



**The  
Telecommuter's  
Guide**

The  
Telecommuting  
Option  
Section I

## **Program Description**

When an employee works a portion of his or her work hours at home, it's called telecommuting. Telecommuting is not so much a commute option as it is the option not to commute. It brings the work to the worker instead of the worker traveling to his or her work.

Telecommuting can be done on a temporary or a regular basis (regular is no more than two times per week). Telecommuters communicate with the main office by telephone, email, fax, and/or computer modem.

Telecommuting is not for every job or employee. It works best for employees who can schedule work flow, and benefit from quiet or uninterrupted time. Telecommuting employees must be self-motivated, results-oriented, productive, conscientious, knowledgeable about their jobs, adaptable, and effective communicators.

Supervisors of telecommuters must be comfortable managing by deadlines and goal achievement rather than observation. Telecommuting fits best with a corporate culture that emphasizes productivity and accountability or visibility.

## **Benefits from Telecommuting**

### **Society**

- Less traffic congestion.
- Less gasoline consumption.
- Fewer vehicle emissions.
- More job opportunities for disabled people.

### **Organizations**

- Enhanced employee job performance (productivity and work quality).
- Increased ability to attract and keep valued employees.
- Improved employee morale and job satisfaction.
- Increased access to new labor markets including the disabled, part-time and semi-retired.
- Reduced office and parking space requirements.
- Less sick leave and reduces absenteeism.
- Better corporate image.
- Increased ability to meet air quality and/or transportation demand management requirements.

### **Employees**

- Improved work environment.
- Enhanced job performance (productivity and work quality).
- Improved morale and job satisfaction.
- Greater degree of responsibility.
- Greater lifestyle flexibility.
- Reduced transportation costs.

The City of Mercer Island supports telecommuting as an option available to employees who meet qualifying conditions as outlined in this guide. Telecommuting is a mutually agreed upon work alternative between the telecommuter and their supervisor. The telecommuter or supervisor may end the telecommuting arrangement at any time. The approved telecommuter must establish coverage for the on-site demands of their job. This is an arrangement made between a co-worker and/or a supervisor to handle the in-office tasks that may arise while the telecommuter is out of the office.

### **Attributes of the Successful Telecommuter**

- Has limited need for face-to-face contact with co-workers and/or customers.
- Workload demands require quiet time to complete projects.
- Can communicate directly from home to customers.
- Has access to quiet office space at home.
- Has access at home to the necessary equipment of their job.
- Is self-motivated and able to work with little supervision.
- Performs tasks that can be done from home.
- Reports to a supervisor who manages by results, not by surveillance.
- Has developed trust within his or her work group.

### **Eligibility**

All city employees are eligible to apply to telecommute if they meet the following requirements:

- You must be a regular City of Mercer Island employee who has successfully passed their probationary period, and has a documented history of job performance that exceeds your supervisor's expectations.
- Your work must be of a nature wherein face-to-face interaction is minimal or may be scheduled to permit telecommuting. Also, a portion of your workload can be performed away from the regular job site without diminishing the quality of customer service.
- You must possess the appropriate equipment (defined by the supervisor of the telecommuter) to accomplish the workload away from the job site. *Note: The City of Mercer Island will not purchase equipment for the sole purpose of telecommuting. Need for specialized material or equipment must be minimal or flexible.*
- You must establish coverage for the on-site demands of your job. This is an arrangement made between your co-worker and/or your supervisor to handle the in-office tasks that may arise while you are out of the office.
- Your Department Director must approve your telecommuting agreement.

### **Participation Requirements**

- You must meet eligibility criteria.
- You must possess all of the attributes of a successful telecommuter.
- You must submit a complete telecommuting agreement application to Human Resources.
- You must sign and abide by all participation guidelines.

