Challenges Associated with the Implementation of Telework in Federal Agencies Today

Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation
School of Public Affairs
American University

March 1, 2007

In Cooperation with

Watson Wyatt Worldwide
Government Consulting Services

National Press Club
Washington, DC
Program Speakers

Bob Tobias  
Director  
Public Sector Executive Education  
American University

Vickers Meadows  
Chief Administrative Officer  
U.S. Patent and Trademark Office

Nancy Kichak  
Associate Director  
Strategic Human Resources Policy  
U.S. Office of Personnel Management
### Participating Agencies

- Department of Commerce, Office of Inspector General
- Defense Information System Agency
- Department of Veterans Affairs
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection
- U.S. Office of Personnel Management
- Overseas Private Investment Corporation
- Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts
- Court Services and Offenders Services Supervision Agency
- Federal Trade Commission
- U.S. Patent and Trademark Office
- U.S. Postal Service
- Triangle Service Center
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- Telework Exchange
- U.S. Department of Defense
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Department of Transportation
- U.S. General Services Administration
- U.S. Department of State
- U.S. Department of Education
- U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
- U.S. Department of Energy
- U.S. Government Accountability Office
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- Deputy Under Secretary of the Army for Business Transformation
- U.S. Census Bureau
- U.S. Department of Labor
- U.S. Maritime Administration
- Smithsonian Institution
- Defense Contract Audit Agency
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- Peace Corps
- Office of Civilian Personnel, U.S. Coast Guard
- NASA
- Transportation Security Administration
National Institutes of Health
MSPB
Indian Health Service
Office of Family Assistance/ACF
NFFE
Nocommute.org Telework Centers
WHS
U.S. Department of Interior
U.S. Marshals Service
Good morning. Today, we’re going to talk about the actions that agencies can take to enhance managerial acceptance of teleworking.

Before we get to that however, I’d like to offer a brief word, if I may, about the Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation at American University.

The Institute and its Leadership Forum were started in 2001 to bring together people from the Hill, political appointees, career executives, mid-level managers, opinion leaders, consultants and academics to focus on public policy implementation.

As most of you who read the Washington Post know, public policy implementation issues only get on the front page of the newspaper when someone screws something up.

Normally, what’s on the front page of the Post are stories about public policy creation – what Congress is doing, what statutes are passed or not, what regulations are implemented or not, and so forth.

What the Institute focuses on is on how, once legislation is passed and regulations are issued, people like you in this room actually implement government policy.

The issues you grapple with are complex and incredibly difficult.

How, for example, do you organize resources, operate an agency, infuse it with technology, and create employee alignment to actually implement what public policy calls for?

That’s what the Institute and leadership forums like this one are intended to address.

I’m extremely pleased that Watson Wyatt’s Government Consulting Services practice will be sponsoring several leadership forums like this one over the next year or so to help government executives examine the complex issues involved in effective public policy implementation. We’re pleased to have Watson Wyatt as a sponsor in that endeavor, and will be inviting you to additional programs in the months ahead.
• What I’d like to do to get started this morning is to have each table here discuss the following question: “What concerns do managers in your agencies have about allowing employees to telework?”

• Please address this question and select someone to speak for you, and then I’ll ask for a report from each table.

After about 15 minutes of small group interaction, Bob led the group in a discussion of concerns typically voiced in federal agencies when the issue of telework is raised. Different tables offered different ideas, but generally people’s concerns centered on the following issues:

- Technology: How does one ensure adequate IT security when implementing telework programs? Also, how does one ensure that there is robust IT infrastructure in place to handle the heavy data transmission requirements associated with teleworking?

- Manager trust. Several attendees noted that in their agencies there is (or would be) manager concerns about letting agency employees work from home or alternative work sites. There was broad agreement that manager mistrust of telework is largely a generational issue, and one that’s also tied to an agency’s established work culture.

- Training. There was significant discussion of the ways that training can be used to create a culture of change and accountability associated with successful telework programs. People also expressed the belief that training can help overcome manager resistance to telework, and dispel some of the popular myths and misconceptions about teleworking that exist today.

