

Office of the Provost

BEST PRACTICES FOR INCLUSIVE REMOTE WORK IN THE ACADEMY

Addendum to the *Guide to Best Practices for Departmental Climate*



BEST PRACTICES FOR INCLUSIVE REMOTE WORK IN THE ACADEMY

This addendum to the [Guide to Best Practices for Departmental Climate](#) will equip faculty and administrators to switch rapidly to working remotely in response to a crisis. The practices and insights that follow provide a framework to rethink the ways in which we teach, conduct research, and perform service during a contingency period while collectively maintaining a climate of inclusive excellence. One of the most important priorities during such a time is the tone of communication. When conveying urgent information, we must strive to be mindful of how it will be received.

The guidance in this addendum applies to the general adoption of inclusive remote work; however, the specific focus is in executing an academy-wide shift to remote work in response to an unforeseen disruption, such as a global pandemic, other natural or man-made disaster, or cyberattack. This will require:

DEVELOPING CONTINGENCY PLANS

- Quickly adapting departmental policies and processes (i.e., promotions, admissions)
- Clear communication to faculty regarding service commitments and duties
- Communicating with transparency and receptiveness to feedback during the period of disruption

FOSTERING A SENSE OF BELONGING AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

- Developing alternative forms of virtual community-building and mentorship, with an enhanced emphasis on respect, patience, tolerance, understanding, and humility
- Increasing awareness of and support for the complexities of managing work and personal circumstances; offering accommodations for barriers to teaching, learning, attention, and/or productivity
- Maintaining standards regarding potentially discriminatory or problematic language and behaviors in a virtual setting
- Communicating difficult information with warmth and acknowledging faculty, staff, and students for being adaptable and engaged throughout the transition
- Reiterating the importance of your unit's work to the mission of the University

BEST PRACTICES FOR INCLUSIVE REMOTE WORK IN THE ACADEMY

INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE AND REMOTE WORK IN RESPONSE TO A CRISIS



TRANSPARENCY

Redefine Excellence

- Identify and communicate essential unit functions and priorities, and adjust these as circumstances evolve



UNIFORMITY

Revise Remote Work Best Practices

- Devise and communicate clear expectations and structures for remote work, adapting standard best practices to crisis-related space and technology constraints
- Provide tools and processes for unit members to perform essential job functions
- Communicate that existing University policies and expectations for conduct remain in effect



ASSISTANCE

Encourage Shared Leadership and Mentorship

- Communicate that faculty mentoring is even more important during a shift to remote work
- Maintain respect for individual differences and a commitment to collegiality



RESPECT

Promote Virtual, Inclusive Community

- Communicate with extra patience, collegiality, kindness, and humility
- Establish department rituals that mirror in-person community-building behaviors (e.g., say “hi” in the morning and “good night” at the end of the day)

CHECKLIST: ACTION STEPS

When you are working remotely, the four principles of transparency, uniformity, assistance, and respect take on even greater significance. The checklist below is an overview of practices that support an inclusive remote work environment.

