desks or heavy bulky equipment (e.g. filing cabinets). They are currently setting up to conduct virtual ergonomic assessments and have provided a guide to management with recommendations for home office ergonomics.
Blue Earth	Employees can take home their office equipment such as keyboard and mouse. Required to use county owned technology.	Same
Scott		Allowing laptops, monitors, printers, but no furniture to be brought home.
St. Louis		Can take computers, scanners, printers, keyboards but no chairs and no desks.
Winona	Staff can take home current office supplies such as computers, keyboards but not typically chairs.	Same

APPENDIX D: DIVISION FEEDBACK SUMMARIES

As part of this report, feedback was received from divisions regarding three telework issues.

- *Supplemental Policies* – What approaches toward telework have been utilized in your division, including any supplemental policies and procedures?
- *Lessons Learned* – What have you learned during the past several months of telework?
- *Equipment and Technology Needs* – What telework-related equipment and technology needs are present in your division?

Four divisions and two elected offices were interviewed to receive feedback. Due to the size of the Community Services division, five additional interviews were requested of department managers.

County Attorney's Office

Supplemental Policies

- *Previously, Telework Used Sparingly* – Prior to COVID-19, telework was utilized sparingly, was dependent upon division, and work was very dependent upon being onsite.

Lessons Learned

- *Scheduling* – Established a two-week schedule that reduced redundancy without losing expertise.
- *Staffing* – Primarily support staff have returned onsite.
- *Spacing* – With the two-week rotation, there is ample spacing for the work teams.
- *Concerns* – Some staff have expressed concerns about returning onsite.
- *Virtual Setting* – Prior to COVID-19, support staff was very dependent upon paper.
- *Virtual Setting* – Zoom works much better for VDI⁵¹ than Skype.
- *Social Aspect* – Creating ways for staff to connect has been a challenge. Requiring video to be turned on for calls has helped.
- *Social Aspect* – Creating social activities and learning about co-workers is important, but it also should not feel forced.
- *Communication* – Maintaining the right amount of communication with staff has been important. The accuracy of information is also important.

Equipment and Technology

- *Monitors* – Most CAO staff utilize three monitors and the move to utilizing only two within a remote setting was difficult.
- *Printing* – It is difficult to work with large documents on VPN and VDI.
- *Ergonomics* – The remote setting creates ergonomic challenges for items such as chairs, desks, and the placement of monitors.

Other

- *Ongoing Offsite Work* – Policy decisions will be needed for addressing individuals that are not required onsite. This possibly includes having employees work within a mixed office environment (remote and onsite) or determining if an employee's role enables them to work offsite.

⁵¹ Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI).

Community Services – Administration

Supplemental Policies

- *Limited Supplemental Policies* – Prior to COVID-19, EEA and Social Services had some supplemental telework policies. During the pandemic, supervisors and staff have been empowered to address different family situations, as they arise.
- *Considerations* – Departments consider teleworking needs by program (e.g. which services require face-to-face client meetings) and health and safety considerations (e.g. use of internal space and staff protocols).

Lessons Learned

- *Position Consideration* – Telework must consider both an employee's position and resident expectations, which help determine the telework capabilities for each position.
- *Cost Benefit* – Within a COVID environment, a cost benefit analysis is needed to balance the need for a return to the office with the associated cost.
- *Offsite Workspace* – Having a designated work area within the offsite setting is of primary importance.

Equipment and Technology

- *Optimal Needs* – Considering "optimal needs" (how employees can work best) over "minimum needs" is critical. Optimal needs will help consider how often employees need to return to the office (e.g. returning to the office for printing needed to provide effective customer service).
- *Consider the Position* – Optimal equipment needs will vary by position.
- *Equipment Needs* – Dual monitors; mobile printers; and the ability to mail and scan.
- *Connectivity* – Continued IT support to resolve offsite connectivity issues is important.

Other

- *Post-COVID-19* – Considering potential impacts on the post-COVID-19 work environment are important.

