

IOWA

Future of Work@Iowa

Pilot Project Summary Report & Recommendations

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Residential Campus Experience	3
Guiding Principles	4
Service Excellence	4
Flexible Work Defined	5
Key Recommendations.....	5
Background on Flexible Work	6
Pilot Project Findings	6
Peer and Regional Benchmarking	7
Remote/Hybrid Work Arrangements and Locations	7
Employee Engagement	7
Improved Space Utilization & Savings	7
Ongoing Implementation	8
Local Decision-Making	8
Standardized Process.....	9
Equipment, Facilities & Parking.....	9
Annual Evaluation.....	9
Conclusion.....	10
APPENDIX: Future of Work@Iowa Work Groups.....	11
Work Implementation Team.....	11
Evaluation Group	12
RFQ Selection Committee (out-of-state work).....	12

Introduction

Like other major employers, the University of Iowa has used the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic to evaluate and modernize flexible work policies and practices.

This report summarizes findings from the Future of Work@Iowa pilot that began in mid-2021. It cites opportunities and challenges and proposes an agile framework for flexible work in select circumstances.

Flexible work is not the new norm. Most faculty and staff roles require on-campus work that provides the residential campus experience students expect.

Rather, flexible work is an option for specific roles that can be performed effectively from remote locations or on alternative schedules. Mission-driven flexible work can expand services, save space and money, support employee well-being, and help the university compete for talent.

Residential Campus Experience

The University of Iowa promises students a vibrant residential-campus experience. Face-to-face classroom interaction, engaging campus life, convenient support services, research and creative connections, and an open, welcoming culture are fundamental to Iowa's community, core values, and missions.

As we establish flexible work practices, we must identify strategies that augment and enhance how students, employees, and visitors experience our campus, consistent with the purpose and mission described in the university's [Operations Manual](#):

- **Aspiration:** The University of Iowa aspires to attract the most talented faculty, staff, and students; to provide an environment where they can discover and fulfill their potential.
- **Goal 1:** To create a university experience that enriches the lives of undergraduates and helps them to become well-informed individuals, lifelong learners, engaged citizens, and productive employees and employers.

Core to the Future of Work@Iowa initiative is balancing the implementation of flexibility with a robust student experience. Through the initiative's pilot phase, we have demonstrated that achieving this balance is possible. Flexible work—wisely implemented and evaluated—can provide an experience that complements campus aspirations and goals.

Among the lessons we've learned:

- Providing select services online (with remote or on-campus staffing) **expands options for students and opportunities to engage** with communities across Iowa.
- Saving space and funds through flexible work will allow the university to **reinvest resources** in student-facing priorities.
- Offering mission-driven flexible work helps the university **recruit and retain talent** and can improve employee performance and engagement.
- Studying the **impact of flexible work practices on the culture** will provide information to determine the most effective strategies for promoting engagement and success.

Guiding Principles

Guiding principles for flexible work offer a foundation for specific policies, implementation decisions, and assessment. Moving forward, we must ensure that flexible work practices:

1. Support Iowa's residential-campus mission and values
2. Maintain or enhance service to students, visitors, employees, and stakeholders
3. Align with a culture of engagement
4. Leverage good stewardship of resources

Policies and principles governing flexible work should be set at the university level. Specific decisions about policy application and implementation should be made at the college and administrative unit level.

Flexible work is not an "all-or-nothing" proposition. Rather, it provides a "both/and" opportunity to support our academic mission and student success while encouraging a people-first approach across our culture.

Through flexible work, Iowa can lead the way in innovative higher education work practices that support service excellence university wide.

