

Telecommuting

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Prepared by Donna M. Fletcher

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By definition, telecommuting is the partial or total substitution of telecommunications technology for the trip to and from the primary workplace, along with associated changes in policy, organization, management, and work structure. In other words, it is the act of moving work to the workers, rather than the workers to the work. Computers, cellular phones, fax, advanced communications links, and dial-up access have removed the physical barriers that required workers to be in their offices at all times.

Telecommuting Options

There are a number of ways to establish a workplace for the remote employee:

- **Work at home:** Employees designate work space at home to conduct business
- **Satellite office:** A remote office location usually placed within a concentration of employee residences, allowing employees from a single company to share office space and reduce the time and expense of traveling to and from the main office facility
- **Neighborhood work center:** Provides work space for employees of different companies in one location. Each company at a neighborhood work center is responsible for the administrative and technical requirements of its employees
- **Virtual office mobile worker:** An airport, hotel, car, or other location can be a workplace for employees who use technology to link them to customers, the office, or suppliers

Benefits

The acceptance of telecommuting is growing, as are its benefits, which include:

- **Conserving energy.** Telecommuting to work creates a great potential to save energy. The three major areas where energy can be conserved are vehicle-related materials and resources (e.g., fuel and vehicle maintenance); highway-related materials and resources (e.g., maintenance); and office-related materials and resources (e.g., janitorial services, power, water, and climate control).

Organizations with a large number of telecommuters have actually reduced their office space requirements, and consequently, their rents, by setting a policy for telecommuting employees to share desks and other resources at company facilities. This type of savings can be recognized when organizations schedule their employees' telecommuting days appropriately.

Some organizations go so far as to treat office space as "hotel suites" that can be reserved in advance or assigned when telecommuters "check in" on days when they commute. In these organizations, an individual's telephone number can be routed to whichever office suite they are occupying.

- **Preserving our environment.** Telecommuting reduces automobile emissions and land use requirements for highway expansion
- **Promoting safety.** Reduced highway use will prevent thousands of traffic-related deaths and severe injuries every year

- Improving health. Telecommuting reduces stress related to compromises made between family and work
- Allowing closer proximity to and involvement with family. Working in the home offers people a greater opportunity to share quality time with family members, to promote family values, and develop stronger family ties and unity
- Allowing proximity to extended family. Through telecommuting, a person can live in a completely different part of the world from their company's location
- Allowing selection of a remote work site that is mutually acceptable to all family members. This gives the telecommuter's spouse an opportunity to pursue his or her career
- Allowing employee freedom. Telecommuters can look for a place to live where they can feel comfortable -- both from a social and economic standpoint -- and live near people who have common interests
- Improving productivity. Time is saved because the commute is eliminated, along with interruptions and conversation that inevitably take place at the central workplace. In addition, working from home may offer some opportunities for physically challenged individuals. Telecommuters are more productive when they can schedule their actual work time during their most effective periods and around the other demands in their lives. Additional savings of productive time are realized as a reduction in the use of company paid time to meet personal or family needs. Telecommuting is also useful in minimizing the impacts of other uncontrollable events such as extremely inclement weather, highway construction, or special events
- Reducing the number of people who "job hop." Telecommuting lets people move without losing their jobs, substantially reducing the costs of recruiting and training

Challenges

Understanding the potential business problems associated with your telecommuting program is essential to its success. Awareness of these problems will help you determine what program will make sense for your organization.

Telecommuting Challenges for Employers

- management resistance and skepticism
- control issues
- culture change
- start-up and operating costs
- security of data/information
- safety and well-being of employees

Telecommuting Challenges for Employees

- isolation and lack of interaction with team members
- household distractions (e.g., chores, children, neighbors)
- perceived hindrance of career advancement; less visibility
- lack of support services such as secretarial and copying services
- reduced living space

Tips for Managing Telecommuters

Trust Your Telecommuters

- get to know them
- encourage team relationships

Manage by Measuring Results

- set goals and objectives with telecommuters
- provide routine and timely feedback
- set deadlines
- delegate assignments equitably between telecommuters and non-telecommuters
- recognize results
- establish fair methods to distribute work