Community Services – Community Corrections

Supplemental Policies

- *Temporary Procedures* – During the pandemic, several temporary procedures have been pursued, including providing remote assistance to clients immediately after court appearances, the use of DocuSign, and fillable PDF forms.

Lessons Learned

- *Response Rate* - Probation Officers have utilized Zoom to meet with clients. This has resulted in an increased response rate, due to easier scheduling and elimination of the transportation barrier.
- *Orientation Sessions* – Orientation sessions for the Probation Service Center (PSC) (low to moderate risk clients) have been replaced with one to one contact by a probation officer.
- *PSC Low Risk* – Low Risk PSC clients continue on phone reporting. In person meetings for moderate risk clients have been replaced with one on one virtual contact with a probation officer.
- *Work Crews* – Work crews resumed in July 2020, with only two to three riders allowed per vehicle. Clients are also provided with an incentive to utilize their own vehicle, which can result in an eight-hour shift reduction.
- *Gift Cards* – Gift cards are mailed, as needed, or are also available for pick-up from the Officer of the Day.
- *Drug Testing* – Drug testing was temporarily suspended, but has recently resumed for high priority Drug Court and High Risk clients.
- *Therapy* – Therapy sessions for children via Zoom have experienced a positive response rate. Cognitive Thinking Groups have also moved to virtual models and seen an increase in attendance and course completion.
- *High Risk Clients* – Personal visits with High Risk clients are conducted outside using PPE. Home visits have also been altered to enable the use of PPEs.
- *Employee Productivity* – The dashboard of Work from Home reports, enables a view of work volumes, which can be used to help evaluate employee productivity.

Equipment and Technology

- *Printing* – The main challenge has been related to printing and scanning.
- *Onsite Printing* – Currently, two staff remain onsite, who assist with the printing, mailing, and scanning of client correspondence. The two staff members have been able to absorb the additional activities, since the level of Court activity has been slower.
- *Visual Contact* – In Community Corrections, there is an identified value in seeing clients during appointments.
- *Additional Equipment* – Additional requests have been received for chairs, monitors, and other office equipment.
- *Client Technology* – There is a need to address the challenge of client access to technology.

Community Services – Employment & Economic Assistance

Supplemental Policies

- *Pre-COVID Policy* – EEA Telework Policy 2136 creates a telework opportunity for employees.
- *Inability to be Online* – A recent procedural consideration was that if an employee cannot get online, they may either return onsite or take flex.
- *Onsite Visits* – If an employee needs to return onsite, they must notify their supervisor as soon as possible.
- *Flexibility* – Supervisors need to be empowered to address individual situations, such as work outside of normal business hours and children in the home.
- *Away-from-Home Remote Work* – Problems have developed with staff performing remote work in a location other than their home. Challenges include only being periodically available, poor connectivity, and privacy concerns. Currently, only supervisors are authorized to work in an Away-from-Home remote setting.

Lessons Learned

- *Customer Service* – Impact on the level of customer service should always be considered when changing the approach toward telework.
- *Remote Customer Service* – CARES Act funding has created additional possibilities for providing remote customer service.
- *Regular Check-Ins* – Holding weekly check-ins with employees have been helpful. Check-ins for larger teams is more of a challenge.
- *Personal Connections* – Several items have helped with maintaining personal connections in a remote setting, including the use of cameras on video calls, ice breakers during staff meetings, and direct one-on-one outreach to staff.
- *Remote Challenges* – Several aspects of work are more difficult in a remote setting, including introducing new employees into the office culture, conducting training, and the mental health of staff.
- *Productivity* – A challenge within any telework setting is knowing that employees are spending their time productively. Productivity matrixes also vary by position.
- *Return Onsite and Fairness* – When employees begin returning onsite, it is important to consider the issue of fairness, especially when client services need to be performed onsite.
- *Tax Information* – Some challenges are associated with the need to scan and enter tax information onsite.

