

September 14, 2006 Meeting Summary

HJ 144, the Joint Subcommittee studying telework opportunities in the Commonwealth, held its second meeting on September 14 at the Center for Innovative Technology in Herndon, Virginia. The focus of the meeting was hearing from state agencies and local governments that had launched successful telework programs.

Catherine Chianese, Assistant to the Fairfax County Executive, discussed Fairfax County's telework program, which has been in place for 10 years. She said that after 10 years, the culture of telework is engrained in county government, and it no longer has to deal with some of the cultural hurdles that newer telework programs face. This year, the county met its goal of having 20% of its eligible workforce telecommute, a goal set by the chairman of the board of supervisors in 2001. Ms. Chianese noted that having this kind of goal and support from the highest level of government was very important in the success of the program.

Part of Fairfax County's success can be attributed to its reinvigoration of the telework program after the 2001 announcement. The county established a brand and a logo for its telework program, and developed different training tracks tailored to management and workers. Fairfax also allows their telework program to operate in a decentralized manner, which permits each department figure out how to best roll out the program to meet their needs.

Diane O'Grady, Telework Program Manager for Loudoun County, shared her county's experiences with telework. The recent growth in Loudoun County was the key driver in the county's focus on telework beginning in 2005. The county had previously established a program in 1996, but it was put on hold. In 2005, the Board of Supervisors made an active decision to reinvigorate the program. The county was facing a lack of space for its growing workforce and growing traffic problems. In addition, the county saw telework as a tool for work retention, and wanted to build a model that private businesses could follow.

Ms. O'Grady noted the role that the county's IT Department has played in the successful deployment of telework. The Department has helped to incorporate new tools into the program, which have helped to revamp and revise work processes. She said that the Department is also devising a standard telework tool kit.

Loudoun County has also been focused on the opportunities that telework provides for continuity of operations in the event of an emergency or disaster. They encourage managers and employees who are part of the continuity of operations plan to telework from home at least one day a month in order to practice telework in case the plan must be activated.

Dave Jordan, Assistant Tax Commissioner with the Compliance Division, described to the joint subcommittee the telework practices of his compliance unit. In 2000, there were nine district offices in Virginia. Because of rising rent costs, the Department of Taxation

closed two of the offices, and the 49 workers from the offices began to telecommute full time. In 2003, due to fiscal constraints, the other regional offices were also closed, bringing the total number of teleworkers to well over 200.

Mr. Jordan said that in his experience, most teleworkers adjusted rapidly to the new policy, even in situations where there had been resistance. He noted that while it is more difficult to measure productivity when working at home, the general experience has been that productivity rises for most workers. However, some employees do not work as well from home, and the Department did find the need to let go about 5 employees. He said that the Department of Taxation has recently set a new goal to get another 150 employees from its Richmond offices to begin teleworking. Currently, the Department of Taxation is spread out among four different offices in Virginia, and they would like to be in one facility. The Department would also eventually like to be able to hire someone from anywhere in the Commonwealth for any job opening that they may have.

Mr. Jordan shared a set of lessons that he has learned in implementing a telework program:

- ◆ A solid technology infrastructure is important;
- ◆ Employers need to listen to what employees say they need to do their job from home, in terms of equipment and support;
- ◆ Employers need to be prepared to confront low-performing employees with real data and numbers, and be prepared to let them go if necessary;
- ◆ An involuntary telework plan is not problematic;
- ◆ Supporting teleworkers should be part of a manager's performance plan and evaluation;
- ◆ Anyone should be allowed to telework -- it should not be reserved for only the highest performing employees.

Following Mr. Jordan's presentation, Secretary of Technology Aneesh P. Chopra announced that the Department of Taxation had offered to act as the lead agency for state telework pilot program. He also described Executive Order 35 that announced the formation of the Office of Telework Promotion and Broadband Assistance in the executive branch. The new office is a collaborative, cross-secretariat effort to link supply of broadband with the need for increased telework, telemedicine, and teleeducation. The Governor has announced a goal of having 20% of the eligible workforce at each state agency teleworking at least one day a week by 2010. The three underlying initiatives behind this effort are to reform government operations, alleviate traffic congestion, and to pursue economic development opportunities through telework.

Secretary of Administration Viola O. Baskerville shared the results of a telework survey that had just been received by the Department of Human Resource Management. The survey solicited state agency input about the number of employees telecommuting at each agency, the inclusion of telework in continuity of operations plans, and perceived benefits of and barriers to telework. Of the results received before the meeting, representing about half of the state agencies, there were 2,067 positions designated eligible to telecommute, and 1,469 employees were telecommuting. Delegate Hugo asked for more

information to be provided at the next meeting about what types of positions in the state were being designated as ineligible, and why there were not more eligible positions.

The top perceived benefits of telework included commuter costs savings, increased employee satisfaction, and flexibility. Barriers included the cost of IT equipment and support, diminished access to work resources, and traditional office culture.

In addition to the survey information, Secretary Baskerville also provided a copy of a leadership memorandum distributed to all agencies about current telework requirements, as well as an overview of telework best practices compiled by IBM for the Commonwealth (free of charge).

After these presentations, the meeting was adjourned. The next meeting date has not yet been scheduled.