- Metrics. Several attendees noted that as part of implementing telework programs, agencies need to give serious thought to how such work can be measured, especially when employees work from home.

- Practicing Telework. Several attendees expressed the opinion that “practicing” telework is key to building manager and leadership acceptance of telework as a viable business model in federal agencies.

• Leadership Support. People expressed the view that for telework to succeed in their organizations, it requires strong and enthusiastic top level leadership support.

After about ten minutes of facilitated conversation, Bob continued with his remarks:
• Our discussion this morning shows us how important the issue of telework is in government today.

• Telework has very broad implications for increasing agency productivity, improving employee satisfaction, enhancing the ability of agencies to operate in the event of emergencies, and for reducing traffic in the Greater Washington Metropolitan Area!

• Notwithstanding the fears that you’ve expressed here, which are broad and deep, every study of telework, as most people in this room know, has shown that employee productivity actually increases – it doesn’t decrease.

• There’s also no question that employee satisfaction increases when people have the flexibility to telework.

• It’s been estimated that for every additional 3% of commuters who work from home, traffic delays can be cut by ten percent.

• Finally, the law requires that the federal government create a policy for encouraging telework.

• It’s clear that even though we’ve made significant progress with implementing telework in government agencies, there’s more work to do.

• The most recent survey published by OPM and GSA identified many of the same concerns with telework that you have identified here this morning …

• But what people in the field report to be the single largest barrier to increasing the number of teleworkers in government today is managerial acceptance of telework.

• Many government managers continue to believe that there’s considerable risk of decreased productivity and performance for those that are involved in telework.

• I’m very pleased that we’re going to hear this morning from two people who know more about the topic of telework than most people in the federal government. Our two speakers have also had real successes with it -- successes that they’re going to share with us in detail.

• Our first speaker this morning is Vickers Meadows, who serves as the Chief Administrative Officer at the Patent and Trademark Office – a position she’s held since May 2005.

• In her position, Ms. Meadows is responsible for PTO’s Human Capital management, civil rights and corporate services programs.
• Prior to joining PTO, Ms. Meadows was the Assistant Secretary for Administration and CIO and CHCO at HUD.

• Prior to that she served as a special assistant to President George W. Bush and director of the White House Management Office. And prior to that she served as Governor George W. Bush’s director of Administration in the State of Texas.

• So, she’s had experience in agencies, in the White House, and at the state level. She comes to her position at PTO therefore with an incredible perspective, a great deal of energy, and a lot of experience.

• Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Vickers Meadows.
Vickers Meadows
Chief Administrative Officer
U.S. Patent and Trademark Office


Prior to joining the USPTO, Ms. Meadows was the Assistant Secretary for Administration, CIO, and Chief Human Capital Officer of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. In 2001, she served as a Special Assistant to President George W. Bush and Director of the White House Management Office. Previously, she was the Director of Administration for the Bush-Cheney Presidential Transition.

From 1995 to 2000, Ms. Meadows was the Director of Administration for the Office of Texas Governor George W. Bush; and from 1989 to 1993, she served as the Director and Deputy Director of the Executive Secretariat at the U.S. Department of Transportation. She was the Special Assistant to the Vice President for Administration for the Office of the Vice President at the White House from 1987 to 1989, and Procurement Officer and Director of Presidential Gifts for the White House from 1985 to 1987. From 1980 to 1985, Ms. Meadows held positions in the Reagan-Bush 1980 and 1984 campaigns and worked for the Republican National Committee.

Ms. Meadows graduated from Green Mountain College in Vermont.
Remarks of  
Vickers Meadows  
Chief Administrative Officer  
U.S. Patent and Trademark Office

• Thanks Bob to you -- and to Watson Wyatt -- for inviting PTO to come out and talk today about its experience with teleworking.

• Let me start off by making a confession: I’m a convert to telework. When I came to PTO almost two years ago I was a telework skeptic. I really didn’t understand the depth and breadth of a good telework program. And I consider myself very fortunate to have seen how powerful telework as a work practice can be, on a number of levels, to an organization’s success.

