



Barbados Employers'  
Confederation

This document aims to provide guidance on work options caused by dislocation due to the current global pandemic.

# Business Continuity Practices

COVID-19 Pandemic Response

Barbados Employers Confederation

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## Flexible Working Arrangements

During the global pandemic of COVID-19, should Barbados move from Stage 0 through Stage 3, flexible working arrangements may allow for business continuity.

Flexible work arrangements are alternate arrangements or schedules from the traditional work setting. Not all types of flexible work arrangements are manageable or worthwhile for all sizes and types of organisations, so every employer considering flexible work should undertake an organisational assessment to determine whether and what kind of flexible scheduling will meet their needs the best.

There are some limitations on the degree of flexibility that can be expected. Some positions will require staff to be available during certain times and it is a prerequisite of this policy that the operational demands of the organisation must always be met.

The success of the flexible working arrangement requires close cooperation within and between staff to ensure that arrangements are in place to make sure business activities are adequately performed.

Employers should discuss work options with staff and trade union representatives, where applicable, before implementation.

### Types of flexible work arrangements

Whether formally written into company policy or an informal agreement between the employee and employer, common flexible work arrangements are summarized in the below table:

<b>Flexible Work Arrangement for Employees</b>	
<b>Flex Time</b>	<b>Flex Location/Roles</b>
Alternative Work Schedule	Telework or telecommuting
Remote work	Temporary remote work for caring purposes
Compressed work week	Change of responsibilities

## Alternative Work Schedule

An alternative work schedule is a scheduling arrangement that permits a variation from the employee's core hours in starting and departure times but does not alter the total number of hours worked in a week.

The starting and departure times may be fixed and selected periodically for a specified period with the same numbers of hours worked per day. Or, the starting and departure times can vary daily with a personalized work schedule, where a staff member may arrive at work and leave at a different time each day, provided the same number of hours are worked each day. This window of time may vary by hours or minutes on either end of the day.

### **Pros & Cons**

Possible benefits include better office coverage, extended service hours, enhancement of staff morale, increased employee ability to better manage personal life, increased productivity because an employee may choose to work during their own peak times.

However, access to public transportation and dependent care options can often be a challenge.

## Remote Work

A remote work arrangement is an option that allows an employee to work at home or different off-site locations, for a specified number of hours per week, month, etc.

### **Pros & Cons**

Benefits of remote work include increased performance/productivity because the employee may have "quiet time" to complete projects uninterrupted, reduced energy consumption, reduced parking/travel costs/stressors, and often the feeling by employees of empowerment and control of their work. It lessens contact with other during the pandemic and helps with child care coverage.

### **Considerations**

Supervisors need to determine whether the work that is being done can be accomplished in an as effective (or more effective) manner by utilization of a remote work arrangement. They should take performance evaluations into consideration, as well as the reliability and work styles of their employees.

Hourly employees can work remotely. However, employees and supervisors are still required to comply with all timekeeping and overtime regulations. Hourly employees who work remotely are required to be cognizant of these policies and structure their remote work just as they would in a typical workplace. Hourly employees may be managed by results and supervisors must ensure accurate recording of hours worked.

Types of work that may be performed remotely

Here are some ideas for consideration:

- Customer service/response and scheduling: Use tools such as phone/call forwarding and group calendars
- Training: Improve office skills using SkillSoft, LinkedIn Learning, or other online learning resources.
- “Back Burner Projects:” Remote work time can be ideal to have your team member tackle delayed projects such as writing manuals or other types of documentation.
- Research: Ask the employee to do benchmarking research on a topic the department is interested in pursuing.
- Planning: Is there planning that needs to occur in your department? For example, do you run an annual meeting or conference in several months where the planning can start earlier?
- Data-Crunching: Compile department data to generate reports/metrics
- Updating Websites: Review department websites (and other promotional/written materials) for information that needs to be updated.

Compressed Schedule

A compressed work schedule allows an employee to work a traditional 35-40 hour workweek in less than the traditional number of workdays. Many compressed work schedule options may be negotiated. For example, a full-time employee scheduled for 40 hours per week could work four 10-hour days instead of five 8-hour days. Or, an employee could opt to work 8.9 hours per day, and take one full day off every two weeks.

### **Pros & Cons**

Possible benefits include extended office coverage/customer service periods, alleviation of traffic concerns for employees, the employee’s ability to better manage his/her personal responsibilities, and an additional day off for employees while preserving their full-time income.

During the pandemic compressed work weeks can be used to lessen the number of staff on site daily and increase distance between workstations.

