

# **Flex Time and Personal Sustainability Guidelines for Agents and Parent Educators North Dakota State University Extension**

The purpose of this document is to describe, clarify and support flex time and personal sustainability for North Dakota State University (NDSU) Extension agents and Extension parent educators.

## **PERSONAL SUSTAINABILITY**

The balance of work and personal/family life is important. It requires personal sustainability or management of a reasonable workload to avoid exhaustion, burnout, negativity and other potential chronic conditions. Personal sustainability is the responsibility of the employee.

Additionally, NDSU promotes and supports employees with a variety of policies and services that are designed to address personal, professional and family needs. Please see the NDSU Human Resources and Payroll website for information on various options:

[https://www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/forward/documents/FORW\\_6570\\_ResourcesBro.pdf](https://www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/forward/documents/FORW_6570_ResourcesBro.pdf)

## **SCHEDULING AND COMMUNICATION**

Extension agents and parent educators provide unique community and county-level services that require activity outside of the office on a regular basis. Agents and parent educators are expected to be transparent about their hours with office co-workers as a professional courtesy. For accountability and safety reasons, Outlook calendars or in/out boards can be used to keep others informed of expected return date/time.

## **FLEX TIME**

Flex time is arranging one's work schedule to best achieve the responsibilities of the position while achieving a balance of professional and personal time.

The use of flex time may vary based on office operations and position responsibilities. Flex time should meet the needs of county citizens, and be developed in cooperation with co-workers. Flex time might need to be communicated with county officials, if desired/required.

### **Key Elements of Flex Time:**

- Available to full- and part-time Extension agents and parent educators
- Requires good communication with office colleagues so everyone is aware of scheduling adjustments
- Should not be taken on historically busy days/hours of the week
- Should be used within the pay period or reasonable time period

### **Examples of Flex Time Use:**

- **Working long days at events.** *"I worked three, 12-hour days for the county fair."*
  - Flex time options might include coming in later for a couple days or leaving early a day or two within a short span of the extended work days.
- **Taking calls, texts and Facebook messages outside of work time.** *"I received four requests by text after I left the office today, and then saw someone at the supermarket who asked me to take a look at a tree in his yard as we left the store."*

- Working off the clock is a personal choice, but it is best avoided. In addition to affecting your re-charge time, it can present a liability issue if there is an incident during non-work hours. Communicate with your clientele in a tactful way about your office hours.
- **Unsafe conditions.** *"I don't feel safe driving to the office today because of the icy road conditions."*
  - This is a personal decision. Safety is important, and coming in later or taking vacation time is allowable as long as it is not overused or abused. It is important that office members communicate with each other about who can arrive at the office. It is also recommended to let the county auditor or building representative know of any unexpected office closures.
- **County offices with established office hours of less than 40 hours.** *"Our building is only officially open from 8:30-12:30 p.m. and 1-4 p.m., so that is a seven-hour day. Do I need to work 40 hours a week?"*
  - Full-time agents and parent educators are expected to work 40 hours a week. Options might include gaining access to the building earlier or later, or fulfilling hours missing from the work day through weekend or evening events.
- **Special hours.** *"We usually have summer hours. Everyone wants Fridays off. What should we do?"*
  - Adjusting office hours in the summer is acceptable as long as there is office coverage during building hours. This needs to be established as a team and may require everyone to alternate covering Fridays.

**Flex time is not:**

- An hour for hour tracking of time worked beyond the standard 40-hour work week (NDSU Policy 101.1 and 101.3.2)
- A way to build up hours or accumulate paid leave for a vacation or necessary medical leave
- An opportunity to work from home
- To be used when there are significant needs in the office or field

**Violation:**

- If abuse is demonstrated in any of the above, disciplinary actions can result.
- Staff members who are aware of others improperly using flex time can communicate their concern to that employee or contact the employee's supervisor.

**NEED HELP PRIORITIZING?**

When setting program priorities, the questions below may be helpful (from the Personal Sustainability Project of Maine Extension Service).

- *How does the request/issue/need align with Cooperative Extension's mission? With my plan of work? If it does not, is it worth pursuing and why?*
- *What would I need to defer or let go of in order to pick up this new activity?*
- *Do I have the time available to do this well?*
- *Are there others with whom I could partner to achieve the goals of the initiative or project?*
- *Is there another resource, person or agency that could more effectively address the issue/request?*
- *How will I be able to account for my time allocated to this initiative and show impacts of my work in the short-, medium- and long term?*

**If you have questions about any of this information, please visit with your supervisor.**