Actions	Principles	Resources
TRANSITIONING TO REMOTE WORK		
<input type="checkbox"/> Identify essential services and job functions that must continue seamlessly, without interruption: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - at the unit level; and - for each constituency within the unit (i.e., faculty, trainees, administrators, staff). 	Transparency Uniformity	TOOL B: Prioritizing Commitments and Activities
<input type="checkbox"/> Collect alternate contact information, including location, and share (with permission).	Assistance Transparency Uniformity	
<input type="checkbox"/> Identify and prioritize technology (software licenses, hardware) and other supplies to support these functions	Transparency Uniformity	TOOL A: Identifying Technology Needs
<input type="checkbox"/> Survey unit to assess technology needs, including the availability of high-speed internet access, VPN access, and laptops that meet CUIT security standards.	Assistance Transparency Uniformity	TOOL A: Identifying Technology Needs
<input type="checkbox"/> Develop and conduct work-at-home training to verify remote access, familiarize colleagues with software, and model best practices for interaction.	Assistance	
<input type="checkbox"/> Create a communications plan to create community and to share information. Possible tools include Zoom video meetings and Slack workspaces. Communicate frequently, yet succinctly.	Transparency Uniformity	TOOL C: Communications Protocol
<input type="checkbox"/> Develop and implement a digital security policy; ensure that backups are available if primary servers go down.	Assistance Uniformity	CUIT or department protocols
<input type="checkbox"/> Develop and share best practices for remote communication, establishing preferred platforms (i.e., Zoom for faculty meetings and Slack for chat) for the unit. Establish expected engagement level for virtual meetings and response times for emails and messaging apps.	Transparency Uniformity	TOOL C: Communications Protocol
PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT		
<input type="checkbox"/> Direct faculty and staff to existing Columbia resources; i.e. the Work/Life, The Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Advancement, Columbia Libraries, the CTL, and EOAA.	Assistance	See Appendix
<input type="checkbox"/> Encourage faculty to comfortably share their teaching and mentoring needs during this time by modeling these practices at the leadership level.	Assistance Transparency	
<input type="checkbox"/> Create structures for leadership to check in with colleagues and assess their needs as they evolve.	Assistance	
<input type="checkbox"/> Collect feedback, reassess needs, and adapt processes accordingly.	Respect	
<input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledge colleagues for being adaptable and engaged throughout this transition.	Respect	

INCLUSIVE REMOTE WORK: GOALS AND CONSIDERATIONS

TECHNOLOGY—ACCESS AND PROFICIENCY

(Tool A: Identifying Technology Needs)

UNIFORMITY



Keep It Simple

- Estimate the level of access to and proficiency with the technology required to communicate and execute tasks
- Create a plan to rapidly close as many gaps in access and proficiency as possible, within policy limits (i.e., cost or procurement policies and protocols)
- When identifying primary communication channels, prioritize technology and platforms with the most consistent level of access and proficiency
- Communicate flexibility, patience, and a willingness to assist with technology while new technology is being adopted

ASSISTANCE



Start with Where You Are

- When choosing technology solutions for a given purpose, consider extending the use of familiar, existing platforms to minimize the stress of the transition
- As able, support peer-to-peer sharing of best practices in one-on-one and in group/class communication forums

RESPECT



Respect Individual Levels of Comfort and Mastery of Technology

- Communicate appropriate CUIT/CU/unit resources for those who experience technical difficulties, and designate an administrative liaison to serve as a concierge for those who need extra support
- Create a resource (Google doc or other) of online tutorials (i.e., LinkedIn Learning) to ease the transition to new technology

TRANSPARENCY



Use Remote Work Experience to Inform Future Investment and Learning

- During the crisis remote work period, solicit feedback and document real-time insights to make remote work more inclusive and effective
- Conduct SWOT analysis; use insights to inform post-crisis policies, training, and practices, whether these be remote, remote/on-site hybrids, or fully on-site

COMMUNICATION

(Tool C: Communications Protocol)

Replace Water Cooler Interactions

- Use technology and communications platforms, such as Slack, WhatsApp, or Facebook Groups, to replicate inclusive, real-time informal interactions
- Check in with your team during the day; post questions; share best practices; form groups around topics (i.e., [food](#), [exercise](#), [wellness](#), [parenting](#), [eldercare](#), [books/movies](#))

(NOTE: All communications technology must conform to software/platform terms of use and [CUIT policy](#))

Recognize Different Communication Styles

- Ask team members to share preferred modes of communication (i.e., phone call/video chat, text, email, etc.)
- Consider preferences, and establish guidelines for when to use email, instant or text messages, or voice or video calls
- Be flexible with colleagues whose care responsibilities or other constraints prevent them from use of video in a virtual meeting

Best Practices for Inclusive Video Meetings:

- Use a headset or press mute when not talking to minimize ambient noise
- As comfortable, use chat function to share links and resources
- Share the meeting agenda in the chat or on a shared doc; share notes/action items afterward
- Share this link to Zoom tutorials: <https://cuit.columbia.edu/zoom>

Consolidate Regular Communications

When working remotely, we receive more emails than usual. Below are some best practices for the use of email:

- Make emails succinct; use a clear subject header; include a call to action; note when a response is required; use bullets rather than paragraphs where possible; use line breaks strategically
- If important information is being updated on an ongoing basis, consider maintaining an easily accessible website with the most current information
- Establish and communicate expectations for response times
- Strive to convey warmth in emails; in the absence of body language, the intended tone of a message may be lost.

