

Technology Subcommittee Summary

This document summarizes methods, findings, and recommendations from the Future of Work technology subcommittee. Key recommendations are included in the full Future of Work@Iowa report. This summary offers additional background.

Technology Subcommittee Members

- Adam Burghdoff, undergraduate student government representative
- Jay Currie, clinical professor of pharmacy practice and science, College of Pharmacy
- Steve Fleagle (co-chair), chief information officer and associate vice president
- Mike Kaplan, director of HR systems and analytics, Administrative Information Systems, Information Technology Services
- Gautam Pant, associate professor of business analytics, Tippie College of Business
- Ana Rodriguez-Rodriguez, associate professor of Spanish and Portuguese, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Faculty Senate representative
- Tracy Scott (co-chair), senior IT directory for service management and support, Enterprise Services, Information Technology Services
- Paul Soderdahl, associate university librarian, University of Iowa Libraries

Technology Subcommittee Charge

Evaluate the impact of remote work and identify data to answer these and other relevant questions:

- How do we ensure employees have the technical resources to succeed in remote and hybrid work models?
- How do we encourage adaptation and provide the campus community with resources to better utilize technology in order to achieve results in faster, more efficient ways?
- What do we do when employees lack access to internet connectivity?

Collect data, summarize findings, and identify recommendations for full committee consideration.

Methods

The technology subcommittee held regular meetings and consulted the following sources to assemble findings and develop recommendations:

Campus-wide survey: An April 2020 campus-wide survey asked a broad set of questions around remote work, including several on technology considerations. The survey generated nearly 4,000 responses (from 7,300 invitations).

Campus focus groups: Most UI orgs conducted focus groups during March 2021, addressing a range of remote working topics including technology.

Conversations with peer-institution counterparts: Remote work and technologies that support it have been common topics across higher education since the pandemic started. Subcommittee members shared observations from frequent conversations with peers at all levels, including chief information officers.

Industry literature: Subcommittee members shared numerous articles and documents regarding remote and hybrid work in the IT industry, higher education, and other sectors.

Technology subcommittee members: The subcommittee included diverse individuals representing various IT backgrounds, student perspectives, and staff and faculty roles. Members engaged in wide-ranging discussion about the role of technology in remote and hybrid work and related considerations.

OneIT and UI Health Care IT staff reports: Throughout the pandemic, IT professionals at all levels have assessed what has worked, what has not worked, and where technology could be improved to make remote/hybrid work experiences better. Subcommittee members have shared observations from formal and informal surveys, listening posts, community meetings, general support contacts, and other sources.

Findings

General findings show that information technology has worked well for most faculty and staff throughout the pandemic.

The majority of faculty/staff expressed satisfaction with IT support they received while transitioning to remote work and with the IT services available to them. Individuals who previously had worked remotely were able to transition more quickly and easily than others adjusting to new remote routines.

IT played a critical role in the university's success throughout the remote-work transition.

Equipment

- Early in the pandemic, an estimated 40% of people used personal equipment to complete their work from home. While this worked for many people, it raised concerns about data security, access to appropriate software and services, and IT support.
- Individuals who already had university-provided laptops more easily transitioned to remote work and reported experiences similar to what they'd had on campus.
- Having a home set-up similar to one's campus environment (e.g., university-owned computer, dual monitors, keyboard, webcam) was important to a positive remote work experience.
- Non-IT equipment including adequate workspaces, standing desks, ergonomic chairs, etc., also were important factors for successful remote work.

Internet

- Reliable and adequate Internet service is critical to remote work. Individuals with unreliable Internet service or wireless coverage issues have found it harder to work from home and participate in online meetings.
- The number of individuals in a household trying to work and/or study remotely impacts remote work due to competition for space, equipment, and Internet bandwidth.

Meetings

- Overall, online meetings have worked well, and tools like Zoom have proven central to successful meetings. Not all feedback has been positive—common complaints include trouble “reading the room” and inconsistent use of cameras by meeting participants.
- Availability of multiple online meeting tools (Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams) has caused some frustration and confusion.
- We have heard concerns about how hybrid meetings will work as some employees transition back to campus and others continue working remotely. Conference rooms may not be properly equipped, and people may not have the knowledge or training to help all participants fully engage in hybrid meetings.
- Specific capabilities like whiteboarding continue to pose challenges in online environments due to lack of tools and/or equipment.
- The ability to record meetings and, especially, lectures has been both positive and negative. Faculty say availability of recordings has reduced class attendance and participation. On the other hand, recordings allow students to watch lectures again, rewind complex topics, and speed up playback.
- Training and support for large-scale meetings and events (100+ people) are commonly cited needs that transcend technology. Running larger meetings requires additional facilitation skills.

