



Office of Human Capital Departmental Remote Work Policy Personnel Bulletin 20-06 Frequently Asked Questions

Personnel Bulletin (PB) 20-06 establishes the Departmental policy guidelines and requirements for **implementing employee-initiated requests** for remote work arrangements with the U.S. Department of the Interior (Department or DOI), which is effective on August 23, 2021. These questions and answers are intended to accompany the new Departmental remote work policy.

To review the Departmental remote work policy and other related resources, please visit the Department's remote work resources pages available [here](#).

If you have any additional questions, please contact your [Bureau/Office Remote Work Coordinator](#).

About the Departmental Remote Work Policy

1. Why is the Department establishing a remote work policy?

The last 18 months have caused the Department to re-imagine how and where work is performed. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic created an opportunity to examine the effectiveness of remote work arrangements in facilitating the accomplishment of agency operations. The successful implementation and utilization of technology has demonstrated that employees and supervisors in positions suitable for remote work and who possess characteristics needed to work independently can efficiently perform their official duties from an alternate location. Moreover, survey responses regarding the future of work at Interior made it clear that employees value flexibility in how and where they perform their jobs.

Accordingly, the Department has issued its first-ever agency-wide policy governing **employee-initiated requests** to work remotely. Key provisions of the Departmental Remote Work Policy (Personnel Bulletin (PB) 20-06) include:

- Applies to all eligible DOI employees except for SES/SL/ST employees
- Clarifies that a remote work arrangement is not an employee entitlement—such arrangements will be considered when it is in the best interest of the agency and is cost-effective for the Bureau/Office
- Requires approval of the Bureau Director/Equivalent Office Head (or may be delegated to Bureau Deputy Director/Office Deputy Head) for the first year that the policy is implemented
- Establishes minimum requirements for implementing remote work arrangements, which Bureaus/Offices may supplement in their implementing procedures
- Requires that, if approved, the arrangement be documented in writing via a remote work agreement, which outlines the expectations between the Bureau/Office and employee.
- Permits overseas remote work arrangements—but must be approved by the Bureau Director (or Equivalent Office Head), the Office of the Chief Information Officer, and the U.S. State Department

2. When is the new remote work policy effective?

The new remote work policy is effective August 23, 2021.

3. I work for a DOI Bureau. What do I need to do to initiate a new remote work arrangement?

Consistent with Personnel Bulletin (PB) 20-06, each Bureau/Office will determine their respective remote work request approval process, which will be outlined in the Bureau/Office remote work implementing procedures. Employees interested in establishing a new remote work arrangement may contact their servicing Human Resources Office or [Bureau/Office Remote Work Coordinator](#) for additional information.

Departmental Remote Work Policy: General Information

4. What is remote work?

Remote work is an arrangement under which an employee is scheduled to perform work **within** or **outside** the local commuting area of an agency worksite and is not expected to report to an agency worksite on a regular and recurring basis. For a remote worker, the approved remote worksite is the 'employee's official duty station for pay purposes, even if that location is their home.

5. What is the difference between remote work and telework?

The key difference between a telework and remote work arrangement is how the official duty station is determined for the employee. For a teleworker, the official duty station is the **agency worksite**—the DOI owned/leased worksite where the employee must physically report at least two full workdays per bi-weekly pay period. For a remote worker, the **approved remote worksite** (e.g., their home) is the 'employee's official duty station. This distinction is important because a remote worker receives locality pay and other entitlements based on the approved remote worksite.

6. Are all DOI employees covered by the Departmental Remote Work policy (Personnel Bulletin 20-06)?

No. This policy applies to all DOI employees (including supervisors) except for Senior Executive Service (SES) members, Senior Level, and Scientific or Professional (SL/ST) employees.

7. I was hired as a remote worker. Does this policy apply to me?

No. The Departmental Remote Work policy, Personnel Bulletin 20-06, establishes the policy guidelines and requirements for implementing **employee-initiated requests** for remote work arrangements. Personnel Bulletin 20-06 is not intended to address management determinations (including recruitment decisions) that a position is designated as a remote position.

Remote Work: Eligibility Requirements

8. What are the eligibility requirements for establishing a remote work arrangement?

Since remote work is an alternative work arrangement where employees perform work at a location other than the traditional agency worksite, remote work position suitability and employee eligibility determinations are similar to that of telework. Positions that are more oriented toward research, writing, and analysis and produce tangible work products are generally a good fit for remote work arrangements. In general, employees eligible for remote work arrangements must be able to accomplish work requirements without close on-site supervision or continual in-person interaction with other staff.

