Accommodation Problems and Solutions Associated with Telework
Version 1.0

As we adjust to a world with Covid-19, many employees find themselves working from home. Employees find themselves dealing with new technology, new methods of communication, new workstations, and new ways of managing time. Unfortunately, some of these changes will pose barriers to people with various disabilities.

This document outlines potential accommodation problems resulting from telework, and when possible, lists ideas for accommodation solutions. It is a work in progress, and is part of the Work ACCESS project's efforts to develop an online tool for conducting workplace accommodation assessments.

This list will be further developed with crowd sourcing. If you would like to help us with this effort, please email us your suggestions or join us in June/July for a series of focus groups to brainstorm additional solutions.

Some of the solutions listed in this document come from the following references:

"Tips for Being an Effective Teleworker" by the Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology (PEAT)
https://www.peatworks.org/content/tips-being-effective-teleworker

"Inclusive Remote Work Environments", a presentation for the Virtual AFB Leadership Conference 2020 by Erin Lauridsen and Tanner Gers
https://www.afb.org/about-afb/events-and-awards/afblc-2020-overview/virtual-afblc/inclusive-remote-work-environments

"Time Management: Working from Home", by Dave Crenshaw
https://www.linkedin.com/learning/time-management-working-from-home

"If you have ADHD, here's how to manage working from home", by Kristen Rogers, CNN
https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/29/health/working-from-home-coronavirus-adhd-wellness

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Technology Issues (Impact: All disabilities)

Problems	Solutions
Remote work software (e.g., teleconferencing, file sharing) may not be accessible Assistive technologies conflict with telework software or slow it down	• See CIDI's other resources on teleworking software platforms. • Use phone conferencing on a speaker phone instead of video conferencing. • For accessibility with vision-related AT, check https://www.afb.org/about-afb/events-and-awards/afblc-2020-overview/virtual-afblc/remote-instruction • Use a second USB sound card to separate screen reader and teleconferencing audio streams
Don't know how to set up or use the accessible features offered by online meeting platform	• Provide video instructions on accessibility features. • Provide one-on-one remote training, possibly with screenshare and control options to demonstrate setup or use.
Home technology (e.g., computer processor, monitor, keyboard, mouse) is inferior (e.g., slower, smaller, less ergonomic) to what would normally be used in the workplace	• Ask if work equipment can be brought home from the workplace. Make sure that employees know the process for these requests. Note that the equipment might need to be shipped or delivered if the employee normally relies on public transportation. • Find out if workplace assistive technology is licensed for use on a second computer, or transfer the license. • If workplace AT is unavailable, explore options built into computer and phone operating systems, such as Voiceover on iOS or TalkBack on Android.

Additional Technology Problems **(not related to disability):**

- Lack of updated technology
- File storage and security: can home computers connect through firewalls, are corporate machines allowed to connect to telework software, does file storage meet security rules
- Home internet connection: availability, stability of connection, lack of bandwidth when also used by other family members
- Increased power bills
- Power outage

Communication Issues (Impact: All / Depends on problem)

Problems	Solutions
Teleconferencing presentations are difficult to see or cannot be seen (Vision)	• Follow guidelines for making presentation slides accessible. Resource: https://www.w3.org/WAI/teach-advocate/accessible-presentations/#preparing-slides-and-projected-material-speakers • Provide training to both host and participants on accessibility for online meeting software. • Provide an auditory description of graphics. • Send materials to the employee for viewing with their own computer settings, separate from the screen sharing of teleconferencing systems.
Employee's voice is too soft over conferencing system (Speech) Loud work environment (apartments, condos, multiple people working from home, kids)	• Adjust microphone (speaker for other participants) settings in software • Try using headset microphone instead of computer microphone (or reverse) • Use chat features within the software instead of communicating by voice • Use captioning features built into some conferencing software. See CIDI's other resources on teleworking software platforms.

Other participants' voices are too soft over conferencing system (Hearing) Loud work environment (apartments, condos, multiple people working from home, kids)	• Adjust speaker (microphone for other participants) settings in software • Try using headset to listen instead of computer speakers (or reverse) • Use chat features within the software instead of communicating by voice • Use captioning features built into some conferencing software. See CIDI's other resources on teleworking software platforms.
Teleconferencing platform does not support captioning or ASL (Hearing)	• See CIDI's other resources on teleworking software platforms.
AAC system voice output cannot be heard over conferencing system (Speech)	• Use external speakers (wired or Bluetooth) • Use chat features within the software instead of communicating by voice
Online meeting participants have difficulty staying focused (All, Cognitive)	• Keep track of time; make the meeting concise. • Give the meeting participants time to think and give breaks. • Engage employees; ask questions. • Use multiple communication methods for different learning styles. Combine verbal, picture and text format. • Be visible on screen, this helps some people hear and understand better. • Use captioning features built into some conferencing software. See CIDI's other resources on teleworking software platforms. • After the meeting, share meeting materials (notes, transcript, recording) in an accessible format. Helpful resources: https://www.w3.org/WAI/teach-advocate/accessible-presentations/#planning-your-session-speakers

