

Flexible Work in the BC Public Service FAQ

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Part One: Flexible Work Approach

1. What is the BC Public Service's updated approach to flexible work?

The BC Public Service has had policies and processes in place to support flexible work for more than a decade. Some of the flexible work requirements were relaxed during the COVID-19 pandemic to allow for a quick transition of more employees working from home at the direction of the Public Health Officer. The BC Public Service is reinstating its pre-pandemic approach to flexible work, including the mandatory completion of telework agreements for all flexible work arrangements.

In addition to the pre-existing criteria, the updated approach includes the following changes:

- Current employees must complete all mandatory corporate training prescribed by the Public Service Agency (PSA) before a telework agreement can be approved. This includes IM 117 and the Annual Review of the Standards of Conduct and Oath of Employment. New employees, especially those hired as teleworkers, must take the Oath and complete IM 117 as soon as possible after they're hired. The PSA may prescribe additional training in the future.
- Requests for remote work three or more days a week require approval by your Assistant Deputy Minister or Executive Lead. Ministries have discretion to delegate this approval decision as deemed appropriate to a senior excluded manager or another member of executive.
- If you wish to work remotely three or more days a week, your ministry will require you to forego a dedicated desk or workspace in your regular workplace, subject to the ministry's workspace planning requirements. At their discretion, ministries may extend this requirement to telework agreements involving one or more days of remote work a week to address their workspace planning needs.

On July 20, the BC Public Service announced employees who wished to continue working remotely beyond September 7 must have an approved telework agreement in place using the [telework agreement template](#). You must also meet the [criteria outlined on MyHR](#).

In response to the recent increase in COVID-19 cases and resulting measures announced by government, on August 24 the timeline for implementing telework agreements was extended to October 12.

Approved telework agreements must still be in place by September 7, but they will not be implemented until October 12. This means employees who are currently working remotely can continue to do so until that date.

2. What do you mean by "flexible" work?

Flexible work for the BC Public Service is defined as alternate work arrangements, which includes mobile work within a BC Public Service office, working from home or working from another location outside the office.

Depending on the operational needs of the ministry, such as employee and ministry requirements for providing excellent service to our citizens, employees should discuss with their supervisor to determine if a flexible work arrangement is suitable for their role.

This does not include flexibility in schedules beyond what is supported through existing collective agreement provisions, or the terms and conditions of employment for excluded employees.

3. What factors were considered when developing our refreshed flexible working model?

The new flexible working model is shaped by three primary factors:

- Ensuring effective and, where possible, enhanced delivery of service to people in British Columbia.
- Delivering on our accountability and priorities as an employer.
- Providing a positive employee experience for the BC Public Service.

4. Will the approach to flexible work be applied the same in all ministries?

Each ministry has unique needs and requirements shaped by its mandate, priorities and operations. Ministries use their discretion to apply the flexible work framework in their work environment to support their employees, ensure operational effectiveness and provide service to citizens. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to flexible work.

The BC Public Service remains flexible to the unique needs of each ministry, our employees and our citizens as we create and implement the model. However, where ministries do support flexible work options, they must do so using the mandatory telework agreement template and follow applicable BC Public Service policies and criteria.

5. Are supervisors or ministries required to support flexible working?

While the BC Public Service supports flexible working in principle, ministries and supervisors determine their level of support for flexible work in the context of their unique operational needs. Where flexible work is supported, it must be implemented following the corporately defined policies and criteria set out by the PSA. This includes using the approved [telework agreement template](#).

6. Who may participate in telework arrangements?

Regular full-time or part-time employees are eligible for telework. Supervisors should contact MyHR for guidance in cases where other employees or appointees wish to pursue telework agreements.

Teleworking is not an employee entitlement or right. The BC Public Service has the discretion to determine if a proposed telework agreement should be approved.

7. What is meant by “operationally feasible” in the context of approving telework agreements?

The BC Public Service supports flexible work arrangements that are advantageous to both the employer and employees. When considering a telework agreement, supervisors should assess a range of factors to determine whether it’s operationally feasible.

At a basic level, supervisors need to determine whether the employee can fulfil the responsibilities of their job and if it’s operationally effective for the work to be done from the employee’s work location. In addition to assessing the impact on service delivery and productivity, consider the impact (positive or negative) on factors such as team dynamics and engagement, organizational culture and the ability of other members in the employee’s work group to fulfil their duties. Supervisors should not assess each telework agreement request in isolation, but rather in the context of the overall organizational effectiveness of their business area.