Communicate

- include telecommuters in appropriate communications and meetings
- use various forms of communication with all employees (e.g., e-mail, phone, face-to-face meetings)
- encourage interaction with all team members
- reinforce timely two-way communication

Support Telecommuting

- take telecommuting seriously
- require participation in surveys and the evaluation process
- use a telecommuting agreement
- provide appropriate training
- be prepared to expand the telecommuting program or allow employees to withdraw from the program
- celebrate the successes

Tips for Telecommuters

- Learn to motivate yourself
- Define your telecommuting day. Teleworkers who do not separate their work and family lives find that they are either always at work or always at home. Either situation can have disastrous consequences. Therefore, determine issues like how many hours you will work at home; which hours you will work; how many breaks you will take during the work day; when you will do household chores; when you will eat; when and how you will dress; and what interruptions you will allow
- Organize your work at home
- Identify your most productive work period. Are you a morning person or are you most productive late at night?
- Maintain relationships with co-workers via e-mail and telephone to minimize isolation, or form a telecommuters' support group to develop a networking group or forum to share your experiences
- Expect a 30- to 90-day acclimatization period when you begin telecommuting. It takes a while for even the most organized person to figure out how to manage time, space, communication systems, and projects while working in two locations
- Establish daily and weekly guides that will give you (and your employer) some ability to measure the progress and value of your work

Steps for Implementing Telecommuting Programs

Before beginning a telecommuting pilot project, ensure that appropriate management personnel have agreed to the goals, objectives and measurements for the pilot. Implementing a telecommuting program is similar to implementing a compressed work week or flex-time program. Follow-ing is a list of steps to get there (*=critical steps):

1. Prepare and present a telecommuting proposal (see [Exhibit 1](#))
2. Obtain support from the top*
3. Establish a telecommuting implementation committee
4. Define pilot program parameters*
5. Present telecommuting orientation sessions
6. Develop a telecommuting policy for the organization* (see [Exhibit 2](#))
7. Develop a telecommuting agreement* (see [Exhibit 3](#))
8. Develop criteria to screen the participants* (see [Exhibit 4](#))
9. Develop evaluation criteria for the program* (see [Exhibit 4](#))
10. Determine equipment, technology, and security needs (see [Exhibits 5](#) and [6](#))
11. Develop resource and reference material*
12. Recruit participants*
13. Implement a managing-by-objectives strategy
14. Select the telecommuters and supervisors*
15. Select the control group
16. Train the telecommuters and supervisors. Establish a "lab" for would-be telecommuters. This practice lab should be far removed from the normal work area. Prospective telecommuters communicate with their managers as they would at their telecommunication site and with the same equipment. The trial should be of sufficient length to assess the employee's suitability for telecommuting*
17. Administer pre-telecommuting evaluation (see [Exhibit 4](#))
18. Begin telecommuting*
19. Conduct focus groups (see [Exhibit 7](#))
20. Administer telecommuting post-evaluation* (see [Exhibit 4](#))
21. Analyze and prepare the results of the evaluation*
22. Present the results to senior management*
23. Obtain concurrence from senior management to expand and formalize the program
24. Begin implementing the program throughout the entire organization
25. Monitor the program
26. Make adjustments where necessary*

Implementation Considerations

Tax requirements: Telecommuters should contact their accountant or tax consultant. A copy of IRS publication #587, Business Use of Your Home, can be obtained by calling the IRS.

Workers' compensation: If an injury sustained while telecommuting appears to be work-related (i.e. if it occurs in the home office or while working with office-related equipment), the chances are better that workers' compensation will cover the medical costs relating to the injury.

Security: Before implementing a telecommuting program, assess the security controls in your department. Find out what the current security is, and upgrade it if necessary. Many of the same controls will apply at home (e.g., passwords, hardware and software security standards). (See [Exhibit 6](#).)

Patient confidentiality: Ensure that patient confidentiality is safeguarded by orienting employees to confidentiality measures and having them sign confidentiality agreements.