Personnel Bulletin 20-06 establishes the minimum requirements for implementing remote work arrangements.

- **At a minimum**, positions suitable for remote work must have quantifiable, project-oriented, or other portable job tasks that can be performed at the approved remote worksite; off-site access to needed technology; and work materials that can be appropriately secured/safeguarded at the remote worksite.

- **At a minimum**, employees eligible for remote work must maintain a performance rating of Fully Successful or higher; and have had no official disciplinary action (e.g., written reprimand, suspension, removal, reduction in grade/pay) taken against them in the last two years.

Bureau/Offices may supplement these minimum requirements in their implementing procedures, as appropriate. Employees interested in establishing a new remote work arrangement may contact their servicing Human Resources Office or [Bureau/Office Remote Work Coordinator](#) for additional information.

9. Who determines if a position is suitable for remote work?

The determination regarding the suitability of a position for remote work, the eligibility of an employee to work remote remotely, or the approval of an employee's request to work remotely resides with management. These determinations must be made in a fair and equitable manner, ensuring that any determination or decision is based on sound business or mission-related criteria.

Establishing a Remote Work Arrangement

10. What is required for an employee to implement a remote work arrangement?

Consistent with Personnel Bulletin (PB) 20-06, each Bureau/Office will determine their respective remote work request approval process, which will be outlined in the Bureau/Office remote work implementing procedures. At a minimum, the process must include a determination of whether the employee is eligible for remote work and the duties of the position are suitable for remote work; and a requirement that a written request justifying the requested arrangement be submitted. If approved, the remote work arrangement must be documented in writing via a remote work agreement, which outlines the expectations between the Bureau/Office and the employee.

Employees interested in establishing a new remote work arrangement may contact their servicing Human Resources Office or Bureau/Office Remote Work Coordinator for additional information.

11. Is there required training an employee must complete to begin a remote work arrangement?

At this time, there is no Departmental mandate for employees to complete required training prior to initiating a remote work arrangement. However, Bureaus/Offices may have a training requirement for employees in their bureau/office-specific implementing procedures. Employees interested in establishing a new remote work arrangement may contact their servicing Human Resources Office or Bureau/Office Remote Work Coordinator for additional information.

12. My Bureau approved my request to work remotely prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. How does the new Departmental Remote Work policy affect me?

Employees whose requests to work remotely were approved under their Bureau/Office's previously established policies are grandfathered in under the Departmental Remote Work policy.

13. If a supervisor denies an 'employee's request to work remotely, can the employee grieve that decision?

Yes. Employees may grieve the denial of a requested remote work arrangement or the termination of an existing remote work agreement via applicable grievance procedures.

14. An employee with an approved remote work arrangement wants to move from their home in Fairfax, Virginia, to Orlando, Florida, to be closer to an elderly parent. Will the terms of their current approved remote work arrangement automatically transfer to the new location in Orlando, Florida?

No. The move from one remote location to another remote location constitutes a change in the terms of the remote work agreement. Consistent with Personnel Bulletin 20-06, **employee requests to change the terms of a current remote work arrangement must be approved in advance and require the employee to submit a new remote work agreement to document the new agreement terms.** A new remote work agreement must be approved before the employee implements the requested change.

15. Once approved, does a remote work agreement need to be reviewed periodically?

Yes. Consistent with the Departmental remote work policy, remote work agreements must be reviewed on an annual basis by the employee and supervisor to determine whether the arrangement is still in the best interest of the agency. If any changes are needed, a new agreement should be prepared and executed as soon as possible.

16. My request to work remotely from a new location has been approved. Am I eligible for relocations expenses to move to the new remote work location?

No. An employee-requested relocation to a remote work location is for the 'employee's own convenience and benefit. Therefore, pursuant to Federal Travel Regulations (41 CFR Chapter 302), the agency is prohibited from paying relocation expenses to a new remote work location.

Working from the Approved Remote Worksite

17. Is the agency required to reimburse or pay for the remote 'worker's internet costs?

The Department assumes no responsibility for any costs associated with the 'employee's home residence, including home maintenance, insurance, utilities, internet access, and telecommunication costs. Employees considering remote work arrangements should consider that the arrangement may increase certain costs to the employee.