• Our topic today is: “What actions might agencies take to enhance managerial acceptance of telework?”

• It’s a huge issue. I’ve got a few thoughts on this I’d like to share. Some of these things can’t be said enough.

For starters, we need to do a better job of educating our agency leaders and employees about what telework is and what it can do.

• We heard earlier about the misperceptions – I call them the myths -- of telework. There are a lot of them out there.

• Because they exist we need to do a better job of getting the good word about telework out to our leaders and employees. And also to our managers.

• We need to think about changing the conversation. Right now, everybody says, “Why telework?”

• What we really should be asking ourselves and our leaders is: “Why shouldn’t people be able to telework?”

• So I challenge all of you to go back to your leaders and say, “Why not telework?” Tell me why we shouldn’t do this in our agency?”
• We need to understand that government is increasingly decentralized today. How many of you work for agencies that have field offices throughout the U.S.? I ask you, how do you communicate with them? It’s by electronic means right?

• So, I challenge you to go back and help educate your leaders and your organizations about how you communicate with these field offices. In essence, you employ telework technology to communicate with them. You communicate via phone, computer and data links.

• Government, in fact, is highly decentralized today. We’re working in a global work environment and field offices are a good example of that.

Another issue: To promote the benefits of telework we need to do a better job of how we measure our success.

• You know, of course, that in government today it’s all about the President’s Management Agenda – about achieving results. We need to be able to measure our success in telework. We need to define what our desired outcomes are. We need to do a better job of measuring what our organizations do.

• I’ll try to address these thoughts as I tell our story at the USPTO.

• Let me say again that I wasn’t there when telework started at PTO. I got there two years ago, and I was really fortunate to come to an agency that already had a very successful program in place, and which is embarking today on doing even more.

• I know that many of you know her, but I want to take this opportunity to introduce Danette Campbell of our staff. Danette started with PTO just over a year ago. When I started with PTO, I saw an organization that had a lot of good things going on in telework around the agency, but things were very siloed.

• We needed to get our arms around the programs. We had 15 separate telework programs at the time. And we needed to bring some consistency to all these programs.

• So, we hired Danette to help coordinate, implement, educate, train, consolidate, and bring consistency to our different telework programs.

• I want to ask you something: How many of you are doing your jobs as telework coordinators full-time?

• I think every agency needs to sit back and have a good conversation with your leadership about this. Managing a telework program isn’t a part-time job. If
you’re serious about it, it requires a full-time effort, and requires staff to be involved on a full-time basis.

- At PTO, Danette spends an incredible amount of time educating, training, explaining and dispelling myths, at all levels within the agency, about telework.

- So, if I leave you with just a couple of thoughts about telework today, one of them is this: Implementing telework successfully in your agency requires a full-time effort.

- With Danette’s help, I have become a true champion of telework.

- There’s a story about Danette that I’d like to share with you. This was a huge light bulb going off in my telework world.

- Danette sits about four offices down from me at USPTO. As such, I stop by and talk to her fairly regularly.

- A lot of the time she’s not there. She’s out at meetings, out educating, out training, out doing what a telework senior advisor needs to be doing.

- She also teleworks one day a week herself. And, I will tell you, every time I pick up that phone, and Danette is teleworking, I call her extension because that’s how our system works, and she answers the phone. She’s more accessible to me at home than when she’s at the office!

- The realization of that was a powerful learning experience for me.

- Before she teleworks Danette also gives me her schedule and a list of things she’s going to do. She even tells me when she’s going to take a break for lunch. So I actually have a better sense of what Danette’s doing with her day when she’s teleworking, than I do when she’s physically in the office!

Let me now talk more about the telework story at PTO – about what I came into.

- Trademarks. I’m sure most of you have heard about our Trademark organization. Our Trademark organization is made up of about 600 employees. It’s not a big part of PTO but it’s a very important part. Trademarks is getting ready to celebrate its 10\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of teleworking. The Trademark program started as a Council for Excellence in Government cohort project ten years ago.

