

Telework / Hybrid Work Toolkit

INTRODUCTION

Why hybrid/remote work?

Telecommuting, telework, and remote work are nothing new. Former rocket scientist Jack Nilles is credited with first coining the term “telecommuting” in 1973, which he defined as **“the substitution of telecommunications and/or computers for commuting work.”** While living in Los Angeles in the 1970s, Nilles questioned the need for so many office workers to drive to the workplace where they talked on the phone or worked on the computer. This led to a nine-month research project that Nilles conducted as a researcher for the University of California. The book, [*Telecommunications-Transportation Tradeoff: Options for Tomorrow*](#), detailing the 1976 study showed significant benefits – employee productivity went up, health care costs went down, and infrastructure costs decreased.

Nilles’ early work caught the attention of government air quality and transportation agencies and led to the development of successful telecommuting initiatives across the country. States that were early adopters of telecommuting/teleworking include Arizona, California, Oregon, Washington, and the Washington Metropolitan Region (District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia). Over time, the term “telecommuting” was replaced by “teleworking,” so that the emphasis was on *work*, rather than *commuting*. The [*2006 Telework Benchmarking Study*](#), conducted by the Telework Coalition, documented the emergence of broader scale “mobility” programs where remote workers could work from anywhere they chose, not just from home.

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) has done extensive research through its [*State of the Commute Survey Report*](#) to track the number of teleworkers on a regional basis. COG’s regional telephone household survey has been conducted every three years since 2007. The survey results show that the percentage of employees teleworking increased from 19% in 2007 to 35% in 2019 (the year of the most recent survey). In addition, the 2019 COG State of the Commute Survey Report showed that 25% of employees not currently teleworking said they “would and could” telework if given the opportunity to do so. COG’s survey shows that upwards of 60% of the region’s workforce could telework one or more days per week.

Then came the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many employers and employees into work at home arrangements almost overnight. Some employers were well prepared, having embraced telework long ago, while others scrambled to prepare their workers for working outside of the office. According to the [*State of Washington Office of Financial Management*](#), the COVID-19 pandemic drove a shift to full-time remote work for approximately half of the state workforce in 2020.

Since the pandemic, the workforce mindset has shifted. According to a [*2022 survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management*](#), nearly half of workers would prefer to continue working remotely in some capacity, and employers are paying attention. Having the capability for a mobile workforce just makes good business sense going forward. Hybrid work models are increasingly becoming the norm and many employers have a combination of staff working in the office, working from home a portion of the workweek, or working 100% remotely from home.

Employer Business Case

There are many well-documented employer benefits resulting from remote work, including:

- Continuity of operations
- Recruitment and retention
- Operating cost savings
- Increased productivity
- Reduced absenteeism
- Improved employee satisfaction

These benefits will be discussed further in the [Employer Section](#) of this Telework / Hybrid Work Toolkit.

Employee Benefits

Hybrid work arrangements give employees more flexibility, resulting in the following benefits:

- Work/life balance – Saving time that would otherwise been spent commuting allows employees to add hours back to their day. This enables employees to better balance work, personal, and family responsibilities and reduces the need for time off to tend to these needs. Better work/life balance was consistently ranked high among the reasons employees want to work from home according to Global Workplace Analytics' [The Business Case for Remote Work](#).
- Reduced stress – Employees also report reduced stress, mostly from reduced risks associated with driving and commuting.
- Cost-savings – Likewise, employees who work remotely on a part-time basis can save between \$640 to \$6,400 a year due to reduced costs for transportation and parking, work clothes and dry cleaning, and meals and beverages at work according to a [report by Global Workplace Analytics](#). These costs are net of any additional energy costs and eating expenses when working from home.

Environmental/Community Benefits

Numerous studies conducted by state and regional air quality and transportation agencies over the past four decades have shown that remote work is an effective strategy for reducing commute trips, vehicle miles travelled, and vehicle emissions. According to [research conducted by Global Workplace Analytics](#), if those available to work remotely did so half the time, the nation could reduce greenhouse gases by 54 million tons (the equivalent of taking nearly 10 million cars off the road for one year).

Societal and community benefits attributed to remote work include:

- Increased community presence during the day due to more people at home in their neighborhoods.
- Reduced overall traffic congestion, making it easier for non-teleworkers and commercial vehicles to get around.
- New employment opportunities for the disabled, military families, and rural/disadvantaged populations.
- Increased volunteer opportunities for remote workers to get involved in local issues in their communities due to less time spent commuting.