

For: FSA Employees

2012 FSA Telework Campaign and Information

Approved by: Associate Administrator for Operations and Management



1 Overview

A Background

Telework is one of the critical components under the Secretary’s Cultural Transformation Initiative. The Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 added new features such as the requirement that each Federal agency incorporate telework into its Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). The Act also requires that agencies provide explanations where the number of employees teleworking is 10 percent lower than the year before, and explain what actions are being taken to eliminate barriers to maximizing telework opportunities. Accordingly, each USDA agency is being measured on the rate of participation in telework by providing a monthly telework progress report to the Secretary. Since the start of the fiscal year, FSA has seen little to no improvement in Core telework participation rates by FSA employees; similarly, Ad Hoc (or situational telework) has been consistently low in FSA as well. FSA can do more to improve telework participation. With a commitment of support and encouragement from supervisors and managers, more eligible employees can join the telework team and assist FSA in reaching its telework participation goals.

As FSA continues to transform, it is important that FSA is promoted and viewed as an employer of choice, a place where employees and constituents feel valued, appreciated, and engaged. In recent years, several analyses and surveys identified significant issues affecting the workplace environment and employee satisfaction, and it is incumbent upon FSA to better address those issues.

B Purpose

This notice:

- communicates FSA telework goals
- promotes and provides guidance on the types of telework and telework eligibility criteria

Disposal Date	Distribution
January 1, 2013	All FSA employees; State Offices relay to County Offices

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1 Overview (Continued)

B Purpose (Continued)

- provides direction and guidance to supervisors on increasing FSA telework participation rates, which includes the requirement to:
 - determine position eligibility for every employee
 - communicate position eligibility to employees
 - notify HRD of all positions deemed ineligible for telework participation
- provides information on telework initiatives and resources.

Note: Policy in 34-PM will be updated to reflect the changes provided in this notice.

FSA's senior leadership is responsible for supporting Cultural Transformation. The FSA Executive Leadership Committee endorses and encourages telework participation. The FSA Executive Leadership Committee also understands that not every position, particularly positions in Field Offices who serve the customers, are eligible to participate in Core telework. Telework not only benefits the individual teleworker, but it has a positive impact on employee performance. The decrease in stress and reduced expense of commuting brings an attitude of joy and satisfaction to the employee, making him or her more productive on the job.

C Contacts

Yolanda Provost, FFAS National Telework Program Manager, is the contact person for FFAS/HRD telework issues. Questions may be directed to Yolanda Provost through e-mail at yolanda.provost@wdc.usda.gov.

All employees who wish to telework and have questions about connectivity, access, and equipment, or technical problems must speak directly with their immediate supervisor and their local ITSD Helpdesk or point of contact.

For assistance with:

- connectivity, access, and equipment, or technical problems contact:
 - ITSTechnicalSupport@wdc.usda.gov
 - 202-690-1000
- the Telework Management System (TMS), contact the TMS Help Desk by either of the following:
 - FSA.EMSO@wdc.usda.gov
 - 202-690-2256.

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1 Overview (Continued)

D Labor/Management Obligations

Where contract language addresses these policies and procedure for bargaining unit employees, contract language prevails.

2 Telework

A FSA Telework Goals

FSA has been behind in reaching its telework participation goals. As part of the Cultural Transformation metrics, telework goals are set by the Department. It is the intention of FSA to become a leader among USDA agencies that embraces telework enthusiastically, providing employees with the moral support and technology needed to create a successful telework environment. Going forward, FSA wants to see a significant and continued increase in telework. It is expected that every manager and supervisor will, to the extent possible, support FSA in achieving its telework goals. It is crucial to the success of telework that managers and supervisors be open-minded in considering participation for all eligible employees who express an interest in telework. FSA is committed to achieving a goal of 45 percent of eligible positions participating in Core telework, which involves a routine reoccurring schedule of 1 day per week or more. Employees who are authorized for Ad Hoc telework do not count against the 45 percent goal for Core telework; only those employees in positions eligible for Core telework that are approved for Core telework will be counted towards the Core telework metric.