Equipment: Practical arrangements for equipment should be made between the company and the employee prior to implementation of the program. How much premium equipment (hardware, software, printers, etc.) will be needed? What company-owned equipment can be loaned without inconvenience to the office-based workers? Will insurance be needed for equipment being transported regularly?

Union considerations: Companies have handled union/telecommuting issues in various ways. Some organizations reserve telecommuting for nonunion personnel. Others invite union representatives to participate in the telecommuting planning process.

Emergency preparedness/disaster recovery: Telecommuting programs facilitate emergency preparedness compliance and increase emergency effectiveness. For example, in the case of a fire at the main office, telecommuting employees could easily resume work at their homes where voice calls to the damaged office could be redirected. Call forwarding or voice-mail on home lines would handle calls when employees are on the line or do not answer. E-mail and corporate databases could be accessed via modem or switched digital services.

Exhibit 1: Sample Telecommuting Proposal Contents

Executive summary -- Outline the proposal. It is designed to summarize and highlight the key items detailed in the proposal.

Introduction -- Explain why the organization is interested in telecommuting.

Definition of telecommuting -- Explain what telecommuting is. Each organization has specific ideas regarding its own program.

History of telecommuting -- Introduce the background of telecommuting as a concept. It is not widely known that telecommuting has been in existence for nearly 20 years.

Evaluation of competition -- A critical component of your proposal. Request information from a competitor or similar industry that has a telecommuting program. Include whatever statistics are available.

Benefits of telecommuting -- List and quantify the potential benefits to the organization.

Adjustments -- Document what changes should take place in your organization for telecommuting to be successful.

Objectives -- List the objectives of your program by priority. Include a cost-benefit analysis and/or preliminary cost-justification model.

Telecommuting policy -- Create a guideline for your custom program.

Implementation plan -- Detail a time schedule for implementation. Selection of telecommuters -- Detail the guidelines your organization will use to select telecommuters.

Training -- Outline the topics that will be included in the training sessions.

Focus groups -- Establish who will be responsible for implementation and early evaluation of the telecommuting program and when the sessions will take place.

Evaluation -- Reinforce the reasons for a telecommuting program. It should provide an overview of the anticipated impact telecommuting will have on your organization and underscore the importance of evaluation.

Recommendation -- Summarize the benefits of telecommuting for the organization, why it should implement a program, and when that implementation should take place.

Appendices -- Include examples of materials referenced in your plan.

Exhibit 2: Sample Telecommuting Policy Content

A telecommuting policy will provide your organization with clear, consistent guidelines. The policy should fit the culture of your company and be flexible enough to be customized. It is recommended that the human resources department or personnel department oversee the development of the policy. Consider the following components when preparing a telecommuting policy:

- The definition and interpretation of telecommuting at your organization
- An actual policy statement explaining the commitment to telecommuting your organization has made. This can be a very simple, one-sentence statement
- The principles of telecommuting at your organization. Include statements regarding business needs, terms and conditions of employment, equipment provision, work space designation, the telecommuting agreement, tax implications, dependent care, and scheduling. Establish the voluntary nature of the program
- Selection of telecommuting candidates. Include the job characteristics, telecommuter characteristics, and supervisors' characteristics that will be used to determine your telecommuting personnel
- A section detailing equipment assignment. Define what equipment will be provided and who is responsible for its care. You may wish to include company policy regarding proprietary information and security
- A process by which your organization can measure performance and evaluate the success of the program. The guidelines you establish to manage -- by objectives or results -- can serve as a refresher for potential telecommuters and supervisors
- Time-keeping. The organization's existing policy may be included as a reminder of how you currently manage this process. Specific language regarding overtime should be included in this section
- Safety. The safety policy can include a brief statement on ergonomics

Exhibit 3: Sample Telecommuting Agreement

I have read and understand the attached Telecommuting Policy, and agree to the duties, obligations, responsibilities, and conditions for telecommuters described in that document.

