Workplace Decisions Guidance for Units and Supervisors

Mission, Values and Principles
The university is committed to employee and student safety and well-being. Our work is guided by the institution's mission, values, and principles. As a public, research-intensive, land-grant university funded in part by the state of Michigan, our mission is to advance knowledge and transform lives by providing outstanding education, conducting research, and advancing outreach and engagement. MSU must always be appropriately staffed on campus to effectively pursue our educational mission.

Key Resource
The university is planning for a more typical fall semester, which means larger groups of students living and learning in person in a few months. It is the expectation that employees who have student-, faculty- or public-facing roles will be returning, in some capacity, to in-person positions. Units will need to make decisions about which administrative and academic duties and functions are best done on campus this fall or are deemed possible or a better fit for hybrid or remote work. Units must create their own Return-to-Work Procedures and Protocols using the **Return-to-Work Framework for Units**, which outlines what steps need to be taken before bringing employees back to campus. Key parts of the framework include <u>required training</u>, expectations for personal protective equipment and physical distancing, cleaning and sanitation guidance and reporting requirements for those who experience COVID-19 symptoms or have a confirmed diagnosis.

It is recommended that you utilize and apply this framework and the guiding principles outlined below as you move forward with organizational plans to return work to campus. Your staffing plans can then be immersed into your overall return-to-campus plan.

Please note that this document is intended to be used as a resource for your decision-making process. We understand that each employee situation may be different and may produce a different outcome, also that each individual unit may have different outcomes based on the operation and dynamics of work. This resource should be used as a tool to ensure that you are following an equitable process in making staffing decisions. Equity must remain at the forefront in everything we do.

All employees should be primarily considered for remote/hybrid status based upon each employee's position tasks and activities that are necessary to carry out programs, services, and operations. This guide proposes an equitable process that ensures all people are treated fairly by applying the same decision-making criteria across all employee positions. This does not imply that all employees will or should have the same equal outcome of the decision-making process.

It is important for decision-making processes by units and supervisors to first focus on what the work is, rather than who will be doing it. Once this is established, one approach could be to offer equal or the same one-size fits all options to everyone. However, an equitable approach is ultimately a more effective solution to support the needs of the position (i.e., function, projects, activities, service, etc.).

Once positions are determined in-person, hybrid, or remote, focus should shift to providing the necessary support that is tailored to the specific needs for every employee to be successful and thrive. In this context, it is important to distinguish between equity and equality. Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the resources needed accordingly to reach the same desired business outcome (i.e. goals achieved, productive, etc.). In contrast, equality would mean each employee is given the same resources, assuming everyone's needs are the same and that they benefit from the same support despite their unique needs and situations. We are striving for equity.

Guide: Determining What Work Returns Onsite

1. **Begin with a Unit-Level Approach**
   To start the process of determining what work needs to be performed on campus, first clearly identify and understand the work of the unit. Collaborate with your supervisors and/or HR representative(s) to review organizational structures and position descriptions. The employee's generic job classification should not be used alone to determine work needing to be performed, but rather the more detailed position description of tasks performed. These documents will lend great information on how the department is structured, what work is performed and who currently performs that work.

   Steps to take:
   - What are the critical functions of the position? Review employment contracts, position descriptions and other methods of capturing work that is performed in the department.
   - Categorize the work that is performed in a manner that makes most sense for your operation. Are there elements of the position that require in-person customer/student facing/research activities? Would working from home compromise those critical functions? If so, how?
     - (e.g., **Academic unit**: teaching, research, administration, etc. **Service unit**: landscaping, custodial, administration, etc.).
   - For each category assess the *nature of the work performed* and the *key responsibilities*.
   - Identify what **work** is necessary to be conducted in person or on campus and **why**. Would working from home cause an undue burden on the department? Why or why not?
   - Include in this step an assessment of what has been learned about the nature of the work if it has been done remotely during the pandemic. What benefits to remote or hybrid work have been identified?
   - Is all work related to that function necessary to be done onsite? Is there an alternative way of completing work that is traditionally identified as work that is necessary to be done on campus? Are there space constraints alleviated by a work from home rotation?
     > **Example:** traditionally thinking about a departmental office assistant as needing to be onsite to interact with faculty, staff, students and visitors – the unit establishes new procedures to move some or all of that work remote utilizing video chat, email, phone, and other modalities of communication. (**Hint**: you are already likely operating in this manner).