B Telework Options

Per the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010, there are two basic reporting metrics that the Department and OPM require for telework. These are **Core** (includes Category I and II) and **Ad Hoc** (Category III) telework, explained as follows.

- **Category I Core/Regular (24 hours or more)** are those employees who have a regular telework schedule (an agreement other than Ad-Hoc) of 3 or more days per pay period.
- **Category II Core/Regular (1 hour to 23 hours)** are those employees with a regular telework schedule (an agreement other than Ad-Hoc) of less than 3 days per pay period.
- **Category III (Ad Hoc/Situational)** are those who telework but are not on a regular telework schedule, i.e. categorized as Ad Hoc agreements in TMS.

Ad Hoc telework complements training programs, providing employees the option to complete online training in a more suitable environment. Ad Hoc telework also allows employees to perform unscheduled telework because of a snowstorm, office power outage, or other natural disaster or emergency situation where working at the official duty station is not feasible.

2 Telework (Continued)

C Telework Coverage

In the Telework Act of 2010, agencies are to identify positions eligible for telework. Thus, in complying with this requirement, leadership has determined that the following categories of employees agency-wide are ineligible for **Core** telework:

- FSA Federal and non-Federal employees located in County Offices and those who work in Service Centers whose job duties are customer-facing
- SED's
- any employee in the GS-318 series.

All other FSA employees not described above may be considered for Core or Ad Hoc telework using the guidance discussed in the sections that follow.

FSA customer-facing Service Center Office and county field employees are **not** eligible for Core I or II Regular telework because they have daily, customer-facing duties. However, they are eligible for Category III Ad Hoc telework. Ad Hoc telework may be appropriate for training or in the event of a natural disaster or other emergency that prevents the employee from reaching the FSA office, provided that the employee has adequate connectivity, work to perform, and is on an approved Ad Hoc telework agreement. Ad Hoc telework may be rarely used; it will be expected that, barring a natural disaster or other severe emergency, FSA customer-facing Service Center and county field employees will always fulfill the business and workforce needs of FSA in order to provide customer service.

In the event of an emergency need to Ad Hoc telework, it is expected that this type of telework will be requested in advance. FSA customer-facing Service Center Office and county field employees will not be expected to perform Ad Hoc telework if they do not have access to the FSA server.

3 Supervisory Responsibilities

A Determining Eligibility

Supervisors must ensure that the employee can meet the following 3 sets of criteria for telework eligibility/suitability: position eligibility, employee eligibility, and employee suitability. See Exhibit 1. These criteria work interdependently. For example, an employee may be **position**-eligible for telework, but because of a less than "fully successful" performance rating, the employee is not **employee**-eligible for **Core** or **Ad Hoc** telework. Supervisors are responsible for determining position eligibility, employee eligibility, and employee suitability, and communicating to employees their telework-eligibility status.

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3 Supervisory Responsibilities (Continued)

B Identifying Positions Ineligible for Telework

By memorandum dated June 6, 2011, then Acting Administrator Nelson conveyed that FSA employees will be afforded the opportunity to participate in telework as long as the employee's participation will not diminish performance or workforce needs.

Additionally, not all telework options will be applicable or suitable for all employees, and it is up to the immediate supervisor to work closely with the employee to determine which telework option might be available in a given situation. Many, if not most employees, however, should be eligible for Ad Hoc (situational) telework opportunities. Again, this demands a conversation between the supervisor and the employee.

All managers are to immediately review positions for their eligibility to telework and communicate to HRD by March 30, 2012, which **positions** other than those listed in subparagraph 2 C are not eligible for **Core** telework.

C Reporting Positions Ineligible

After determining that an employee's position is eligible or not eligible for telework, the manager or supervisor must communicate this information to the employee. If a position is not eligible for Core telework but may be eligible for Ad Hoc telework, this must also be communicated to the employee.

County-level supervisors are not required to report positions approved for Ad Hoc telework at this time. A process will be developed in the future to allow County Office supervisors to report the number and positions approved for Ad Hoc telework.