I agree that, among other things, I am responsible for establishing specific telecommuting work hours, furnishing and maintaining my remote work space in a safe manner, employing appropriate telecommuting security measures, and protecting

company assets, information, trade secrets, and systems.

I understand that telecommuting is voluntary and I may stop telecommuting at any time. I also understand that the company may at any time change any or all of the conditions under which I am permitted to telecommute, or withdraw permission to telecommute.

1. Remote work location:

Employee residence

Company premise

Description of work space at remote work location

2. Telecommuting schedule:

On a weekly basis as follows

On a monthly basis as follows

No regular schedule (separate permission for each telecommuting day)

3. Regular telecommuting work hours:

From _____ to _____

Meal break/other breaks: _____

4. Company assets to be used at remote work location: (Description and ID numbers)

5. Company information systems to be accessed from remote work location: (List)

6. Non-company equipment, software, and data to be used at remote work location: (List)

7. Other

Exhibit 4: Sample Screening and Evaluation Form

Critical components of your telecommuting program are the screening and evaluation processes. It is imperative to assess what impact telecommuting will have or has had on the organization.

The checklists and questionnaires below can be used to generate screening and evaluation forms for use by telecommuters, managers, and control groups. If they are administered to the participants before the program is implemented and again at the end of the pilot program, the two surveys can be compared and analyzed.

General Information

Have you ever telecommuted?

How often do you expect to telecommute?

What type of work will be done while telecommuting?

<input type="checkbox"/> Administrative	<input type="checkbox"/> Analysis	<input type="checkbox"/> Auditing reports	<input type="checkbox"/> Batch work
<input type="checkbox"/> Calculating	<input type="checkbox"/> Computer conferencing	<input type="checkbox"/> Conducting business by telephone	<input type="checkbox"/> Contract preparation/monitoring
<input type="checkbox"/> Data analysis	<input type="checkbox"/> Data entry	<input type="checkbox"/> Data manipulation	<input type="checkbox"/> Data processing
<input type="checkbox"/> Data programming	<input type="checkbox"/> Dictating	<input type="checkbox"/> Field visits	<input type="checkbox"/> Maintaining databases
<input type="checkbox"/> Meeting with clients	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning	<input type="checkbox"/> Project-oriented work/management	<input type="checkbox"/> Reading
<input type="checkbox"/> Recordkeeping	<input type="checkbox"/> Research	<input type="checkbox"/> Sending/receiving electronic mail	<input type="checkbox"/> Spreadsheet analysis
<input type="checkbox"/> Support activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Thinking	<input type="checkbox"/> Typing	<input type="checkbox"/> Using a computer
<input type="checkbox"/> Word processing	<input type="checkbox"/> Writing	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

Do you have a room or an area at home to dedicate to telecommuting?

What equipment/services do you need to successfully telecommute? What equipment do you currently have?

	Need	Currently Have
Additional phone line		
Answering machine		
Bookcase		
Calling card		
Computer		
Desk		
Facsimile machine		
File cabinet		
Modem		
Pager		
Printer		
Software		
Typewriter		
Voice mail		
Internet access		
Other		

Communications Information

Do you have a separate telephone line at your residence for work-related calling?

Do you use residence or business telephone services for your work-related calling?

Which of the following special telephone services do you use in your work-related calling?

<input type="checkbox"/> Conference calls	<input type="checkbox"/> Call forwarding	<input type="checkbox"/> Voice mail	<input type="checkbox"/> Call waiting
<input type="checkbox"/> Three-way calling	<input type="checkbox"/> Other		

What additional communication equipment or services would improve your productivity?

<input type="checkbox"/> Video	<input type="checkbox"/> Fax	<input type="checkbox"/> Voice mail	<input type="checkbox"/> C800
<input type="checkbox"/> ISDN	<input type="checkbox"/> Modem	<input type="checkbox"/> Internet services	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

Would you use your telephone more if it cost you less to make the calls?

Estimate the monthly cost of work-related telephone usage for local and long-distance services.

How many hours each day do you use a computer?

Do you use a modem for computer communications?

