Quick Steps to Prepare a Remote Work Policy for Your Local Government

A quick list of things to include and/or consider in your remote work policy.

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Work-from-home policies have typically been in place to provide better work-life balance options for staff members. Now, they take top priority as communities in the United States and around the world prepare to social distance and quarantine to slow the spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus).

WORK FROM HOME

Local governments already started to take action in developing alternative work arrangements last week. If your local government is still operating as business as usual or if you are exploring work-from-home policies now, below is a list of things to include or consider in your remote work policy:

1. Eligibility to work from home.

To keep the virus from spreading, scaling back some government operations and working from home should be considered. A recent article from CNBC provides the following tips when considering work-from-home options for your employees or yourself:

- Sit down with your manager, walk through your daily responsibilities, and determine which, if any, can be done remotely.

- If you need to be on the premises to do your job, ask for your employer to accommodate alternative shift schedules, where you would come in outside of the traditional 9-to-5 workday. This could result in staggered commute times and fewer people in a space at a given time, which could help limit an individual's exposure to the coronavirus and other illnesses in general.

2. Development of an employee telework form.

Last week, ICMA made the executive decision for employees to work from home. Employees were asked to complete and sign a modified telework form that included the following telework parameters:

- I understand that when I am away from the office teleworking, I must comply with all organizational rules, policies, and procedures.
- I understand that my compensation, benefits, and work responsibilities will not change due to the telework arrangement.
- I understand that my telework work schedule will be consistent with my current work schedule and will not significantly change without the approval of my supervisor.
- I understand that if I am eligible for overtime pay, I must get advance approval from my supervisor to work over hours per week while teleworking.
- I understand that while teleworking, it is my responsibility to:
  - Maintain a safe work environment.
  - Protect any company equipment in my possession.
  - Safeguard confidential work-related information.

- I understand that I will not hold business visits or in-person meetings with business affiliates or coworkers at my home telework site.

To distribute something similar to your employees, download a sample employee telework form.

3. Instructions on accessing communication channels.

In addition to an employee telework form, ICMA employees were provided with a remote work equipment and connectivity guide. Elements to this guide include:

- **Key points of contact.** This should include all members of your IT team.

- **Recommended IT equipment.** Recommend to your staff that they carry with them their issued equipment back to their place of residence after the conclusion of their workday. Here is a recommended list of equipment to take home every day (if it applies):
  - Issued laptop
  - Issued laptop power cord
  - Issued mouse (if you prefer it to using a built-in trackpad)
  - Issued headset

- **Remote connectivity.** Access to emails and network (Intranet and file shares) should be done using a computer provided and managed by your organization. If your staff members cannot use such a computer, they should contact your IT team.
- **Remote communications.** Set your team up for success with the following remote communication tools.
  - Telephones. Remind your staff members to make it so that all new incoming calls to their office phone are auto-forwarded to another number.
  - Video conferencing. If you don't have a video conferencing system in place, here are several free video conferencing apps to take advantage of:
    - Google Hangouts. Supports: Up to 10 participants for an unlimited duration.
    - CISCO Webex Meetings. Supports: Up to 100 participants for an unlimited duration.
    - Zoom Meetings. Supports: Up to 100 participants for 40 minutes.
    - Skype. Supports: Up to 50 participants for an unlimited duration.

  - Chat apps. Team chat apps are the way modern teams communicate and could be key to your success while working remotely. Chat apps include: Microsoft Teams, Google Hangouts, Slack, GoToMeeting, and Free Conference.

- **Remote customer service support.** If it doesn't exist already, be sure to set up and share an email account or telephone number for employees to use and get in contact with your IT team personnel in case they have questions or issues.

4. IT practices, procedures, and security.

Now is a good time to determine which systems work and which systems don't work for telecommuting. Some of the important questions from IT Practices and Procedures to Consider in Cases of Extended Telecommuting

- What extra security risks are entailed with remote staff? If staff are taking laptops home, your office firewall is no longer protecting them.

- Do you have adequate remote connections to the office? If not and all staff connect remotely, services and productivity may suffer, and staff without connections might be subject to forced leave time.
- Is your telephone system fully mobile? Consider options to have your major help numbers answerable by teleworking staff.
- Is each staff member provided with laptops that they take home daily as a regular policy? It doesn't help if all of your staff are suddenly tasked to work remotely and half of your staff leave their computers at the office. If you're trying to keep your staff mobile-ready, you want a policy that ensures that they have their laptops home every night.
- Do remote staff have access to all systems needed to keep them productive and keep the critical systems running? Consider how systems need accessing and design secure connections to them through your VPN.

For additional information, visit ICMA's Coronavirus Resource page.

For perspectives on how local leaders are preparing for and dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak, visit Part 2 Update: Perspectives from ICMA Leaders Across the Globe on COVID-19.

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