

FLEXIBLE WORK HOURS

Description

Flexible work hours allow employees to work an eight hour shift that typically begins between 6:00 and 9:00 a.m. and ends between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m. Providing a range of start and end times reduces the number of workers traveling to and from work during the peak volume times while still allowing typical office hours.

Staggered work hour programs are a variation of flextime that alternates the arrival of groups of employees, but the employees may have no ability to choose their shift. These programs work well in manufacturing or plant operations to alleviate crowding at entrances/exits, elevators, and parking areas. Flexible work hours can help employers improve productivity by allowing employees to work at times that fit their lifestyle needs. These programs distribute peak hour traffic to less-congested hours, reducing commute times.

All flexible work hours programs can be voluntary, mandatory, and used to satisfy trip reduction ordinances and air quality regulations. The use and administration of a flexible work hours programs is up to the business management and individual workers.

Target Market

Local, State, and Federal Government Agencies
Government agencies in heavily urbanized areas that employ a large number of people that work a typical shift are a prime target. Workers can commute at non-peak times to reduce the number of cars on the road and alleviate congestion.

Business in All Sectors and Industries

Staggering work schedules or allowing flexible work hours in all businesses removes a large number of vehicles traveling at the same time. Flexible work schedules used in areas of high congestion increase the productivity of the



Creative Class

Cost:	●○○○○
Time:	Short
Impact:	Region
Who:	City/Private
Hurdles:	None

roadways and reduce the traffic backups commonly seen during the rush hours.

Unlike telecommuting, flextime can be more easily implemented by manufacturing and industrial businesses that rely on employee shift work.

How Will This Help?

- Flexible work hours reduce traffic volume and congestion during peak times by shifting drivers' commutes to less congested periods.
- Flexible schedules and staggered work hours help increase productivity and reduce costs of overtime and sick leave for businesses. The reduced road and parking lot congestion minimizes wasted time and frustration. Also, the flexible work hours allow workers to determine

their own schedule at times, and build their work hours around other appointments that may typically result in absences.

Implementation Examples

National: Texas Instruments (T.I.) began their workplace flexibility program in 1993. The program emerged as a result of an employee needs assessment survey. The company encourages its employees to use different flexible schedule options to fit their individual needs. T.I. believes there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to providing employee flexible work schedules. The company allows its employees to have set flexible schedules or offers flexibility on a case-by-case basis. T.I. does not actively measure the benefits of the program but believes the workplace flexibility program creates higher employee retention due to less stress. The company also believes the program produces more effective employees.

Houston: In 2006, Houston's mayor initiated the pilot project Flex in the City. The pilot project required volunteer employers to alter their employees' schedules for two weeks. The goal of the program was to improve peak period travel time along Houston's congested corridors. Before and after data, collected by travel time runs, indicated a reduction in travel time. Although initially city administered, a private company now manages the Flex in the City program and continues to work with businesses to support flexible work schedules to improve congestion.

Application Techniques and Principles

Work schedules for some businesses are easily managed and changed to fulfill the needs of the flexible work hour technique. Adequate planning, enforcement, and coordination are required to make the technique successful at mitigating congestion. An important item to include in the plan is a voluntary adoption clause that also values employee input. The flexible

work hours should take into account the distances workers must travel and the external factors (i.e., family and other situations) that will affect the hours they can work, as starting early and ending later may cause hardships if the employee is traveling a long distance. It is further recommended to incorporate a three to six month pilot program to fully analyze the benefits of flexible work hours before committing to the technique.

Issues

The private and public sectors must partner to educate and encourage organizations to take advantage of this strategy. Flextime programs are easily created but may be less appropriate for some employers. Businesses must assess the costs and operational changes needed to accommodate flextime schedules. Ridesharing programs and employee scheduling should be coordinated for maximum benefit.

Who Is Responsible?

Business management and individual workers should work together to create a manageable flexible hour schedule. Management should consider what schedules will benefit each worker based on family and out-of-work appointments, while workers develop schedules that accomplish organizational and personal or family goals. City and state officials should highlight the benefits of flexible work hours to business management and workers to convince everyone that it is worth the effort to accommodate altered work schedules.

Project Timeframe

The flexible work hour implementation timeframe is relatively short compared to more complex alterations. The project depends on the amount of time needed for business managers to reschedule workers and implement the plan and for the program to gain employee acceptance; typically this takes between three and six months.

Cost

The cost of flexible work hours is minimal. A majority of the cost is the work required to implement the plan and reschedule the workers. Any additional costs are primarily due to operational changes in the business. Typically, flexible work hour plans cost between \$20,000 and \$40,000 to implement and maintain.

Data Needs

The data needed to evaluate the benefits and costs of flexible work hour plans include the number of workers willing to participate, the average commuter distance and number of weekdays with altered hours. If only a small percentage of people are willing to shift their schedules, management should evaluate the need for the program and the effects of relatively few workers being involved.

Flexible Work Hours Best Practices

- Type of Location: Any organization that does not have strict 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. business hours.
- Agency Practices: Strong program support from administrators and policy makers.
- Frequency of Reanalysis: Annually.
- Supporting Policies or Actions Needed: Clear policies on flextime guidelines.
- Complementary Strategies: Compressed Work Weeks, Telecommuting.

For More Information

Crawford, J.A., T.B. Carlson, W.L. Eisele, B.T. Kuhn. *A Michigan Toolbox for Mitigating Traffic Congestion*, Texas Transportation Institute, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, September 2011.

Mobility Improvement Checklist: Managing Demand: Vol. 1. Texas Transportation Institute, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, September 2004.