

EXPANDED TELEWORK PILOT

Seeing What Works



Overview

- Background
- Where we are now ...Expanded Telework Pilot
- Where are we headed in light of the hopes and expectations of employees, supervisors, NTEU and FNCS
- Q & A

Background

- Following discussions in the FNCS LMF, in the spring of 2012, FNCS and NTEU revamped their existing **Article 20 (Telework)**, originally created in July 2010.

This was a *joint effort* to:

- ❖ enhance an already vibrant and productive program;
- ❖ bring a contract into compliance with the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010, USDA policy and OPM guidance;
- ❖ provide a full-time telework option for those in closing field offices;
and
- ❖ marginally expand and clarify the terms of and opportunities for telework arrangements generally.

This reconstruction of Article 20 also created ***the foundation*** for an Expanded Telework Pilot.

Background

- The Pilot was carefully developed by the Parties as an informative experiment --- designed to provide information on how best to structure and support telework arrangements for the future.
- Its terms are contained in an MOU signed in early May 2013.
- After Department approval, the joint production of many documents needed for implementation, including survey instruments, and the cooperative efforts of applicants and their supervisors,
it became ready for prime time in September 2013.
- To appreciate the purpose, intended conduct of and hoped-for results from the Pilot, context is required.

Important Changes to the Telework Framework

- As previously recognized through FNCS Labor Management Forum discussions, NTEU and FNCS knew that an expanded approach to telework could be beneficial in a variety of ways.
- Before expanding, the FNCS telework program framework needed to first be updated and solidified.
- Consistent with the law, the Agency determines first whether each position (and then each employee) is eligible for basic telework. The position is eligible **unless** its duties require:
 1. daily physical presence at the worksite for the performance of specific tasks;
 2. daily presence for contact with the public, co-workers, customers or stakeholders;
 3. daily use of specialized equipment located at the traditional worksite; or
 4. daily handling of classified materials.
- **Net Result: All but 35 of FNCS' 1326 employees are eligible for at least one day of telework per pay period**

Telework Profile

- **Maximum pre-Pilot** telework frequency: **6** days per pay period
- All teleworkers must have agreements or opt out.

October 2013:

35 ineligible

107 opt outs

617 plan to telework 3 or more days per PP

236 plan to telework 1 to 3 days

331 plan to telework ad hoc

- Best current data on Actual Frequency:
 - @ 630 are **regularly** teleworking at least one day per PP
 - @ 105 are teleworking at least one day per PP on an **ad hoc** basis
- (Note: telework frequency coding is imperfect)
- So more than **55%** of FNCS employees are teleworking at least once every 10 days. Most Pilot participants teleworked at least 4 days per pay period.

Pilot eliminates
the 6 day maximum and
expands to 7, 8, 9 or 10
days per pay period,
business needs permitting

Pilot Eligibility Requirements



Eligibility for the Pilot is limited to those who:

1. Have worked in their current position for FNCS for more than one year;
2. Have fully portable work for each of the days requested, i.e., work that requires no in-person interaction with others in order to maximize effectiveness and efficiency, as verified by the supervisor and affirmed by the supervisor's boss; and
3. Have a most recent performance rating of "Superior" or "Outstanding."

Pilot Concept and Scope

- The Pilot is an experiment.
- FNCS and NTEU seek to learn whether more telework, or telework in particular circumstances, is advantageous to the Agency, those we serve, and to employees --- teleworkers and co-workers alike.
- To accomplish that, the Pilot is structured to **increase the likelihood of success and to generate information** that will help FNCS and NTEU determine how best to support and customize telework going forward.
- Like any study, our Pilot has a limited number of participants. Here, each of the six NTEU-represented Regions may have up to six (6) participants. Up to fourteen (14) Headquarters employees may participate as well.
- **Maximum number of participants: 50**

--- Going Forward ---

All employees selected to participate in the Expanded Telework Pilot Program were notified in late August 2013. This communication provided next steps for approved participants to take to move forward with the Pilot.

1. Revise existing Telework Agreements with the Supervisor.
 2. To **minimize communications** challenges on the front end of an expanded schedule, spell out in writing with your supervisor the **work requirements**, **communications** expectations and preferences, and **commitments** that will be in play during the Pilot.
 3. Review and complete the baseline data-gathering survey (one for participants; a companion survey for their supervisors).
- (We are using SurveyMonkey to administer surveys for employees, supervisors, customers and stakeholders and to capture responses.)

Data is in the mind of the beholder....

- We'll also be looking at impediments to success and causes of any snafus or failures.
 - Nature of the work
 - Nature or size of the work team
 - Numbers or types of demands from customers/stakeholders
 - Location within or outside the organization of customers/stakeholders
 - Experience of participants and supervisors
 - Their willingness to address issues as they crop up
 - Managerial support/resistance at higher levels

Objective: *help determine what works for FNCS and its employees*

Data is in the mind of the beholder....

- To position NTEU and FNCS to evaluate Pilot results as the experiment unfolds (and perhaps effect mid-course corrections) and when it ends in September 2014,
 - the **perceptions** of the participants, their supervisors, their customers, including colleagues, and those who have a stake in the work of the participants' office or unit are being gathered.
- Beyond participants' demographic and commuting information, we're looking at possible changes in:
 - Productivity
 - Satisfaction
 - Work quality
 - Responsiveness
 - Collaboration &
 - Connectedness

Pilot holds potential for agencies seeking to reduce footprint, and maintain excellence

- Pilot MOU foreshadowed discussion/consideration of hoteling and other space conserving measures; discussions will continue as the Pilot continues.
- Through USDA Secretary Vilsack's Space Utilization initiative, the Department has prioritized more efficient use of space; collaborating with GSA, it's sprinting up that learning curve.
- And as we proceed, we are mindful of President Kelley's admonition that only through adapting workplace flexibilities can the government expect to attract and keep the talented workforce it must have to serve the American people.
- Creating an environment conducive to instant communication and individual or collaborative work production, irrespective of the physical location of team members, customers and stakeholders, can produce multiple dividends --- for reinvestment or reallocation.

What's success?

One Pilot participant has defined it this way:

- ❑ Employees' productivity, availability, accuracy and timeliness remain stable or improve.
- ❑ Communication remains frequent and positive.
- ❑ Customers perceive no change or a positive change in availability and customer service.
- ❑ Employee is fully engaged when working at home.
- ❑ Co-workers, customers and stakeholders do not perceive any lack of professionalism due to the work environment.
- ❑ Employee and supervisor are both happy with the arrangement and feel supported by the agency.

Information and Assistance

- FNCS and NTEU are happy to share their experience and work to date.
- NTEU's Eve Epstein can be reached at Eve.Epstein@nteu.org
- FNCS' Frank McDonough can be reached at Frank.McDonough@fns.usda.gov
- **NTEU Chapter Presidents and FNCS management are committed to Pilot success.**

Questions/Concerns?

