TO: The University of Georgia Board of Directors

FROM: Jakob Biddle, Data Collection Specialist

DATE: 28 April 2024

SUBJECT: Proposal to Integrate Work-From-Home Options at The University of Georgia

I am pleased to submit the attached proposal to improve the availability of remote work for the employees of The University of Georgia. The proposal outlines the expected benefits, potential challenges, and practical steps needed to transition smoothly to a more flexible work model. It also addresses the financial implications and cultural impact of adopting these practices.

Thank you for reviewing and considering this proposal. I am available to discuss its contents and respond to any questions you might have.

EMBRACING FLEXIBILITY: A PROPOSAL TO INTEGRATE WORK-FROM-HOME OPTIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Prepared for
The University of Georgia
Board of Directors
Athens, GA

By
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April 28, 2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This proposal presents an in-depth strategy for the University of Georgia to adopt work-from-home policies in order to enhance flexibility and meet the expectations of a modern workforce. The transition to remote work is supported by statistics showing that a significant percentage of the workforce desires such flexibility, with many citing increased productivity and improved work-life balance.

This initiative proposes adjustments in management practices that maintain the university's culture and community, even in a remote setting. The anticipated benefits of this transition include cost savings on campus resources and an increase in employee satisfaction and retention rates. By implementing these changes, the university commits to a progressive work environment that aligns with our core values of innovation and adaptability, allowing us to attract top talent and maintain a competitive edge in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Problem

In today's changing work environment, the demand for flexibility and remote work opportunities has significantly increased. Recent studies from McKinsey & Company indicate that 58% of Americans now have the opportunity to work from home at least one day a week. This highlights a significant shift towards more adaptable and personalized work environments that cater to a diverse set of needs and lifestyles. This puts the University of Georgia at a crossroads between tradition and progress. Our current structure doesn't have many of the work-from-home opportunities desired by today's current workforce. This growing preference among employees challenges our organization to pivot and embrace the new era of work dynamics with open arms. Our university's ability to attract, retain, and nurture a strong and committed workforce may heavily depend on our response to this shift.

Solution

This proposal is aimed at expanding the horizon of work-from-home options, propelling the University of Georgia towards a future where flexibility goes hand in hand with productivity and employee wellbeing. Embracing a remote work policy aligns with our "Sic-Em" values of servant leadership, innovation and commitment, while also offering a sustainable approach that can reduce our operational costs. By integrating a more flexible work model, we not only improve our staff's work-life balance but also position the university as a frontrunner of progressive academic work environments.

In endorsing this proposal, we are embracing transformations that are not only cost-saving but also provide long-term strategic advantages in the competitive landscape of higher education. This document, therefore, outlines a detailed rationale supported by data-driven evidence and the desires of our staff. The University of Georgia has the potential to help redefine the future of work on our campus and beyond.

Objectives

The intent of this proposal is to adapt the University of Georgia's workplace flexibility options to meet the expectations of modern workforces. The goal of allowing more work-from-home and hybrid options is that it will help cultivate and retain a workplace of happy employees by allowing them to save on the costs of commuting while improving their overall well-being. This proposal will also allow the university to cut significant costs in several areas while also aligning with sustainable practices that reduce our carbon footprint.

Background

The demand for work-from-home options is clear and substantial. 98% of workers express a desire to work remotely at least part-time (Buffer), and 59% of workers are more likely to choose an employer that offers remote work opportunities (Science of People). This growing desire among employees is being seen not just globally, but within our own organization.

In a survey I conducted involving the responses of 20 UGA employees, I found that 85% of our employees want to be allowed to work from home several days a week or more.
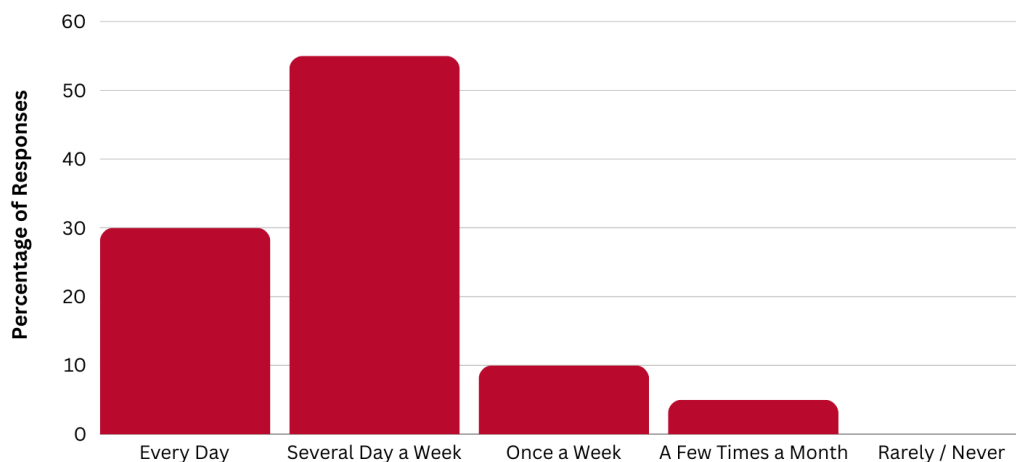
This proven demand for more work-from-home flexibility within our organization contrasted with our current lack of options poses a threat for us. The longer we wait to embrace a more modern work environment, the harder we're making it on ourselves to find and retain the best employees that the workforce has to offer. Our organization clearly has an interest in improving employee retention, as evident by the introduction of our recent "UGA Journeys" program. But the fact is that work-from-home options are becoming an important part of retaining employees, and you best bet that other organizations are allowing this flexibility in order to attract top talent.

