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Report Highlights

Challenges With Telework During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

Executive Branch Agencies

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Why We Conducted This Audit

The purpose of this report is to provide information on the challenges executive branch agencies experienced with telework during the COVID-19 public health emergency in order to identify lessons learned and best practices to guide agencies for subsequent events that may necessitate telework.

What We Found

Overall, we found that agencies experienced various challenges when they transitioned to telework during the stay-at-home order. Specifically, we found the following:

- **Most agencies did not have telework policies prior to the pandemic. According to the survey, 18 (56.3%) of 32 of agencies and offices surveyed had no telework policy. In addition, only 1,562 (16.3%) of 9,582 employees (staff and supervisors) reported teleworking on a regular/intermittent schedule prior to COVID-19, which, together with the lack of policies, made the transition to telework more difficult.** Best practices show that the key to successfully using telework in an emergency is to have an effective routine telework program.
- **Agencies did not consistently accommodate non-essential employees whose job duties could not be performed during telework. For example, some agencies assigned employees duties that could be performed remotely, while others required employees to use leave.** According to the survey, 953 (9.9%) of 9,582 employees reported that they did not telework. To better prepare for subsequent telework events, agencies should identify how they will accommodate non-essential employees who cannot work remotely.
- **Technology challenges, such as inadequate equipment and connectivity problems, were the most common barriers employees faced when transitioning to widespread telework. Agencies that relied on paper for their business processes also faced more challenges than those with automated processes.** According to the survey, 46 (83.6%) of 55 respondents from agency leadership and 4,525 (47.22%) of 9,582 employees reported that they experienced barriers related to technology. Best practices state that successful telework programs should ensure that employees not only have technology, such as laptops, but also tools conducive for collaboration, such as digital signature software, instant messaging platforms and web conferencing.
- **Agencies did not always provide supervisors with sufficient guidance on how to manage their remote teams, and measure and track employee productivity. According to the survey, 655 (26.6%) of 2,461 agency supervisors reported facing barriers in leading their remote teams.** Some supervisors reported struggling with maintaining productivity while also balancing the needs of their staff during the pandemic, and that they did not receive adequate guidance regarding policy changes or work priorities and expectations. Establishing clear expectations, providing training for supervisors, and creating telework agreements for teleworkers would help ensure that employees remain productive while teleworking.

View the full report, including management's response, at www.la.gov.