8. If my agreement requires me to give up a dedicated office or desk, when will that happen?

If you wish to work remotely three or more days a week, your ministry will require you to forego a dedicated desk or workspace in your regular workplace, subject to the ministry’s workspace planning requirements. At their discretion, ministries may extend this requirement to telework agreements involving one or more days of remote work a week to address their workspace planning needs.

Your ministry will determine the timeline for this transition, and in most cases, it isn’t likely to happen right away. This requirement is to help ministries adjust their long-term space plans once they have assessed the scope of flexible work adoption in their workplaces and the impact on space requirements. You will still have access to a workspace in your regular work location, but it will be a shared or mobile workspace.

Part Two: Telework Agreements

9. Why do I need to use the corporate telework agreement template?

The template addresses all the responsibilities of both the employee and employer for the protection of both parties. It is also the only template endorsed by the BCGEU for use with BC Public Service employees and is consistent with the provisions of the collective agreement.

10. If I already have an approved telework agreement that pre-dates this updated approach do I need to get my supervisor to approve a new agreement?

Telework agreements should be reviewed annually. If your existing agreement is more than one year old, you should review it with your supervisor and confirm it can continue.

If your existing agreement was established in the last year, you should confirm with your supervisor they still support you continuing your current arrangement after September 7. If your agreement allows for working from home three or more days a week, your supervisor also needs to have the request approved by your Assistant Deputy Minister or Executive Lead. You will need to update your agreement or establish a new one to reflect any changes to your current arrangement.

All telework agreements must also use the corporate telework agreement template provided by the BC Public Service Agency. If your existing agreement does not use this template, you will need to complete a new agreement using the proper template and have it approved. All sections of the agreement must be completed.

11. I am taking part in Leading Workplace Strategies (LWS). Do I need a telework agreement?

Yes. This is a necessary document regardless of how frequently an employee is working remotely under LWS. The BC Public Service needs to ensure your location meets all the criteria for flexible work. Regardless of where you work, employees are required to follow Workplace Safety and Information Management policies.

12. What is the general process for requesting a telework arrangement?

Employees interested in teleworking should:

- Review the telework agreement and [flexible work resources on MyHR](#) to ensure they understand the obligations and requirements of telework and maintaining a home office.
- Discuss the details of a possible arrangement with their supervisor/manager to ensure the arrangement is suitable to their job duties and is mutually beneficial to the employee and employer.
- Work with their supervisor/manager (or other decision authority) to complete and sign a telework agreement.

Once a telework agreement is completed and signed by the employee and their supervisor/manager, the employee may establish a home office, arrange for necessary equipment and network access, etc.

13. Why do I have to have a telework agreement completed by September 7?

This date coincides with the originally planned transition to Step 4 of [BC's Restart Plan](#), when we most workplaces would resume more regular operations. With the recent increase in COVID-19 cases, the transition to Step 4 may be delayed and the timeline for implementing telework agreements has been extended to October 12. However, approved telework agreements are still required by September 7.

14. If I don't have a telework agreement approved by September 7, does that mean I won't be able to work from home?

You can still have a telework agreement approved at any time after September 7. For the purposes of this transition, completing agreements by September 7 helps your ministry and the BC Public Service plan for implementation. If you do not have an agreement in place by the extended date of October 12, you are expected to return to your regular workplace until a telework agreement is in place.

15. Why do I have to complete a telework agreement now when I didn't have to during the pandemic?

The telework agreement ensures you and your supervisor agree on your responsibilities and confirms the expectations for both parties. Telework agreements were mandatory for flexible work arrangements prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The requirement was not enforced early in the pandemic to allow for a rapid shift to working from home in alignment with the public health direction. The PSA continued to recommend telework agreements throughout the pandemic and, as the pandemic subsides, the BC Public Service is reinstating this as a mandatory requirement in the best interests of employees and the employer.

16. Why do I need my supervisor's approval?

Your supervisor needs to approve flexible work arrangements because they are best positioned to assess the operational impacts of your request.

17. What are the criteria supervisors use in considering whether to approve a request for flexible work?

When approving a request for flexible work, you and your supervisor must follow these guiding principles:

- Participating in a flexible work arrangement is voluntary and requires the mutual agreement of you and your supervisor. It is neither an entitlement nor a term of employment.
- Open, ongoing communication about performance, team goals, workplace environment, scheduling changes, training and technology is key.
- The suitability of flexible work options varies according to specific operational requirements or employee circumstances.
- Employees must be performing satisfactorily prior to being approved and must maintain their performance.
- Flexible work options support the health and safety of employees.