How long is your average online session?

Approximately how many online sessions do you have each day?

Would you use computer communications more often if the communications cost less?

Commute Information

How do you usually travel to and from work?

<input type="checkbox"/> Drive alone	<input type="checkbox"/> Carpool	<input type="checkbox"/> Vanpool	<input type="checkbox"/> Public transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> Motorcycle	<input type="checkbox"/> Bicycle	<input type="checkbox"/> Walk	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

How many miles do you travel to work each day (round trip)?

How long does it take you to get to and from work (round trip)?

What time of day do you arrive at work?

What time of day do you leave work?

General Attitudes

Please indicate, by degree, the extent to which telecommuting has changed your life (Greatly Increased, Increased, Neither Increased nor Decreased, Decreased, etc.):

Productivity

- Time spent working
- Effectiveness of working relationships at the office (communication, coordination)
- Absence from the office
- Quality of work
- Amount of work done at home

Motivation

- Satisfaction with work
- Morale
- Professional/personal balance
- Autonomy in carrying out assignments

Social Issues

Assess the following issues by degree, as above:

- Communication with co-workers
- Work-related stress
- Control over work
- Isolation
- Sense of belonging to the organization
- Responsibility for work
- Opportunity for promotion or career advancement
- Desire to look for a different job
- Expectations of co-workers
- Expectations of the telecommuter
- Quality of supervision
- Trust between management and telecommuter

Management Issues

The following factors should be included in your screening/evaluation surveys for management, supervisors, and control groups, and assessed by degree:

- Communications between management and telecommuter
- Management attitude toward telecommuting
- Employee attitude toward telecommuting
- Impact of telecommuting on the organization's competitive edge
- Time spent managing telecommuters as opposed to office employees
- Nervousness regarding telecommuter output
- Negative attitude toward non-telecommuters
- Difficulty scheduling meetings
- Objective-setting skills

Exhibit 5: Sample Equipment and Work Space Checklist

Which of the following items are required to telecommute? Which are optional?

Work Space Requirements

- ☐ Adequate electrical support
- ☐ Desk allowing room for a computer, telephone, fax, or other necessary equipment
- ☐ File space
- ☐ Chair, ergonomically designed
- ☐ Lighting adequate for reading, writing, and computer use
- ☐ Supplies (e.g., business cards, phone numbers, calculator, calendar, diskettes, letterhead, file folders, pens, pencils, pencil sharpener, scissors, stapler, tape, and sticky notes)

Hardware (type)

- | | | |
|------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> PC | <input type="checkbox"/> Modem | <input type="checkbox"/> Fax |
| <input type="checkbox"/> LAN | <input type="checkbox"/> Terminal adapter | <input type="checkbox"/> Video |

Software (packages)

- | | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Encoder | <input type="checkbox"/> Medical dictionary | <input type="checkbox"/> Registries |
| <input type="checkbox"/> E-mail | <input type="checkbox"/> Calendar | <input type="checkbox"/> LAN |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Word processor | <input type="checkbox"/> Spreadsheet | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

Communications

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Voice line | <input type="checkbox"/> Features | <input type="checkbox"/> Data line |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fax line | <input type="checkbox"/> External text services | <input type="checkbox"/> Cellular phone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other phone | <input type="checkbox"/> Paging device | <input type="checkbox"/> Video |

Mainframe issues

- ☐ Hours of access
- ☐ Security
- ☐ Interfaces to other systems (e.g., admission/discharges/transfers [ADT], laboratory, and computer-based patient record)

Off-site disaster recovery plan**Maintenance plan and agreement****Off-site security plan****On-site equipment training****General training****Exhibit 6: Sample Telecommuting Security Checklist**

Consider the following questions, as appropriate, and use them to structure your telecommuting security policy. These approaches, principles, and ideas are options to assist the organization in establishing plans for dealing with information security.

