Remote Work Policy

Policy Approval Authority: President
Responsible Division: University Administrative Services
Responsible Office: Human Resource Services
Responsible Officer (title only): Chief Human Resource Officer
Contact Person: Bill Hodson

Purpose/Guiding Principles

Remote work is a voluntary work arrangement that enables an employee to work off-site for all or part of the workweek on a regular basis. NIU has a Remote Work Policy because the university recognizes that, where feasible and appropriate, offering the option to work off-site can benefit individual employees and the university. Employees who work remotely benefit in a variety of ways including reduced travel time, commuting costs and parking expenses. Successful remote work arrangements benefit the university by increasing employee morale and productivity, fostering employee commitment and retention, attracting quality job candidates, and providing opportunities to improve our office environments.

NIU acknowledges that remote work may be an option for employees in positions where their role does not require a consistent, on-campus presence critical to maintain the highest possible quality of job function and/or campus service. NIU has profound respect for those who are not able to work remotely/on campus and encourages dialogue between supervisors and employees to identify other possibilities to promote flexibility and opportunities to support employee morale.

NIU is committed to balancing the opportunity for employees to work off-site for all or part of the work week with the need to maintain a vibrant and thriving university community to support the success of our students, faculty and staff. Remote work arrangements should build off our established mission, vision and values, and encourage meaningful dialogue between supervisors and employees to identify ways to enhance efficiencies, productivity and work/life balance.

Accordingly, the following guiding principles should be considered when developing, implementing and assessing remote work arrangements:

- Prioritize student success and a high-quality student experience by ensuring that student needs are addressed, and student services are maintained or enhanced.
- Promote flexibility to enhance employee health/well-being and work-life balance.
- Empower the recruitment and retention of a diverse, talented and engaged workforce.
- Sustain or strengthen operational effectiveness, efficiency and productivity across the university.
- Provide excellent customer service and be responsive to and engage consistently with external stakeholders, partners, alumni, donors and clients.
• Ensure fairness and equity, and encourage inclusiveness and belonging among members of the university community.

Policy Narrative

Overview of Remote Work Arrangements for NIU Employees
Remote work is a voluntary work arrangement that enables an employee to work at home or an alternative location for all or part of the regular workweek. Generally, remote working arrangements are developed with the understanding that there may be instances when a remote working employee will need to come to campus for specific events or activities. In the right circumstances, remote work can increase flexibility and work-life balance while potentially improving productivity. However, remote work is not appropriate for all employees or positions.

Remote work is not a university-wide program available to all employees, and it does not change the standard policies, terms and conditions of employment with NIU or the obligation to comply with federal, state and municipal laws that apply to employees at NIU. Remote work is separate from processes such as requesting sick leave, FMLA or ADA accommodations. HRS is available to help NIU employees understand and navigate options based on their individual circumstances.

NIU considers remote work to be a viable alternative to working on campus in cases where the circumstances and conditions can support success. Consideration should be given to job responsibilities and performance, physical space, equipment and technology needs, communications, as well as impacts to students, employees in and outside the department, and overarching university interests. Employees are expected to be responsive and provide high quality support to the campus and community whether in-person or remote. To this end, assessment tools are available to help employees and the supervisors explore and develop remote work arrangements.

Faculty members have routinely operated with the latitude to carry on certain aspects of their work away from the physical campus. The need for this flexibility is understood across college and academic departments, and there are shared expectations regarding faculty productivity. When making decisions about remote work, chairs and faculty members are encouraged to balance their opportunities to work productively off-site with the need to maintain a vibrant and thriving university community to support the success of our students in accordance with the guiding principles presented above. However, this policy does not apply to faculty.

Prior to the pandemic, the number of NIU staff working remotely was relatively small. As a result, the university community had limited experience developing and evaluating remote working arrangements for staff. The following section of this policy is designed to help supervisors and staff design and document mutual expectations.

Documentation of Mutual Expectations and Responsibilities for NIU Staff
A successful, long-term remote work arrangement requires a high degree of mutual trust and ongoing communication to ensure optimal work productivity and performance. The best way to achieve mutual awareness and understanding is through written documentation, signed by both the employee and supervisor prior to the start of the arrangement. Once a written agreement is developed and implemented, it should be jointly reviewed and discussed by the supervisor and employee one to two times per year to assess success and determine if revisions are necessary. Formal written agreement, while appropriate for ongoing remote work arrangements, may not be necessary to cover emergency or last-minute needs to make a short-term change. Emergency and last-minute changes are infrequent and easily managed on a case-by-case basis through employee and supervisor communication.

NIU has posted example agreements to help supervisors and staff members develop mutually beneficial remote working arrangements. In general, remote working agreements should include specific expectations regarding performance of duties (availability by phone and/or Teams Voice, hours worked, and outcomes to be evaluated); availability on campus and in person; and use of university-owned equipment off-site. The agreement may also
reference this university policy for the general discussion of those elements, as well as security, safety and accommodations.

It should be noted that the remote work agreement, this policy, and associated resources and guidelines cannot provide for every contingency that may arise, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach for all campus units. Supervisors and employees entering a remote work arrangement based upon this policy should endeavor to work together to be fair and flexible and resolve any unique situation that may exist. Employees should be aware of the impact of their remote work status on fellow employees and not assume that colleagues working on campus will automatically take care of tasks that must be taken care of in person. The immediate supervisor is responsible for the decision to implement or discontinue any remote work arrangement. However, when differences of opinion or interpretation occur between and employee and their immediate supervisor, next-level supervision will be called upon to review and make a final determination.

Procedural History of the Policy

This policy supersedes Work at Home Policy that was adopted on 10/7/21

The current policy was informed by the experience of NIU employees working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as by the efforts of the Remote Working Task Group empowered by President Lisa Freeman in April 2021 to gather information, engage in discussions and make recommendations for how best to implement remote working at NIU moving forward. The task group was made up of about 55 employees representing diverse roles across campus, organized into six subgroups: Policy; Technology; Student Experience; Faculty Experience; Models and Effective Practices; and Employee Engagement, Support and Work-life Balance. The full report is available on President Freeman’s website. NIU Chief Human Resources Officer, in collaboration with other members of the university community, used the task group report to update this policy effective 9/29/22.