- The Trademark organization has built and developed one of the most – if not the most successful – telework programs in government today. Today, 85 percent of the eligible people in our Trademark organization telework. They are trademark attorneys. That equates to over 220 employees.
Recently, our Trademark organization accepted a Worklife award for our telework efforts.

You might ask: “Why do only 85 percent of people telework?” The answer is that telework isn’t for everybody. That’s one of the truths we have to talk about. It is not going to work for everybody. It does work for 85% of eligible employees at USPTO. So, it can work for a lot of people.

The Patent Office – the other part of PTO – is a much larger organization. Patents has about 6,000 employees – about 4500 of whom are patent examiners. And telework and hoteling became important realities in that organization about two years ago; when our leadership decided that we needed more bodies to examine patent applications.

Two years ago, the leadership said, “We’re going to hire 1200 patent examiners a year for the next five years. That, in itself, created a whole new set of challenges for us – including how to deal with serious space constraints. We really had to look at what options were out there.

So our leadership started talking about making a huge paradigm shift at the Patent Office. We were going to hire more people, train them better, and then send them home to work. And today that’s become the mantra I use in the Patent Organization in terms of how we hire and supervise people.

Last year, for example, the Patent Office sent over 500 patent examiners home to work in a hoteling environment. It required tremendous preparation and planning to do this. It was no small task. But we sent people home to work, and so far it has been a tremendously successful program. We’ve had only 3 people out of 500 not succeed in working as teleworkers. So, it really can work. Our pilot has been a huge success. Our plan right now is to send hundreds more home over the next five years, as we hire additional patent examiners.

So, what have we learned from our experiences with telework thus far? Basically the learnings fit into eight key categories.

**Point #1: To Make Telework Work in an Organization, You Have to Have Top Leadership Support.**

- We’re very fortunate to have that at PTO and any of you who have heard Jon Dudas (USPTO’s Director) speak knows that he talks a lot about telework and hoteling as part of our business model at PTO.

- But there are a lot of misperceptions -- a lot of myths out there -- that have to be combated. There’s also managerial resistance which, I believe is a generational
issue. Those in managerial roles in federal agencies today are often baby boomers, and they are sometimes distrustful of the telework concept.

- But today there’s a new generation of workers coming into government. They’re a much more technologically savvy breed of worker than we’ve seen in years past, and among other things, they’re looking for flexible work arrangements that will give them both autonomy and flexibility in their work schedules.

- So, there’s an opportunity there, as we bring new talent in, to introduce them to telework. And, to entice and attract them to careers in government with this work option.

- But making the commitment to incorporate telework into an agency’s talent recruitment efforts requires strong, top level leadership support.

**Point #2: An Agency Needs to Articulate a Strong Business Case for Teleworking.**

- At PTO, we’re developing a Return on Investment (ROI) model of telework that, once we validate it, we’ll be happy to share with all of you here.

- Danette has talked to a number of people in the federal government about making a good ROI model for telework. What’s the baseline? Are we all measuring on the same level?

- If anybody is doing any work on this, please call Danette or me, and we’d love to collaborate with you on developing an ROI model for telework. The private sector is measuring ROI as well.

- In your business case you need to talk about concrete savings and cost reductions that can be realized from implementing telework.

- Take the issue of real estate – office space. For us, at PTO, we don’t want to go out and rent more space. For those of you who deal with budgets, you look at that rent figure in your budget and it often constitutes the bulk of your budget.

- So the concrete savings in office space costs is something that’s important to incorporate into your business case for telework, and to emphasize to top leadership.

- Other cost reductions are softer in nature but nonetheless real. For example, you typically see sick leave usage go down under teleworking. Being able to measure this can obviously help you make a compelling case for the implementation of telework as a work option.
• The benefits that teleworking can bring to COOP\textsuperscript{1} situations and to emergency planning, in general, are also important to consider.

• The concepts of work/life balance and worker recruitment and retention are also vital to factor into your equations. Again, we’re hiring 1200 patent examiners a year. Telework in Trademarks is a key recruitment and retention tool. So, that needs to be part of the business case.