DISCUSSION

Common Concerns

The misconception that remote work could lower productivity is a significant factor in companies' hesitation to implement it. However, research has shown that this is nothing to be afraid of. In a survey conducted by CNN, they found that 94% of employers said that their company's productivity had either stayed the same or improved after transitioning into a remote workplace. The improved productivity seen by many companies could be attributed to a number of factors, including the time and energy saved on commuting, and the ability for workers to fine-tune their workspace exactly how they like it.

Another concern about remote work is its potential impact on the university's culture. The University of Georgia undoubtedly has a rich culture that has been around for a long time, and it's important that we keep that alive. If implemented correctly, remote and hybrid models can be a part of the culture that this campus is known for rather than replace it. There are things our organization can do, such as have regular on-campus events designed to build relationships between teams all across campus.
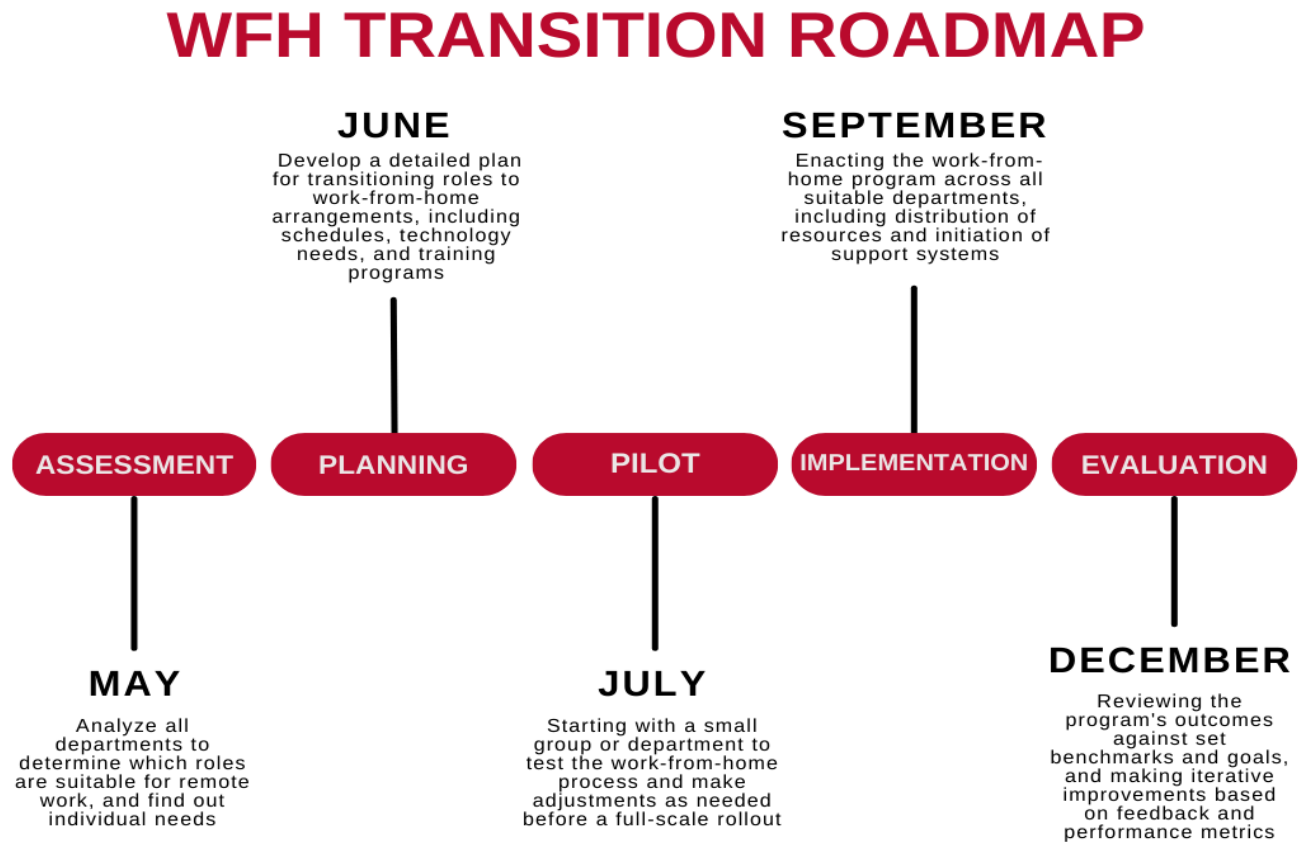
Remote work would not only be a part of this university's culture but would help to improve it. Simply put, there is a direct relationship between a positive work culture and employee's satisfaction and happiness with their jobs. On average, remote workers report higher satisfaction with their jobs than in-office workers (Flexjobs). They also report having a better work-life balance (Owl Labs). During an interview we conducted with a current UGA staff member, this concept was further highlighted.