Service Excellence

Excellence is an Iowa core value. The Future of Work pilot has offered examples that demonstrate how flexible work can support new service-delivery models that expand access and effectiveness:

- **College of Liberal Arts and Sciences academic advising:** Students who choose online advising meetings are more likely to attend appointments.
- **Student Health Services:** Online visits reduced no-show rates from 5.1% to 3.2%.
- **University Counseling Service:** Clients generally prefer in-person counseling but report 99% satisfaction with both in-person and online services.
- **Student Legal Services:** 95% of clients say online and in-person appointments are similar quality. About 48% would prefer online meetings for future appointments (versus 13% who prefer in-person meetings).
- **Student Wellness:** Students prefer online/phone meetings for basic information and stress management and in-person meetings for fitness and nutrition information. Both formats showed similar satisfaction levels.
- **Information Technology Services:** Overall satisfaction with Help Desk services increased during the flexible work pilot when compared to pre-pandemic baselines.
- **Office of Teaching, Learning, and Technology:** Online services boosted participation. For example, participation in new teaching assistant orientation increased 78% in 2021 versus 2019 (when sessions were offered in-person).
- **University Human Resources:** Online services scored a 95% satisfaction rate among campus HR professionals. Services such as coaching, counseling, and training also attained high levels of employee satisfaction across both in-person and virtual delivery.

Flexible Work Defined

Flexible work encompasses specific arrangements compatible with certain job functions and **intermittent flexibility** that helps *all* employees meet day-to-day needs.

Most faculty and staff roles require on-campus work on standard schedules. Intermittent flexibility—for example, temporary remote work during weather-related closures, or short-term flexible schedules—can help these employees balance work and other responsibilities.

Some job functions (e.g., information technology, finance, research administration, etc.) can be effectively performed from off-campus locations or on alternative schedules. These functions may be eligible for longer term arrangements including:

- **Flexible schedule:** Designated and consistent work hours that differ from standard start and stop times for employing units. Work may be performed on or off campus.
- **Remote work:** Job functions that can be effectively performed entirely off campus. Remote employees will not have personally assigned on-campus workstations.
- **Hybrid work:** Job functions that can be effectively performed in a combination of on- and off-campus locations. Hybrid employees typically spend 2-3 days per week at an off-campus location and generally will not have personally assigned dedicated on-campus workstations.
- **Out-of-state work (domestic):** More than 30 consecutive days of work from any U.S. state other than Iowa. Requires expanded review and approval processes.
- **Out-of-state work (international):** More than 14 consecutive days of work from outside the United States. Requires expanded review and approval processes.

Key Recommendations

Using a strong set of guiding principles, the University of Iowa should fully implement flexible work practices developed during the Future of Work project. We will continue to refine policies, principles, guidelines, and assessment methods to support flexible work consistent with university missions.

- Iowa's **residential-campus experience** will continue to shape directions for remote work, hybrid work, and other flexible work practices.
- Most university jobs require on-campus work. Available work arrangements must **align with job functions**.
- Colleges and units must provide **business rationales** that show how flexible work supports the university's core missions (e.g., how specific arrangements enhance the student experience, expand services, redirect resources, or support employee recruitment and/or retention).
- Workplace culture must support both the individual and the unit with the focus on **engagement and well-being**.
- Colleges and administrative units will make **org-specific decisions about flexible work implementation** in keeping with policies set at the university level. Colleges and administrative units shall apply flexible work practices consistently across their orgs.

- While long-term remote work suits only certain jobs, Iowa's workplace culture should embrace **intermittent flexibility** that helps employees meet day-to-day needs and supports flexibility for all.
- The university, orgs, or work groups may designate **on-campus priority days** where most employees are expected to work from campus locations.
- Remote work from **locations outside Iowa** requires expanded review and approval at the university level.
- Flexible work practices will provide opportunities to **improve space utilization**.
- Employees working in remote or hybrid arrangements generally should not be assigned dedicated personal **on-campus workstations**. They should have shared spaces available to them when working on campus.
- All flexible work arrangements shall be **reviewed annually** at the college or administrative unit level as part of the annual performance review cycle.
- University Human Resources will establish a **multidisciplinary team** to guide ongoing implementation of flexible work practices.

Background on Flexible Work

The University of Iowa has supported flexible work options for more than 25 years, recognizing their value in employee recruitment, retention, and well-being.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, University Human Resources (UHR) provided policy guidance and templates for flexible work arrangements. This experience helped the university scale up remote work during the pandemic.

