

Participant Workbook



Flex Work Makes the Team Work

Aligning Your Project to
Your Institution's Mission
and Values

Presented by



METROPOLITAN
STATE UNIVERSITYSM
OF DENVER

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Case Study

Summary

Just prior to the pandemic, the Staff Senate of Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU Denver) began drafting a Staff Alternative Work Arrangements (AWA) policy that was co-sponsored by Human Resources. Flex work had been practiced in pockets around the university, but conversations about workplace flexibility were not available to all employees.

Then the pandemic showed us that many functional elements of positions and roles across the University could be performed as well, if not better, remotely than from the brick-and-mortar office. The pandemic also caused employees to rethink their expectations of their employers, inciting the Great Resignation. Flex work rose to the top as a significant factor in attracting and retaining talent. Alternative Work Arrangements (AWAs) became imperative to MSU Denver achieving its goal of being an employer of choice in Colorado.

AWAs give employees and their supervisors the context and guidance to craft alternative work arrangements that enhance the work environment for the individual, the team, and the University. AWAs give employees and managers flexibility in when and where work is being done to advance the University Mission and Strategic Plan. Leaders are empowered to make decisions for their teams, and employees benefit from flexibility in many ways. The policy is intended to advance the University's Mission and Strategic Plan by serving as a tool for recruitment and retention; contributing to consistent expectations and practices across departments to foster a more equitable environment; and providing flexibility for solutions in workspace management. Overall, AWAs enhance employee engagement and commitment, essential elements to positioning MSU Denver as a best place to work.

Three key elements were critical in successfully advocating for the approval of the Staff Alternative Work Arrangements Policy:

- Knowledge of and competence navigating the university's decision-making processes and systems
- Aligning the policy with University Mission and Strategic Plan, and
- Effective cross-functional collaboration to operationalize the policy

Policy Process

The MSU Denver Staff Senate Policy Review Committee worked in collaboration with Human Resources and the VP of Administration to gain buy-in and solicit input and feedback from the office that would, ultimately, be responsible for overseeing the policy implementation. It was also critical to garner the support of executive leadership to champion the policy at the highest level.

The Staff Senate began researching alternative work arrangements in late 2019. The AWA draft went through two readings to gather feedback from Staff Senate and was voted on in May 2021, passing 19 approved, no opposition, and no abstention. This vote would be used to show our support of the policy as it moved forward to the University Policy Advisory Council (UPAC).

University operational policies are reviewed by the UPAC, University community, and President's Cabinet before being approved by the MSU Denver President in accordance with the MSU Denver Trustees' Policy and Procedure Enactment Policy. UPAC is a cross-functional governance group led by the University Policy Office and comprised of members from across the University, at all levels and from all departments. Proposed policies are typically drafted outside the UPAC or through subcommittees and discussed within the UPAC. The UPAC will vote on a proposed policy before moving to senior leadership and the University President's Cabinet. The AWA Policy moved through the UPAC process, including multiple rounds of discussion and revisions, and 30-day community review. The policy was moved forward to senior leadership and President's Cabinet in August of 2021.

Up to this point, the AWA Policy was largely philosophical. It provided broad guidelines to foster flexibility and established the mindset and approach but did not go into detail on the specifics of operationalizing the policy. After passing through UPAC, senior leadership focused on the 'how' of AWAs. Human Resources led the effort to develop the AWA Guide and supplemental tools to support employees and managers in planning and managing AWAs. Once developed, the tools and policy were presented to senior leadership before being presented to President's Cabinet. At Cabinet, the AWA went through two reviews. The final presentation of AWAs occurred late 2021 and was formally approved by the University president in March 2022.

Alternative Work Arrangements Implementation

To operationalize AWAs, a Toolkit for Supervisors and Employees was created to assist in implementation of the policy. The Toolkit included an AWA Guide, Employee Self-Reflection Tool, Supervisor Self-Reflection Tool, a Team Conversations Guide for supervisors, and an informal Individual Agreement for the manager and employee to document the AWA. Two collections of courses – one for supervisors and one for

employees - were curated on LinkedIn Learning to support the essential skills for negotiating and managing alternative work arrangements. These included topics around communication, time management, collaboration and managing hybrid teams, among others. Communication events with senior leaders were held to discuss AWAs from a high-level perspective, and the Sr. Human Resources Business Partners were trained on the AWA policy and Toolkit to be able to support and coach supervisors and employees in AWA conversations and planning.

