

A Sample Compressed Workweek Program

Contributed by the AIA Knowledge Resources staff

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SUMMARY

In today's competitive market, an employer must offer alternative benefit options to attract talented employees. One such alternative, the compressed workweek, offers employees greater flexibility—either year-round or during selected months—to have certain days off in exchange for longer hours on the days they do work.

AIA National offers its staff a compressed-workweek program during the summer. The program allows employees, on a voluntary basis, to work the equivalent of two 5-day workweeks in 9 days rather than 10. Participation in the program does not affect an employee's position, salary, salary review, or consideration for transfer or promotion.

WHO BENEFITS FROM THE PROGRAM?

Participation in a compressed workweek can benefit the organization, the community, and the employees alike. The organization may reduce operating costs, improve employee retention, and decrease absenteeism and tardiness. Fewer daily commuters means less environmental impact on the community. Most important, employees may be able to better balance work and personal life, which potentially raises morale.

When an organization decides to offer the compressed workweek benefit, it is important to first determine the criteria for program participation. At the AIA, for example, a participant must

- Be a regular full-time employee
- Have satisfactorily completed a six-month probationary period
- Have a performance record that at least "fully meets expectations"
- Have no disciplinary actions in his or her file for the past six months

APPROVAL DEPENDS ON OPERATIONAL NEEDS

To work on a compressed schedule, an AIA employee must initiate the process by filing a request form, signed by both the immediate supervisor and the department head, with the human resources department (HR). The supervisor and department head jointly make the decision, possibly in consultation with others.

When evaluating a request, supervisors consider staffing constraints, in-house staffing needs for their departments and teams, and operating requirements. If the change to a compressed workweek could negatively affect service levels, workflow, or other key functions, the supervisor may deny the request, clearly stating the reason(s) to the employee and HR in writing.

A supervisor also has the authority to determine if and when the compressed workweek is no longer a viable scheduling alternative for the department or for a specific position. The benefit can be modified or canceled at any time, although advance notice is desirable. When a change or cancellation is necessary, the supervisor must provide written notice to the employee and submit a copy to HR.

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

Once a compressed workweek request is granted, a participant must adhere to his or her approved schedule to reduce departmental and team-wide scheduling and planning conflicts. In addition, participants must ensure that tasks are covered on their compressed workdays off and that the alternative schedule causes no project delays.

Firms that offer this benefit may find it necessary to either rotate or stagger the employees' days off—for instance, to alternate first and second Mondays and Fridays of each month—thus preventing the possibility that too many employees take the same day(s) off.

Supervisors who approve compressed workweeks also must guarantee that efficient, effective

teamwork continues and that productivity does not decline in response to the new schedules.

In coordination with their supervisors, employees also can change the compressed schedule, perhaps deciding either to change the designated day off or even not to work a compressed schedule during a particular pay cycle. However, it is generally best to establish and maintain the same compressed schedule within the period of the program to maximize the number of staff who can participate and to help supervisors effectively manage staffing or service levels on each team.

Unlike paid days off (PDOs) that are part of standard annual leave, compressed days off cannot be accrued and do not carry over to the next pay period if unused. If, due to an unexpected work event, an employee ends up working on a scheduled compressed day off, the employee should be offered a substitute day off during the same period when feasible.

Employees on a compressed work schedule may, however, make travel plans for their approved days off. If they take any PDOs during a compressed workweek segment, they charge the number of hours they would have worked that day (e.g., 8.5 hours instead of the 7.5 hours per day during a standard workweek). If they take a partial PDO during such a period, they would work the remaining number of hours scheduled that day (e.g., 4 hours of PDO, 4.5 hours of work) and mark their timesheets accordingly.

THE AIA PROGRAM'S SUCCESSES

The AIA has seen increased interest in this plan since its inception in summer 2005, when 20 employees participated. In 2006, 31 employees participated out of roughly 200 employees. Many employees find the program offers a more agreeable balance between working hours and time at home.

RESOURCES

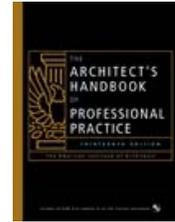
More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 07.01.05 Telecommuting Considerations
- 07.05.02 Develop a Talent Retention Plan
- 07.02.03 How a Talent Strain Affects Architectural Firms

For More Information on This Topic

See also “Managing People” by Kathleen C. Maurel, Assoc. AIA, and Laurie Dreyer-Hadley, *The Architect’s Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 9, page 221.



See also the 14th edition of the *Handbook*, which can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by email at bookstore@aia.org.



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Keywords

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- Employment
- Personnel benefits
- Flexible work schedules