Encourage Boundaries and Rituals

- Establish and share personal preferences for time, location, or conditions for different types of work (i.e., email; calls; “deep work” or writing)
- Respect boundaries regarding others’ use of a personal cell phone

For unit leaders who wish to share their remote work plans with their colleagues, we offer a customizable email template: tinyURL.com/ColumbiaRemoteWorkEmail

CREATIVELY ADAPTING TO INCLUSIVE REMOTE WORK

Build Trust, Maintain Flexibility, and Experiment with New Ways of Working

- Share leadership and learn from each other
- Faculty can partner with students, colleagues, or the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) staff to enhance the delivery of instruction
- Units should establish a culture of inquiry and curiosity when tackling a new challenge

Rethink the “Campus”

- Be creative about hosting interviews/campus visits
- Ensure that prospective faculty and students have access to diverse members of the faculty and community

Rethink Community-Building Activities

- Consider converting planned events/webinars/conferences/readings/invited talks to a virtual format

Assess Possible Implications for Interruptions to Research

- May not apply the same to all—lab-based research versus human subject, grant-funded research versus independent
- Department Chairs can assist to minimize losses; offer support; and identify implications for productivity, publication, or compliance

ANTICIPATING CHALLENGES DURING THE TRANSITION

As teams transition to a new virtual environment, you—or members of your unit—may experience difficulty or resistance.

If you perceive resistance from members of your unit, ask yourself if it is a function of:

- Insufficient tools/resources, e.g., a lack of furniture or equipment for remote work
- Discomfort with technology
- Situational/personal factors, such as decreased motivation or feeling overwhelmed
- External factors (personal circumstances of the individual)

If a proposed change gives you pause, consider whether it is related to:

- An institutional policy (e.g., approval for furniture or equipment for remote work; budgetary limitations regarding reimbursement; IRB protocols; HIPAA regulations)
- An objective concern related to performance
- Your personal preference, which might be reconsidered

INDIVIDUAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND INCLUSIVE REMOTE WORK: TIPS FOR MANAGERS

Expect Greater Insight into the Personal Lives of Colleagues

- Respect the privacy of each individual; it can be difficult to establish boundaries between personal and professional life while working remotely

Encourage Mental, Physical, and Emotional Well-Being

- Ask unit members how they are doing; model healthy practices (e.g., limit sending and responding to late-night emails by using the “send later” email function)

Be Patient with Unique Challenges of Crisis Work and Life Circumstances

- With the boundaries between work and life blurred, expect that managing personal responsibilities and work will become more complex

Promote and Actively Utilize Existing Columbia Work/Life Supports

- Highlight the offerings of the [Office of Work/Life](#): Back-up care, well-being webinars, yoga, and meditation, as well as the Employee Assistance Program ([EAP](#)), whose offerings include counseling, legal, and financial services



ONGOING ASSESSMENT OF INCLUSIVE REMOTE WORK PRACTICES

Encourage participation in ongoing review and learning from inclusive remote work period

- Debrief using the Checklist above once a routine is established; solicit and review feedback; incorporate new ideas into future practices

RECALIBRATING INCLUSIVE REMOTE WORK

This addendum was developed to assist faculty and staff to maintain an inclusive climate, even when working remotely during a time of crisis or rapid change. The broader future implications of any particular crisis for

institutional policies and practices are unknown. With feedback from our vibrant and diverse community and its shared leadership, we can constantly improve, integrating ever-evolving best practices during less fraught times.