The following is a specific example of how our Sr. HRBPs support managers in AWAs. While working in a hybrid environment a supervisor noticed an employee was unresponsive, not meeting deadlines, and was sloppy with submitted assignments. The supervisor's first instinct was to bring the employee back to campus full time, but our HR guidance advised against that option. Our HR representative dug a little deeper to see what was going on. We didn't want the employee to think of in person, on campus work as "punishment." We guided the supervisor to find out what the performance issue was first. It turned out that the employee needed some additional training. The supervisor provided the training virtually and in person. The supervisor also emphasized expectations of the position. Within three months the employee's performance improved dramatically and they continue to be a valued member of our Student Affairs team.



Decision-Making Process

Instructions

Individually, describe/draw/etc. the decision-making process at your institution that is specific to your project.



Mission, Values, Strategic Priorities

Part 1

Individually, reflect on how your project aligns with your institution’s Mission, Values and Strategic Priorities. Use this space to record your thoughts.

Part 2

Discuss with a partner/small group how your project aligns with the Mission, Values and Strategic Priorities of your institution. Use the space below to record additional notes, if applicable.



Business Case

Part 1: Project Analysis

Instructions

Use the questions below to guide your thinking through your business case. Where appropriate, provide quantifiable details.

Business Case

Describe the problem being solved?	
How is the project aligned with our Mission, Vision, and Values?	
How is the project aligned with our Strategic Priorities?	
What are the benefits the University can expect from this work?	
Who will be impacted by the project? (i.e. students, departments, roles)	

Opportunity and Risk Statement

What opportunity is being pursued?	
Is this project a response to a regulatory, compliance, or safety issue?	

What are the risks if you do the project?	
What are the risks if you don't do the project?	
What other processes upstream or downstream will be impacted by this project?	
What is driving the timeline for this project?	

Financial Analysis

What are some of the direct costs (i.e. purchases, expenses, vendor contracts, etc.)?	
What are some of the indirect costs (i.e. staff time, reassign time, etc.)?	
What funds do you have to complete this project?	
What resources (financial and otherwise) do you still need?	

PART 2: Write Your Business Case

Instructions

Use your responses in Part 1 to complete the project profile and write a narrative describing the project and its importance to the success of the University.

Project Name:					
Project Sponsor	Name		Project Manager	Name	
	Email			Email	
Business Case <i>Provide a brief overview of why this project is important to the success of MSU Denver</i>					
Opportunity and Risk Statement <i>Describe the problem you are trying to solve and/or the opportunity to be leveraged</i>					
Financial Analysis <i>General estimates based on early research: Equipment, resources, etc.</i>					
Projected Budget					
Expense Category			Estimated Cost	Funding Source	

Additional Resource Needs:		

Sample Business Case

Project Name:	Staff Alternative Work Arrangements				
Project Sponsor	Name	Larry Sampler	Project Manager	Name	Rebecca Reid
	Title	VP Administration, COO		Title	Staff Senate President
	Email			Email	
Business Case					
<i>Provide a brief overview of why this project is important to the success of MSU Denver</i>					
<p>Flex work has been practiced in pockets around MSU Denver, but conversations about workplace flexibility are not available to all employees. The pandemic had showed us that many functional elements of positions and roles across the University can be performed as well, if not better, remotely than from the brick-and-mortar office. Employees are rethinking their expectations of their employers and flex work is a significant factor in where people choose to work.</p> <p>Pillar 5: Goal 1 of the MSU Denver 2030 Strategic Plan calls for organizational agility and sustainability by being an employer of choice in the state of Colorado. Alternative Work Arrangements (AWAs) contribute to MSU Denver achieving this goal by serving as a tool for recruitment and retention and can contribute to consistent expectations and practices across departments that foster a more equitable environment. Additionally, AWAs provide flexibility for solutions in workspace management.</p>					

Opportunity and Risk Statement

Describe the problem you are trying to solve and/or the opportunity to be leveraged

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Financial Analysis

General estimates based on early research: Equipment, resources, etc.

Projected Budget		

Additional Resource Needs:

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