• Data: Managers and leaders want data. So, this needs to be factored into the business case. Figure out how to get good data and incorporate it into your business case.

• In the business case of course, you also must talk about why you’ll achieve better results and better employee productivity.

• Bob mentioned earlier that in telework situations employee productivity goes up. That’s true. You’re not spending two hours in the car every day. That’s more production time for that employee. They can get to work at 8 am, instead of having to be on the Beltway at that hour. And a lot of people are willing to get to their desks at that hour – especially if they don’t have to physically commute to work!

**Point #3: It’s Important to Do Good Planning, Especially if You Want to Build Broad based Support for Telework among Managers.**

• For some organizations that means starting small, beginning with a pilot program.

• For skeptical managers, a telework pilot goes a long way to assuage their fears, and helps them understand how telework can actually improve worker productivity.

**Point #4: Your Agency’s Work Policies Need to Clearly Define the Roles and Responsibilities of all Parties in a Telework Environment.**

• This is important.

• On a regular basis, it’s important to set expectations. People don’t like surprises, so good policies are vital. There are many good examples of telework policies out there – many can be found on OPM’s website.

---

\textsuperscript{1} Continuity of Operations
• Nancy will talk about this in a few minutes.

Point #5: Bringing Consistency to Telework Programs is also Important.

• At USPTO, Danette works on teleworking issues 24/7.

• That has enabled her to develop a model for pilots.

• So for example, at six months, she surveys work units and she does focus groups. She derives a lot of data from her regular monitoring and evaluation efforts.

• At USPTO our Civil Rights Office just completed its pilot. We’ve also got pilots going in our Human Resources office, and our General Counsel’s office.

• Again, it’s great for trademark attorneys and patent examiners. But we really want to live and breathe this throughout our entire organization. And Danette is doing a great job in helping us bring consistency and reliability to all our efforts.

• It’s amazing when Danette goes in and talks to these offices. Many of them are consumed with the myths. So, there’s a lot of handholding that goes on in educating people about telework.

Point #6: Performance Management also has to be part of a Good Teleworking Program.

• Developing measures and measuring performance is critical with telework.

• We’re fortunate at PTO because in the Trademark organization people work in a production environment. They review trademark applications. So, it’s easily measured. The PTO does an unbelievable job in measuring production.

• We have many ways of determining whether employees are being successful or not successful. We can measure this quite accurately. So, much of the work at PTO is quantifiable.

• What we’re struggling with right now – and a lot of agencies are – is how do we measure and set performance metrics in non-production environments? We can all find things to measure, of course, but the question is, “Can we find ways to measure the right things?”

• That’s where we’re struggling. And, as with any telework initiative, one of the big issues is trust and how you establish that trust. If you don’t know exactly how
to measure what people do when they’re in the office, how the heck are you going to know what they’re doing when they work at home?

• I think this challenge relates to more than just telework, but it is an essential question to answer in making telework programs successful.

• It requires the building of trust between managers and employees, and establishing the right metrics by which to evaluate people’s work.

• Another issue that comes up with telework is the issue of control. In our organization, we’re sitting back and saying to ourselves: “Do we really care when and where people work?” I don’t think so.

• What we really do care about however is whether the work gets done and generates concrete results.

• This is something that other organizations need to think about: Do they really care when and where people do their jobs, so long as they get results?

Point #7: Another Key to Effective Telework Programs is Having the Right Technology in Place.

• Strong IT support is critical to making telework programs successful.

• One issue is security. You’ve got to be certain that security issues are addressed.

• Another issue is capacity. One of the challenges we have at the Patent Office is how to manage patent applications in an online environment. Patent applications are big documents, so, you can’t handle these using dial-up technology. We need a lot of bandwidth to move information around. There’s been a lot of focus at PTO on building the IT infrastructure to support our operations.

• Having good collaboration tools\(^2\) available is also key to making telework programs operate well in agencies.

• PTO has really been on the cutting edge of developing good collaboration tools. They can be expensive, but when you look at what you save in rent, there’s your business case. Having good collaboration tools is very important to telework productivity.

