



Flexible Workplace Arrangement Policy

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1. **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance and clarity around Buncombe County's Flexible Workplace Program, also known as telework. This policy defines the various types of flexible workplace arrangements and the necessary structural elements for successful operation of the program. Implemented and used appropriately, a flexible workplace program can increase productivity and effectiveness of staff, promote efficient use of County resources, reduce negative environmental impacts, and assist Buncombe County in retaining qualified employees.

2. **Applicability**

This policy applies to all Buncombe County departments and employees unless there is a conflict with GS 153A-103 related to hiring, discharging, and supervising employees. Such exclusion is noted at the end of this policy. Otherwise, departments may adopt and enforce policies that are more restrictive than County Policy.

3. **Policy**

An approved flexible workplace arrangement allows employees to work at an approved off-site location for some or all of their work week.

- 3.1. **Eligibility:** A Flexible Workplace Arrangement (FWA) is a type of work arrangement that is assigned to specific and appropriate classifications where a flexible workplace is both practical and beneficial. Due to the nature of services provided by Buncombe County, not all classifications and positions are eligible for an FWA. Departments with operations that are impacted by an employee's physical location are likely not suitable. Likewise, positions that are primarily location-dependent, or require access to resources that are not accessible from an off-site location are likely not suitable for this program. Additional criteria and guidance for determining eligibility at the department, classification, and position level is provided in the procedures document. Training is a crucial element of a successful flexible work arrangement and therefore mandatory for all eligible employees that enter into an FWA as well as for their immediate supervisor. Additionally, new employee orientation will require on-site attendance by all employees regardless of their work location.

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Departments that designate a position as eligible for FWA should ensure that such arrangements meet the following criteria:

- Departmental operations and service delivery are improved or maintained
- Staff availability to internal and external customers is improved or maintained
- Employee productivity is improved or maintained
- Position costs are neutral (i.e. no additional positions needed and no increase in overtime or comp time)
- Other County departments, services, or staff are not negatively impacted
- Recruitment and retention of qualified, productive, and engaged staff is enhanced

3.2. Flexible Workplace Arrangement Types: There are three types of FWA available: Full-time, Part-time/Hybrid, and Mobile; FWA type will be assigned by the Department Director based on position eligibility. Occasional off-site work is not covered under this policy and should be discussed and approved by an employee's supervisor.

3.2.1. Full-time: An employee will spend 100% of their time working away from the County worksite (at an approved remote workspace) on established days, as agreed upon by the Department Director. A flex space may be available in a County facility.

3.2.2. Part-time/Hybrid: An employee will spend less than 100% of their time working away from the County worksite (at an approved remote workspace) on established days, as agreed upon by the Department Director. A flex space will be provided in a County facility.

3.2.3. Mobile Work: This arrangement provides flexibility of work locations for employees whose responsibilities require them to be away from the office for much or all of the regular workday due to community interaction, working "in the field," home visits, or other job requirements outside of a county worksite location. A mobile worker will be assigned to a regular county worksite location but will likely not be assigned a permanent workspace. A flex space will be provided when reporting to the regularly assigned county worksite location.

An employee in a position approved for FWA may be required to attend on-site, in-person meetings, functions, trainings, and/or appointments as requested or required to meet the business needs of Buncombe County. The employee may be required to report to work at a County worksite based on departmental business need and position requirements at the Department Director's discretion.

3.3. Terms of Employment: An employee that is approved for Buncombe County's FWA must comply with the terms and conditions of employment as set forth in Buncombe County's Personnel Ordinance and all other relevant policies. Employee work hours, overtime, compensation and leave will continue to conform to existing County policies and procedures and should not be altered due to a flexible workplace arrangement. Work hours outside of the county normal business hours is at the discretion of the department director and based on the function of the position. Departments are encouraged to clearly establish specific days of the week and hours when employees are expected to work on-site versus at an approved remote workspace and document in a flexible workplace agreement between the employee and the organization.

