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Date

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT**

**HUMAN RESOURCES (HR) BULLETIN #031, FY06, 41 CFR**

**SUBJECT:** Guidelines for Alternative Workplace Arrangements

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** Upon release of this HR Bulletin

**EXPIRATION DATE:** Effective until canceled or superseded

**SUPERSEDES:** N/A

**BACKGROUND:** 40 U.S.C. §587(c)(3), (Public Law 104-208, div. A, title I, §101(f), title IV, §407(a), (September 30, 1996)), as revised, restated and by Public Law 107-217 (August 21, 2002) authorizes the General Services Administration (GSA) to provide guidance, assistance, and oversight, as needed, regarding planning, establishment, and operation of Alternative Workplace Arrangements (AWAs). In accordance with this law, the head of each bureau must also consider whether acquiring space, quarters, buildings, or other facilities for use by employees can be met using AWAs (see 08 under Basic Principles).

Section 359 of Public Law 106-346, effective October 23, 2000, also requires each Executive agency to establish a policy under which eligible employees of the agency may participate in telecommuting to the maximum extent possible without diminished employee performance.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this HR Bulletin is to provide additional guidance on AWAs, including telework, to assist bureaus in their efforts to comply with the above laws. This HR Bulletin provides guidelines for designing, implementing, and operating AWAs.

Although the Department's Telework Program specifically refers to telework, some bureaus have implemented hoteling and other forms of AWA which also include virtual offices, telework centers, hot desking, and other distributed workplace arrangements. The Department's Telework Plan places responsibility with each bureau for the

(1) development, funding, administration, operation, and evaluation of its telework plan; and (2) establishment of their own procedures for the purchase or transfer and installation of Government-owned equipment for its employees who telework. This HR Bulletin extends these responsibilities to include all forms of AWAs.

**COVERAGE AND EXCLUSIONS:** Provisions of this HR Bulletin are applicable Department-wide. In implementing AWS, bureaus must be aware of any labor relations obligations that may arise.

**DEFINITIONS:**

01. Excess Personal Property/Equipment - Any personal property no longer required by the holding agency for the discharge of its responsibilities.
02. Virtual Office or Virtual Workplace - A work environment in which employees work cooperatively from different locations using a computer network in lieu of a single building or other single physical location. A virtual office is typically a collaborative communications medium (e.g., a computer network, etc.) where workers gather electronically to collaborate and/or carry out other work activities. The physical locations of the employees working in a virtual office can be temporary or permanent and can be almost anywhere (e.g., a corporate office with shared workspace, airports, airplanes, automobiles, etc.).
03. Hoteling - An AWA in which employees work in one facility (facility A) part of the time and at one or more alternative worksites the rest of the time. When working in facility A, employees use nondedicated, nonpermanent workspaces assigned for use by reservation on an as-needed basis.
04. Hot desking (or Free Address or Touchdown Workstations) - An AWA in which employees work in one facility (facility A) part of the time and at one or more alternative worksites the rest of the time. When working in facility A, employees use nondedicated, nonpermanent workspaces assigned on a first come, first served basis.

**BASIC PRINCIPLES:**

01. Providing Workplace Equipment for Use of AWAs (e.g., employee residences, telework centers, etc.)

Bureaus may provide or procure either new or excess equipment for alternative worksites as long as it is clear that (1) the equipment continues to belong to the Government, and (2) there is an audit trail indicating the location of the equipment. Bureaus may provide and/or purchase (using appropriated funds) telecommunications equipment and services for employees working in home-based or other AWAs for:

- a. installing telephone lines and necessary equipment;
- b. facsimile machines;
- c. internet services;
- d. broadband access;
- e. e-mail services;
- f. voice over IP equipment and services;
- g. desktop videoconference equipment and services; and
- h. in general, any other telecommunications equipment and services the bureau deems needed by individuals working in home-based AWAs.

