

Proposing Flexible Work Arrangements

A guide for employers

Many employers are recognising the social and economic benefits of introducing flexible work arrangements into their businesses. To ensure flexible work practices are integrated successfully, businesses need a flexible workplace policy in place that clearly outlines the process involved in approving flexible work arrangements.

People require flexibility for a range of reasons. They may need to:

- Manage a healthy work/life balance;
- Spend more time with children or grandchildren;
- Pursue professional hobbies;
- Run small businesses alongside another career;
- Take a career break to travel explore their passions;
- Pursue post graduates study and other tertiary courses;
- Prepare for, or transition into retirement;
- Meet carer/volunteering/personal responsibilities.

Steps in creating flexible workplace policy:

Step 1: Define and communicate your organisation's position on working flexibly and describe what types of flexible work options might be available to employees. These might include variable work arrangements such as reduction of hours, variable start and finish times or staggered return from parental leave, working from home options, additional paid time off during peak study times or during school holidays and more.

This process does not have to be time consuming, costly or complex to implement. It can simply be a guide for managers and employees to explore options and make common sense decisions.

Step 2: Provide your employees with a flexible work 'toolkit' that outlines how they can apply for flexible work arrangements and what points they should consider and address when proposing a flexible work arrangement. We recommend you provide your employees with a template or a set of questions so their proposal is structured and considerate of specific processes and issues relating to your business. This acts as a catalyst to facilitate a discussion about what flexible options are viable.

Depending on the size of your business, you may need to provide advice to your managers on how to assess the feasibility of flexible work options, and to manage ongoing flexible arrangements.

Flexible work plan/proposal guidelines for employees

When asking an employee to provide a flexible work proposal, we suggest you ask employees to consider the following:

1. Ask the employee to clarify their needs

Why do they require flexible arrangements? You need to understand their reasons for requesting flexibility so you can assess it on a case-by-case basis and identify the most feasible options.

2. Ask the employee how they propose working flexibly could work and to provide several options for consideration.

- What flexible working arrangements are they seeking? For example, they may wish to work school hours only. Are they able to suggest other flexible work options for consideration?
- What are the potential positives and downsides of working flexibly for them and the business. How can these be enhanced and minimised?

3. Ask the employee to review and analyse their job responsibilities to consider what elements of their job will be impacted.

- How do they propose that it will work in terms of their existing workload?
- Will they still be able to complete their tasks and duties, or will another employee need to pick up the shortfall? What are the implications on their colleagues, clients etc?
- Can they identify what work can only be done in the office versus what can be done at home/via phone/via email.

4. Ask the employee to discuss the proposed flexible options with their manager

- Suggest that the employee meet with their manager to discuss the proposed flexible work options before making conclusions or decisions.
- Get the employee and manager to make a list of all the implications and how it could work.
- Agree to trial the new working arrangements to assess if it will work for the employee and manager.

Where can I get more information?

Ask us about our customised consulting service. We can design a tailored **flexible workplace policy, toolkit and flexible proposal template** for your organisation.

Contact Emma Walsh, Director Mums@Work on 02 9966 1697 or email emma@mumsatwork.com.au

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