



Workplace flexibility for SMEs

Under the Fair Work Act, certain types of employees have a right to ask employers to consider flexible working arrangements for them. These include permanent employees or long-term casuals who are parents & carers, have a disability, are affected by domestic violence, or are aged 55 and over.

The benefits for your business

Businesses that offer flexibility are better able to attract and retain good staff and they often see an increase in their productivity and less staff turnover. Employees who have the opportunity to work flexibly are often happier, less likely to be late or take sick days, and are more engaged with their work.

Types of flexible working arrangements

Flexibility doesn't just mean part-time. There are a range of flexible working arrangements that can support your employees and your business. The most common types are:

- Flexible work hours – varying start and finish times
- Compressed weeks – working longer hours over fewer days
- Part-time – working less than full-time hours
- Job sharing – splitting a full-time position into multiple roles
- Altered work location – working from home or remotely

Don't assume that:

Flexibility only works for some jobs: Changes in service delivery and technology mean most jobs can allow some form of flexibility.

Only working mothers want flexibility: All employees may be interested in some type of flexibility at different stages in their career.

Employees have to be present to be productive:

Research and experience with COVID-19 has shown that, if their job allows it, employees can be even more productive working off-site.

Making flexibility work for your business

Use the questions below to help you work out how to make your jobs more flexible. Employers may also be able to negotiate Individual Flexibility Arrangements with employees covered by a Modern Award or Enterprise Agreement.

How many hours are needed and when for the job to be done?

- Could the job still be done:
 - If staff worked fewer hours?
 - If the start and finish times changed?
 - Over the same number of hours, but fewer days?
 - By more than one person?

Where does the work need to take place?

- Does all of the job need to be done from a fixed location or could part be done from another location?

Managing flexible working arrangements takes planning and good communication, but your business and your employees are worth the effort. See pages 3-4 for a template and example of how this might be done for a small business.

Some tips for managing flexible working arrangements:

Talk to your employees about how you could make flexible arrangements work for their roles.

Trial flexible arrangements for a short period to see how they could work.

Have a flexibility policy and talk to staff about how they can negotiate flexibility.

Record flexibility arrangements to help make consistent decisions.

Employers must have “reasonable grounds” to deny employee requests for flexible work. Taking into account all the circumstances, these reasons may be “reasonable”:

- Too costly for the business
- Significant loss of productivity
- Significant negative impact on customer service
- Impractical or no ability to change arrangements for other employees or to recruit new employees



For more help with flexible work arrangements in your business, see Fair Work Australia’s **Workplace Flexibility Online Course** and Chiefs for Gender Equity’s **Work Smarter. Work Better. Work Flex.**

Job flexibility analysis

EMPLOYEE NAME		
JOB TITLE		
FLEXIBILITY REQUEST		
KEY DUTIES What does the employee do? Does this need to be done at set times/locations?	REQUIREMENTS	OPTIONS
IMPACT ON OTHER STAFF How will flexibility for this job affect other jobs and staff? Will it change the roster or workload for others?		
COSTS Are there costs, e.g. recruitment, or savings, e.g. wages? Will additional resources be needed?		
PRODUCTIVITY Is it likely to improve employee productivity? How might it affect service delivery or other stakeholders?		
SAFETY Are there any work health and safety risks with the arrangement, e.g. extended hours?		
OUTCOME		

Job flexibility analysis example

EMPLOYEE NAME	Eric Lynton - Eric has been with Bridgevale Lifestyle Village for 12 years. He is highly competent and reliable, and is well-liked by the Village residents.	
JOB TITLE	Maintenance Officer	
FLEXIBILITY REQUEST	Reduction in days worked - Eric would like reduce the number of days to help his sister care for their father who has dementia. <i>NB. Carers have right of request under the Fair Work Act</i>	
KEY DUTIES What does the employee do? Does this need to be done at set times/locations?	REQUIREMENTS Building and facilities repair and maintenance, including pool and gardens, at the Village between 7.30am to 3.30pm. Hours outside of 7.30 to 3.30 may be able to be accommodated.	OPTIONS Altered work location is not an option. Although varied work hours may be possible, this will not allow Eric to reduce his days, but compressed hours may be an option.
IMPACT ON OTHER STAFF How will flexibility for this job affect other roles and employees? Will it change the roster or workload for others?	There is one other maintenance officer, Amy, who works 2 days per week. If Eric's hours worked change, either Amy will have to increase her hours, or a new person will need to be recruited to ensure that the work gets done.	Discussions with Amy, reveal that she would be more than happy to increase her hours as she loves the job and is trying to save for a car.
COSTS Are there costs, e.g. recruitment, or savings, eg. wages? Will additional resources been needed?	Recruitment costs if a new position is advertised. No savings, as the hours would need to be redistributed. No additional resources required	The Village can cover additional recruitment and training costs.
PRODUCTIVITY Is it likely to improve employee productivity? How might it affect service delivery or external stakeholder?	Eric has recently been making mistakes and is occasionally late, so reducing his days may help. Residents like Eric and many have already expressed unhappiness with staff changes.	Compressed hours reduce working days, but a job sharing arrangement would reduce Eric's days and lessen his workload. Keeping Eric and redistributing hours to Amy, there will be no staff changes.
SAFETY Are there any workplace health and safety risks with the proposed arrangement, e.g. extended hours?	Given the physical nature of the work, it is not safe for Eric to work shifts of more than 10 hours.	Compressed hours would allow Eric to work 10-hour shifts over 4 days, but will not lessen his workload and is unlikely to be manageable for Eric.
OUTCOME	A job sharing arrangement with Eric working at 0.8FTE and Amy at 0.6FTE works well for both staff, without requiring additional recruitment costs or disruption to the residents.	

Links

Fair Work Australia, Workplace Flexibility Online Course

www.fairwork.gov.au/how-we-will-help/online-training/online-learning-centre/workplace-flexibility

Chiefs for Gender Equity, Work Smarter. Work Better. Work Flex

eoc.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/inline-files/CFGE-Work-Flex-toolkit.pdf