Policy and Guidelines

- Does a remote access security policy exist?
- Is the security policy frequently reviewed and revised to reflect technology changes, outmoded approaches, or new product or service offerings affecting company/customer relationships and system interaction?
- Does the remote access policy specify guidelines for the selection and implementation mechanisms that control access between authorized users and corporate computer and networks?
- Does the remote access policy conform to all existing corporate communications guidelines?
- Does the remote access policy address the physical protection of the communications medium, devices, computers, and data storage at the remote site?
- Does the security policy require the classification of the functions, applications, and data to determine the levels of security needed to protect the asset?
- Does a policy exist to obtain access to important proprietary information at remote sites?
- Does a policy exist which defines who is responsible in case of theft of hardware, software, or data at remote sites?
- Does a policy exist for reporting unauthorized activity?
- Does a policy exist for "appropriate" personal use of company equipment?
- Do remote access users have to sign a form stating they know and understand the remote access policies?
- Is there a formal, complete, and tested disaster recovery plan in place for the remote sites?

Identification and Authorization

- Do the remote access security controls require that users be identified before the requested actions are initiated?
- Does each user have a unique identifier (user ID)?
- Does the corporate site maintain and use authentication data for verifying the identity of a user?
- Can the security controls uniquely identify each remote access user, device, and port?
- Are there automatic time-out or lock-screen capabilities on the remote site equipment to control access during periods of non-use?

Access Control

- Do the remote access security controls limit the unauthorized sharing of users' access rights?
- Does the access control mechanism support the customizing of privileges for each user ID at remote sites?
- Do the remote access security controls protect audit records from unauthorized access?
- Are users provided with last log-in session information?
- Are banners displayed regarding unauthorized usage?
- Are banners displayed regarding the usage of monitoring policy?
- Are there controls to prevent the uploading of unauthorized programs (e.g., virus programs) from remote site equipment to the corporate site?
- Does the remote site have the capability to encrypt transmitted sensitive information, including authentication information?
- Are users allowed only one remote connection to the corporate network (per user ID or address)?

Auditing

- Does the remote access security mechanism record alarms and authentication violations as a default?
- Does the audit record for each recorded event identify:
 - Date and time of the event?
 - User or entity?
 - Origin of the event (e.g., network address, originating phone number)?
 - Type of event?
 - Success or failure of the event?
- Is the audit trail information retained long enough to support reviews and analyses by security personnel and to meet corporate policy?
- If dial-up access to the remote site is possible, does the audit mechanism record the details associated with each user access?
- Can the security controls uniquely identify each remote access user, device, and port?

Integrity

- Are virus-scanning capabilities required on remote sites? How often are they updated?
- Is access to public bulletin boards allowed?
- Are there capabilities to perform network and server congestion management in terms of monitoring, detection, and enforcement functions?

- Are measures in place to ensure the proper disposal of confidential data (paper, fax, digital, etc.) at remote sites?

Physical Security

- Are the remote sites in physically secure locations?
- If equipment is stolen, can the perpetrator access proprietary information?
- Is a full physical inventory of remote site equipment and user systems maintained and periodically verified?
- Are backup tapes and media available and secured on-site for remote site equipment?
- Does a policy exist addressing fire, smoke, water, and hazardous material contamination damage at a remote site?
- Is all paper data (proprietary, confidential, etc.) physically secure at the remote site?
- Is all computer data (floppies, hard drives, etc.) physically secure at the remote site?
- Is all media destruction (proprietary, confidential, etc.) at the remote site consistent with corporate security policies?
- Is there a process for return of equipment and proprietary data upon termination of employment?
- Does a policy exist for repair of equipment that contains proprietary information?
- Is there insurance for liability and personal injury at the remote site?

Security Administration

- Are organizational responsibilities for remote access security defined?
- Is there a remote access security administrator?
- Is security a part of the defined responsibilities for the personnel who monitor, maintain, and control various remote site equipment?
- Is there a process for authorizing new remote users, authorizing and updating remote user access capabilities, and deleting access when no longer needed?
- Are there periodic reviews of remote user privileges to ensure that capabilities remain commensurate with job functions?
- Do security event triggers generate alarms to provide administrator notification?
- Are security alarms properly categorized in terms of severity? Can triggers be modified by the administrator?
- Do the remote access security controls permit only authorized users (administrators) to grant access privileges to remote site equipment for new, authorized users?