- Flexible work options must safeguard the security and confidentiality of government information.

Supervisors should also consider the potential impact of flexible work arrangements on other members of the team and other factors that influence organizational effectiveness such as workplace culture and team dynamics.

Criteria for telework includes:

- The arrangement must be operationally feasible and provide benefit to the employee and employer.
- Service standards are expected to be maintained or improved.
- The employee must attest their home office facilities are adequate and meet safety, security and confidentiality requirements.
- Remote work should not generate any additional net costs for the employer and upfront costs can be recouped over a reasonable period.
- Completion of a signed telework agreement is mandatory, and it must be reviewed annually.
- Telework results only in a change to the office location of an employee. Other aspects of the employment relationship (including employee benefits, entitlements, responsibilities, salary and the application of terms and conditions of employment, collective agreements and workplace policies) remain unchanged.
- The employee must have completed all mandatory training as prescribed by the BC Public Service Agency.
- If the employee wishes to work remotely three or more days a week, they must acknowledge their ministry will require them to forego a dedicated desk/workspace in their regular workplace, subject to the ministry's workspace planning requirements. Ministries may, at their discretion, extend this requirement to telework agreements that involve one or two days of remote work per week to address their workspace planning needs.
- Requests for remote work three or more days per week also require approval by the employee's Assistant Deputy Minister or Executive Lead. Ministries have discretion to delegate this approval decision as deemed appropriate to a senior excluded manager or another member of executive.

18. I have been working remotely full-time during the pandemic. Will this still be an option?

Full-time flexible work is an option where supported by supervisors. Any flexible work arrangements where you will be working three or more days from home also require approval by your Assistant Deputy Minister or Executive Lead.

19. As a supervisor, what do I need to consider if an employee needs a medical accommodation that requires working from home?

If there is an operational requirement for the employee to be in the workplace, the supervisor, with the support of the Public Service Agency, will determine if there is a duty to accommodate. They must assess the employee's situation, including medical information and if they are able to provide information as to why they cannot return to the workplace.

Supervisors in this situation should have a discussion with the employee about their circumstances, including their limitations and restrictions and should discuss safety procedures at the workplace. If this discussion does not resolve the employee's concerns, the supervisor should contact MyHR for assistance. For further information see the [Managers' Guide to Reasonable Accommodation](#).

In cases where the employer is not required to make an accommodation, ministries may consider alternative work arrangements depending on operational requirements and the employee's individual circumstances.

20. I used to work in the office, but I have found it is much easier given my individual circumstances to work from home. How do I get a telework agreement so I can continue working from home?

You should approach your supervisor to discuss your situation. Prior to having this discussion, review [Flexible work readiness reflection and discussion](#) and other [flexible work resources](#) on MyHR.

21. If I change jobs does my telework agreement still apply?

Telework agreements are specific to an employee's position with their current work unit. If you take on a new position with another work unit, your current telework agreement will be terminated, and you will have to propose a new arrangement with your new supervisor/manager.

22. Do any of my terms and conditions of employment change?

No. Telework results only in a change to the work location of an employee. Other aspects of employment (including employee benefits, entitlements, responsibilities, salary and the application of terms and conditions of employment, collective agreements and workplace policies) remain unchanged. See the "Employee Status, Benefits and Hours of Work" section of the [telework agreement](#) for more information.

23. I only telework from home on a very occasional basis and not according to a strict schedule (e.g., working from home one morning due to a home emergency, working from home one afternoon to focus on a specific work project, etc.) Do I still need to have a formal telework agreement signed by myself and my supervisor/manager?

A telework agreement must be in place for all employees with regularly scheduled telework arrangements, whether they work from home part-time or full-time. This ensures proper approvals are obtained, costs and expenses are pre-authorized and both employee and employer have a clear understanding of all aspects of the telework arrangement.

A telework agreement should ideally also be in place for employees who work from a BC Public Service office full-time, but on rare occasions work from home.

Employee travel or field work are not considered telework situations and an agreement is not required for these circumstances. Telework agreements are about the location an employee works and not used to address hours of work.