	https://www.w3.org/WAI/teach-advocate/accessible-presentations/#provide-accessible-material-and-media-organizers--speakers https://www.peatworks.org/content/checklist-accessible-virtual-meeting-presentation
Employees have more trouble reaching a colleague with questions about assignments due to the teleworking technology used	• Set regular times for employees to discuss assignments • Use phone calls or chats instead of elaborate conferencing systems for some communications. • See CIDI's other resources on teleworking software platforms.
Appropriate timing for communication (e.g., what are work hours) may be difficult to determine	• Share employee's work schedules if they are working non-standard days/times. • Set regular times for employees to discuss assignments • Make use of email features that delay the sending of messages until standard work hours.
Online communication (e.g., screen sharing) is not as effective as demonstrating something in-person (Cognitive; Vision)	• ??
Understanding nonverbal cues when unable to see coworkers (Cognitive; Vision)	• ??

Working Space / Ergonomics Issues (Impact: All, but particularly motor and vision)

Problems	Solutions
Working areas at home may not be set up for long-term work and may further aggravate existing motor conditions (Motor) There may not be space to work from home as many people have roommates or live in apartments/condos.	- Set up a dedicated work space - As much as possible, follow guidelines for ergonomic workspaces. - Laptop computers are not designed to be used on a person's lap. - Sit in a firm chair with good back support. - Use a work surface that allows the employee to access the keyboard with a neutral arm position, without having to reach significantly up or down. - Use bricks or books to adjust table height. - Use books or boxes to adjust monitor, keyboard and mouse heights - Take regular, short breaks to alleviate stress on the back and to avoid repetitive stress injuries
Monitor placement may not be ideal to maximize vision (Vision) Heavier use of computer and conferencing software is causing eye strain	- Set up a dedicated work space. - Set monitors at a right angle to windows to avoid glare. - Use books or boxes to adjust monitor height. - Ask if larger monitors and/or monitor stands can be brought home from the workplace. Note that the equipment might need to be shipped or delivered if the employee normally relies on public transportation. - Take regular, short breaks to alleviate eye strain. - Hold phone-based or audio-only conference calls instead of video meetings.

Time Management (Impact: All, but particularly cognitive disabilities)

Problems	Solutions
Frequent interruptions at home may disrupt employees from being productive Background noise from other family members can be distracting People may find it difficult to be productive in their work area at home due to difficulties with associating their home environment with their workplace environment	• Follow a set work schedule / routine. • Try to find a dedicated, isolated area for work. • Use headphones to block out noise distractions. • Use white noise generation or listen to a sound track block out noise distractions. • Position the workspace to face a corner or put up visual dividers to block out visual distractions.
Getting distracted (e.g., from other websites) is much easier when not in a working environment It may be harder to distinguish working time from time spent on breaks	• Follow a set work schedule / routine. • Use a time management app to track assignments. • Try the Pomodoro technique, in which breaks work into set intervals separated by short breaks. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pomodoro_Technique • Set aside specific times for responding to emails or other messages; avoid these outside of those set times.
Managers may be concerned about whether the employee is working	• The employee can use time management apps, to-do lists, or other reminders to keep track of assignments and deadlines. • The employer can use online project management software to track time and completed assignments. • Check in with employees at the beginning and end of their shift to provide assignments and track progress.

Mood / Health / Stress Management (Impact: All)

Problems	Solutions
Isolation from the rest of the team Missing hallway talk water cooler talk	• Use chat messages to check in with people regularly • Create opportunities for the whole team to virtually get together • Create fun activities and challenges to maintain morale
Lose work and life balance If the person has children, he or she may need to switch around work time to assist with school hours, etc. Pressure to work longer hours because of unclear boundaries when working from home a.k.a. seeing manager or other coworkers working beyond dedicated hours Remembering to get up to eat, take walks, and breaks	• Follow a set work schedule / routine. Keep separate work and outside hours. • Use a visual tool to organize work and home tasks. • Set regular times for employees to discuss assignments. • Share employee's work schedules if they are working non-standard days/times. • Try the Pomodoro technique, in which breaks work into set intervals separated by short breaks. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pomodoro_Technique • Set aside specific times for responding to emails or other messages; avoid these outside of those set times. Sign out of emails if done for the day. • Make use of email features that delay the sending of messages until standard work hours. • Plan meaningful breaks, including time to exercise or simply relax. • Use a therapy app to relax.