- Do the remote access security controls allow network devices to be isolated when there is a compromise?
- Are there defined administrator responsibilities to isolate a compromised device?
- Do the remote access security controls include testing, detecting, and reporting communication errors (e.g., high retransmission rate)?
- Is there a way to prevent bypass of the audit and alarm mechanisms by resetting remote access devices to invoke an insecure default configuration?
- Is periodic testing for unauthorized access, denial of service, or other security weaknesses performed?
- Is there a defined practice of reviewing audit information on a periodic basis?
- Are there reporting capabilities to provide information on user profiles and access rules?
- Are there adequate controls to restrict access to and use of network troubleshooting equipment (e.g., protocol analyzer)?
- Are there adequate controls to restrict access to and the use of network management software tools?
- Is there a capability to force re-authentication after the server has been unavailable?
- Is there a capability to force sign-off and prevent sign-on during system maintenance?
- Are there means to run scheduled unattended backups of the remote site equipment?
- Are all security functions and software changes made only by an authorized administrator?
- Is there a way to ensure that only authorized, legally acquired software (e.g., applications, tools) are installed and used on remote-site equipment?
- Are backup copies of authorized software and documentation available?
- Are purchasing records and other proof of licensing requirements for software properly maintained?

Architecture and Topology

- Is network equipment in place to separate traffic according to user communities?
- Is the remote access equipment interconnected with less trusted or untrusted (e.g., Internet) networks?
- In a multiple remote-site environment, are all sites maintained at the same security level?
- Are the remote access physical topology and network maps documented, verified, and kept up-to-date?

Education/Awareness/Enforcement

- Are users aware of the signs of a virus or worm?
- Are users familiar with the use of virus scanners?
- Are users aware of the dangers of software engineering?
- Are users aware of the remote access security policies?
- Do remote access users and their managers receive security training prior to using remote access?
- Do remote access users and their managers receive annual security training?

Modem Access

- Is there a single point of entry into the network (e.g., modem pool or terminal server)?
- Are all modem phone numbers unlisted?
- Is dial-out allowed at the corporate site?
- Do modems exist on individual corporate site systems?
- Is auto-answer on dial-in access allowed at remote sites?

Exhibit 7: Focus Groups

Telecommuting focus groups are part of the evaluation process. Focus sessions should be held when a program is implemented in an organization or department that has had no previous experience with telecommuting. These sessions are an excellent way to determine the effectiveness of a program in its early stages.

A focus session should take place two to three months after implementing the telecommuting program or after the participants have telecommuted 10 times. The focus group moderator should be a neutral party or someone outside the organization or department. The purpose of the focus group is to obtain an honest snapshot of how the program is progressing.

Focus groups can be broken into two sessions. The first session is attended by telecommuters and the second by supervisors. A follow-up session can be scheduled for supervisors based on information received in the telecommuters' session. If the pilot program is large, break the telecommuters into groups of 25.

Information acquired from the focus groups should be documented and communicated to the organization. Focus group feedback can then be used to correct any problems uncovered by the sessions.

Prepared by

Donna M. Fletcher, MPA, RRA, HIM practice manager

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Pacific Bell Network Telecommuting Guide. Available at <http://www.pacbell.com/products/business/general/telecommuting/tcguide/>

Related AHIMA Practice Briefs

- Disaster Planning for Health Information (April 1996)
- E-mail Security (February 2000)
- Information Security: A Checklist for Healthcare Professionals (May 1997)
- Writing an Effective Request for Proposal (RFP) (July 1998)

Related AHIMA Position Statement

- Confidential Health Information and the Internet (January 1998)

For More Information

- The American Telecommuting Association, 1220 L St., NW, Suite 100, Washington, DC 20005; (800) ATA-4YOU; go to <http://www.knowledgetree.com/ata.html>
- International Telework Association & Council; go to <http://www.telecommute.org/>

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