TOOL A: IDENTIFYING TECHNOLOGY NEEDS

This is a sample template; individual units might adapt this for their needs

	Estimated Level of Access to Hardware and Software (5-Complete Access to 1-No Access)		Estimated Level of Proficiency with Hardware and Software (5-Complete Proficiency to 1-No Proficiency)	
	You, as Faculty	Staff	You, as Faculty	Staff
HARDWARE				
Laptop				
Headset				
Earphones				
WiFi/Internet				
Video Camera				
Printer				
Scanner				
Other				
SOFTWARE				
<i>Instructional:</i>				
CourseWorks (Canvas)				
Zoom				
Panopto				
<i>Communication:</i>				
Email				
Cell Phone/Text				
Slack				
Other				

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Resource: <https://ctl.columbia.edu/resources-and-technology/teaching-with-technology/contingency-planning/>

TOOL B: PRIORITIZING COMMITMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Identify, Prioritize, Confirm, Schedule, and Coordinate

Working remotely, especially during a crisis, requires prioritizing and communicating essential unit functions and activities, and continuously reassessing them as circumstances evolve.

This tool will help with that prioritization, communication, and scheduling process:

1. Identify key commitments and activities. Some examples of this include academic instruction, department meetings, committee meetings, previously scheduled events/programming, and student advising.
2. Rank each of these activities as High/Medium/Low priority.
3. Determine if the task can be done remotely, or if it must be rescheduled or canceled.
4. Review rankings with key stakeholders.
5. Schedule the activity/commitment, and coordinate with unit administration as needed.
6. Regularly repeat this exercise during the crisis remote work period.

Commitment/ Activity	Level of Priority High/Medium/Low Explain	Remote/ Reschedule /Cancel	Confirmed with Chair	Scheduled	Coordinated with DA

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TOOL C: COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOL

How can we communicate effectively while working remotely?

A shift to remote work requires units to establish, share, and flexibly adapt communication methods between a variety of constituents. Administrative leaders (deans, chairs, and division administrators) should model the expected **content**, **tone**, **method**, and **frequency** of communications to faculty and students, which may vary depending on the intended audience and the context.

The chart below is helpful in establishing guidelines for communication. When considering a particular method, consider transparency and inclusivity. Formal guidelines, if any, should be shared widely. Informal communication methods should be negotiated between the relevant parties.

Please visit [this link](#) for an editable version of this form.

	FORMAL		INFORMAL	
	One-on-One	Group/Class	One-on-One	Group/Class
Administration/Unit Leadership to Students				
Department Chair to Faculty				
Mentor/Adviser to Mentee/Advisee				
Faculty to Administration				
Faculty to Department Administrator				
Department Leadership to Administrators and Staff				

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APPENDIX: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY RESOURCES FOR INCLUSIVE REMOTE WORK

[The Office of Work/Life](#) Columbia University's Office of Work/Life fosters the well-being of the Columbia community and its people in their pursuit of meaningful and productive academic, personal, and work lives. Columbia faculty and staff may find Work/Life's [well-being](#) and [back-up care](#) resources particularly useful when working remotely.

[The Center for Teaching and Learning](#) The Columbia CTL offers [resources and support](#) for instructors facilitating their courses online, including employing instructional technologies like CourseWorks (Canvas), Zoom, and Panopto.

[Research](#) The Office of the Executive Vice President for Research has overall responsibility for the University's research enterprise at all locations, including the Morningside and Manhattanville campuses, Columbia University Irving Medical Center, Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, and Nevis Laboratories, and internationally. The [Columbia Research website](#) provides updates regarding on-site, in-person research activities.

[Columbia University Libraries](#) Columbia University Libraries is a top-tier academic research library, serving one of the world's most important centers of research and learning. During periods of remote work, [Your Libraries Online](#) is the gateway to the services, tools, and collections available to the Columbia community.

[The Office of University Life](#) The Office of University Life is a hub for University-wide student life information and initiatives, offering a variety of resources, including campus conversations on pressing issues; wellness events; and community citizenship workshops, task forces, and working groups.

[Human Resources](#) Columbia University Human Resources (CUHR) is dedicated to providing quality service to develop, manage, and support the University's vibrant community—so Columbia faculty and staff can do great work.

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