\(^2\) In a telework environment, collaboration tools include such capabilities as File Sharing, Screen Sharing, instant messaging, video web conferencing, data encryption, and other capabilities.
• We’ve learned a lot at PTO about effective use of collaboration tools. Anyone who’s ever been part of a meeting where you have really good collaboration tools available -- where people pop up on screens and you can hear them speak -- knows that it can boost productivity a great deal.

• But acquainting people with collaboration tools is one of the challenges we’re seeing as we roll out our patent examiner telework program. Again, talk about trust. It’s trust of a different kind. You have to give people confidence that they can communicate and make work happen through good collaboration tools.

• I do think it’s possible to achieve transparency in a telework environment. It takes training and education. It takes good communications skills. But you can do it.

Point #8: The last thing essential to effective implementation of telework programs is good training.

• Solid education can dispel myths and misperceptions about telework.

• Our agency policy requires that every teleworker get training ahead of time.

• At PTO, Trademarks has its own training program. And the Patent Office has developed an incredible model for training as well. Patent examiners go to a two week, intermittent training program. Patents has a whole program just for training managers on telework procedures.

• To be successful, you’ve got to give people the tools to telework successfully, and training is one of those tools.

So Those are My Top Things to Keep in Mind with Teleworking:

  o You need to have top leadership support
  o You need to make a strong business case.
  o You need to do good planning.
  o You also need to develop good performance measures, and put good technology, training, security and collaboration tools in place to make everything work well.

• That’s our story. The Federal Human Capital Survey just came out and PTO job satisfaction in this particular area is very high.

• 90% of Trademark’s teleworkers report a direct relationship between Trademark’s work at home program and their continued employment in the agency.
• Telework makes for a good recruitment and retention tool!

• Moreover, we haven’t had to go out and make major acquisitions of space. And we’ve been meeting our production goals in terms of work production and work quality.

• PTO is happy to be an information resource to other agencies. Danette is here. (She’s reachable at: danette.campbell@uspto.gov.)

• Thank you very much for your time this morning!

**********************************************************************

After her prepared remarks, Ms. Meadows answered a number of questions from audience members. In response to one question, she noted that PTO’s implementation of telework has been accompanied by the use of “hoteling” at PTO offices. “Hoteling” involves giving teleworkers who work from home most of the week the opportunity to reserve office space and use computers and phones while on PTO premises for once-a-week visits.

In response to a question about how to “sell” the concept of telework to skeptical government managers, Meadows noted that incorporating examples of successful telework pilot programs and telework testimonials into telework proposals can do a great deal to overcome managerial and leadership skepticism. Such proposal elements showcase practical and concrete gains to be derived from implementing agency telework programs.

More information about USPTO’s telework program is available at: www.uspto.gov.
Nancy Kichak  
Associate Director  
Strategic Human Resources Policy  
Office of Personnel Management  

Nancy Kichak was named Associate Director for the Human Resources Policy Division in September 2005. In this position she leads the design, development, and implementation of innovative, flexible, merit-based HR policies, which includes government telework policies and initiatives.

Ms. Kichak previously held the position of Deputy Associate Director for the Center for Workforce Planning and Policy Analysis and Chief Actuary. Under her leadership, the center conducted statistical analysis and analytical workforce/human resource studies and provided actuarial support for all OPM offices and other central management agencies. In 2004, the Center for Workforce Planning and Policy Analysis conducted the Federal Human Capital Survey that is providing valuable information to shape the management of the Federal workforce.

In 2003, Ms. Kichak was awarded the Presidential Rank Award of Distinguished Executive for sustained extraordinary accomplishment in the management of Government programs. Previously, Ms. Kichak was awarded the Director's Award for Meritorious Service for her role in the development of a long-term care proposal to protect Federal employees from the financial devastation caused by a chronic long-term illness. She served as a member of the White House Task Force on Health Care Reform.