A **position is ineligible** when 1 of the following 4 conditions exist.

- Duties require daily contact with other people or where daily physical presence is required per the official duties of the position.
- Duties require daily use of specialized equipment located at the worksite.
- Duties require daily handling of classified materials.
- Use of government-furnished computer access to LAN or email is not available.

Position ineligibility is not the same as *employee eligibility* or *employee suitability* (Exhibit 1), which is determined by the supervisor. Only eligible positions are counted in the monthly metric submitted to the Department. Keep in mind that if a position is not eligible for regular, scheduled telework, this same position may still be eligible for Ad Hoc (situational) telework, and, therefore, this would **not** be an ineligible position. Our objective is to accurately identify and report monthly telework data; therefore, it is imperative that we receive the following data from managers and supervisors on positions that are **not** eligible for telework.

3 Supervisory Responsibilities (Continued)

C Reporting Positions Ineligible (Continued)

For all positions ineligible, send the following information to yolanda.provost@wdc.usda.gov:

Important: Do **not** identify the employee by name.

- Office/Branch
- Supervisor
- Position
- Grade/Series
- Category I or II Core Regular Telework (Y/N)
- Category III Ad Hoc Telework (Y/N)
- Number of Positions **ineligible**
- Reason/justification for position ineligibility
- Date.

Managers and supervisors considering allowing their employees to telework for the first time may initially approve short-term telework agreements of 6 months or less. This provides new teleworkers and their supervisors a trial period where the supervisor can determine if the telework agreement needs any changes. We expect every manager to contribute in the achievement of FSA in meeting or exceeding its telework goals.

D Telework Denial

Managers and supervisors are expected to provide employees with specific reasons why the employee cannot participate in the telework program. See the Position Eligibility, Employee Eligibility, and Employee Suitability criteria in Exhibit 1). A telework denial must be in writing. Additionally, managers should respond to employee telework requests within a reasonable amount of time, such as 5 working days.

E Important T&A Reminder

All managers and supervisors shall pay particularly close attention to how to code time correctly when teleworking. For those using WebTA, employees must code their time as:

- 01 - 01 Regular Time Telework for instances of Core I or II
- 01 - 01 Telework Other for instances of Ad Hoc III.

This is very important because many teleworkers may not be tracking their telework time correctly, and some teleworkers may not be tracking their time at all. We need to show an accurate number of telework participation in the telework T&A report every month.

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4 Join the FSA Telework 2012 Initiative

A FSA Telework 2012 Initiative

USDA has emphasized its commitment to enhancing the Telework program within the Department. FSA adds its concurrent support and endorsement to that message. Federal employees are encouraged to fully consider how telework might be used within the context of their specific job description and location. Importantly, supervisors and managers are encouraged to take full advantage of telework tools and concepts, and to work closely with employees to evaluate how telework might be better used in the workplace.

- Federal employees are encouraged to submit a telework application via TMS as soon as possible. Employees who are not certain of their telework eligibility must have a discussion with their supervisor to find out. All FSA employees shall request telework through TMS at <https://wdcprod81.sc.egov.usda.gov/Tms/login.aspx>. Employees shall use their eAuthentication user ID and password to access TMS.
- All county employees eligible for Ad Hoc telework shall submit telework agreements using FFAS-10 to their supervisor.
- Recognizing that the new definitions of telework as Core and Ad Hoc are not in TMS and that the guidance provided on TMS was designed years ago, we are hoping to make some structural changes to the system. The current 34-PM describes the following the types of telework agreements available in the TMS application system:
 - **Ad Hoc:** A type of telework that is not based on a set schedule of telework days per pay period.
 - **Long Term:** A type of telework where an employee works on a regular and recurring basis as with Core telework. “Long-term” as it applies to a TMS application indicates that the duration of the agreement may last up to 1 year. However, employees or supervisors desiring a shorter (Core) telework agreement period can simply shorten the duration of the agreement when prompted in the TMS system for a date.
 - **Short-Term Medical:** A type of medical telework that has a duration of 6 months or less.
 - **Long-Term Medical:** A type of medical telework that has a duration of more than 6 months and less than 1 year.

