

Federal Telework By the Numbers

Flexible work policies are a strategic business tool used by both the public and private sectors to enhance an organization's ability to recruit and retain top talent. They also lead to increased employee productivity and potential cost savings from a reduced real estate footprint.

Moreover, federal telework policy represents a long-standing, bipartisan federal workforce strategy that supports our government's ability to effectively deliver services to the public. While the COVID-19 pandemic increased the amount of federal telework and remote work, many agencies have had policies enabling these work flexibilities since at least the passage of the bipartisan Telework Enhancement Act in 2010. Over the past decade, about half the federal workforce has been eligible to telework.

As the data below highlights, telework isn't the overwhelming work posture of federal employees, but rather one used as determined by agency leadership.

For the federal workforce, there is a distinction between "telework" and "remote work"—terms that in other contexts might seem interchangeable.

TELEWORK

in the federal government is a flexibility that allows eligible employees to work from home or another approved worksite for a certain number of days per pay period. Federal telework is the equivalent of what is often called hybrid work in the private sector.


REMOTE WORK


allows eligible employees to work from their home or another approved worksite on a full-time basis.


Agencies set their own telework and remote work policies in accordance with OPM guidelines and the needs of their mission. The details of individual telework and remote work arrangements—including how much time employees may work from home or another approved worksite—must be approved by employees' supervisors in a written agreement.


FACTS

In-Person Work

 **43%** of federal employees—nearly 1 million out of a civilian workforce of 2.28 million—are required to work in person because of the nature of their jobs, such as providing health care to veterans, managing natural resources, protecting borders and inspecting food.

 In the private sector, only **20%** of employees work exclusively in person, according to Gallup.

 Federal employees—including those allowed to telework—spend the vast majority of their time working in person. With the exception of fully remote staff, nearly **80%** of the working hours of all federal employees were in person in 2024, according to an OMB survey. Counting only telework-eligible employees, **61%** of working hours were in person, significantly exceeding OMB's current expectation that teleworking teams work in person at least **50%** of the time.

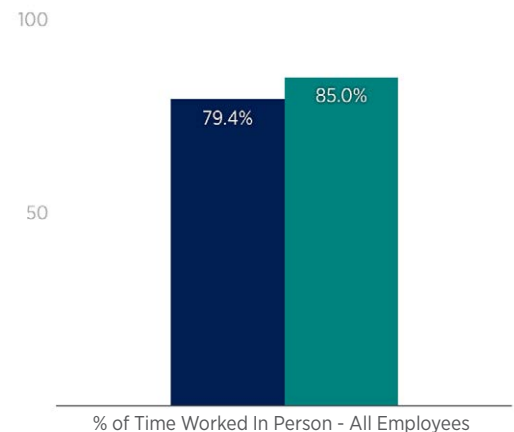
 Telework frequency is comparable to that of the private sector, where employees worked **84%** of the time in person in 2024, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Remote Work

7%-10% of federal employees worked remotely full time in fiscal 2023, according to government estimates. In the private sector, **28%** of workers in remote-capable jobs worked remotely.

SHARE OF TIME WORKED IN PERSON, BY SECTOR

■ Federal Government - CFO Act Agencies
■ Private Sector



Government data represents averages from two pay periods in April and May 2024, ending on May 4 and May 18, collected from agency time and attendance systems.

Private sector data represents averages calculated from self-reported hours collected through the Current Population Survey in May 2024.

Source: Office of Management and Budget | Bureau of Labor Statistics | Census Bureau

Telework Eligibility and Participation



In fiscal 2023, just **43%** of federal employees teleworked some amount, according to OPM, even though **57%** of the workforce was eligible to telework. In the private sector, more than **50%** of full-time, telework-capable employees teleworked in 2023, according to Gallup.



More and more federal employees allowed to telework choose to work in person. In 2023, only **75%** of telework-eligible employees chose to telework, a 19-point decrease from the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 and a 12-point decrease from 2022.

2023

The decrease in federal telework participation is due, in part, to three issues: waning public health concerns, OMB's April 2023 memo calling on agencies to increase "meaningful in-person work," and agencies providing more rewarding in-person work experiences.

Benefits of Telework and Remote Work



Recruiting and Hiring

51% of more than 80 agencies OPM surveyed reported that their telework and remote work policies "played a significant role" in candidates applying for and new employees accepting a position.



Employee Engagement, Retention and Productivity

60% of agencies OPM surveyed said their telework and remote work policies are central to employee retention. In the private sector, **53%** of managers say telework or remote work policies help retain talent.



Agency Operations and Costs

69% of agencies see telework and remote work as enabling their operations to continue during emergency events such as extreme weather and natural disasters.

Telework and remote work can help reduce agencies' operating costs significantly. Telework-related reductions in real estate, energy, and transit-subsidy costs across the executive branch yielded \$230 million in savings in fiscal 2023 alone.

The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office was able to avoid nearly \$70 million in annual real estate costs due to its telework and remote work programs. Similarly, GSA was able to reduce its annual rent from more than \$180 million in fiscal 2012 to \$130 million in fiscal 2022. Over this 10-year period, telework and remote work enabled the agency to eliminate more than \$360 million in real estate costs.

Additionally, unnecessarily eliminating flexibilities could backfire, resulting in a loss of valued employees and even greater reliance on more expensive contractors, who are in many ways not bound by in-person federal civil service workplace rules



DATA NOTE

The data in this fact sheet represents the current state of federal and private sector telework and how they compare. It does not create an exhaustive picture of telework in the United States—as there is no comprehensive source for data on federal or private telework—but, rather, presents the key pieces of an incomplete puzzle. Because the data comes from several sources with different data-collection methodologies, not all datapoints are perfectly comparable.

RESOURCES

- OPM, [Status of Telework in the Federal Government Report to Congress: Fiscal Year 2023](#), 2024
- OPM, [2021 Guide to Telework and Remote Work in the Federal Government](#)
- GAO, [Selected Agencies Need to Evaluate the Potential Effects on Agency Performance](#), 2024
- [The Telework Enhancement Act of 2010](#)