24. Can I telework from another province?

Because employees who live or work in another province are normally subject to different tax rules and employment legislation, out-of-province working arrangements can create unanticipated obligations and liabilities for the employer. Such an arrangement is supported only in rare and exceptional circumstances, and any temporary out of province or out of country work arrangements must be reviewed by the Deputy Minister of the BC Public Service Agency.

25. Can I have a telework agreement with non-standard hours?

Telework agreements define where an employee works but are not designed to address changes to an employee's work schedule. Hours of work are determined in accordance with applicable collective agreements for included employees and the terms and conditions of employment for excluded employees.

Note, employee access to "flex days" or modified work week arrangements is a separate decision from telework agreements. Having a modified work week does not preclude also having a telework agreement and vice versa.

26. What is the process for terminating a telework arrangement?

As noted in the telework agreement, an employee or their supervisor can terminate the agreement by providing 30 days written notice. In rare circumstances, such as a serious breach of the Standards of Conduct or other condition of employment, or a health and safety risk, a telework agreement may be terminated immediately.

27. My work unit has been restructured and my manager now wishes to terminate the telework arrangement to meet operational requirements. Is that permissible? What if I don't agree?

Telework is not an employee entitlement or right and the BC Public Service has the discretion to terminate an arrangement to meet operational or other business requirements. Regular communication about the arrangement should take place between you and your supervisor/manager to make sure both parties understand whether the arrangement remains operationally feasible or requires modification.

28. Other members of my team have been granted telework agreements. My supervisor refuses to grant me one. What should I do?

A telework agreement considers many factors, including the needs of the ministry and approval by the supervisor. Each request is reviewed on its own merits. A telework agreement is a voluntary privilege and not an entitlement. Prior to approaching their supervisor, employees are advised to review [Flexible work readiness reflection and discussion](#) and other [flexible work resources](#) on MyHR. These resources help employees when preparing their flexible work arrangement proposal.

29. Why do I have to check in with my supervisor when I work remotely?

Under WorkSafeBC's [Occupational Health and Safety Regulation](#) the BC Public Service must have a system in place to check on employee well-being when they are working alone or in isolation. Using family members for a check-in and out instead of your supervisor or having family members present so you are not working alone is not an acceptable method of ensuring worker safety. Work with your supervisor and health and safety committee to establish a check-in and out routine. While WorkSafeBC prefers a visual check, check-in and out can be done by email, phone or instant message.

For more information see [Working alone risk assessment and check-in](#) or contact the Public Service Agency Workplace Health and Safety area through [Ask MyHR](#).

Part Three: Flexible Work Tools and Expenses

30. Who is responsible for the costs of equipping a home-based work location?

One of the criteria for supporting flexible work is that any arrangement should not generate additional net costs for the employer.

Flexible work arrangements are voluntary, and most expenses related to setting up and maintaining an employee's home office are the responsibility of the employee. For the majority of telework agreements office equipment and furniture are not paid for by the BC Public Service, except for basic employer-provided equipment and office supplies such as laptop, pens, paper, etc. The employer is also not responsible for associated utility costs such as the employee's home internet service.

The BC Public Service is responsible for providing appropriate tools and equipment for employees to use when they are in their regular workplace on a "one device per person" basis. The BC Public Service is not expected to provide a second set of comparable tools for the employee's mobile work location, such as a second computer, additional monitors, furniture, etc.

31. Can I use my personal computer or other tools if I'm working from home?

Employees should always default to using government-issued devices as they have the best IT resources and security for government information. However, you may use your personal device to access government portals such as [Summer/Webmail](#) or [Time/Pay Home](#). If you are going to use your personal device for government business, you should discuss this use with your supervisor and review the [Appropriate Use Policy 2.0 \(AUP\)](#).

Keep in mind:

- Employees must ensure the same protection of government information whether they are at home, in the office or at a coffee shop.
- Government information must be saved in an appropriate system (see the [Managing Government Information Policy](#)).

For more information on privacy or security, please contact the [Privacy Helpline](#) or [Information Security Helpline](#).

32. Can I use my government device for personal use?

Yes. Section 2.2 of the [Appropriate Use Policy 2.0](#) discusses reasonable personal use of government IT resources based on certain conditions.

33. If I am called into the office on a scheduled telework day, may I claim reimbursement for travel costs between my home and the office?

No. A teleworker's headquarters for the purpose of travel reimbursement claims remains the employer's workplace, not their home office. As such, employees may not claim travel expenses for travel to and from the office.