Equipment and Technology

- *Virtual Backgrounds* – It is important to provide intake staff with technology capable of providing virtual backgrounds.
- *Monitors* – Dual monitors, including the laptop monitor, are important for most positions.
- *Ergonomics* – Home ergonomic considerations are important. Allowing staff to relocate their onsite chairs for telework was helpful.
- *Damaged Equipment* – Especially during the early days of the pandemic, there was a significant problem with damaged equipment (e.g. laptops falling off broken tables or equipment being damaged during relocation).

Community Services – Public Health

Supplemental Policies

COVID-19 Response – Several adjustments were made in response to COVID-19, including the following.

- WIC Waiver with all remote visits done via phone.
- Family Health remote visits.
- DocuSign.
- Schedules in Public Health Administration that maintain effective operations.
- Allowing onsite work, as needed.
- Increased communications, including a weekly email from the Public Health Director, the Sunshine newsletter, and monthly all-staff meetings. These forms of increased communication helps with isolation issues.
- Increased regular check-ins, including one-on-ones, as well as staff meetings.
- Active promotion of mental health resources, as well as Sand Creek virtual visits.
- Regular Public Health COOP meetings, as well as small team and regular team meetings with the Public Health management team.
- In Public Health Administration, main line phones were rolled over, so that staff could answer at home.
- Safety plans were completed.

Lessons Learned

- *Expectations* – Communicate clear expectations about returning to work, including items such as the increasing frequency of time onsite. Organizational wide expectations should be reviewed to ensure uniformity.
- *Business Need* – Identified a clear business need for bringing an employee back onsite.
- *Balance Staff Needs* – When considering a return onsite, balance individual staff needs (e.g. at-risk partner or spouse) with the needs of the work team.
- *Communication* – Ensure that there is frequent and accurate communication with staff.
- *Engagement* – Engage staff in planning.
- *Lead Time* – Provide staff with as much lead time, as possible.
- *Adjustments* – If items are not working as planned, check-in with staff and make real time adjustments.
- *Balance Safety* – Balance mental health with science (e.g. Plexi-glass and PPE).
- *Consistency* – Try to maintain as much consistency across divisions, as possible.
- *New Employees* – Consider the best ways to bring new employees onboard.
- *Mileage* – While teleworking, clarification may be needed if mileage should be considered to return to the office for a business need.
- *Shared Office Space* – Consideration should be given as to the management of potentially share workstations in a post-COVID environment.

Equipment and Technology

- *COVID-19 Response* – Several equipment considerations were made in response to COVID-19, including the following: headsets, softphones, cell phones, hot spots, laptops, chairs, and monitors.
- *Monitors* – The ability to relocate monitors for telework has been helpful.
- *Future Consideration for Mixed Offices* – A review would be needed to see if an adequate supply of monitors and chairs are available to create a mixed office environment.

- *Universal Docking Stations* – Consider future use of universal docking stations to improve office space flexibility. Universal docking stations will also be critical in the pursuit of shared office space.
- *Chair Expectations* – Now that office chairs are being utilized offsite, what expectations exist post-COVID for a mixed office environment.
- *IT Support* – There is a high demand for IT support.
- *Printing and Scanning* – Improvements are needed to the existing remote printing/scanning option. Currently, staff need to return to the office, in order to print large documents.
- *Minimum Equipment Needs* – Items considered for minimum equipment needs include the following: a laptop; two monitors and in some cases larger monitors; wireless mouse; headset; cell phone, where needed; and chair.
- *Additional Considerations* – Ensure proper connectivity and consider ergonomic assessments for more difficult situations.

Community Services – Social Services

Lessons Learned

- *Connectivity Challenges* – In rural areas, connectivity can be a challenge. IT Loaner wi-fi hot spots could potentially address this limitation.
- *Mail* – There have been challenges associated with utilizing the EEA Print-to-Mail option. Specifically, large packets are sometimes difficult to process. As a result, staff sometimes need to return to the office to complete mailings. It helped having the time for a document to be present on the print cue extended from 72 hour to eight days. DocuSign has also helped.
- *Onsite Scheduling* – CLS has assigned half days for employees that need to return onsite for printing or office work.
- *Productivity Measurement* – OnBase has quality reporting, which assists in measuring employee productivity.
- *Offsite Communication Challenges* – Having employees offsite has made it more difficult for staff to stop by a supervisor's office with a question. Team building and one-on-one learning has also been impacted.
- *Dedicated Remote Offices* – Some employees have struggled to create dedicated office spaces in their homes.