### **Participation Guidelines**

- Telecommuting must appear invisible to customers.
- You must submit a work schedule to the City's Receptionist and/or all affected co-workers.
- You must forward your business line to home, the Receptionist, or voicemail; whichever is appropriate for your circumstances.
- You must check your voicemail for messages regularly to avoid any delay in serving your customers.
- You must answer your home phone with a City of Mercer Island greeting during business hours if your office phone is forwarded to your home.
- If used, your answering machine message must convey an office image.
- You must be phone accessible for a minimum of four hours on your telecommuting day unless otherwise specified by your supervisor.
- You must identify the number of hours you will work on your telecommuting day with your supervisor.
- You must receive pre-approval for any overtime or compensatory time while telecommuting.
- Your work output and customer service must remain at optimum levels.
- You will use SCAN when making long distance calls. Other long distance calls will not be reimbursed.
- Pre-approval is required for all office equipment and supply purchases for the telecommuter's use.
- If you have children at home, you must keep a log of the hours you work and the projects that you complete. You must complete an established amount of hours per day (7.5 hours for most schedules). If you are unable to work all the hours required, you must use vacation or personal leave.

Determining  
The Option To  
Telecommute  
Supervisor/Employee  
Questionnaire

Section II

## **Attributes of a Successful Telecommuter**

### ***Self-Motivated and Responsible.***

You need to be responsible so that you don't work too little, or in the case of many telecommuters, too much.

### ***Results Oriented.***

Successful telecommuters are comfortable setting priorities and deadlines. By focusing on the results of your work rather than on the process, it may be easier to adjust to telecommuting.

### ***Can Work Independently.***

Successful telecommuters are competent workers who don't need close supervision at all times.

### ***Familiar and Comfortable with Your Job.***

If you already understand and have experience with your responsibilities, you will probably have fewer questions and need less contact with the office.

### ***Knowledgeable About the City's Procedures.***

When you are off-site and problems arise, you need to know what resources are available to resolve them and how to access these resources. If you have established relationships with co-workers, you will know which co-workers to ask for assistance, feel comfortable asking, and better understand a co-worker's needs and/or concerns. If you're new to a work group or organization, you probably need to establish work, communication, and social patterns with co-workers.

### ***Successful in Current Position.***

Current job performance can be a very strong indicator for your performance as a telecommuter. If you are successful working in the office, you probably have a clear understanding of your responsibilities and have developed successful work habits.

### ***Effective Communicator***

Successful telecommuting requires effective communication. As a telecommuter, you're primarily responsible for keeping your supervisor, co-workers, support staff, and customers aware of your activities and schedule.

### ***Adaptable***

If you're capable of working with changing routines and environments, you will adapt better to telecommuting. If you prefer some distractions or personal interaction during the day, you may not adapt well to telecommuting from an empty home.

### ***Committed to Telecommuting.***

Ensuring that telecommuting succeeds requires you to plan ahead and establish effective communication and work flow patterns.

### **Completing and Comparing Questionnaire Responses**

The following questionnaire will allow you and your supervisor to identify any areas of concern, discuss these areas, brainstorm approaches and compromises. Ultimately, the questionnaire will help to determine your success as a telecommuter.

Once you have filled out the employee section of the questionnaire pass it on to your supervisor to complete the supervisor section. Schedule a time to discuss the responses to each of the questions.

If you and your supervisor agree with most of each other's questionnaire responses and find no serious barriers, then you should feel confident committing to telecommuting and following the next step of the application process.

### **Preparing a Telecommuting Agreement**

After you and your supervisor have determined that you will make a good telecommuting candidate, you will have to present your telecommuting application to your Department Director (if other than your supervisor) for final approval. The City of Mercer Island requires you to complete the following:

- The Telecommuter Agreement
- The Telecommuter Application/Schedule
- The Equipment Check-Out Form

Once the above forms have been processed, you should review Section IV of the telecommuter's guide for important information.

## The Telecommuter Determination Questionnaire

### *Employee's Section*

1. I would like to telecommute:  
 one day per month  
 two days per month  
 one day per week  
 two days per week  
 other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
2. My telecommuting will not interfere with the scheduling of face-to-face meetings:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
3. I can easily organize my work so that I don't need specialized office equipment, files, or other resources on my scheduled telecommuting days:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
4. My co-workers and customers call me with questions or requests that I can respond to only while I'm at the central office:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
5. Someone at the office could resolve, or be trained to resolve, most issues that come up while I'm telecommuting:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
6. My work group has discussed the potential impacts of telecommuting and supports the telecommuting schedule that I have applied for:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
7. I would feel isolated on telecommuting days without the social interaction at the office:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
8. I fully understand the procedures and policies of my organization:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
9. I am comfortable discussing problems with co-workers and my supervisor:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
10. I would be comfortable working at home:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
11. My family is supportive of my working at home:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
12. If others will be home, I am concerned about the potential distractions while I am working:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
13. I have a suitable room, or part of a room, for a home office:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly

## The Telecommuter Determination Questionnaire

### *Supervisor's Section*

1. I support the telecommuting option for:  
 one day per month  
 two days per month  
 one day per week  
 two days per week  
 other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
2. I agree that telecommuting will not interfere with this employee's scheduling of face-to-face meetings:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
3. The need for specialized equipment, etc., will not hinder this employee's ability to telecommute:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
4. This employee's co-workers and customers need face-to-face contact daily:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
5. A co-worker will be available to resolve issues at the office while this employee telecommutes:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
6. Our work group is supportive of this employee working in a telecommuting arrangement:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
7. This employee needs the social interaction at the office:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
8. This employee has a thorough understanding of the procedures and policies of our organization:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
9. This employee has the ability to discuss problems or issues with co-workers or supervisors:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
10. I am comfortable with this employee working from home:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
12. I have discussed any issues regarding this employee's family being home during telecommuting hours and feel confident that family will not interfere with telecommuting:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly
12. I manage by evaluating results rather than activity:  
 strongly agree  
 agree somewhat  
 disagree somewhat  
 disagree strongly

**The Telecommuter Determination Questionnaire, continued**

***Employee's Section***

I have the following equipment to work at home on my telecommuting days:

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I need the following equipment to work at home on my telecommuting days:

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I have the following specific concerns about telecommuting that I want to discuss with my supervisor and/or my co-workers:

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***Supervisor's Section***

I have the following specific concerns about telecommuting that I want to discuss with the telecommuting employee:

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The following steps must be taken in order for this employee to telecommute:

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The  
Telecommuting  
Application  
And  
Forms  
Section III

**Telecommuter Application and Schedule**

*(Copy this page for Human Resources once approved)*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

Dept \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Extension \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address \_\_\_\_\_

Approximate Commuting Time – One Way \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ (minutes)

Supervisor's Name \_\_\_\_\_

**TELECOMMUTING SCHEDULE:**        \_\_\_\_\_ **APPROVED**        \_\_\_\_\_ **REVISED**

In Office:

Days – M\_\_\_\_(hrs) - T\_\_\_\_(hrs) - W\_\_\_\_(hrs) - TH\_\_\_\_(hrs) - F\_\_\_\_(hrs)

At Home:

Days – M\_\_\_\_(hrs) - T\_\_\_\_(hrs) - W\_\_\_\_(hrs) - TH\_\_\_\_(hrs) - F\_\_\_\_(hrs)

CORE HOURS \_\_\_\_\_

START DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Describe the types of work to be done while telecommuting: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**The following signatures are required for approval:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Employee Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Department Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Human Resources

**The Telecommuter Agreement**

*(Copy this section for Human Resources once approved)*

1. I have read the City of Mercer Island's Telecommuting Policy and my supervisor and I agree that I have met all eligibility criteria and requirements (see exceptions and additions).
2. I agree to abide by all of the participation guidelines outlined in the telecommuting policy document.
3. I agree to communicate with my supervisor about progress on assignments worked on while telecommuting.
4. I agree to communicate with my supervisor and co-workers about any problems that I may experience while telecommuting.
5. I agree to structure my time to allow schedule flexibility and to ensure my attendance at required meeting and City events as designated by my supervisor.
6. I agree to communicate any schedule changes to my supervisor, co-workers, and the Receptionist.
7. I understand and accept the special responsibility I have as a telecommuter to facilitate communication with my customers and co-workers if inconvenienced by my telecommuting. I further agree to make a special effort to stay current on departmental events that affect my work that occur on my telecommuting days.
8. I understand that my supervisor or I may suspend my telecommuting arrangement at any time pending a review based on the participation guidelines that may result in termination of the telecommuting arrangement.
9. I agree to return any City-owned equipment or supplies used for telecommuting purposes immediately upon termination of the telecommuting agreement. I understand that I will be financially responsible for any equipment or supplies that, for any reason, does not get returned to the City of Mercer Island.
10. Other requirements as determined by the Director, supervisor and/or employee:

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11. Exceptions to the agreement as determined by the Director, supervisor, and/or employee:

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Employee Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Department Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Human Resources

**Equipment Check-Out Form**

*(Copy this page for Human Resources once approved.)*

Please complete this form for any equipment, computers, software, and/or supplies belonging to the City of Mercer Island that you have checked out for telecommuting purposes.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Department \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address

\_\_\_\_\_

Stationary Equipment (list)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Mobile Equipment (list)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The City of Mercer Island will be responsible for the repair and maintenance of any provided equipment. Surge protectors must be used with any City-owned computer equipment made available to the telecommuter.

The telecommuter will be responsible for:

Any intentional damage to City-owned equipment;

Damage resulting from gross negligence by the telecommuter or any member of the telecommuter's family;

Damage resulting from a power surge if no surge protector is used.

Damage or theft of City-owned equipment that occurs outside the employee's control will be covered by the City's insurance policy. The City of Mercer Island is not responsible for damage or loss to employee-owned equipment.

I have read and understand the personal liability of using City-owned equipment for telecommuting purposes and agree to abide by the conditions as written above and related information in the Telecommuter Agreement.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Employee Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor Signature

**Some  
Important  
Information  
For The  
Approved  
Telecommuter  
Section IV**

## **Telecommuting from Your Home**

### ***Establishing New Household Pattern***

Other household members may have to change patterns of activities to work around your schedule. You'll have to respect each other's need for space and privacy. Discussing telecommuting and its potential impacts with your family members is a good first step if you're considering working out of the home.

### ***Having Your Own Room***

Telecommuting from home works best when you have a physical separation between your home office and home environment. Many people choose to devote a room of the house for this purpose. Many people choose to devote a room of the house for this purpose. The files, books, and materials can remain in the home office without being in the way or being disturbed. Having a separate room also allows you to shut the door for privacy during work hours, thus reducing visual and audible distractions. From the perspective of other family members, a separate office keeps the rest of the house free of work influence and places fewer constraints on using the house during the day.

### ***Sharing a Room***

If you don't have space to devote an entire room to a home office, you may try devoting a section of a room. The workspace usually includes a work surface, space for storage of supplies and files, telephone access, and possibly space for computer equipment. If you're alone in the house during working hours, then using part of a room should present few disadvantages.

Working in part of a room while other people are in the house requires cooperation between you and other household members. A part of a room that is out of the way of traffic flow and that is visually screened works the best. Don't plan on using the kitchen table or other vital home areas. You should contain your work materials within your work area so that your home doesn't become overrun with business.

### ***Keeping Your Home Office Space Safe***

The employee's home workspace will be considered an extension of the City's work space and therefore, the City's liability for job-related accidents will continue to exist during the understood and approved telecommuting schedule.

The telecommuter should maintain the home workspace in a clean, professional, and safe condition at the alternate work location.

As liability will extend to accidents which may occur in the alternate work location, the City retains the right to make on-site inspections of this work area, at a mutually agreed upon time, to ensure that safe working conditions exist.

## **Changing Your Work Habits to Accommodate Telecommuting**

### ***Organizing Your Activities***

Many telecommuters find the way they organize their work activities evolves as they settle into a telecommuting routine. Some telecommuters divide their days by activity type, saving certain activities for particular days. For instance, telecommuters whose jobs include using drafting boards may do all their drafting on days they are in the office. This same individual may find that writing, analysis, and research activities are ideally suited to the quieter, less distracting environments of the office. For other telecommuters, work activities are accomplished in the same manner no matter where they're located. For example, every day might include some telephoning, some letter writing, and some budget work.

You should not ask co-workers to do your work or cover for you unless you, in turn, help them with their workload. If telecommuting requires some switching of job duties, have all affected parties participate in designing the new job duties.

### ***Using Your Free Time***

By avoiding a long-distance commute, many home-based telecommuters report a gain of up to 3 hours in their day for leisure or home oriented activities. Telecommuters may spend time during the day (that might otherwise be spent commuting) gardening, exercising, walking the dog, working on home projects, or cooking, etc.

