HR Guidance for COVID-19 Telework and Flexible Schedules

As of March 13, 2020, All content is subject to change

A memo was issued to presidents on March 12, 2020 in response to the Governor’s State Workforce Readiness for COVID-19 to address effective means to reduce the number of employees on-site at any one time. This document provides additional direction as it relates to policy interpretation and implementation of the Governor’s goal.

Your institution’s readiness plan will impact your implementation strategy for telework options. Please note that USG campuses are not closed. State officials will continue to assess the current situation regarding coronavirus (COVID-19) in Georgia.

Please work with your campus leadership to implement the following practices as appropriate for particular positions. Policy reference to the individual strategies has been provided as well as applicable policy interpretations or exception for use during this time.

- **Telework** - Telework options should be allowed for employees who can conduct their job duties remotely without interruption.
  - USG Policy Reference: [https://www.usg.edu/hr/manual/teleworking_flextime_policy](https://www.usg.edu/hr/manual/teleworking_flextime_policy)
  - Institutions may waive the requirement to complete a telework agreement, and the direct manager may approve the arrangement via email or alternative form.
  - Managers are encouraged to utilize this option where feasible.

- **Flexible Schedule** – Supervisors should implement schedules that will reduce the number of employees to the minimal level required on-site at any given time to sustain service, safety, and compliance.
  - USG Policy Reference: [https://www.usg.edu/hr/manual/teleworking_flextime_policy](https://www.usg.edu/hr/manual/teleworking_flextime_policy)
  - Shift times for employees who will need to be on campus should be amended to limit the individuals on-site in a particular location at any given time. Alternative schedules may include adjusting start and end times, workdays, or location.

- **Virtual Meetings/Gatherings** – Transition required in-person meetings to an electronic format or reschedule for a later date in time.

- **Suspend non-essential travel** – This includes travel to conferences (particularly those held out-of-state), training, site visits, and any non-essential activities.
  - All non-essential travel is suspended, and managers have the authority to rescind previously approved travel. It is recommended that campuses establish a travel approval structure at the senior leadership level.
  - Employees should explore all options to obtain refunds or credits for cancelled or rescheduled conferences and business meetings. Employees will be reimbursed for expenses that cannot be refunded due to COVID-19 assuming the travel was properly authorized consistent with travel regulations.
Leave Guidance

In addition to use of telework and flexible schedules, institutions shall utilize all available leave options as explained below.

- **All available leave will be allowed for COVID-19 illness or to minimize exposure for those that are high-risk as defined by DPH and CDC and unable to telework.**
  - USG Policy Reference:
    - [https://www.usg.edu/hr/manual/teleworking_flextime_policy](https://www.usg.edu/hr/manual/teleworking_flextime_policy)
  - Institutions should follow the established cascading rules for leave.

- **At the point that all accumulated leave has been exhausted, employees have access to the institutional shared sick leave pool. If the institutions pool becomes depleted, special enrollment periods may be initiated to accept additional program participants and leave donations.**
  - USG Policy Reference: [https://www.usg.edu/hr/manual/teleworking_flextime_policy](https://www.usg.edu/hr/manual/teleworking_flextime_policy)
  - Institutions may open a special enrollment for COVID-19 to allow employees to contribute the minimum eight (8) hours or greater to participate.
  - The sick leave pool may be used for individuals who have a serious health condition and those who are subject to high-risk of contracting COVID-19 as defined by DPH and CDC and unable to telework.

- **Employees who exhaust their paid leave options will be able to request “authorized leave without pay” in order to take care of themselves and our community without negatively impacting their continued participation in their USG insurance plan. FMLA will apply to eligible employees who contract COVID-19 or are caring for a qualified family member that has contracted COVID-19.**
  - USG Policy Reference: [https://www.usg.edu/hr/manual/sick_leave_without_pay](https://www.usg.edu/hr/manual/sick_leave_without_pay)
  - Employees will be required to pay their established premiums. Failure to pay will result in loss of coverage.
  - Members of the ERS retirement plan may request to reinstate forfeited leave for COVID-19 related absences.

- **Finally, please ensure that your employees know that it is imperative that they stay home if they or a member of their household is ill.**

Guidance for Students

- **Federal Work Study (FWS)**
  - FWS students may continue to be paid if their specific office is closed or they unable to perform their duties in accordance with DOE guidance.
  - “Federal law includes a provision allowing an institution to make FWS payments under certain limited circumstances to disaster-affected students who are unable to continue working. Given the unique nature of this situation, it is unlikely that an entire region would be declared a Federal disaster area, yet to students enrolled at a campus that must
close temporarily, the loss of this important form of financial aid can be devastating. The impact may be magnified if the institution accommodates students by providing alternative instructional opportunities and the student is required to continue paying tuition, but the student loses FWS as an important part of their financial aid award. For students enrolled and performing FWS at a campus that must close due to COVID-19, or for a FWS student who is employed by an employer that closes as a result of COVID-19, the institution may continue paying the student Federal work-study wages during that closure if it occurred after the beginning of the term, the institution is continuing to pay its other employees (including faculty and staff), and the institution continues to meet its institutional wage share requirement. Students who were prevented from beginning a term at the institution as a result of a COVID-19-related disruption would not be eligible for Federal Student Aid for that term, and therefore could not be paid FWS wages for hours they did not work. Graduate students who are paid FWS wages on salary may continue to be paid for the remainder of the term if the institution is also paying its faculty and staff during that period. In these instances, institutions should document (as contemporaneously as feasible) that the COVID-19 disruption was the reason the student received FWS funds without documentation of hours worked.”

- **All Student Employees**
  - Students are eligible to telework where appropriate or utilize a flexible work arrangement.
  - Student that are unable to work shall not be paid.