Guidelines for Managing and Communicating with Staff in Remote and Hybrid Settings

As a residential liberal arts institution, Swarthmore College values a vibrant learning, work and community. For some departments, incorporating remote and hybrid work into the operations of the department can be an effective and productive tool for meeting goals and objectives in accordance with the mission of the College. While many of the practices described below are important in any management situation, these guidelines have been developed to provide you with support and guidance to address the particular needs of managing employees who are working in remote and hybrid settings. As always, our goal is to offer our community resources and information to support their work and professional development.

There are several key considerations when successfully managing staff members remotely including technological support, consistent communication, managing work, established goals and objectives, providing meaningful feedback, and attention to equity.

This guide includes helpful information on each of these areas. We encourage you to also visit our website for additional resources on supporting your staff in working remotely. If you have questions, please contact Paula MacDonald @pmacdon1@swarthmore.edu.

Technological Support

Your staff members should be adequately equipped with the necessary technology to work from home effectively. You can access ITS resources, support, and training at this link: kb.swarthmore.edu/display/remote/Working+Remotely.

Clear and Consistent Communication

Communicating in clear and consistent ways with your staff is essential. It is important that you intentionally create opportunities for ongoing communication throughout the day and week with remote and hybrid working staff members. Establish regular 1:1 meetings with team members to ensure consistent opportunities to touch base and provide feedback.

When communicating with your staff, be mindful of the following components -

- **Meeting Logistics:** Zoom meetings can cause fatigue easily. Be mindful of whether all meetings need to occur over Zoom or if a simple phone call or text or email exchange will suffice. Use meeting times wisely by establishing and following an agenda. Be aware of the lengths of meetings and their frequency. Also, be sure to prepare for the technology
needs of blended meetings - when some staff join meetings in-person while others join remotely.

- **Consistency**: holding regularly scheduled meetings, including 1:1’s, staff meetings or departmental meetings, can offer structure for your staff.

- **Preferred method and frequency of communication**: Establish the preferred method(s) of communication and communicate those clearly and in writing to ensure understanding by all.

- **Responsiveness to emails and phone calls**: Staff members should be expected to implement call forwarding ([call forwarding directions](#)) whenever necessary to ensure responsiveness and that phone calls will be received in a timely manner. Establish a reasonable timeline for answering emails.

- **Comprehensiveness**: Ensure that whatever means you use to keep your staff in the loop on changing priorities, projects, and deadlines are adapted to remote work. Communicating changes in writing, holding virtual stand-up meetings, using shared documents circulated amongst everyone will help ensure information reaches everyone.

- **Methodologies**: In addition to Zoom, use Chat, Hangouts, Slack, or other forms of instant messaging as well as phone/text to allow more real time communication. All team members should be utilizing the same technology for instant messaging and clear standards should be in place.

- You may find that you need to connect with remote or hybrid team members more frequently. Be mindful of varying your methods of outreach to maximize productivity while minimizing fatigue.

Unless otherwise approved the general expectation is that remote and hybrid-working employees will maintain the same work hours and schedule as on-campus employees.

**Performance Management**

The performance of remote and hybrid employees should be managed in the same manner that you manage your on campus person employees’ work performance. Critical elements include having updated job descriptions, establishing goals and objectives, and providing meaningful feedback.

- **Update the job description**: Managers should review each employee’s job description to ensure that it is clear, accurate, and up-to-date and ensure mutual understanding with their
employee. Any substantive changes should be developed in consultation with Human Resources.

- **Establish goals and objectives**: Goal creation is a critical step in effectively supporting each of your staff members’ performance and productivity.
  
  - Utilize the **SMART** (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timebound) goal method to develop appropriate goals with time frames.
  
  - **Ensure a shared understanding of how goals, priorities, and changes impact your whole team**: It is helpful for all staff members to understand the demands being placed both on their colleagues and on their team. Clearly describing how goals, priorities, and ongoing changes impact individual team members and the entire team opens up the opportunities for staff members to collaborate or offer assistance when possible. Additionally, it allows you to clearly align (and realign as needed) the work of individual staff members and the overall goals and objectives of the department.
  
  - **Measure results, not simply hours worked**: Deliverables are often a better measure of work productivity than hours worked, for both remote, hybrid, and on campus work. Supervisors should be evaluating the results that employees are delivering regarding day to day work, along with the progress on previously assigned goals and objectives.

- **Continuous Feedback**: Providing meaningful feedback safeguards their success. Keep in mind that your feedback should be:
  
  - **Timely**: Both accolades and constructive criticism should be delivered in a timely fashion. Be mindful of recognizing good work and effort openly and on a regular basis. Concerns regarding issues such as productivity, responsiveness, executing deliverables, etc, need to be addressed quickly to understand the root cause of the problem and develop a plan to improve performance.
  
  - **Continuous**: Your staff members deserve continuous feedback so that they can understand where they are excelling, and where they may need to strengthen their work. Too often, supervisors wait until there are a multitude of issues and address them all at once, an approach that can leave staff members feeling overwhelmed and defeated. The goal is to include feedback in every 1:1 meeting that you have, so that it becomes a regular part of your ongoing conversations.
  
  - **Honest**: Your staff members deserve an honest assessment of their performance so that they can understand where they are demonstrating success and where they can improve. An honest response doesn’t have to be harsh or unkind; your focus
should be on offering constructive, thoughtful criticism that can help your staff member grow professionally. Often the way a message is delivered will have an immediate impact on the way the message is received. The goal is to provide clear expectations to your employee so they have a clear understanding of what success looks like.

- **Mutual**: as a supervisor, it’s important to remember the value of two-way feedback. Create an environment that permits your staff members to let you know what support they need from you, and that they feel comfortable communicating struggles as they work to accomplish the goals you have set together.

**Managing Work**

Managers should expect that employees who are working remotely to maintain the same level of productivity, performance, communication, and responsiveness, as they would have achieved working on campus. Important elements to consider include:

- **Project management**: Managers should maintain a system of tracking the progress of work (project tracker, etc.) Ideally the system would be kept current, available to all team members, and show the status of ongoing work.

- **Use of calendars**: If appropriate for your function, establish clear standards for all staff members about the use of calendaring systems that show availability during work hours.

- **Storing and accessing files and documents**: Work materials should be stored in a shared drive, and not on a desktop, so that they are secure and accessible to others in the department who may need it. Departmental storage locations and file names should be clear and used consistently by team members.

- **Develop a continuity plan**: In the case of an absence or disruption, a continuity plan outlining who will share responsibilities or provide back-up assistance should be created and shared in ways that can be accessed by other staff members.

**Ensuring Equity and Engagement**

When considering remote/hybrid work arrangements it is important to ensure that a remote work arrangement doesn’t advantage or disadvantage a remote worker. The following guidelines are designed to ensure equitable treatment amongst all employees, regardless if they are working remotely, a hybrid arrangement or on campus.

- Ensure all employees have access to appropriate **professional development** opportunities. Explore online learning platforms including [LinkedIn Learning](https://www.linkedin.com/learning), virtual conferences, and webinars.
• Ensure the overall **workload** is aligned with the employee’s position description. Resist the urge to give extra assignments, or quick turn-around assignments to on campus employees simply due to proximity and easy access.

• Be aware of how opportunities to work on **new projects/initiatives** or with particular campus partners is divided amongst remote, hybrid and on campus employees. This includes ensuring awareness of these opportunities is made to all categories of employees in a similar timeline and method.

• Check in regularly with remote and hybrid employees to ensure a sense of community and engagement. Consider utilization of check in meetings to establish a continued sense of engagement that isn't solely focused on status of work projects and initiatives.