

THE NEW ERA OF EXECUTIVE ACTION

# PROMOTING A CULTURE OF WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY

May 5, 2015

## Background

The balance between family life and work life has shifted over the past half-century, with more women now in the workforce and many households comprised of dual-earners couples. But workplace flexibilities to accommodate the dynamics of these changes have not kept up.

In 1950, 34 percent of women participated in the labor force—by 2010, 59 percent of women overall, and 71 percent of women with children were working. But while mothers today are working more, they still spend the same number of weekday hours with their children as they did in 1977, and still do the majority of the cooking, cleaning, and other household chores. Additionally, the average workday time of fathers has increased significantly, precisely at a time when some fathers are doing more household chores and spending more time with their children. As a result, 49 percent of employed men with families have reported experiencing some or a lot of work-family conflict.

According to this 2009 Talent Management Study, in the private sector, only 31 percent of employers felt their organization had established flexible options for employees to a moderate/great extent. In the manufacturing sector, only 18 percent of organizations felt they had established these options. Currently, laws that guarantee workers a right to request flexible work arrangements have been passed in Vermont and the city of San Francisco.

Employers are under increasing pressure to establish workplace flexibility, such as flexibility in scheduling full-time hours, flexibility in number of hours worked and location of work, career flexibility, and flexibility to address unexpected and ongoing personal and family needs.

## Action

On June 23, 2014, President Barack Obama signed a presidential memorandum: Enhancing Workplace Flexibilities and Work-Life Program.

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This brief is part of The Century Foundation initiative, The New Era of Executive Action, which is available online at <https://tcf.org/atavist.com/executive-action>.

## What It Does

The presidential memorandum requests that the federal government, as the nation's largest employer, lead by example and revisit and enhance its policies on workplace flexibilities through the following initiatives:

- Establishing the right to request work schedule flexibilities. Federal agencies will ensure that employees understand and are aware of their right to request work schedule flexibilities available to them under law without fear of retaliation or adverse employment action as a consequence of making such a request. Supervisors must consider the request and respond within twenty business days.
- Expanding access to workplace flexibilities. Agency heads will ensure that flexibilities, such as part-time employment, alternative work schedules, telework, sick leave, and so on, are available to the maximum extent possible.
- Expanding and encouraging use of work-life programs. Agency heads are encouraged to increase the availability and use of work-life programs such as on-site child care, child care subsidies, counseling, support for nursing mothers, and so on.
- Helping agencies encourage the use of workplace flexibilities and work-life programs. The director of the federal Office of Personnel Management (OPM) shall work with agencies to provide appropriate education, guidance, and support to all agency employees on use of and promotion of workplace flexibilities and work-life programs. The OPM will also create and annually update a Workplace Flexibility Index in order to monitor progress over time.
- Establish agency review of workplace flexibilities and work-life programs. Each agency will review its workplace policies and issue a report with best practices and any barriers or limitations that may unnecessarily restrict workplace flexibilities and work-life programs.

## Status

On August 22, 2014, Katherine Archuleta, director of OPM, released a memo with guidance for implementing the presidential memorandum to the heads of executive departments and agencies. The memo contained the following attachments:

- Overview of Right to Request Work Schedule Flexibilities
- Overview of Leave and Workplace Flexibilities
- Overview of Work-Life Programs

## Impact

This memorandum, which applies to executive agencies, extends the benefits to up to 2,067,262 federal employees.

## Response

- David Cox Sr., president of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), praised the memorandum, saying that some of their members have faced resistance to the implementation of flexible work schedules, especially when it comes to telework.