Equipment and Technology

- *Replacement Schedule* – Telework has illustrated how a five-year computer replacement schedule is a challenge.
- *Equipment* – Headsets, webcams, and duplicating the three monitor setting that is onsite have been the most important equipment aspects of telework.
- *Future Challenge* – Considering how to create a balance of equipment within a mixed office setting will be a challenge that needs to be addressed, as staff are transitioned into a future work setting.

Community Services – Veterans Services

Lessons Learned

- *Activity Log* – Created a telework log for staff to complete showing their daily activities. The log shows the number of clients contacted, along with administrative tasks and trainings completed.

Equipment and Technology

- *Kiosk* – A kiosk check-in at WSC, which was approved prior to COVID-19 with BIP funding, may allow teleworking staff to provide remote customer service.

Other

- *Social Distancing Needs* – Staff offices are not large enough to see clients and maintain social distancing. A preference would be to have a conference room designated for Veteran’s Services use to meet with clients.

Operations, Management and Budget

Supplemental Policies

- *Previous Telework Agreements with Staff* – Prior to COVID-19, individual telework agreements were made with staff.
- *Reporting* – Prior to COVID-19, teleworking staff in Finance would email their supervisors to indicate what items had been completed.

Lessons Learned

- *Scheduling* – It would be beneficial to have staff rotations, when a return onsite begins. One potential challenge is transporting paperwork between a remote and onsite setting.
- *Hours* – Allowing some flexibility in office hours is beneficial to staff.
- *Equipment* – Laptops have been essential for telework. Allowing staff to move some equipment offsite has been helpful.
- *Collaboration* – Virtual collaboration has become second nature.
- *Signatures* – DocuSign was a significant efficiency improvement and reduced the volume of paper.
- *Paperless* – Staff have lessened their use of paper and use technology instead.
- *Communication* – Thoughtful communication has been essential. Setting clear expectations for staff, as well as holding regular check-ins, has been important.
- *Staff* – Maintaining team building activities is important in a telework setting.
- *Travel Time* – Efficiency gains have been seen with the elimination of travel time to meetings.

Equipment and Technology

- *Minimum Equipment Needs* – VPN, computer, multiple monitors, and docking station.
- *Ergonomics* – Ergonomic needs include wrist rest, footrest, mouse, and keyboard.
- *Beyond Minimum Needs* – Additional ergonomic considerations include stand up desks, chairs, and laptop stands.
- *Monitors* – More monitors needed.
- *Printer Ink* – Printer ink is not being considered.
- *Offsite Ergonomics* – Currently, teleworking staff can order ergonomic items at their own expense. A policy decision would be needed for the County to pay for ergonomic items beyond an established minimum.

Physical Development

Supplemental Policies

- *Future Considerations* – Although PDD does not have a supplemental policy, they are actively engaging PDD managers and supervisors regarding their telework needs.
- *Onsite Staff* – Any future telework policies will also need to consider staff that remained onsite.
- *Return Onsite* – Ensure that any staff returning onsite are returning for a business purpose.

Lessons Learned

- *Onsite Socializing* – When staff return onsite, there tends to be more socialization than was anticipated.
- *Teambuilding* – Having staff telework has created a challenge for teambuilding and the continued ability to spark innovation.
- *Communication* – Communication is an essential aspect of telework. During the start of the pandemic, management would send daily updates to ensure that staff felt connected. Now the challenge is ensuring that teams can still collaborate to address issues and generate strategies.
- *Productivity* – Need to ensure that work is still getting done. Perhaps this concern could be tied into a PSI measure.
- *Approaches for Interaction* – Ensuring staff engagement is important to provide a comfort level between employees and being a good team member. An example of ensuring engagement is requiring cameras to be on for remote calls.
- *Flexibility* – Managers must have an ability to adapt to changing situations, such as adjusting work schedules to address changes in the school calendar.

