

Managing in Hybrid Work 2.0: A Supervisor's Guidebook

The key to successful work in a hybrid environment is intentionally developing collaboration norms, addressing critical logistical issues, and establishing a system to stay informed about how work is progressing to keep things on track and your team cohesive. As a supervisor, one of your primary responsibilities is to nurture an environment where everyone can reach their highest potential as we meet the needs of the university. Your onsite and remotely managing experience will serve as the foundation to help your staff succeed.

How AU Works

Based on learnings from the past year and new workplace approaches to advancing our mission, serving our students, and supporting our staff, American University developed a [new operating framework](#) that began in fall 2021 and is intended to be the way AU works in the future.

Use this guide to establish procedures and expectations for team members who work hybrid schedules. Agreeing upon detailed operational guidelines and performance expectations upon hire and at least once at the beginning of the academic year provides staff with a clear understanding of the rules of the road working in a hybrid modality, helps to ensure staff have the support they need to thrive in their roles, and lessens misunderstandings that may arise.

Setting Standards

Staff are responsible for their behavior no matter where they work and must comply with all university policies, including attendance, performance, code of conduct, confidentiality, leave, data privacy, and security. Hybrid schedules must conform to the overtime, record keeping, meal breaks, and other provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act and other relevant laws and university policies. Lunches, scheduled breaks, and leave are never eliminated, regardless of work arrangement.

Coordinating hybrid schedules and setting work expectations

While hybrid work allows for increased flexibility, it also requires supervisors to plan well. Staff working remotely must be available and engaged in work activities during the schedule agreed upon in a Hybrid Work Agreement. Staff are expected to attend all mandatory meetings and regularly check in with their coworkers and supervisors. With advance notice, supervisors can require staff to work in person on individual days to meet operational needs, and staff should generally not anticipate taking a hybrid extra day to offset a required in-person day.

AU will also implement an “all hands” philosophy where those on remote schedules either across the university or in certain divisions may be required to be in person for important university events. The goals are to support students, build community among our staff and faculty, demonstrate the vibrancy of our campus, and bolster those teams that work a majority of the time in-person. All hands days for the fall semester may include, but are not limited to, First Year Student Move In (August 24-25), Convocation (August 26), Family Weekend (October 7-9), and Winter Commencement (December 18). For all hands days, units are encouraged to have staff volunteer for event-related activities and/or be in-person for the day. For those units

housed on main campus (or in locations where events are occurring), the intention is for staff to work in the office on all hands days, even if the event falls on a regularly scheduled hybrid day. Units will be encouraged to, where possible, identify early in the year dates that require staff in the units to be in-person to assist with planning.

When we classify position modalities and arrange work schedules, we may not have anticipated all the unit's needs or onsite demands that might arise during the academic year. It is recommended that supervisors regularly check in with their teams, departments with whom they work regularly, and constituents they serve to ensure that schedules work for everyone. However, it's essential that everyone on the team understands that the modality may change to meet university or department needs.

Some strategies that help the hybrid environment work effectively include planning for contingencies and having information that staff need readily available. Ensure you have enough redundancy built through cross-training to cover office services and functions. This will help in case of absence or vacancies.

When managing a hybrid team, it is important for staff to have information, guidance, and instruction that does not depend on immediate contact with a supervisor. If questions or needs arise while you are not online or unavailable, staff may be unable to move forward on the task. Accordingly, invest time creating comprehensive resources so staff can find answers to common questions and challenges. Keep these shared resources updated, so the guidance is never erroneous or obsolete.

Using the Outlook calendar and shared project management platforms are necessary with multiple schedules on a team. Team members can work together regardless of location by recording progress, challenges, and instructions in a collaboration tool in a central location. Adopting ServiceNow as a customer management platform can help ensure a high level of service in your department and contribute to more seamless and consistent service across campus.

These ground rules and the Work Schedule and Modality policy establish how AU operates in the hybrid work environment. However, continued successful implementation will require setting additional expectations and norms, and we may adjust as we learn what works.

See our Resources section at the end for discussion planners, a checklist, and other helpful information. Once you have gathered your team's input, document the expectations and share them with your team.

Managing performance problems – balancing trust and accountability

Regardless of work modality, the university's performance management program is integral to supporting staff performance and continued growth. You will need to set clear expectations, monitor performance, coach staff throughout the year, and evaluate performance against established and communicated performance expectations.

Tools to support supervisors and staff to manage performance can be found on [AsuccessfulU](#):

- [Establishing expectations quick guide](#)
- [Performance feedback quick guide](#)
- [Performance appraisal quick guide](#)

Managing good performers in a hybrid environment

Managing good performers in a hybrid environment is not unlike managing them when in physical proximity. Setting clear expectations, coaching, giving good feedback, and checking in frequently are always crucial to good performance. You want to check in with all of your staff, not just the best performers, and evenly distribute the work and new projects to all on your team. It can be tempting to give more work to your best performers since you know they are fast and reliable, but that can lead to overwork and burnout.

Managing a low performer in a hybrid environment

If performance is an issue, consider whether a performance improvement plan or other progressive processes will help the staff member improve their performance, regardless of work location. Use all the tools in your toolbox to help the staff member improve their performance (e.g., a written performance improvement plan that both of you create, frequent check-ins, and plans to assess how the improvements are working).