18. What supplies, furniture, and equipment will be provided to an employee on a remote work arrangement?

To the extent permitted by Bureau/Office policies and procedures, Bureaus/Offices will provide the equipment and supplies **the supervisor determines necessary** for the employee to perform official duties from the approved remote location. The equipment and supplies should be deemed necessary for the performance of the 'employee's assigned duties, reasonably available, cost-effective, and subject to availability of funding. The Bureau/Office agrees to service and maintain any government-furnished equipment issued to the remote worker. Any equipment that will be provided to the employee should be identified in their remote work agreement.

19. Does having a dependent in the home while performing remote work violate this policy?

Not necessarily. Remote workers are expected to use their time performing official duties as if they were in the official office location. Generally, employees cannot personally care for a dependent while working from the remote worksite and are responsible for securing appropriate arrangements for any dependents who are unable to care for themselves independently. This does not preclude a remote worker from having a caregiver in the home who provides care to the dependent(s) while the employee is on duty, provided the arrangement does not disrupt the 'employee's ability to work effectively. Also, a dependent may be permitted in the home, provided they do not require constant supervision or care (e.g., older child or adolescent) and their presence does not disrupt the 'employee's ability to work effectively.

20. I have been approved to work remotely from my home. How should I code the hours worked during my tour of duty on my timesheet?

A remote worker should record their non-overtime hours worked as **“Regular (Pay Code: 010)”** on their timesheet. Currently, there is no special timesheet indicator or code for hours worked on a remote work arrangement. Since remote work is not considered telework, employees should not use the telework indicator codes available in QuickTime, the 'Department's timekeeping system.

21. As a remote worker, am I eligible for 'workers' compensation benefits if I am injured at the remote work location?

Remote workers may be covered by the Federal 'Employees' Compensation Act for an on-the-job injury or occupational illness sustained while conducting official Government business at the remote worksite. Employees must inform their immediate supervisor of any on-the-job injury or

occupational illness sustained at the remote worksite at the earliest time possible and provide their supervisor all relevant medical documentation related to the injury or illness. Accidents and on-the-job injuries must be reported using the Safety Management Information System to enable Bureau/Office Safety Managers to track and report incidents. Remote workers must also visit the Department of 'Labor's Employees' Compensation Operations & Management Portal to file a workers' compensation claim with the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs.

Issues/Emergencies at the Approved Remote Worksite

22. Can a remote worker be granted weather and safety leave?

If an employee is prevented from safely working at the remote work location due to an act of God; terrorist attack; or other condition that prevents the employee from safely performing work at the approved remote work location (e.g., weather-related damage that makes occupying the home unsafe, loss of power at home), the supervisor may grant weather and safety leave to the employee in accordance with Departmental policy.

23. What should an employee do if they lose electricity/connectivity at their remote work location? How would they record their time?

When an emergency affects the remote work location, and the employee cannot perform work for any reason beyond their control (e.g., loss of electricity, loss of internet service), the employee must notify their supervisor immediately. The supervisor should evaluate the facts of the situation and determine appropriate next steps after consulting with the servicing Human Resources Office. Depending on the circumstances, the supervisor may offer that the employee uses their accrued leave or other paid time off (e.g., credit hours, compensatory time off, time off award, etc.) or grant the employee the use of weather and safety leave, if applicable, in accordance with Departmental policy. Depending on the location of the employee's remote work location and the anticipated duration of the emergency affecting the remote work location, the supervisor may have the employee report to the agency worksite until the emergency situation is resolved.

24. Is a remote worker permitted to care for dependents during a weather/emergency event?

If a remote worker cannot arrange for appropriate dependent care because of a weather or emergency event affecting the remote worksite, any time spent providing personal care to dependents cannot be considered hours of work. The employee is expected to accurately account for work and non-work hours during their tour of duty and to take the appropriate leave (paid or unpaid) to account for any time spent away from normal work-related duties during their scheduled tour of duty.

Travel from the Approved Remote Worksite

25. My remote work location is located within 50 miles of the agency worksite, and I am required to report to the office for a week-long training. Am I entitled to reimbursement for temporary duty (TDY) travel and/or per diem expenses?

No, because your remote work location (i.e., official duty station) is within a 50-mile radius of the agency worksite, you are not eligible for TDY or per diem expenses. However, you would be eligible for reimbursement of local travel expenses (e.g., mileage, mass transit expenses, parking).

26. My employee works from a remote work location more than 100 miles from the agency worksite. I have required them to report to the office for an annual staff meeting. Am I required to pay TDY travel expenses to/from the office?