When on-site or in-person meetings require the employee's physical presence, the department and employee should make every attempt to schedule on-site work days to coincide with on-site meetings as much as possible to minimize disruption to the workday. FWA employees may not

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charge hours or mileage for travel between their remote workspace and County worksite. Employees traveling for business will be reimbursed for mileage consistent with existing County travel policies.

- 3.4. **Performance:** Performance management techniques practiced by a supervisor will support the transition to a flexible workplace environment. Performance standards for off-site employees are the same as performance standards for on-site employees. Supervisor expectations of an off-site employee's performance should be clearly addressed and understood in advance of off-site work and documented in an agreement between the employee and the organization. As with on-site employees, off-site employees are accountable for their results. Other factors for supervisors to keep in mind include the following:
- Remain equitable in assigning work and acknowledging performance
 - Avoid distributing work based on "availability" as measured by employee presence in the office
 - Avoid the pitfall of assuming that employees who are present are actually accomplishing more work than employees who are not on-site
 - Ensure inclusive practices are in place to equally engage on-site and off-site employees

- 3.5. **County Closure and Unscheduled Leave:** Procedures for requesting leave are the same for all County employees. If an employee working within a flexible workplace arrangement is unable to completely perform their expected duties during the days and times established with their supervisor, they are expected to notify their supervisor immediately and use leave to cover hours not worked.

If County offices are delayed or closed due to inclement weather, holiday or any other reason, employees should adhere to relevant Buncombe County policies or other standards (e.g., Inclement Weather policy).

- 3.6. **Managing Distractions:** FWA participating employees are considered to be in an official duty status during their designated work schedule and must be careful to keep interruptions to a minimum to avoid disruptions in accomplishing their work. Employees should not engage in activities while teleworking that would not be permitted at a regular County worksite such as child, elder or other dependent care. Teleworking employees should take care of personal business during unpaid lunch periods or by using approved leave time.

3.7. **Workspace:**

- 3.7.1. **Remote Workspace:** Eligible employees are approved to work at a remote location on the days and hours established with their Department Director. Any employee entering into a flexible workplace arrangement after the adoption of this policy will be required to be in an approved remote location no further than a 2-hour drive from the employees assigned county facility location. Employees must maintain a safe, productive and functional workspace that is free from hazards and supports their flexible work arrangement. If in-person customer interactions are necessary, employees are expected to make accommodations to meet at an approved location determined by their supervisor and based on job duties. A remote workspace should have an internet connection that ensures the employee can reliably perform work and remain available and responsive during scheduled work hours. Buncombe County is not responsible for the costs or maintenance related to an eligible employee's remote workspace and connectivity. With 24-hour advance notice, a

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County representative may make on-site visits to the employee's remote workplace location as deemed necessary. If an employee needs a reasonable accommodation they should contact Human Resources.

3.7.2. County Facility Workspace: Employees engaged in a part-time flexible workplace arrangement have agreed to working at an approved remote location for some or most of their work week. Flex Space at a County workplace location will be made available to employees according to their flexible workplace arrangement type. Employees in this arrangement will not be assigned to a specific office or workspace with the exception of a Department Director.

3.8. **Communication:** The supervisor and remote employee should establish a plan that details the required frequency and types of communication with internal and external customers. This should include expectations related to: work schedules and locations, voicemail messages, meeting attendance, video calls, and telephone contact. Supervisors and Managers should be available to engage in regular, predictable, and supportive communication with their team regardless of the employee's location. Likewise, employees are expected to be available and responsive during designated work hours.

3.9. **Supplies, Technology, and Equipment:** Basic supplies and standard operating equipment needed to perform job duties will be provided for all County employees. It is the responsibility of the Department Director (or designee) in consultation with Information Technology and Budget to determine the necessary equipment and software needed to perform the job duties of a position. The purchase of new equipment or supplies is contingent upon the department's available budget and should be consistent with equipment and supplies offered to similar positions and other employees regardless of location. Employees working off-site should coordinate the acquisition of necessary supplies on the days that they are scheduled to work on-site and communicate supply needs to their Department Director (or designee). It is the expectation that employees working in a flexible workplace arrangement will have consistent access to a reliable internet connection that is sufficient for work-related duties. Employees that perform their duties within a flexible workplace arrangement are responsible for expenses incurred related to internet, utilities, and any other additional costs that fall outside of standard provisions provided to all County employees.