34. What if my child or other dependent is sick on a day I'm scheduled to telework?

Telework is not a substitute for dependent care arrangements (e.g., childcare, care for an elderly parent). Employees should have care arrangements in place, so their mobile work environment is free from distractions and they are able to respond to work demands as required by the employer. If the employee cannot make alternative arrangements for childcare, they should discuss with their supervisor whether suitable leave, such as family illness or annual vacation, as provided for in the collective agreement is reasonable in the circumstances.

35. What if I require home renovations to establish a home office? Will the employer pay for that?

No. Renovations required to create a home office, including installation of phone lines or other home modifications, are the responsibility of the employee.

36. Are expenses related to my home office eligible for income tax deductions?

Some home office expenses may be tax deductible if certain conditions established by the Canada Revenue Agency are met. All tax matters related to a home office are the responsibility of the employee.

37. I was allowed to take some equipment home during the pandemic. Do I have to return that equipment if I am going to continue to work outside of the office? [Updated]

Each situation is assessed on the individual circumstance. However, during the pandemic employees were allowed to take some equipment home, such as chairs and computer monitors, to allow the BC Public Service to follow the public health advice of maximizing remote working where possible. These items remain property of the BC Public Service and should be returned to your regular workplace by October 12. However, your ministry can require you to return any government-owned equipment at any time. If you return to the workplace on a part-time or full-time basis before October 12 you should expect to have to return any equipment needed to perform your duties in the workplace.

Outside the unique context of the public health emergency employees are responsible for the costs of equipping their mobile work location. Except for employer-provided equipment and office supplies (e.g., laptop, pens, paper, etc.), the BC Public Service is not responsible for the cost of home office equipment or utilities such as internet service.

Employees cannot purchase the equipment they took home during the pandemic from the BC Public Service. However, they may purchase their own office equipment.

Part Four: BC Public Service Office Space

38. If I work outside of the office, does that mean I won't have a dedicated desk when I work in the office?

For flexible work arrangements where the employee works remotely three or more days a week, they are expected to forego a dedicated workspace in their regular office, subject to the ministry's workspace planning requirements. Ministries may decide to extend this requirement to flexible work arrangements involving one or two days of remote working as part of their overall workspace planning requirements.

You may not be required to forego a dedicated office or desk immediately. Your ministry will assess its workspace planning requirements over time and determine how best to configure and assign space to meet operational requirements. Your ministry will consider delivery of services and programs to the public and accountabilities as an employer, such as health and safety and commitments outlined in the BCGEU collective agreement.

Policy and guidance related to flexible work opportunities and associated workspace provisioning is a decision made by ministry executive and the BC Public Service Agency.

Existing guidance indicates the suitability of flexible work options varies according to operational requirements or employee circumstances. Considerations related to the dedication of workspace at a government facility are outlined in the [WorkPoint Plan](#).

Various work scenarios are broadly described for different worker types, such as internally and externally mobile workers, occasional teleworkers and resident workers. Individual employee workspace requirements, whether at a government office or a remote location, are generally determined between the supervisor and employee when flexible work arrangements are formalized and in accordance with these existing guidelines.

39. Will more ShareSpace locations be established throughout the province?

[ShareSpace](#) is a workplace solution currently being piloted in the Victoria area as an on-demand alternative workplace model to support employees across the BC Public Service. While there are no specific plans to implement additional ShareSpace locations, the ShareSpace solution will be explored by the Real Property Division in consultation with ministry clients for sites that may benefit from this type of flexible co-working arrangement.

Employees working in a ShareSpace location are required to have a telework agreement in place because it is not an employee's base or headquarters location. More information on [telework agreements and ShareSpace](#) is available on MyHR.

Part Five: Support and Resources

40. What resources or training are there to support employees and supervisors with flexible work arrangements?

The Learning Centre offers flexible work learning resources to support employees and supervisors in flexible work arrangements. Additional training and resources are being explored and will be added as learning gaps are identified and new needs arise.

41. Are there resources/tools that I and my supervisor/manager can access to assist with considering whether to initiate and implement a telework arrangement?

Yes. Resources include:

- [Flexible workplaces for BC Public Service employees](#)
- [Telework Agreement](#), including information on occupational safety, emergency preparedness and information security requirements
- [Flexible work learning resources](#)
- [BCGEU Main Agreement](#)
- [WorkPoint Plan](#)

42. Who should I contact if I have questions?

Employees or supervisors/managers with questions about telework arrangements can contact [Ask MyHR](#).