Yes, because the employee's remote work location (i.e., official duty station) is in excess of 50 miles from the agency worksite, they would be entitled to reimbursement of authorized transportation and per diem expenses should they meet the 12-hour time duration for the trip.

27. My remote work location is located within 15 miles of the agency worksite. I want to travel to the office to attend a colleague's retirement luncheon. The event is not mandatory. Am I entitled to reimbursement for TDY travel, per diem, or local travel expenses?

No, because this is not a mandatory event, the agency is not required to reimburse you for temporary duty (TDY), per diem, or local travel expenses.

Supervising a Remote Worker

28. Do I have to manage a remote worker differently than the non-remote workers on my staff?

No. It is important to note that performance standards for remote workers must be the same as performance standards for similarly situated non-remote workers. Management expectations for performance should be clearly addressed in the employee's performance plan, and the performance plan should be reviewed to ensure the standards do not create inequities or inconsistencies between remote workers and non-remote workers. Like non-remote workers, remote workers are held accountable for the results they produce. Each employee should be appraised against their performance standards, independent of their location.

29. How will I know my employees are available when I need them?

Supervisors are responsible for establishing and communicating clear expectations regarding the remote work arrangement to include methods of communication (e.g., customer service time frames for returning phone calls, email communication), meeting attendance, duty hours, and procedures for requesting leave. This discussion is important to ensure that employees

understand the supervisor's expectations concerning maintaining communication with the office and what will be done to meet contingencies.

Working Remotely Overseas

30. Can I work remotely from another country?

Yes. The Departmental remote work policy permits overseas remote work arrangements. However, employee requests for remote work arrangements outside of the United States and its territories and possessions **require extensive coordination** within DOI and with the U.S. State Department (at least three to six months of preparation) and **should only be considered in limited circumstances**. Bureaus/Offices must carefully consider the implications of permitting an employee to conduct official government business outside of the jurisdiction of the United States. When considering such requests, Bureaus/Offices must address issues such as, but not limited to, how the employee will adhere to the Department of State's Chief of Mission's security requirements and standards; whether the employee has the proper documentation such as passports, visas, etc. required to perform work in the foreign location; whether the employee will derive protections and immunities provided for through bilateral or multilateral agreements; and contingency planning should problems arise with the overseas remote work arrangement.

31. What is the process for securing approval of an overseas remote work arrangement?

In addition to the normal approval process, requests for overseas remote work arrangements must be approved by the Bureau Director (or Equivalent Office Head), the Office of the Chief Information Officer, and the U.S. State Department. The U.S. Department of State has established an approval process for such overseas arrangements:

- **Requests of Less than One Year.** Bureaus/Offices intending to establish an overseas remote work arrangement for a period of less than one year must obtain Chief of Mission approval through the country clearance process. Unclassified country requests must be sent through the State Department's automated eCountry Clearance (eCC) system at <https://ecc.state.gov/security/EccLogin.aspx>. A Chief of Mission is the principal officer in charge of the diplomatic mission of the U.S. or of a U.S. office abroad which is designated by the Secretary of State. The Chief of Mission is often an Ambassador. Extensions of these arrangements such that the total duration of the arrangement would be more than one year will require a National Security Decision Directive 38 (NSDD 38) request (see below for additional information).
- **Requests of One Year or More.** Activities that require or envision a DOI employee conducting official business in a foreign country for one year or more are considered permanent. If a Bureau/Office intends to establish an overseas remote work arrangement for one year or more, it must follow the procedures

outlined in the NSDD 38. NSDD 38 requests must be submitted via the online application at <https://nsdd38.state.gov/>.

Terminating an Existing Remote Work Arrangement

32. Can I end my remote work arrangement voluntarily?

Yes. An employee may terminate the remote work arrangement at any time. However, the employee must submit their request to terminate an existing remote work arrangement in writing with advance notice of at least 90 days, generally.

33. Can my supervisor terminate my existing remote work arrangement?

Yes. A supervisor may terminate an existing remote work arrangement at any time if it no longer meets the needs of the office, for a decline in performance or productivity, for misconduct, for non-compliance with the terms of the remote work agreement, or for other reasons. For management-initiated terminations, the employee must receive advanced written notification of the decision to terminate the remote work arrangement at least 90 days before the effective date of the termination.

If you have any additional questions, please contact your [Bureau/Office Telework Coordinator](#).