3.9.1. Technology: Buncombe County will provide the necessary technology for all County employees as determined by their required job duties. Employees designated as one of the flexible workplace arrangement types listed in section 3.2 will be provided with one (1) setup to include a docking station, two (2) monitors, and necessary peripherals. Employees in a flexible workplace arrangement and without an individually-dedicated office space, may request that their department be provided with additional on-site setups based on at least a 3:1 ratio. A ratio of less than 3:1 must be approved by the County Manager's office. Only County authorized equipment and software should be used for County business. Employees working off-site will be responsible for the transportation and installation of County-owned equipment, as well as scheduling service or repairs at a Buncombe County location as needed. Buncombe County IT will perform virtual support to Remote Workspaces unless on-site support is required as determined by IT.

3.9.2. Equipment: If an employee ends their employment with Buncombe County, they are required to return all County-owned technology, equipment, and supplies within 3 business

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days of their last working day. Failure to return equipment will result in action including deducting the cost of the equipment from the employee's last paycheck in accordance with N.C. Gen. Stat. 95-25.8, and the County reserves the right to take action through any legal means for recovery of or compensation for such items.

- 3.10. **Confidentiality:** Security of confidential information concerning the property, government, or affairs of the County is imperative to ensuring efficient operations. The privacy and security of certain confidential and sensitive information is also mandated by State and Federal laws. Employees in applicable programs and/or positions are required to maintain compliance with those laws and program requirements while working in a flexible workplace arrangement. Like all County employees, they are also expected to adhere to all Countywide and Departmental policies and procedures regarding information security and confidentiality and to report any suspected unauthorized disclosure or loss of information immediately. Employees must take responsibility to ensure security of all County data, equipment, and information in both electronic and paper form that is accessed as part of their job duties to minimize risk of improper disclosure or data breach.
- 3.11. **Revocation:** The Department Director has the authority to revoke a flexible workplace arrangement. If the flexible workplace arrangement is cancelled, the employee will be required to report to work as designated by the Department Director.
4. **Policy Non-Compliance**

Employees willfully violating the terms and conditions of this policy may be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.
5. **Audit**

All policies for Buncombe County may be subject to audit or review as outlined in the [Internal Auditor's Statement](#).
6. **Definitions**
 - 6.1. **Classification** –A class or group of job classes having similar duties and responsibilities requiring similar qualifications, which can be properly designated by one title indicative of the nature of work performed, and which carry the same salary range.
 - 6.2. **County Worksite** – The employee's assigned place of work at a County location, also referred to as "on-site".
 - 6.3. **Flex space** – This is a shared work space that is shared with other flexible work employees at a County facility and may vary depending on the nature of work performed and the number of staff sharing the space.
 - 6.4. **Flexible Workplace Arrangement** –An arrangement that allows an employee to work at a site other than a County office or other County location upon approval by the Department Director.
 - 6.5. **Position** – Seat or post occupied by one employee in a staffing assignment.
 - 6.6. **Telework** – A work flexibility arrangement under which an employee performs the duties and responsibilities of their position from an approved worksite other than the location from which the employee would otherwise work.
7. **Approval and Revision History**

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Policy Origination Date:	July 1, 2021
Requires Board Approval:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Board Approval Date:	Click for Date
Policy Exclusions:	Sheriff's Office
Revision History Dates:	7/6/2022
Revision History Changes:	Edited to expand technology equipment standards

8. Background

A flexible workplace arrangement is an option that strengthens Buncombe County's commitment to its vision and values. By offering a flexible workplace environment, Buncombe County is committed to alignment with its compensation philosophy by supporting a healthy work-life balance and providing opportunities in an innovative environment. This policy also supports the goals within the County's Strategic Plan focused on Operational Excellence and Resources.

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