Note: Long-Term Medical telework is addressed in 31-PM under reasonable accommodation. POC is Nicole White who can be reached at nicole.white@wdc.usda.gov.

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4 Join the FSA Telework 2012 Initiative (Continued)

A FSA Telework 2012 Initiative (Continued)

Therefore, if the employee is a **Core** teleworker, regardless of the number of hours, he or she will choose “Long-Term Telework” in the TMS application. Keep in mind that a Long-Telework application can be a year or any length of time less than a year.

If an employee is an Ad Hoc employee, he or she will select the TMS application choice “Ad Hoc”.

Short-Term Medical and Long-Term Medical are considered to be Core teleworkers and not Ad Hoc. Therefore, those employees on Short-Term Medical and Long-Term Medical telework will be reported as Core teleworkers.

5 Telework Resources and Activities

A USDA Telework Initiatives

USDA sponsors online telework webinars called “Let’s Talk Telework”. On February 13, 2012, Assistant Secretary for Administration Pearlie Reed issued a memorandum challenging USDA to “Turbo-Charge” telework. This memo promoted the “Let’s Talk Telework” webinars held on the last Thursday of each month, which will offer tips, suggestions, best practices, and lessons learned from several seasoned teleworkers across USDA. The next “Let’s Talk Telework” webinar will be held on March 29, 2012.

There are resources and activities available to guide employees in the administration of telework, including but not limited to the excellent AgLearn courses **Telework 101** and **Telework 101 for Managers**. Again, we challenge managers and supervisors to explore AgLearn and learn more about telework. There are many courses that will help supervisors in making decisions about how best to implement telework and how to successfully manage teleworkers while still accomplishing our FSA mission.

B FSA Telework Initiatives

In an effort to share best telework practices, ideas, and inspirational solutions that help and support each other as a telework community, FSA is collecting “telework success stories.” These may include telework challenges you have met successfully, telework tips and ideas for your coworkers, how telework benefits you personally, and what recommendations you would make to improve the telework environment. We hope to feature your telework experience in articles and e-newsletters. Your story should include your position title and a brief description of your work responsibilities. Send your telework stories to yolanda.provost@wdc.usda.gov.

Position Eligibility, Employee Eligibility, and Employee Suitability

FFAS Telework Eligibility		
Position Eligibility	Employee Eligibility	Employee Suitability
FFAS utilizes the USDA premise that all positions are presumed suitable for telework, <i>unless</i> :	An FFAS employee is considered to be eligible for telework if the following four conditions are met. Note: If the employee is covered under a negotiated agreement, the negotiated agreement controls.	An employee suitable for telework is 1 with demonstrated personal characteristics that are well suited to telework, as determined by the supervisor, to include the following:
1. Duties require daily contact with other people or where daily physical presence is required per the official duties of the position. Example: Federal and non-Federal employees located in county Offices and those who work in Service Centers whose job duties are customer-facing.	1. Employee has an existing or expected minimum performance rating of “Fully Successful” or higher.	1. Demonstrated dependability and the ability to handle responsibility.
2. Duties require daily use of specialized equipment located at the worksite.	2. Employee has no misconduct, disciplinary (such as letter of caution, letter of reprimand through 14-day suspension or less) or adverse action or leave restriction occurring within the preceding 12 months.	2. A proven record of high personal motivation, independence, and dependability, and does not require close supervision.
3. Duties require daily handling of classified materials.	3. Employee has never been disciplined for viewing, downloading, or exchanging pornography, including child pornography, from a government computer or while performing official Federal Government duties.	3. The ability to prioritize work effectively and utilize good time management skills.
4. Use of government-furnished computer access to LAN or email is not available.	4. Employee has never been officially disciplined for being absent without permission (AWOL) for 5 days or more in any calendar year.	