Equipment and Technology

- *Printers* – Need to consider different approaches for printing solutions. Currently, employees are using personal printers to generate documents. Engineers occasionally need to return to the office to print larger scale documents.

Other

- *Spacing* – As staff return onsite, it will be important to determine a critical mass for employees working within the same space.

Public Services & Revenue

Supplemental Policies

- *Assessing* – Prior to COVID-19, Assessing was performing telework. They utilized an employee expectations document for offsite work. Offsite assessors were still expected to be present onsite during the first day of the week. The original expectations were to provide assessors with flexibility in scheduling and to serve as a recruitment benefit. Similar approaches could be extended to other areas of PSR, dependent upon the services provided.
- *Property Taxation* – Prior to COVID, Property Taxation required teleworkers to designate an offsite workspace free of interruptions; utilize their own computer, if they utilize a desktop computer onsite; and provide two to three monitors to efficiently complete their work functions.

Lessons Learned

- *Mail* – Teleworking employees who need to mail items to customers have experienced challenges without remote printers.
- *Service Provision* – Prior to deciding which staff should telework, it is most important to first define what minimum services must be provided in person.
- *Recording* – Recording staff might be appropriate for future telework arrangements.
- *Shared Workspaces* – The use of shared workspaces would eliminate the possibility of having all staff members return to the office simultaneously.
- *Post-COVID Considerations* – Potential post-COVID considerations include the following.
 - Telework is a privilege and can be revoked at any time.
 - Maintenance of onsite manager and supervisor coverage.
 - Ensuring onsite support through rotation of teleworking staff.
 - Determining onsite presence by considering position duties and degree to which the position is public facing.

Equipment and Technology

- *Monitors* – The highest priority for equipment needs is additional monitors, as well as docking stations to address the use of tablets. Dual monitors are crucial.
- *Printers* – Providing printers to staff for customer communication has been identified as another high priority need.
- *Additional Equipment Needs* – Other needs include headsets; webcams; wi-fi connections; and ergonomic needs associated with printers and scanners.
- *Laptops* – Laptops are essential for enabling telework.
- *Standing Workstations* – Some teleworking employees have indicated that they miss their standing workstations.
- *IT Loaner Program* – Expressed support for an expanded IT Loaner Program.

Other

- *Long Term* – Long term approaches need to be considered, as buildings are reviewed in terms of actual or perceived services that need to be performed onsite.
- *Permanent Approaches* – Funding decisions will need to be made to enable permanent approaches for telework.

Sheriff's Office

Supplemental Policies

- *Seldom* – Prior to COVID-19, telework was utilized only sparingly.

Lessons Learned

- *Scheduling* – Efforts at transparency focused on communications with unions. Heavy days were rescheduled to reduce staffing overlap and limit contact during shift changes. Work from home days were implemented.
- *Changes for Patrol* – Work from home days focus on training.
- *Communication* – Social isolation has been a challenge, with a limited ability to connect with co-workers.
- *Communication* – Regular check-ins with teleworkers is important.
- *Spacing* – With some staff teleworking, there has been an ability to spread out remaining onsite staff.
- *Return Onsite* – As some staff return onsite, staff that can perform their work offsite will continue to telework.
- *Receiving Mail* – Receiving mail has been a challenge for teleworking staff that handle this as part of their job.

Equipment and Technology

- *Laptops* – A move has been made to become more laptop focused.
- *Monitors* – Additional monitors are needed, since some employees utilize three, when working onsite.
- *Mixed Office Setting* – Interest in limiting the movement of equipment back and forth for staff that work in a mixed office setting (remote and onsite).

Other

- *Appreciation* – Appreciates how the process was handled and the County Manager's active communications.