Ms. Kichak graduated Summa Cum Laude from Westminster College in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania with a Bachelor of Science in mathematics. She studied actuarial science at Georgia State University and Loyola College and is an Associate of the Society of Actuaries (A.S.A.). Ms. Kichak is a Member of the American Academy of Actuaries (M.A.A.A.) where she serves on the Committee for Actuarial Public Service.
Remarks of Nancy Kichak
Associate Director
Strategic Human Resources Policy
Office of Personnel Management

• Thanks for having me here to speak today Bob.

• At OPM we have to do what the law instructs us to do. And the law specifically says that executive agencies shall establish policies under which eligible employees at that agency may participate in telecommuting to the maximum extent possible without diminishing employee performance.

• According to our telework research, 19% of the eligible federal workforce currently teleworks. That number has doubled in the last five years.

• The question we’re here to discuss today is this: “What actions can agencies take to enhance managerial acceptance for teleworking?”

OPM’s answer: Practice, practice, practice!

• At OPM we currently have a lot of teleworking going on, and there is a great deal more of it taking place elsewhere around government.

• Two years ago for example, Department of Defense investigators began to telework. They are not provided with permanent office space. Instead, they work from their homes.

• They travel a lot, because they do investigations, and they go out to interview people. But these people don’t reside in government offices. They work entirely from home. It’s an extremely successful program.

• At OPM, one of the things that’s propelling our telework efforts – and the development of telework policies and programs -- is preparation for a potential flu pandemic.

• Director Springer has said that we really have to test out whether we can run our agency (and other agencies) from alternative work sites.

• In preparing for a potential pandemic, the government is very concerned that it needs to prepare for the possibility that government workers will need to work for a long period of time – not necessarily from alternative work sites -- but from their homes.
• For that reason, all senior OPM managers, without exception, are periodically teleworking for a minimum of three days to test our agency’s ability to continue government operations from people’s homes.

• To date, our efforts with this have been quite an education. In our experience, working this way can be a bit rough at the beginning. We’ve found, for example, that in many cases we don’t have the systems in place to support teleworking operations. So, we’ve had to pay attention to addressing the problems there.

• In my experience, if you get your managers out there in the field, working from alternative locations, they really get into it. They begin to see the value and flexibility that telework offers, and begin to ask the question: “How can I make this work and work well?”

• We’re also working with other agencies, trying to coordinate efforts with them, and support them with regard to their own efforts. Right now, for example, we’re working with Treasury. And it’s been tough. Treasury isn’t used to the kinds of communications requirements involved in communicating among alternative work sites.

• We’re developing new procedures, and gaining a lot of experience, both in-house and in our work with other agencies.

• We’ve learned that the success of an organization’s telework program depends on regular, routine use. Experience is the only way to enable managers, employees, IT support and other stakeholders to work through any technology, equipment, communications, workflow and associated issues that may inhibit the transparency of remote work.

• Director Springer will be briefing the CHCO council on our findings and she’ll be telling them what we’ve learned – that telework has great value.

• That’s a message we’re trying to push out to agencies at this point – that telework can be of great value. But we’re also telling people that they have to have managers and employees practice teleworking, in order to learn what’s involved in making it work successfully.

The other thing that’s important in making telework programs successful is for managers and employees to develop and adhere to telework agreements.

• Such agreements are critical, because what you put in them establishes common expectations between managers and employees. It gives a manager comfort that certain things will happen….and it tells employees how they’re expected to act.
• OPM didn’t always use telework agreements. At first, we just sent people home to work – we didn’t tell them what was expected of them. So, it was often frustrating for managers when they called home, and couldn’t find employees near their phones.

• Today there’s a model telework agreement on the OPM website that agencies can use to develop their own agreements.

• So, what goes into a telework agreement?

• Successful telework arrangements require a strong foundation. No matter how often an employee intends to telework, a written agreement should be executed between the employee and manager.

• The agreement is a strong form of written communication.

