

Federal Teleworking Program* *April 2008*

The Coalition for Effective Change (CEC) supports the principle of a balanced teleworking program when and where feasible in accomplishing an agency's mission. Such a program should reduce facility costs, enhance contingency emergency planning, improve quality of federal work life – recruiting and retention – and maintain, if not improving, service efficiencies.

Not all federal services are conducive for telework protocols in balancing efficiencies, agency team building and employee social interactions. Agency services which require face-to-face contact with the public, national security and privacy standards may not be appropriate for telework.

Yet these exceptions should not serve as barriers from maximizing telework where possible. Notable for all federal agencies is a requirement to implement continuity of operations (COOP) during emergencies which constitute a form of telework – a virtual enterprise wide office – within national security contingency planning and as such represents a basis for telework that transcends a good many barriers which may otherwise be used in deterring telework, particularly supervisory concerns.

Federal programs devoted to teleworking were created as a result of a provision in an appropriations bill enacted in October 2000, Sec. 359 of Pub. L. No. 106-346. According to the Office of Personnel and Management (OPM), only 119,000 or 6.6 percent of the 1.8 million federal employees participated in telecommuting programs in 2005 .

The post-September 11, 2001 reality has required the federal government to ensure continuity of operations during emergencies. Teleworking provides such a mechanism and is also a critical tool for successful recruitment and retention of federal employees while reducing carbon emissions, saving tax-payers funds and ensures the government can continue to provide services to the public.

The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) is an example of a successful use of telework where 40.7 percent of their workforce spends 90 percent of their work week at home while spending four hours per week at the official work site. Participants share dedicated banks of offices called “hotels” which they reserve online before coming into the office. As a result, the participants in USPTO's program completely moved to teleworking. Productivity increased 10 percent and working remotely four days per week saves 372,000 gallons of gas with a reduction in emissions of 5,855 tons per year. USPTO noted that the savings in space from having fewer employees in the office saved the agency from building an additional facility to house their staff. The funds that would have been appropriated toward construction of additional space were now used toward hiring more employees.

**The Public Manager, FEIAA and the National Academy of Public Administration did not sign on to this paper.*