If you have poorly performing staff working remotely, your first instinct may be to bring them back to campus to oversee their work. Keep in mind:

- If additional support isn't available onsite, then requiring a struggling staff member to work onsite is merely punitive and probably won't result in better results than continuing to allow them to work offsite.
- Most workplaces are full of distractions, so being on campus does not guarantee that staff will be more focused or productive. Simply changing the staff members' work modality may not achieve the desired results.
- The staff member may eventually be able to manage their time and effort.
- You will need to provide more direct oversight of the staff member.
- You will need to go through a formal job evaluation to change a staff member's work arrangement.

Helping staff recognize where they do their best work and identifying other forms of flexibility that might meet their needs is preferable to denying access to remote work. In addition, if you help staff come up with alternatives, you can develop their ability to self-manage and maintain their engagement with long-term performance maintenance.

If you need guidance on performance management, reach out to our Talent Strategies team by emailing AsuccessfulU@american.edu. Other options include [HR Employee Relations](#) or the [BHS manager coaching service](#) (user name: AU) for resources to help coach your staff member on needed performance improvement. Encourage staff to utilize the [BHS services](#) (user name: AU) to develop agency in improving their performance. If these strategies aren't effective, please contact [HR Employee Relations](#) for other options.

Remember, no matter where we work, everyone is always responsible for their performance and accountable for their work. You are responsible for directing and developing staff, not policing their day-to-day behavior. It's of no benefit to anyone, least of all to you.

Ensuring equity and creating connections

Inclusion and equity are cornerstones of the AU experience. Just as we work to ensure the

American University student experience is inclusive and equitable, it's our responsibility to create a workplace that includes everyone regardless of race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity expression, religion, and now work arrangement.

Research shows that, when not executed properly, hybrid work environments can have a negative impact on those who work remotely, either primarily or part-time. For example, those working remotely are often left out of meetings, miss important information communicated to those on site, and report feeling less engaged in the workplace community.

Conversely, it is essential to guard against in-person staff bearing the brunt of certain tasks just because they are in the office. Carefully examine your operations, services, and the needs of those you serve to see how work can be allocated evenly across your teams.

As a supervisor, it's essential to actively brainstorm ways to ensure that all staff, whether working offsite or in person, continue to feel part of the team. Coming up with early strategies will help you retain your top talent, ensure high engagement and productivity, and save you time and effort down the road.

Out of sight should not mean out of mind

Due to where staff are located in a hybrid workplace, they may have different access to resources and different levels of visibility. It's important to proactively address the concept of "out of sight, out of mind," which is sometimes called proximity bias.

Proximity bias is the perception that staff with close physical proximity to their team and leaders will be perceived as better workers and ultimately find more success in the workplace than their remote counterparts. Seeing someone working on campus does not mean they are working harder than someone working remotely. In fact, productivity when working remotely can be quite high, as we have found consistently through surveys and feedback since 2020.

As a supervisor, it is essential to intentionally develop systems and processes to ensure that where a team member works does not negatively impact how they are treated or diminish their career advancement opportunities.

The following tips from the Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM) are a broad overview of what supervisors of remote workers should consider when fostering remote work in their teams and maintaining connectedness in a hybrid work environment.

- Schedule time for the whole team to be together rather than separate meetings for remote staff and staff on campus.
- Always have an agenda in advance so that hybrid and on-campus staff can prepare thoughtful responses and questions.
- Document meetings, so those who can't participate are still in the loop.
- In situations where some staff are remote and some are onsite, it may be best to have everyone meet from their individual computers to avoid those with hybrid schedules from feeling left out.
- Give staff the option to stay off-camera or set norms around when to be on camera and when off-camera is acceptable.
- Engage in virtual brainstorming.

- Enable your team to participate in high-profile or developmental projects that showcase their skills.

Evaluating the way we work

It is crucial to set clear expectations and standard operating procedures early, then revisit them frequently throughout the year to evaluate and recalibrate.

There is no 'silver bullet' for creating an effective hybrid work environment. Supervisors and staff will need to be in constant communication to ensure that established rules and norms meet the service needs and expectations of students, stakeholders, and staff. Continue to evolve and refine your management tactics so that you and your team can be most effective.

Don't wait for feedback from your team and stakeholders. Instead, commit to frequent check-ins to help keep you informed about your staff's performance. Of course, how often you check in will vary depending on the department's needs — though once a week is a good rule of thumb.

Check-ins should evaluate whether:

- Things are going well on projects, and if any changes would make things better.
- Coworkers and clients are receiving the service they need from your team and what would make things better.
- Work is allocated evenly, and certain tasks do not just fall to in-person staff because they happen to be there. Be thoughtful about how you can meet customer needs with all your team members, including remote workers.
- Assignments are being met with quality and timely delivery.
- All operational needs are being met.
- Your technology (computer, phone, access to servers, etc.) meets your present and future communication and data management needs.
- There are concerns or problems that you or another stakeholder have raised.
- There is documentation of how remote work has benefited you, staff members, the onsite team, clients, and the university (e.g., better customer service, faster response times, better coverage, less overall stress, etc.).

If you follow the tips in this guide, you set up your team to succeed in the hybrid work environment and work through obstacles together. If something isn't working, refer to this guide for ideas to try to improve things.

We recognize that the best people management techniques don't work for everyone, despite your best efforts. If you continue to face challenges or want additional support, please contact Human Resources at hrpayrollhelp@american.edu.

Resources

- [Interactive Discussion Planner](#)
- [Hybrid Work Reboarding Template](#)
- [Hybrid 2.0 Workplace Checklist](#)