

# Fall 2021 Process for Return to On-Site Work for Staff

*April 21, 2021*

Penn State is preparing to welcome its vibrant community of students, faculty and staff back to campus for Fall 2021. Our expectation is that staff will return to work onsite. Remote working and hybrid remote working arrangements will continue to be available, but will require manager review and unit executive approval.

## Background

During the spring 2020 semester, the pandemic temporarily required staff working on campus to shift to remote work. Over time, staff performing certain types of on-site work were permitted to return to campus via a "Return to On-Site Work" approval process and database.

As we plan for a full return to on-campus activities in fall semester 2021, we recognize the need to balance the functional needs of the University with personal and health-related employee concerns regarding return to on-site work. It is important that as a University we continue to build an on-campus community that focuses on students, visitors, customers and fellow employees. We also recognize that many staff have successfully worked remotely during the pandemic and that some staff may prefer to continue remote work, even when restrictions to on-site work are lifted. The University has convened a Remote Work Task Force to review the costs and benefits of increased reliance on staff remote work and to make recommendations to senior leadership about the University's future workforce options. A long-term remote work strategy and process will be announced later in 2021.

In the meantime, the Return to Work Task Group has developed a return to on-site work strategy to support our return to a full on-campus environment in the fall, under the assumption that health and safety guidance from the Centers for Disease Control, Pennsylvania Department of Health, and other organizations support our return. This strategy will be in place through at least fall 2021, giving staff and supervisors sufficient time to consider longer term workplace adjustments consistent with the new long-term remote work strategy.

## Interim Staff Return to Work Strategy

Supervisors should assess their operations and create work schedules that will allow for a safe return to work and create an appropriate on-site presence for the fall. This includes ensuring that staffing meets each office's needs with regard to in-person interactions with students, visitors, and customers. Staff should begin preparations to return to work by August 16, 2021. At this time, employees should be communicating and working with their supervisors to discuss their transition into the office. This transition may be gradual leading up to a full transition to on-site work.

As the University transitions to on-site work, hybrid or other remote working arrangements may continue where appropriate for the position as described below.



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Supervisors must first review the “Supervisors Guide to Assessing Suitability for Remote Work” to assist them in making a determination about whether the employee’s work can effectively be performed remotely. Supervisors should then evaluate whether all of the below criteria are met:

1. The employee is in good standing and has met or exceeded expectations in the last two performance review cycles. New hires may be approved for remote work, but any such arrangements for fall 2021 should be evaluated by the supervisor mid-semester.
2. The employee’s work can effectively be performed remotely during the fall semester.
3. The remote work arrangement being proposed enables the employee to continue to fulfill responsibilities relating to any in-person interactions with students, visitors, customers, and fellow employees.
4. The continued interim remote work request does not require unit resources beyond those that have already been devoted to remote work during the pandemic.

Supervisors must also take into consideration their unit’s expectations regarding on campus work. If, in the judgment of the supervisor, all of the above criteria have been met, unit executives in consultation with HRSPs will give final approval. At this time, approval for interim remote work may only be granted for fall semester 2021.

The employee’s preference to work remotely is not, by itself, a sufficient justification for approval for interim remote work. The interim work arrangement must meet the aforementioned criteria and staffing levels must be sufficient to meet department and campus needs. Approval or denial of an interim remote work request is not predictive of approval or denial of a longer-term remote work arrangement. All arrangements approved for fall 2021 will continue to be considered temporary, COVID-related remote work arrangements.

### **Additional Considerations**

- In some cases, supervisors may determine that hybrid work schedules are necessary to meet physical distancing or maximum room capacity guidelines. All remote work arrangements must be approved and in place prior to the start of the fall semester.
- Supervisors should work with their staff members to create an established work schedule.
- These guidelines do not apply to faculty, post docs, or graduate assistants.
- Staff seeking an ADA accommodation should contact the University’s ADA Coordinator.

Supervisors must first review the “Supervisors Guide to Assessing Suitability for Remote Work for Staff” to review the remote work request process and help them determine whether the employee’s work can effectively be performed remotely. Supervisors should then evaluate whether all of the following criteria are met.



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