

# Remote Work Arrangements

## IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE FOR LEADERS

As we start to plan for our return to campus, the question of continuing to work remotely is at the forefront for many employees. Our past experience with remote work due to public health orders is different from future remote work, when campus will be busy with students, staff, faculty and community members. The Remote Work Arrangements (RWAs) principled approach has been created for this new hybrid environment where part-time remote work can be considered if service and operational requirements can be maintained when on-campus activities resume. The principled approach also recognizes that a one-size model will not work at UVic. Departmental leaders, including managers and supervisors at the unit level, will need to determine what will and won't work for their teams. The resources provided to support RWAs include principles to guide departmental decision-making, a framework that applies to all UVic RWAs, conversation guides for employee and supervisors, an employee self-assessment tool, a home office safety checklist and Frequently Asked Questions. This implementation guide is intended to assist supervisors to anticipate and plan for remote work requests from their team. The term supervisor refers to anyone with supervisory responsibilities and is not limited by job title.

## OPPORTUNITIES

There are benefits and opportunities to implementing RWAs at UVic. Some of the benefits include:

- The opportunity to re-think space allocation at a time when office, meeting, teaching and research space is at a premium. One RWA principle is those participating in a RWAs may be reassigned from a dedicated office or workspace to a shared workspace. This can help optimize workspace for all employees.
- Many employees reported increased productivity from remote work. That increased productivity can come at the cost of team connection and mental health, so a hybrid model could offer the best of both worlds.
- Recruitment and retention is a challenge for many departments at UVic. Increasing employee engagement and satisfaction through part-time RWAs can lower turnover and will be highly sought after by candidates in a competitive market.
- RWAs can also support other UVic priorities including sustainability through reduced traffic to/from campus and our EDI priorities by increasing opportunities for employment for those with diverse needs and backgrounds.

## CHALLENGES

Based on input from UVic leaders and employees through survey feedback and consultation, RWAs will also bring challenges:

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- The most commonly listed challenge by supervisors is the cost of furniture and equipment. This is a very real issue that has the potential to create the perception of inequity in RWA approval. Some departments will be able to purchase laptops and others will not. There is no one-size solution for this challenge. The RWA FAQs address some common questions around setting up a home office. There is also a short section about home office set up at the back of this guide.
- Another challenge will be scheduling and coordinating coverage, meetings and team collaboration time. The implementation of collaboration tools such as MS Teams and Zoom are excellent resources, but we will need to use them differently in a hybrid environment. Jointly developed and explicit team norms will help to establish protocols for team communication and collaboration. The conversation guides included in the RWA package highlight some of these issues for consideration.

## IT'S A LOT TO TAKE IN AT ONCE

Some people will want to get back to “normal” and do things the way we used to. The pandemic has changed the way we work and we need to evaluate what our new normal looks like. New technology, updated business processes, changed perspectives and our experience working remotely will influence how we approach a future hybrid work environment.

RWAs are not being introduced in isolation. We can't talk about returning to campus without including remote work as part of that conversation. The excitement and anxiety involved in return to campus planning can be either exacerbated or alleviated by RWAs, so these issues need to be consider together. This is also happening at a time when people are still working hard to provide services and respond to emergent issues. People are tired, busy, and many have much needed vacation time scheduled over the summer. Implementing RWAs at this time will require change management skills, empathy, flexibility and a good plan.

## TAKE AN ITERATIVE APPROACH TO PLANNING

UVic is taking a pilot project approach to RWAs and will assess the effectiveness of our tools and resources and the success of the program over time. Return to campus planning with a gradual return over July and August as part of the restart plan is different from a formal RWA. You may need time to develop criteria for your operational and service needs and make changes as you go. Some units may embrace RWAs as part of their restart plans, some may opt to use the summer as an opportunity to assess and practice a hybrid environment while they gradually return to campus, and others may prefer to develop their approach once the team is back and service has stabilized. Determine what is best for you and your team, communicate your intention and timelines clearly with them, and be open to making changes as you go.

## **ASSESS PLAN DO EVALUATE**

Assess, Plan, Do, Evaluate is a responsive and iterative approach to implementing change in complex environments. Each step provides the foundation for the next and it can be viewed as a cyclical process that enables you to start small, try different things and adapt your approach as you learn through experience.

