



## Is Hybrid Work Possible for NJ Municipalities?

It is no revelation that the worldwide pandemic has changed the nature of work in the world. We see this in all sorts of studies, commentaries (such as this one), and actions to determine what post-pandemic work and the demands by workers for alternative work schedules will look like.

Recent studies report nearly 75% of employees want flexible remote work options to be available. One overriding theme that seems to come from all of this discussion is that hybrid working is something for government must consider.

For New Jersey's municipalities, hybrid work discussions have been numerous and varied. As with anything new, establishing standards is difficult and oftentimes confusing. However, we all learned during the height of the pandemic that remote working for New Jersey municipal workers is possible—and local government employees want it to continue.

Adding to the complexity of determining how to responsibly manage hybrid work, New Jersey municipalities are faced with an ever-growing lack of qualified employees. Clearly this is not limited to our industry; it is throughout the United States. Many of us have experienced the difficulty of hiring professional staff. This was pointed out in a recent League article, "Where Have All the CFOs Gone?" (in the January and February issues) about the difficulties of hiring certified financial officers. In that article, author Joseph Monzo, Principal, JPMonzo Municipal Consulting, points out the changing environment and difficult recruitment process for qualified CFOs. Simply put, the demand for hybrid work is growing and those towns willing to accommodate hybrid work find that they are able to retain and recruit qualified professional employees.

### Delivering our mission

To this point, in December 2021, the United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in its report, "Status Of Telework In The Federal Government, Report to Congress" Director Kiran Ahuja, writes "This [the pandemic] experience makes clear that, that when implemented correctly telework,

can help us deliver our mission. As we look in the future, OPM is encouraging agencies to strategically leveraged workplace flexibilities such as telework to attract, recruit, and retain the best possible workforce, as well as leverage telework as a way to ensure greater resiliency and emergency preparedness through the Federal government. Through measurable progress towards enhanced telework eligibility and participation, and the data reporting practices detailed in the report, agencies are better positioned to revisit how they were operating before the pandemic began and leveraged lessons learned to integrate telework into their strategic workforce plans." (<https://telework.gov/reports-studies/reports-to-congress/2021-report-to-congress.pdf>)

Many times, solutions to a variety of problems trickle down from the federal government to the state government and then to municipal government. While many of us in local government like to think that we are flexible enough to come up with solutions on our own—and we do—we look to those forms of governments for guidance on how best to approach the problem in government management. This is particularly true in New Jersey where oversight by the State is clear. While many mayors, governing bodies, and administrators throughout the state are working on this issue, we do have a model provided by the New Jersey Civil Service Commission (CSC) that I believe can help municipal administrations with determining how best to provide a hybrid work model.

On April 6, 2022, Chairperson Deidre L. Webster Cobb, issued Model Telework Pilot Program, State Executive Branch Employees. While this is obviously designed for a certain sector of State employment, it does provide us, as municipal officials, guidance on how we can put into place a hybrid work schedule. I strongly recommend you get a copy of CSC Docket # 2022-2243, which can be found at [www.njlm.org/TeleworkPilot](http://www.njlm.org/TeleworkPilot).

In the descriptions of the pilot program, there are several key points and guidance on implementation that are critical. Most important is the fact that not all work is suitable for telework. There needs to be a thorough assessment of what work for your municipality is possible.

## Critical planning

The discussion of hybrid work will be continuing for many months to come. For the sake of local government functions, it is critical for operations and for the recruitment of qualified employees—especially in the specialty fields. Demands by the tax-paying public are always paramount, and we must find ways to provide services while balancing the demand of the new work conditions for those who provide those services. We, as local government officials, need to address this matter in the coming year.

The NJ State League of Municipalities recognizes the importance of this subject and is currently developing a program to allow more information and discussion by local officials. I am certain much more discussion and information will be coming out over the next several months. 📌

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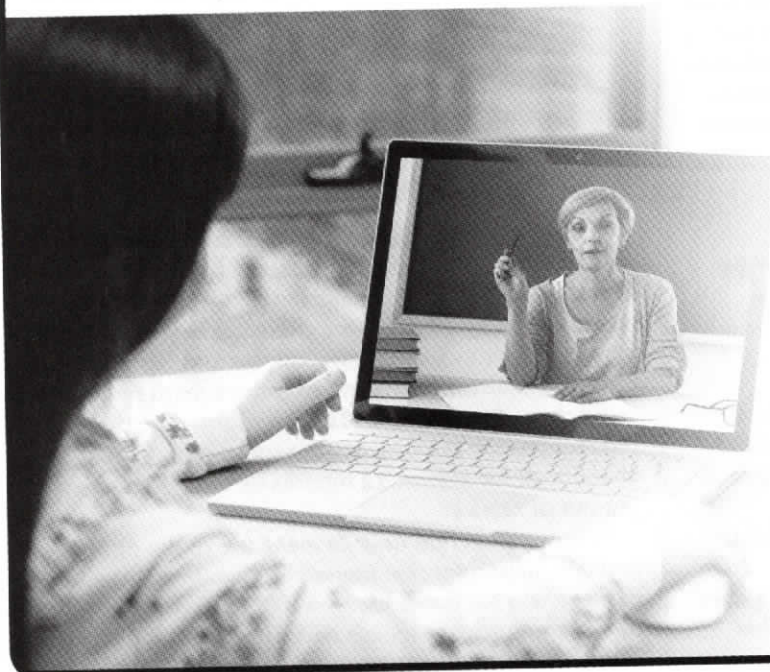
## Telework Pointers

While I will not go into all the points made in Docket # 2022-2243, here are some important points:

- No more than 2 days per week for telework.
- Employees should have an application process and managers should determine if the work is eligible.
- Eligibility process should be clearly defined.
- Training is important to be provided for both management and employee on how the telework is conducted.
- Timekeeping and work performed must be kept along with any records generated.
- Security of information is key. Equipment should be provided that ensures security both of documents and cyber security purposes.
- The process for eligibility should be done in consultation with the relevant unions as plans are being developed.

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