
PROMISING PRACTICES IN STATE SURVEY AGENCIES

Telework Programs

Wyoming

Summary

The telework program at the Office of Health Quality in the Wyoming Department of Health has been in place since 1996. The program increases flexibility for retaining valuable surveyor staff, is a factor in expanding the candidate pool beyond the Cheyenne metropolitan area, and increases the efficiency of travel to accomplish revisits and complaint visits in this rural state.

Introduction

This report describes the structure and functioning of Wyoming's telework program, its impact, and lessons learned that may benefit other agencies considering telework programs. The information presented is based on interviews with agency staff and review of documentation supporting the telework program.

Background

The telework program was initiated to increase the agency's ability to retain surveyors living in or relocating to areas outside of the Cheyenne metropolitan area and expand the candidate pool for recruitment into rural areas of the state.

Intervention

Three of the agency's 12 surveyors currently telework. Surveyors who live more than 50 miles from the central office in Cheyenne are eligible to apply for the program; approval is determined on a case-by-case basis by agency management staff. New surveyors may begin employment as teleworkers, prior to passing Surveyor Minimum Qualifications Test. Surveyors are trained in multiple program types, given the small number of staff and facilities in the state. Teleworkers must sign an agreement that documents expectations and states that the agency may revoke telework status at any time.

Teleworking surveyors are supplied with computers and telephone lines, and in some cases, a state vehicle. The agency holds quarterly in-services, typically at the central office, and

conducts weekly calls involving all surveyors whether at facilities, home-based offices, or the Cheyenne office. The 20 - 40 minute calls are used to discuss the week's activities and resolve questions or problems. Additional communication is accomplished by phone, fax, and e-mail. Occasional supervisor home visits occur, in particular to assist with computer questions and issues.

To further support communication and in-person contact with fellow staff members, the agency plans to have teleworking staff spend one week each quarter working in the central office.

Supervision of teleworking staff is accomplished primarily through routine phone and e-mail communication and by monitoring timely completion of reports, with occasional supervisor participation in facility surveys to allow in-person contact and evaluation of teleworker job performance.

Implementation

The agency began the teleworking program with a six-month trial period and two surveyors. At the end of the trial period, agency management and the teleworking staff agreed that productivity, communication, and overall job performance were maintained and it was determined that the program would continue.

Impact

In addition to providing a means for retaining valuable staff who are interested in maintaining employment but must relocate due to family

commitments, the telework program also appears to benefit retention by reducing travel time and providing more flexible schedules for teleworkers, contributing to enhanced job satisfaction according to teleworker feedback. Office-based surveyors seem to value the program as an option that could allow them to retain their position if they must relocate.

The telework program has helped the agency expand recruitment by attracting qualified candidates living outside of the Cheyenne area, many of whom are tied to rural areas of the state due to family commitments or ranching lifestyles.

With teleworking surveyors located in various regions of the state, the agency also is able to reduce travel time for complaint visits and revisits, leaving more time for effective preparation.

Agency management speculate that the telework program has not resulted in decreased travel costs. The agency has maintained the same office space, to accommodate quarterly staff meetings and occasions when teams choose to reconvene in-person to address report writing or complaints.

Lessons Learned

Agency staff emphasize the importance of frequent communication and recommend establishing opportunities for staff to interact face-to-face outside of the survey setting, to ensure that staff "feel connected" at all times.

Management staff work to ensure equity of assignments across teleworking and office-based staff, including responsibility for external communications related to incident reports from providers and questions from the public.

Contact Information and Resources

For more information about the telework program at the Office of Health Quality, Wyoming Department of Health, please contact Jean McLean, Acting Manager, at 307/777-7123 or jmclea@state.wy.us.

Wyoming's Employee Application Form and Memorandum of Understanding used in the agency's telework program are available as a resource for agencies considering establishing a telework program. These documents can be accessed online by clicking on the Promising Practices Supplemental State Resources link.

This document is part of an issue brief on teleworking practices in state survey agencies. The issue brief is one of a series by the Division of Health Care Policy and Research, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, for the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) highlighting promising practices in state survey agencies. The entire series is available online at CMS' Website, <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/SurvCertPromPractProj>. The issue briefs are intended to share information about practices used in state survey agencies and are not an endorsement of any practice.