

UChicago Remote Work Guidelines & Best Practices for Managers

Although the University of Chicago has moved to distance learning for Spring Quarter, the Hyde Park campus will remain open and will continue the activities central to research, education, and patient care. To help prevent and slow the spread of COVID-19, the University encourages remote work as appropriate. Managers and unit directors should carefully consider which staff members can conduct their work remotely and put plans in place for their teams as soon as possible.

Here are guidelines, best practices, and resources to help you adapt to managing staff remotely. These are general guidelines; individual units may put specific practices or policies in place based on the nature of their work.

SETTING PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

- **While the current circumstances require flexibility and adaptability, be clear on what processes must continue without interruption.** If responsibility will be distributed among multiple staff members, create a schedule for all to see that lists the primary and secondary responsible staff members. Establish processes if staff members are unable to fulfill their responsibilities as scheduled for any reason.
- **If your unit has stated Service Level Agreements, consider whether remote work will have any impact on stated timelines.** If you make any adjustments to any timelines, ensure that information is clearly communicated to all staff members and all stakeholders.
- **Have a conversation with each staff member about their responsibilities and priorities.** Consider the impact and feasibility of completing some or all of the work remotely (with or without adjustments).
- **Recognize each staff member has different circumstances.** Factors may include: the nature of their work; tenure and experience in their role; limitations they may face as a result of their home environment (e.g., children present who need care). Some staff members may need to work during non-traditional hours such as early mornings, evenings, and weekends. Provide as much flexibility as you can while ensuring critical work gets done and setting clear expectations for availability and responsiveness.
- **Focus on outcomes vs. activity.** Set clear expectations for the outcomes you expect and agree to deadlines and timelines. Trust your staff and empower them to complete their work.

PLANNING & CONDUCTING WORK

- **Determine workplans and schedule frequent check-ins with each staff member where they can update you on progress.** We recommend requesting written progress updates and scheduling 1:1 calls or virtual meetings to review at least once per week.
- **When assigning new tasks or projects to individuals or teams, do so in writing.** Track all tasks and projects in one place to ensure alignment about workloads. Plan a quick call or virtual meeting to answer questions and clarify expectations.
- **Work with staff members to break big projects into smaller steps so they can make tangible progress.**
- **Ask staff members to share early drafts of their work for feedback.** This allows you and the staff member to ensure alignment early in the process and avoid time wasted re-doing work that didn't match your expectations.
- **Provide frequent feedback about work.**
- **Ask staff members to document job responsibilities and processes and share in a designated folder on Box or Google Drive accessible to the full team.** This will be necessary in the event staff members need to assist their colleagues or temporarily take over others' responsibilities.



PLANNING & CONDUCTING WORK (CONTINUED)

- **Prepare a list of projects that each staff member can work on remotely if their regular work cannot be accomplished remotely.** Consider research projects or other projects that have been on the back burner due to more urgent demands. Ask staff members to provide project ideas or outline potential process improvements.

INDIVIDUAL AND TEAM COMMUNICATION

- **Use University tools and resources listed [here](#).** Determine which tools your team will use and provide guidelines to all staff members. Your goal is to make it easy for staff members to find and share information. To do this effectively, all team members need to use the available resources in the same way.
- **Encourage the use of [Microsoft Teams](#).** If this resource is new to your team, encourage staff to experiment with its various functionalities. This can be a good resource for staff members to ask quick questions of each other and to allow for socialization among the team. Once you determine how to maximize the resources for your team, provide documented expectations.
- **Recognize different staff members are going to have different communication preferences and needs.** Do your best to adapt and find ways to communicate effectively with each staff member.
- **When in doubt, overcommunicate, and ask your staff to do the same.**
- **Consider how you want staff members to ask clarifying questions.** Do you want them to use email or other tools? Do you want staff to direct questions as they arise in real time or do you want a daily digest? How should staff address urgent vs. non-urgent questions and concerns?

MANAGING MEETINGS

- **Consider which regularly standing meetings are essential and whose participation is required.** Can information typically communicated in meetings be shared in another way?
- **Whenever possible, schedule meetings in advance.** As some staff are working with children at home, it can be challenging to be available for an extended period with no distractions on short notice.
- **Follow best practices for meeting management, including distributing an agenda with desired outcomes in advance.** Share materials you want participants to review in advance.
- **You may have to work harder to make sure people are on the same page when working remotely.** Following meetings, it is useful to provide written documentation of the decisions reached, next steps, accountable parties for each task, and open questions. You can capture this with the [whiteboard feature](#) of Zoom or ask someone in the meeting to take and distribute notes. A written record can lead to greater clarity.
- **Use [Zoom](#) when possible.** Add a [Zoom](#) option to all meetings proactively.
- **Encourage the use of webcam when possible to increase interpersonal communication and support those who rely on lipreading.**
- **Notify other meeting participants in advance if you plan to use video so they can prepare accordingly.**
- **Log in early to calls and test your audio/video settings.**
- **Ask participants to use mute to reduce background noise when they are not speaking.** The host(s) can also mute participants.
- **Build socialization time into meetings.** Find ways celebrate goals met, milestones, birthdays, etc.

SUPPORTING STAFF MEMBERS

- **Remember that given the uncertainty of this situation, staff members will look to you for direction.** Be proactive and consistent in your communication and model the behaviors you want to see in your team.
- **Keep in mind this is a significant change for many staff members and, like any change, transition and adjustment take time.** As the manager, set the tone; remain flexible; embrace iteration and experimentation; be open about what is working and what is not; and communicate frequently.
- **Recognize staff members are likely to react differently to this situation.** Some may struggle with the isolation. Some may be caring for children at home. Some may be worried about ill loved ones. Check in regularly with staff members to inquire how they are personally managing in this uncertain time.
- **If you think a staff member could benefit from additional support, contact your Human Resources Partner.** You can also refer staff to [Perspectives Ltd.](#), the University's Staff and Faculty Assistance Program, for resources such as online counseling and other support.
- **Encourage staff members to engage in online learning and professional development.** Options are available through [LinkedIn Learning](#) or through the Online Skillbuilders offered through [Perspectives Ltd.](#), the University's Staff and Faculty Assistance Program.
- **Share tips for effectively working from home and encourage your team to share with each other.** These may include helpful articles or blog posts.

OTHER

- **Evaluate data security measures for your team as they work and collaborate remotely.** Remind staff members to keep data and devices secure. Whenever possible, they should save and edit all data using cloud storage services ([Google Drive](#), [UChicago Box](#), or [Microsoft OneDrive](#)) rather than on a local computer or external storage device. Sensitive data requires the highest level of security and privacy protection, and must be stored in accordance with the University's [Data Classification Guidelines](#).
- **Remind staff members to use a secure, password-protected wired or wireless network.** Criminals can compromise public Wi-Fi to steal data, so staff members should avoid using public Wi-Fi when possible. If they must use public Wi-Fi, use the University's virtual private network (VPN). See [VPN](#) and [Wi-Fi Security](#) for more information.

[Additional Resources](#)

If you or your staff members are uncertain about where you can safely store and share sensitive data, please see the [UChicago Data Usage Guide](#). [Symantec Endpoint Protection \(SEP\)](#) is the University's supported antivirus software available to students, faculty, and staff.