



Employer Telework Case Study

Employer

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Background

Social & Scientific Systems, Inc., an employee-owned company, has supported public and private sector programs since 1978. We contribute significantly to improving public health around the world.

Whether we are supporting HIV/AIDS clinical trials around the world, providing program monitoring and evaluation services in Africa, collecting epidemiologic data in Europe, coordinating AIDS conferences in the Caribbean and Africa, or analyzing Medicare data in the United States, we consistently provide the highest quality support available. We are committed to conducting ourselves ethically, honoring our commitments, acting proactively and responsibly, and delivering excellent services—on time and at good value.

Social & Scientific Systems was founded by Herbert J. Miller, Denis Ables, and Mary Frances leMat in April 1978. This small, minority-owned business has grown from 4 employees to a 100 percent employee-owned business with approximately 500 employees. As we grew, we acquired four similar organizations. We are a viable enterprise with a diverse portfolio focused on public health. The company was a proud participant and graduate of the Small Business Administration's 8(a) program (1979–1988). We help clients reach their goals by providing research, information technology, and clinical support. Social & Scientific Systems currently has offices in

Silver Spring, Maryland; Rockville, Maryland; Durham, North Carolina; Kigali, Rwanda; and Kampala, Uganda.

Our mission is to improve public health worldwide by providing technical, research, and program management services to government and other clients. This support enables policymakers, medical professionals, communities, and citizens to improve public health knowledge and to mitigate the effects of devastating diseases, such as HIV/AIDS.

We achieve our mission through significant contributions to public health research, international health programs, and health information dissemination. And, we do this in the context of our four core values: exceptional employee-owners, outstanding client service, integrity and viability, and giving back to the community.

The Telework Experience

SSS considers telecommuting to be a viable alternative work arrangement in cases in which job characteristics are suited to such an arrangement. Telecommuting is a voluntary work alternative that may be appropriate for some employees and some jobs.

Participation in the telecommuting program is at the discretion of the supervisor, project manager, and their senior management. Participation in the telecommuting program is not an entitlement, and it does not change the terms and conditions of employment at SSS.

If approved for the program, the staff member may start by telecommuting 1 day a week. After a 3-month trial period, participation may be expanded at the discretion of the supervisor and project manager. Informal arrangements that

may be necessary to accommodate short-term personal and/or project needs are outside the scope of this policy and are dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

How to Apply

Before entering into any telecommuting agreement, the employee and supervisor evaluate the suitability of such an arrangement, paying particular attention to the following areas:

Employee Suitability – The employee and supervisor assess the work habits of the employee, compared with traits customarily recognized as appropriate for successful telecommuters.

Job Responsibilities – The employee and supervisor discuss the job responsibilities and determine if the job is appropriate for a telecommuting arrangement.

Equipment needs and scheduling issues -- The employee and supervisor discuss the equipment needs and scheduling issues related to the employee's job and determine if the job is appropriate for a telecommuting arrangement.

An employee interested in telecommuting must prepare and submit a *Telecommuting Application* form to his/her supervisor and project manager, along with the following documents: a 2-week time log of work tasks; equipment, software, and other resources required for the job; as well as the typical frequency and type of contact required with both coworkers and clients. This log is the basis for determining the equipment and software needed in the home office and the feasibility of telecommuting for this position.

The supervisor, after consulting with the project manager, writes a recommendation for approval or disapproval of the program. The recommendation should include information

regarding how the employee's participation in the program would affect project performance and client response requirements. If the application is disapproved, the recommendation must include a brief reason for disapproval. The supervisor then forwards the form to the appropriate senior management, who sends it to Human Resources for final action. The employee will receive a written response to the application from Human Resources. All applications and responses will be filed in the employee's personnel folder.

As part of the application, the employee must also submit a memo describing his/her home office, including the equipment, software, and phone line(s) available. This information will be submitted to the corporate Service Desk for review to ensure compatibility with SSS equipment. Any upgrades or changes to equipment must also be reviewed.

Employees whose performance or attendance is unsatisfactory or who are on a formal performance improvement plan are ineligible to participate in the telecommuting program. Groups may have additional eligibility restrictions for individual projects or positions.

Managing Time and Communications

The employee must arrange to have fixed hours for telecommuting. For at least 8 hours each day, 6 of which need to be during the regular workday, the employee must be available for phone calls and for the receipt and transmittal of e-mail. (S)he must also have a plan to handle incoming phone calls from clients. One possibility is to have office voice mail state the day(s) the person is working from home with a phone contact number for that period.

Facilities and Technical Considerations

The care and use of corporate equipment and software used at home is the responsibility of the employee; where personal equipment is used for company business, it must be compatible with company equipment. The employee is responsible for the cost of purchase and installation of required equipment and software, such as a separate phone line for a modem and/or fax or an Internet connection using a current approved Web browser.

Challenges and Investment

Our telework program had initial challenges during the implementation stage in 1999–2000, such as difficulty of staff sticking with the same telecommuting day each week or staff needing improved accessibility to files on the network. But these things soon resolved on their own as technology was enhanced and the company invested in VPN connections. As the policy was developed and put in place, guidelines for telecommuters were developed, including the day(s) an employee would telecommute. Overall, our telework program has provided very few challenges, and those challenges presented were easily addressed.

The company also made an investment in buying additional equipment for telecommuters to enhance off-site network access.

Program Outlook

With our commitment to work/life balance—we have received the Alliance for

Workplace Excellence Award for the 12th consecutive year (since the program's inception)—and our committed effort in recruiting and retaining top-notch employees, we will continue to offer these flexible commuting options.

Most Helpful Resources

To get the program in place, we initially conducted a pilot program. Several employees from different groups telecommuted on different days for about 7 months. At the completion of the pilot program, Human Resources gathered feedback from each employee on their experience and any difficulties they or their managers experienced during this time.

Success Tips

Obtain support from leadership.

Put in place a policy that provides guidance but allows for exceptions.

Solicit feedback from all levels within the organization.

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