2. **Assess Individual Employee Roles/Assignments**
   At this point you have identified the work of the unit and determined how that work is to be completed effectively and efficiently while prioritizing student success goals, research, and campus safety. Now it is time to apply assessments to individual employee roles and responsibilities.

   Steps to take:
   - Review individual position descriptions to identify current work responsibilities and how that work was assessed (necessary to be done onsite, can be hybrid or remote)

- Connect with employees to discuss their role and work responsibilities, as well as the assessment of where, when, and how often that work should be completed either remotely or in-person.
  - Consider team dynamics (i.e. a new supervisor/employee may want to connect more in-person, whereas work that may be done well remotely could be determined to be done onsite to build team cohesiveness)
- Complete staffing decisions, *with employee collaboration and input*, and document work schedules and locations. This may include reassigning job duties to match the needs of the unit with the current capacities of individual employees.

Situations involving individual circumstances not covered by other University procedures must be considered thoughtfully, with dignity and respect for the individual.

Supervisor preference or comfort in oversight, alone, is not a sufficient reason to require an employee to return to working on-site.

Unit Considerations
This is not an exhaustive list of considerations but provides various work modalities to consider during determinations. Multiple considerations can intersect.

Consideration	Description
Employee returns fully to campus	All of work is critical on campus.
Employee works fully remote/off campus	All of work can be performed away from on campus work location or it can be performed hybrid or on-campus, if desired by employee.
Employee works hybrid work schedule	A work schedule in which the employee completes part of their work onsite and part of their work at a remote location while maintaining the same number of scheduled work hours for the week. • i.e. 1-2 days remote, 3-4 days on campus
Employee works flexible work schedule	A work schedule in which an employee alters the start and/or end time of their workday while maintaining the same number of scheduled hours for the workday and/or work week. When scheduling employees, supervisors need to be cognizant of FLSA and MSU union overtime rules. For additional flexible work resources please visit the MSU Work Life Office website.
Employee works staggered work schedule	A work schedule that has employees reporting to work at different times and/or in shifts.

Employee works alternating work schedule	A work schedule that alternates days or weeks that employees report onsite. When not reporting onsite, employees will work remotely. This option helps to reduce the number of employees onsite at a given time.

Decisions made about employee work locations have no bearing on the value or appreciation of the job or person and are strictly based on the nature of work. **We are all valued employees of Michigan State University.**

Expectations

- Leaders are encouraged to be compassionate, flexible, and responsive when making equitable decisions that are based on necessary work outcomes.

- As much as possible, and while meeting unit objectives and mission, employees who perform work that is best done on campus should perform that work on campus. At the same time, many lessons have been learned about the benefits of online work options that should be integrated into the work location assessment. It is important to take this new flexibility into account when assessing the work to be done and offering options for hybrid or remote work when possible. This will help to recruit and retain some employees across our community.

- All administrators, supervisors and employees will be inclusive, collaborative, and respectful in working through these decisions.

- Any employee who will have a change in work schedule or work location should be informed as far in advance as possible to prepare for the changes. Ideally, this **notification should be provided 4-weeks in advance.**

- An employee whose work assignment will continue to be remote should be notified as soon as possible.

3. **Preparing for Return to Campus**
   Communication is critical. As new workplace policies and changes are implemented, employers should notify employees of these changes and train employees accordingly, when necessary.
   - Units should comply with university, local, and state mandated reopening requirements
   - Units should develop a plan for re-boarding employee(s) (i.e. required health, safety, and compliance trainings, new unit processes, stock the workplace with adequate supplies, etc.)
   - Be prepared for plans to change
     - Monitor updates from university, local or state officials
     - Have clear plans for re-exit guidelines in place, should restrictions change again
     - Be responsive to employee concerns

Additional Support
For additional support, please contact your unit human resources representative.

Source
Staffing Decision Guidance: prepared in fall 2020 by the HR Subcommittee for Reopening Campus and used for the creation of this document.