Appropriated funds may also be used to pay the monthly charges for the above. Based on the same authority<sup>1</sup> used for installing telecommunications equipment for government employees in a government contractor's office, bureaus may also provide/procure the telecommunications equipment/services described above for employees in non-home-based AWAs (such as telework centers).

02. Providing Teleworkers with Underutilized Equipment Before it is Declared Excess

Bureaus may provide underutilized computers or other equipment for use by teleworkers or for use in other AWAs. The equipment does not officially become excess until the agency determines that it cannot be used in main or alternative worksites.

03. Providing or Procuring Help Desk and/or Other Technical Support Services for Employees Working in Home-Based Telework or Other AWAs

Bureaus may provide or purchase help desk and/or other technical support to employees working in approved AWAs, provided the bureau deems the support necessary to successfully accomplish officially assigned work. These support services may be provided on-site at the employee's alternative worksite, via telecommunication services (e.g., remote control, etc.), at a service site conveniently located to the alternative worksite, at the employing organization's local facility, or using other reasonable means/locations that minimize disruption of the workflow.

04. Providing or Procuring Office Furnishings (e.g., desks, chairs, etc.) for Alternative Worksites

Bureaus may provide new or used furniture or excess furniture from another agency for alternative worksites as long as it is clear that (1) the furniture continues to belong to the Government, and (2) there is an audit trail indicating the location of the furniture.

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<sup>1</sup> PL 104-52, §620: 31 U.S.C. §1348

05. Paying the Utility Costs for Alternative Worksites

Except for the telecommunications costs covered in Basic Principle 01 (above), bureaus may not pay nor reimburse<sup>2</sup> employees for the utility costs for residential (home-based) alternative worksites. Utility costs include heating, air conditioning, lighting, and the operation of government-furnished data processing equipment associated with the residential AWA. Also, bureaus may not pay Federal or State taxes for equipment or services used by their teleworkers.

Bureaus may pay utility costs associated with employee usage of worksites contractually procured by the agency (e.g., telework centers), as long as such expenses are provided for in the contract between the agency and the provider of the site.

06. Requiring Employees to Pay for Their Own Alternative Workspace

Bureaus that require an employee to telework or otherwise utilize an alternative worksite may not require the employee to pay for or share the costs for the alternative workspace. This includes the costs for equipment, facilities, and/or services used by the employee.

07. Responsibility for Relocation and Re-Setup of Alternative Worksite Workstations and Equipment

Bureaus that require an employee to relocate are fully responsible for the relocation and re-setup of any associated alternative worksite workstation and/or equipment. If an employee relocates on his/her own accord, then the determination of responsibility for the relocation and re-setup of alternative worksite workstations and equipment is within the discretion of the bureau.

08. Factors to Consider in Determining Whether Bureau Needs Can be Met Using AWAs

Through early planning, bureaus may be able to shorten and simplify the space acquisition process and acquire the necessary space at the most reasonable cost to the Government. In doing so, bureaus should consider as many of the following factors when determining whether acquiring space, quarters, buildings, or other facilities for use by employees can be met using AWAs:

- a. facility performance and space utilization efficiency/effectiveness;
- b. allocation/utilization/flexibility of space to meet diverse/changing organizational needs;
- c. workspace quality factors, quality of worklife;
- d. individual/organizational performance;

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<sup>2</sup> See General Accountability Office decision B-225159, June 19, 1989

- e. technology utilization and return on investment;
- f. reduced/saved facility costs per person;
- g. reduced/avoided other expenses;
- h. increased/earned revenue;
- i. workplace/space flexibility to accommodate/meet diverse/changing uses, configurations, staff, and/or other organizational needs; and
- j. environmental impact, sustainability.

09. Space Per Person Standards in an Alternative Worksite Environment

The Government no longer maintains space per person requirements. Under current GSA space planning guidance, space allocation should be based on organizational needs. When feasible, AWAs can accommodate those needs as well as reduce overall agency space requirements.

**REFERENCES:** General Services Administration, Federal Management Regulation (FMR), Guidelines for Alternative Workplace Arrangements, FMR Bulletin 2006-B3

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