## **Ensuring Smooth Communication**

When telecommuting is introduced, it's common for work groups to compensate for the person's absence by increasing the frequency of communication. This increase usually levels off after new routines and patterns are established. Eventually work group members may start saving their ideas and messages and contacting the telecommuter on a single occasion instead of multiple times throughout the same day or week. You may look forward to fewer interruptions, but also make sure you aren't interrupting your co-workers too often with your needs. Frequent calls to in-office co-workers and support staff for telephone numbers or other information will quickly wear out your welcome.

## **Who Needs to Know When You're Telecommuting?**

- Supervisor
- Receptionist
- Co-workers

## **What Information Do These People Need To Know**

- Date or dates of telecommuting.
- Time available at home for calls.
- If all or some calls will be forwarded to the alternate site.
- How the telecommuter will receive calls.
  - Same as in the office.
  - Emergency calls only.
  - Emergency calls only in the morning; all calls in the afternoon.
- When or if the telecommuter will be calling in.
- Home telephone number.
- Any information that may be helpful for the co-worker to cover things at the office.

## **Keeping in Touch**

- Provide a schedule of when you can be reached at home.
- Retrieve messages.
- Have all calls forwarded to you, the Receptionist, or your voicemail.
- Use an answering machine or residential voicemail.

## **Communication Hints**

### ***Call a Meeting with Your Work Group before Telecommuting Begins.***

Include the supervisor, co-workers, and support staff. Describe your communication and work strategies for telecommuting. People will have a chance to raise concerns, and you can emphasize that it's okay to call you at your alternate work site.

### ***Over-Communicate at First.***

When telecommuting begins, it's better to error by communicating too often than to have others perceive that you've dropped out of sight. This is usually a temporary need until new communication routines replace the old.

### ***Put Communications in Writing.***

By delivering written reminders or written memos you are creating a more foolproof, professional communication system, thus making less work for others and ensuring smoother telecommuting.

### ***Plan Ahead When Setting Meetings.***

Whenever possible, offer times and dates for meetings to discuss issues surrounding your telecommuting arrangement.

### ***Cover Your Bases.***

If you're the only one who knows particular information or who can repair certain equipment, your absence could cause problems in your office. Avoid these potential problems by training another individual in key areas and familiarizing your co-workers with your filing system.

Telephone  
And  
Voicemail  
Instructions  
For The  
Telecommuter  
Section V

### **Transferring the Office Phone to Home**

Before leaving your office the day before you plan to telecommute, follow these steps:

1. Pick up the telephone receiver
2. Listen for dial tone
3. Depress \* 2
4. Dial the number 7, then dial your home phone number
5. Listen for confirmation tone
6. Hang up the receiver

### **Transferring the Office Phone to Voicemail**

Before leaving your office the day before you plan to telecommute, follow these steps:

1. Pick up the telephone receiver
2. Listen for dial tone
3. Depress \* 2
4. Dial the number 3 2 3
5. Listen for confirmation tone
6. Hang up the receiver

### **Canceling Your Call Forwarding**

Upon returning to your office after your telecommuting day, follow these steps:

1. Pick up the telephone receiver
2. Listen for the dial tone
3. Depress # 2
4. Listen for confirmation tone
5. Hang up the receiver

### **Using Voicemail from Your Home**

The City's voicemail system is accessible from any touch tone telephone anywhere in the United States.

1. To access the voicemail system and your own mailbox, simply dial 206-236-5323.

2. Upon hearing the recorded announcement, depress the # key on your phone.
3. The voicemail system will prompt you to enter your mailbox number, followed by a prompt to enter your password.
4. At this point, you are in your own mailbox and the system can be used identically to the way that you use it when you are in the office.

### **Making Long Distance Phone Calls From Home**

The City will not reimburse any long distance charges made on the telecommuter's home phone unless prior arrangements are made with a supervisor. If you find that it is necessary to make long distance calls while you are telecommuting, you may request a SCAN Plus Card from the Finance Department. This card will be used for the sole purpose of making long distance phone calls on your telecommuting days.

If your telecommuting arrangement ends, you must turn in your calling card immediately to Human Resources or Finance.

### **Recording Your Telecommuting Hours**

When you are filling out your timesheet, simply write the letter 'T' next to the number of hours worked for the days in which you telecommute. Your department timekeeper will be made aware of this code on your timesheet.