IT Services

- Most faculty/staff feel the university provides a good set of IT services that allow them to collaborate successfully with others and complete their work remotely.
- Many key tools and infrastructure elements were already in place to support the remote-work transition. These included the university’s virtual private network (VPN), Skype for Business telephony, online meeting and chat tools, and more.
- Faculty/staff report having too many tools with similar functionality. They also note the challenge of learning how to use tools effectively.

Recommendations

Following are the subcommittee’s initial recommendations. As staff and faculty transition back to campus, we expect to learn more through continued engagement in a hybrid environment.

Recommendation 1: Establish Basic Device Guidelines for Remote/Hybrid Work Arrangements

- The [home-office setup guide](#) provides general information about allowable university-provided computer equipment, peripherals, and office furnishings. Colleges/orgs should provide computers and equipment to all employees, including those working remotely.
- With increased remote/hybrid work scenarios, laptops are strongly encouraged for most users. Laptops provide for increased mobility/portability and integrate key tools (e.g., keyboard, webcam, microphone) in a single device.
- While we encourage colleges/divisions to follow recommendations around equipment purchases and deployment, final approvals should be managed at the local level.

Recommendation 2: Establish Strong Preference for Using University-Managed Equipment

- We strongly recommend that employees use equipment owned and managed by the university to perform university work. That said, we understand that personal cell phones and other devices will be used to perform some university functions.
- Employees who use personally owned devices for university work should follow [data-security policies and best practices](#).

Recommendation 3: Establish that Employees are Responsible for Internet Connectivity and Remote Networking

- Employees who work remotely should be responsible for providing Internet connectivity and bandwidth that allow them to work effectively. Specific Internet speeds and bandwidth may vary depending on an employee's role and the technology required for essential job functions.
- The university will not reimburse employees for Internet service or home networking equipment.

Recommendation 4: Provide Standard IT Services to Employees Regardless of Work Arrangements

- The university is responsible for providing standard IT services, technology, and training all types of workers—remote, hybrid, or on-campus.
- OneIT will provide recommendations on which IT tools should be used when and for what purpose. Where appropriate, OneIT will work to reduce redundant tools and simplify the IT environment.
- IT service standards and recommendations will be posted on the ITS website.

Recommendation 5: Develop IT Standards for Shared Workspaces

- OneIT should develop standard IT recommendations for technology used in shared/hoteling workspaces with specifications for monitors, docking stations, keyboard/mice, webcams, etc. Shared workspaces should support a reasonable number of laptop devices.
- OneIT should investigate scheduling solutions to allow employees to reserve shared/hoteling spaces.
- OneIT and Facilities Management staff should partner on recommendations for new collaborative spaces and technology available to support remote/hybrid workers.

Recommendation 6: Provide Standards and Support for Online Meetings

- All meetings with remote participants should include Zoom or Microsoft Teams links to facilitate inclusion.
- To ensure effective hybrid meetings, meeting rooms should be equipped with appropriate technology, and participants should be able to use technologies effectively. OneIT will develop video-conferencing guidelines and expand equipment availability (e.g., with equipment kits/carts that can set up in spaces as needed).
- OneIT should identify solutions for whiteboarding and other collaboration methods in online/hybrid meetings, providing device recommendations.

Recommendation 7: Consider an Ongoing Project to Enhance Virtual Event and Meeting Production Capabilities

- Large virtual events and meetings can be done very effectively using online technologies. Setting up and running these larger meetings requires additional resources and facilitation skills.
- The university should determine how it can support these types of meetings and events going forward, addressing both IT and non-IT needs.

Recommendation 8: Establish Data Security Responsibilities

- Employees with access to sensitive data are responsible for maintaining the security of that data while working remotely.
- Employees should follow established [best practices for data security and remote work](#).

Recommendation 9: Apply IT Policies Consistently Across Work Arrangements

- All university and departmental IT policies apply in remote, hybrid, or on-campus work situations.

Recommendation 10: Enhance Awareness of IT Training and Resources

- IT training options and resources should be expanded and marketed by both central and distributed units to provide additional training that help faculty and staff use IT services.