### **Assess – gather information**

Take the time to assess your department's needs and context for remote work. One of the first things to do is to develop departmental criteria for RWAs based on your department's operations and the RWA principles and framework. Consider things such as service hours, scheduling requirements, the type of activities that require an on-campus presence, minimum number of staff required on site, safety and team collaboration and communication. Use department leadership team meetings to discuss departmental opportunities, challenges and an equitable approach. Also assess your own preferences and how they may bias your approach to RWAs. If you did not enjoy working remotely yourself, how might that experience influence your response to requests? If you are personally comfortable with flexible planning, how might you provide more structure for team members who need it?

### **Plan – create and communicate a plan**

RWAs will be challenging to manage in a reactive way once requests start coming in. While each request is unique and should be considered on its own merits, a proactive team approach will make it easier to communicate criteria, clarify intentions and provide consistent information. Use a team meeting to discuss the opportunities and challenges of remote work for your team and to review the UVic Principles, Framework and resources. Consider either individual or team conversations to gauge interest in RWAs early on without making or requiring any commitments. Build your criteria for RWAs based on the information you gather and create a plan for your team. Proactive conversations and planning will help you manage expectations and create a process and timeline that works best for your workplace.

### **Do – implement your plan and be open to changes**

UVic's pilot project approach offers a unique opportunity to try new things while minimizing risk. You may wish to establish a process and timeline for receiving and collating all requests, making decisions on a service or unit basis, and to specify RWA start and end dates during the initial pilot project period. The recommended duration for initial arrangements is 3-8 months. Create and adjust team norms to address issues around communication, office coverage, access to on-campus work space, meetings, etc. Arrangements can be reviewed regularly and renewed or adjusted as needed.

## Evaluate – An iterative process requires ongoing evaluation

Check in regularly with those on RWAs, but do the same with those who are working full-time on campus to identify and mitigate challenges early. Help your team to appreciate and normalize that some RWAs will work and others may not. The nature of the work, the team and the individual all contribute to RWA effectiveness and that we can embrace uncertainty and even failure as a normal part of the process. Bring the team together at the midpoint and end of the trial period to discuss what worked well and how the process could be improved for the future. Revisit and contribute to the RWAs FAQs. UVic is new to this and your experience will help us to make adjustments as we go.

## SUPPORT

There are support and resources to help you make decisions and respond to requests. Take time to review the full package of information on the Working Remotely Toolkit website. Attend a supervisor information session to learn more and ask questions. Invite your HRC to a leadership team meeting. Most importantly, take a departmental approach and consult your colleagues about when and how to incorporate RWAs as you plan your return to campus.

## ANTICIPATED ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

### Computers

Survey feedback identified access to funding for computer equipment as one of the biggest challenges to RWAs. UVic policies and standards will apply to computer equipment. The department will purchase and retain ownership of all computers used for UVic work. Some employees were permitted to use personal computers at home in the past but that will not be permitted as part of a RWA. This means that departments that do not have the funds to properly equip employees may need to delay RWAs or rotate employees through RWAs.

### Office Furniture:

Employee will be responsible for purchasing ergonomically optimized furniture for their remote workspace. When employees were required to work at home due to public health orders, UVic provided advice and support to enhance office ergonomics using what employees had at hand. For future RWAs, a more considered approach to office ergonomics and safety will be required, including a home office safety checklist.

We are currently working on providing PEA and ME employees access ProD funds (full or partial) to purchase office furniture. It is important to note that professional development policies state that furniture or equipment purchased fully or partially using ProD funds remains the property of UVic and must meet UVic office furniture standards, so it can be reallocated when returned. Items purchased fully or partially through ProD funds that cannot be reallocated may be purchased by employees at current fair market valued determined by Purchasing Services.

## Relevant UVic webpages and policies for reference:

- [Computer purchase and standards](#)
- [Office furniture standards and process for moving furniture](#)
- [Purchasing and surplus allocation](#)
- [Information security, privacy and records management](#)
- [Ergonomics](#)
- [Health and Safety](#)
- [Use of Pro-D funds](#)