

TELECOMMUTING

Description

Simply defined, telecommuting is working at home or another off site location, full- or part-time. While employees may be hooked up to the main office via a sophisticated computer network, it's possible to telecommute, with as little as a pen, paper and phone.

Telecommuting, for Coloradans, can offer greater independence and mean more time with your family and less time on the road. Imagine putting in a full day's work without ever getting into your car!

Considerations

Telecommuting increases options. Perhaps the main reason people are telecommuting now is simply because they can. In the United States, 15.7 million people telecommute (AT&T Survey, 1998), consisting of company employees working at home or another off site location, on a full- or part-time basis.

Jobs are more portable than they once were. The U.S. used to be largely an industrial nation. In fact, in 1950 only 17 percent of workers were in information or service businesses like sales, public relations, personnel, banking, health-care and publishing. By 1980, that number grew more than half. Teleworking is a viable option for large and small companies in today's economy. In fact, more than 65% of teleworkers are employed by firms with less than 100 employees. (Source: www.telecommute.org/resources/facts.shtm. They cite IDC/LINKFLASH)

Telecommuting offers needed flexibility. While these factors may make it possible to telecommute, others may make it necessary. Some of the changes in our lifestyles are dictating a need for change in our work styles. The

standard "nine to five" schedule was designed around a traditional family that doesn't exist anymore. Picking up and dropping off small children at day-care, arranging after school care – or even handling the growing demand of elder care – cause many employees to need more flexibility in their schedules. While telecommuting is not a substitute for child care, it can allow some workers much-needed freedom.

The benefits of telecommuting include:

- Increased productivity
- Savings on facility costs
- Reduced absenteeism
- Recruitment and retention of skilled employees
- Improved customer service
- Business continuity in the event of an emergency or disaster
- Reduced traffic congestion and improved air quality.

Communities throughout the United States have promoted telecommuting to both employers and residents. Telecommuting can address a variety of community concerns including:

Mitigating disruptions in a disaster – How many of your residents missed work in the past few years because of bad weather or other related emergencies? Employees' home offices become a community's hidden asset when an emergency occurs. During a major storm in central New Jersey, telecommuters at Bellcore and American Express Travel maintained their productivity while many of their office counterparts missed work for a whole week. Telecommuting helped get the newspaper out after a fire at the Dallas Times Herald. It also kept people at the California State Public Utilities Commission working productively at home after an earthquake.

Increased cost of housing – In their search for affordable housing, people are moving further from the cities and from their work sites. They face longer commutes and often wind up searching for work closer to home. Telecommuting can ease the strain of commuting long distances every day. It is a viable option for a firm when it is faced with the possible loss of key employees because of increased local housing costs.

Economic development – Telecommuting can also help with economic development. Telecommuters tend to spend more money at local businesses if they telecommute even one day per week. The City of Encinitas, California, estimated that for each telecommuter, \$1,200 annually is returned to local businesses such as dry cleaners, restaurants and banks.



Program Development

Telecommuting is fast changing the way that people do business. Instead of just being a place where people go, work is now something that they do. Telecommuting programs can focus on any number of options. Here are some of the ways telecommuting can work:

✓ **At Home.** Currently the most popular option, this involves little or no outlay in time or cash for employers. Some employers only allow employees that have home computers to telecommute. Others may provide portable computers to help those that would otherwise not be able to work from home.

✓ **At Satellite Work Centers.** Often confused with “branch offices,” satellite work centers differ in one important respect: all the people who work at them also live near them. For example, if an employer in Boulder had many employees living in Estes Park, the employer could lease office space in Estes Park for the occasional use of employees. The employees’ managers would continue to work from the main office.

✓ **At Neighborhood Work Centers.** Similarly, neighborhood work centers provide an opportunity for employees to work closer to home – in this case, in office facilities with employees of other firms. Tenants in a neighborhood work center usually share support services, such as clerical help, telecommunications equipment, photocopying machines and office supplies.

Many experts believe that we’ll soon see more satellite and neighborhood work centers. In Japan, where housing is at a premium, telecommuting is already almost entirely satellite and neighborhood work center-based.

Although more difficult and costly to set up, work centers are sometimes easier to sell in concept to management – perhaps because they more closely resemble the traditional office.

Satellite and neighborhood work centers also have the potential to solve the growing jobs/housing imbalance problem that many communities in Colorado are facing by moving the jobs closer to where the employees live.