• It should cover the following:
  
  o Location of the telework office (e.g., home, telework center, other location)
  
  o Equipment inventory – what the employee is supplying, what the agency is providing, and if applicable, what the telework center is providing
  
  o The job tasks to be performed while teleworking
  
  o The telework schedule
  
  o Telework contact information (e.g. the phone number to use on the telework day)
  
  o Safety checklist – certifying the home office meets certain safety standards
  
  o Expectations for emergency telework (specify whether the employee is expected to telework in the case of a COOP event, pandemic health crisis, shutdown of agency operations, etc.)

• The manager and teleworker should consult periodically to evaluate their working arrangements, make changes if necessary, and renew the telework arrangement.

• Doing this on an annual basis is recommended.

• As noted, there is an example of a telework agreement on OPM’s website – www.opm.gov.
• You can also design your own. As you get into this and see what you need, write it down.

• If you want to get a manager interested in the possibility of implementing telework – and that person is concerned – suggest that they consider implementing a three-month agreement with employees.

• That gives them the comfort of knowing that if it doesn’t work out they can always change it or drop it.

• What usually happens is that people simply improve their existing arrangements and reengage.

While teleworking can be very productive, and is a very flexible way for people to work, OPM is also using it today as a recruitment tool.

• We need to do this, in light of the pending retirement wave which is going to peak between 2008 and 2010.

• On the OPM website, I suggest you review our Career Patterns guide.

• Building the environments to attract a wider range of potential employees will require planning and investment in equipment and training.

• Among other things, we must make sure our managers and leaders have the specific competencies to supervise and manage in nontraditional work settings.

• We must also be able to offer people alternative work arrangements.

• That’s where the Career Patterns initiative comes in. Using this new approach, federal human capital managers will be able to shape their workforce planning efforts to build and manage a broad range of employer-employee arrangements.

• Many of the alternative work arrangements that will attract and retain talent are already permissible and in use in many agencies.

• With a Career Patterns mindset, government managers will come to think about these different arrangements - telework, flexible work schedules, and varied appointment types - as natural and regular ways of getting work done and not as exceptions.

• Today, OPM is asking all agencies to identify jobs using the dimensions described in the Career Patterns model.
• It gives agency recruiters a valuable tool when they go out to recruit. And certainly a key inducement for many new hires will be the potential to telework as part of their job.

Another thing you’ll want to look at on the OPM website is our telework guide.

• We redesigned the telework site and guide in light of pandemic planning.

• The guide on the site now is much more of a how-to telework manual. It talks about what managers need to do to manage successful telework programs. It also describes what employees need to do to be successful.

• And that brings up an important point:

• While managers need to be firmly committed to telework as a concept, it’s also important that employees be committed to it, and understand their roles in making it a success.

• If a manager is afraid that they’re not going to be able to reach an employee who’s teleworking, that employee needs to step up and say, “Here’s my commitment to you…I will be there! I can get this project done for you faster if I’m not in the office and am a little more isolated.”

• Just as Vickers mentioned, I also believe it’s important that you give managers and employees good telework training, including some IT training.

• Finally, on the OPM website you’ll find information about telework laws, frequently asked questions (FAQ’s) about telework, and many other resources, including telework training for managers and employees.

• I encourage you to review this information, and to give us a call if we can be of help to you.

• OPM’s website also contains links to other related sites.

******************************************************************************************************************************************

Following her prepared remarks, Ms. Kichak answered questions related to a number of subjects. She noted that telework agreements need to be very specific, in order to meet the needs of specific agencies. In some cases this involves stipulating specific work hours, but in other cases, this is not necessary.
She also indicated that telework agreements, if crafted carefully, can help establish a high level of trust between managers and employees, by spelling out work expectations, and stipulating other specifics such as performance metrics, that can help guide and reinforce performance goals.

Kichak also said that telework agreements can serve a tremendously important purpose if the government ever has to operate during a pandemic flu emergency. By spelling out work requirements and arrangements, they can help ensure continuity of government services and operations.

She noted that there is a pandemic flu website connected to the OPM website that describes policies to keep the government operating in the event of a long-term emergency.

Finally, Kichak told attendees that if they are interested, they should contact OPM’s Barbara Kaplan (Barbara.kaplan@opm.gov) for both details and advice on implementing telework arrangements.