Challenges may include limited access to public transportation and dependent care options and figuring out coverage of responsibilities during the off-hours of the employee. Extended workdays can also be physically/mentally draining for some employees.

### **Considerations**

To successfully implement a compressed work arrangement, the employee and department should take into account the following concerns. Supervisors must pre-approve all hours to be worked in excess of the regularly scheduled 39-40 in any workweek. In order to avoid overtime concerns, staff opting to work a compressed work week should plan to take the time off earned within the week it was earned.

**Note:** The Shops Act 2015-30 in its current form would prohibit shop assistants from utilising this option.

## Agreement for Temporary Flexible Scheduling

While an agreement form is unnecessary, a confirmation email can be used as documentation for the arrangement. By proactively creating this kind of agreement, both the employee and the supervisor become clear on expectations and business continuity will be supported.

Identify what measurable projects or tasks will be worked on during the period of time identified and inform of progress made during the work time period.

### Sample

*This agreement will begin on [insert date] for an initial period of [3 weeks]. The intent of the agreement is to support business continuity and productive work amid other workplace dislocation and life needs. If at any point the arrangement becomes a detriment to business needs, we will revisit the arrangement and make changes as necessary. It is my hope that this arrangement will help us continue to meet our business needs while also providing you with some flexibility to conduct your best work.*

## Flexible Work Arrangement Tips for Employees

All employees participating in a flexible work arrangement should:

### **1. Pros and cons**

While initially a flexible work arrangement may seem to be a very positive, some employees struggle with feelings of isolation when they work in solitude for extended periods of time (not all employees who work remotely experience solitude – many interact on a frequent basis with colleagues and customers using technical tools).

### **2. Work with your supervisor**

Set clearly defined, measurable benchmarks and agree on expectations so that you can demonstrate success. Something as simple as sending updates, even unsolicited, demonstrates you are actively working toward organizational goals and achieving results.

Request weekly feedback from your supervisor for at least the first few weeks on how the flexible work arrangement is working

### **3. Be adaptable**

Recognize that flexibility is a two-way street requiring both employees and supervisors to be adaptable. Take initiative to be present at key meetings.

### **4. Cooperate with coworkers**

Create a shared calendar so everyone can keep track of the various remote work arrangements and there is a clear understanding of how and when to contact each other.

Establish "office hours" approved by your supervisor, and clearly communicate them so that others in the office can contact you during those hours. Make sure anyone who might need you knows exactly when they can get you, what to do if they feel it's urgent, and how long it will be before you return their voice-mail or e-mail message.

Modify your voicemail greeting to provide callers with information on how they may reach you, who to contact in an emergency, and when they may anticipate your returned call.

## Business Continuity Considerations

- Consider your essential operations and plan to reassign staff from non-critical functions if employee absence is a threat.
- Garner confirmation of the chain of command and back-ups for leaders and critical roles.
- Review if IT infrastructure is able to support an increase in remote work and manage any added load to client-facing or service delivery technology that may occur - this includes an increase in the use of video or digital telephonic software and an increase in the use of employee intranet apps for company posts.
- Create an internal communications plan to ensure that the business continuity plan (BCP), updates and changes can be communicated in real-time to those who need to know specific information; those who need to take a new action, and that the information has been received and action taken as appropriate.
- Ensure that you have multiple levels of redundancy, should a critical system failure occur.
- Assess the risk level of any vendors or other parties that your organization depends on and gather confirmation from critical vendors that they have a robust BCP and are able to deploy as needed.
- Monitor World Health Organization (WHO)
- Utilize technology to maintain communication with staff and customers
  - Microsoft team
  - Whatsapp groups
  - Zoom and other online platforms
- Forward mailboxes and telephone lines to employees for remote access



Some employees may not be able to work

There are different reasons why an employee may not be able to work in this situation. Each case will need to be reviewed on its merit and discretion applied.

These can include:

- An employer may be unable to provide work for employees who are willing and able to carry out their agreed hours of work.
- An employer may be unable to provide a suitable and safe workplace for employees who are willing and able to carry out their agreed hours of work.
- Employees can't access the workplace because of restrictions not directly related to their own workplace and out of their employer's control (e.g. road closures, unavailability of public transportation, safety issues relating to adjoining buildings).
- An employee (or their dependant) is sick or injured and unable to work.
- An employee has to care for a dependant because usual care is unavailable.
- An employee is abroad and unable to travel due to restrictions.
- An employee is willing and able to work but their usual mode of transport is unavailable.
- The employee's partner or dependent family member isn't injured or sick but they require care. For example, their child's school is closed.