UHR, the Office of the Provost, and campus partners launched the Future of Work project in November 2020 to reimagine how and where Iowa employees work after COVID-19. Project milestones to date include:

- Preliminary guidelines released in March 2021 to inform planning for the fall 2021 semester.
- A full report released in June 2021 with additional guidance on process, university and employee responsibilities, space management, and other topics.
- The university's work arrangement policy was revised in July 2021.
- A work arrangements pilot project for fall 2021 through spring 2022 (preliminary pilot findings were released in late 2021).

University of Iowa Health Care developed a separate initiative designed to meet the needs of a 24/7 patient care environment. The initial rollout began in January 2022, emphasizing corporate shared service functions including information technology, financial services, patient access center, marketing and communications, human resources, and compliance.

Pilot Project Findings

Guided by an implementation team and a cross-campus evaluation committee (see appendix) the Future of Work pilot entered its evaluation phase in Fall 2021. Evaluation included benchmarking, an employee and supervisor

pulse survey, space utilization modeling, and assessment of service delivery effectiveness (see the **Service Excellence** section above).

Peer and Regional Benchmarking

Flexible work has emerged as a post-pandemic priority for employers everywhere. Developing mission-consistent options for work locations and work schedules helps the university stay competitive in its regional labor market and in the higher education sector.

All Big 10 universities are pursuing post-pandemic flexible work strategies in some form. Most introduced new policies during 2021 and have since focused on pilots and implementation.

Large Iowa corporations also are expanding flexible work options. Collins Aerospace, HyVee Corporation, Meredith Corporation, Pearson, ACT, and Transamerica, for example, are assessing job suitability and developing policies.

Remote/Hybrid Work Arrangements and Locations

Colleges and administrative units across the general campus established about 1,800 remote/hybrid work arrangements as part of the Future of Work pilot. Of these arrangements, approximately 95% of employees work from locations within Iowa. The other 5% are located mostly within Midwestern states surrounding Iowa.

Employee Engagement

A pulse survey assessed workplace engagement among employees who adopted flexible work arrangements during the pilot as well as on-campus colleagues:

- Remote/hybrid employees reported more positive work experiences compared to campus peers.
- Remote/hybrid employees prefer their current arrangements and view them as a retention factor
- Employees in their preferred arrangements—on-campus, hybrid, or remote—report more positive work experiences overall.

In addition, supervisors of remote/hybrid teams report comparable or better measures of:

- Service excellence
- Communication
- Activity coordination
- Management capability

Improved Space Utilization & Savings

While effects on space planning must be assessed over the long term, adoption of flexible work during the pilot period indicated the possibility of significantly improved space utilization with subsequent cost savings.

If the university were to repurpose campus space for employees in hybrid work who shifted to half-time on campus during the pilot (with adjustments for shared/hoteling space and spaces difficult to repurpose) it would gain significant square footage.

Decommissioning unused office space would reduce operating, deferred maintenance, and lease costs. Repurposing space will also reduce the need for planned capital investments.

Realizing these efficiencies and savings will require establishing space-use principles that:

- Redirect investments from buildings to people
- Expect employees with remote/hybrid arrangements to use shared spaces when working on campus
- Reflect campus planning core values: efficiency, reduced operating costs, reduced building renewal costs, and improved land use
- Support numerous sustainability goals
- Expand collaborative environments

To explore new ideas for shared spaces and collaboration, the university opened the [CoWork Commons](#) in University Capitol Centre during the Future of Work pilot.

Ongoing Implementation

University Human Resources will establish a multidisciplinary team to guide ongoing implementation of flexible work practices. Initial priorities for the team will include:

- Policy updates
- Supervisor training and resources
- Monitoring and assessing impact on workplace culture
- Communication resources
- Risk mitigation (particularly for out-of-state remote/hybrid work)
- College and administrative unit review processes

The team also will facilitate collaboration among campus stakeholders (e.g., ITS, Parking and Transportation, Facilities Management) and conduct university-level reviews.

Initially, we will focus on key aspects of supervisor training related to diverse work teams; culture, and engagement; effective communication; and risk mitigation. We expect to iterate on policies and practices over time, providing periodic updates to university leadership and campus constituents.