"Honestly though, spending more time with my family is the biggest thing about it for me. Like even just being able to get lunch with them every day would be so nice," said the staff member. "I tried doing that for a minute but I live so far from here. There just wasn't enough time."

Timeline

Allowing employees to begin working remotely is something that would not take much time at all. The fact that the majority of campus was able to quickly switch to remote work for well over a year immediately when covid started proved to us that it's something that can be done on a dime. However, allowing some time to determine the specific needs of each department would help create an easier transition. This would also help our organization to see more specifically where our new savings on costs can come from.

In addition, starting with a smaller group or department would allow us to test our process of switching to remote work and make adjustments/improvements before rolling it out to the rest of campus. Here's what our timeline could look like if implemented soon:

WFH TRANSITION ROADMAP

JUNE
Develop a detailed plan for transitioning roles to work-from-home arrangements, including schedules, technology needs, and training programs

SEPTEMBER
Enacting the work-from-home program across all suitable departments, including distribution of resources and initiation of support systems

ASSESSMENT **PLANNING** **PILOT** **IMPLEMENTATION** **EVALUATION**

MAY
Analyze all departments to determine which roles are suitable for remote work, and find out individual needs

JULY
Starting with a small group or department to test the work-from-home process and make adjustments as needed before a full-scale rollout

DECEMBER
Reviewing the program's outcomes against set benchmarks and goals, and making iterative improvements based on feedback and performance metrics

This timeline would allow us a couple of months of working with the smaller test groups before we introduce these opportunities across campus. A few months after the full roll-out, we can start looking at the outcomes of these changes. This evaluation is something that would be beneficial to have routinely, in the same way we do employee evaluations. This would allow us to consistently find ways to improve these programs.

Materials and Costs

There are very few costs to implementing work-from-home for several reasons. In the survey conducted for this proposal, one of the questions asked "Do you feel you have the necessary technology and resources to work from home?". 60% of respondents said that they are fully equipped for remote work. 25% said that they are mostly prepared but have some limitations.

We'd be able to gather more information on the specifics of these limitations during our test runs and initial few months of implementation based on the timeline from earlier.

From what I've gathered, it seems that all employee workstations currently use laptops as their computers. This prevents us from needing to swap or upgrade our current computers and makes transportation a non-issue for any potential hybrid workers.

As we gather more data on how many employees within UGA will work either fully remote or hybrid, we'll be able to narrow down specifically how to adjust our current office arrangements. That is, deciding which in-person locations we can give up by either selling the property or allowing the school to use it for other purposes. We will also be able to decide which locations we can transition into that are more suited for smaller teams who aren't holding a full in-person staff at all times. While we don't know the specific costs and savings of those adjustments yet, we can use current data trends to predict what we can expect. Research from Global Workplace Analytics suggests that the typical employer can save around $11,000 per employee per year by embracing remote work. Those savings come from reduced real estate costs and lower turnover, among other factors.

CONCLUSION

The direction the University of Georgia takes may be shaped by our adoption of work-from-home practices and the changing landscape of work. The integration of these policies is a testament to our commitment to flexibility and employee well-being. Allowing our employees these flexibilities not only aligns with our goals of cultivating innovation but will help us retain top talent.

The evidence shown in this proposal is clear: remote work is not a trend, but an inevitable part of the future of workplaces. Implementing these changes offers major benefits with very little risk, with a huge potential for significant cost savings and improved employee satisfaction.

The time is perfect for the board to take a step toward actualizing these changes. By doing so, we reinforce our institution's reputation as a progressive and employee-centered place of learning.

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