Local Decision-Making

Flexible work policies and practices are defined at the institutional level. When evaluating the implementation of potential flexible work practices, colleges and units must establish that proposed arrangements meet these guidelines:

- Are supported by business rationales that show how flexible work serves the university's core missions and residential campus experience
- Do not negatively impact student, visitor, or employee services

- Can be completed effectively from available work locations (e.g., remote sites, shared facilities for hybrid employees)
- Support ongoing job performance at the expected level
- Are not substitutes for family or child-care arrangements
- Ensure guidelines are consistently applied
- Advance any additional organizational goals

Over the course of the Future of Work pilot, colleges and units have considered which job functions are compatible with flexible work. Using the guidelines outlined above, University Human Resources and the multidisciplinary team advising on flexible work will develop a standard set of questions to guide ongoing decisions.

Standardized Process

Work arrangement requests and approvals should follow a standardized process. Supervisors and org-level senior HR leaders must review and approve all requests for in-state remote/hybrid work.

Out-of-state remote/hybrid work raises additional compliance and risk-mitigation considerations. All out-of-state arrangements must undergo an expanded review and approval process being developed by University Human Resources.

To address compliance needs, the university issued an RFP for an outside vendor to provide consultation and risk mitigation for out-of-state work arrangements. Areas of focus for the consultant include payroll and tax issues, along with employment and labor laws. In addition, standardized procedures and guidance are needed for verifying employment eligibility of remote hires.

Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak & Stewart, P.C. has been awarded the contract and will serve as the university's vendor.

Equipment, Facilities & Parking

In general, the university will provide IT equipment, limited non-IT equipment (e.g., office chairs), and supplies only for an employee's primary work location. Employees working remotely are responsible for their own internet service and home networks. See the [summer 2020 Future of Work report](#) for additional guidelines.

Employees with remote or hybrid work arrangements should use shared or collaborative spaces when working on campus. In most cases, they should not be assigned personal on-campus offices or workspaces.

Employees working remotely should use cashiered parking facilities when working on or visiting campus. Employees with hybrid schedules can use cashiered facilities or purchase annual parking permits. These employees can also use [alternative transportation or ride share programs](#). Additional options for employees working hybrid may be introduced in the future.

Annual Evaluation

All individual flexible work arrangements will be reviewed annually at the college or administrative unit level as part of the annual performance review process. Annual evaluations should consider impact on:

- Student experience
- Service delivery
- Space utilization (e.g., have arrangements allowed orgs to repurpose space or advance mission goals?)
- Employee recruitment and retention
- Work-team performance

Per university policy, specific work arrangements may be discontinued by either the employee or the employing unit with a four-week notice unless an immediate and unanticipated operational need supports discontinuation on shorter notice.

University Human Resources and the multidisciplinary team advising on flexible work will develop documentation for annual work arrangement evaluations at the org/department level.

This team also will develop a university-level process that reviews a small sample of arrangements each year.

On-going support for flexible work will be provided through the campus HR community. At the college or administrative unit level, senior HR leaders will provide guidance for applying university policy and guidelines related to flexible work. University Human Resources, through the multidisciplinary team, will be available for consultation and will oversee aspects of flexible work related to policy, risk mitigation, and supervisor training.

Conclusion

The University of Iowa has taken a forward-thinking approach in anticipating flexible work practices and supporting the Future of Work@Iowa pilot. As we finalize the university's strategic plan, this report will provide a foundation for practices that meet the needs of today's residential campus while balancing the need to attract and retain top talent.

APPENDIX: Future of Work@Iowa Work Groups

Work Implementation Team

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Evaluation Group

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Rachel Napoli, Information Technology Services

Teri Schnelle, Division of Student Life

Maggie Vogel, Space Planning and Utilization

RFQ Selection Committee (out-of-state work)

Kyle Anson, University of Iowa Health Care

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Terri Hein, University Human Resources Payroll Services

Tom Peifer, Finance and Operations Controller's Office

Rachel Quinlan, University Human Resources Payroll Services