

NTEU Bulletin

Data Supports NTEU Efforts to Expand Options Two Surveys Underscore Success of Telework

Now that the conversation on telework has shifted as the pandemic subsides, NTEU has plenty of data to support its work to permanently expand the program. Results from two surveys confirm both the success of maximum telework during the pandemic and strong employee support for expanded options when the pandemic is over.

Last month, NTEU asked members for their experiences teleworking over the past year, and more than 13,800 frontline employees from 33 agencies and departments responded. Significantly, 87 percent told NTEU they teleworked more often during the pandemic than before, with more than 82 percent teleworking five days per week. Of those who teleworked, 97 percent agree that it kept them safe during the coronavirus pandemic.

“Coronavirus would have devastated the federal workforce even more if agencies hadn’t closed buildings and sent employees home with laptops,” said National President Tony Reardon.

Along with saving lives, members told NTEU that telework programs work. More than 92 percent of respondents called their telework experience “successful” and the vast majority — 94 percent — said they want the option of teleworking additional days after the pandemic subsides.

A week after NTEU released its survey results, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) announced results from its 2020 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) confirming the union’s findings. Eighty-seven percent of FEVS respondents agreed that their work unit produced high quality work, and 86 percent said their unit achieved its goals throughout 2020. Employees who teleworked three to five days per week had an overall employee engagement score of 76 percent, compared to 62.5 percent who could not telework at all.

“The proof is piling up that maximum telework not only saved lives, but we can draw another important conclusion about the program: the work gets done,” said Reardon.

Advocating for expanded telework is nothing new to NTEU. The union successfully pushed for passage

of the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010, requiring executive branch agencies to establish policies under which eligible employees are authorized to telework. And at contract bargaining tables, NTEU has a long history of negotiating telework options and expanding opportunities to more groups of employees.

“Management reluctance, especially in the mid-level ranks, often is cited as the most significant impediment to the development and expansion of telework in the federal workplace,” said Reardon. “The success of telework over the past year should finally put to rest the outdated notion that managers need to see employees in the office to know that they’re working.”

Flexible telework opportunities also would boost agencies’ recruitment and retention efforts, making a government career more attractive to current workers as well as to the next generation of federal employees, Reardon added.

“We now have a potent tool as we continue to make our case for expanded telework on Capitol Hill and at the bargaining table: results from two surveys and more than a year’s worth of solid evidence showing just how successful the program has been,” Reardon said.

In the Workplace, On the Frontlines

While the pandemic made thousands of federal employees into first-time teleworkers, there are some jobs that cannot be performed remotely. Customs and Border Protection personnel have been at the nation’s ports of entry from day one of the pandemic. Other NTEU-represented employees, including those at the Internal Revenue Service, have been called back to workplaces to perform essential work that is not portable. See page 2 for more on NTEU’s work to ensure their health and safety.

NTEU TELEWORK SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

AN OVERWHELMING SUCCESS

92 PERCENT

called their telework experience “successful.”

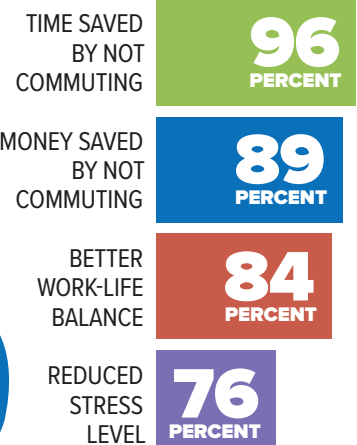
READY OR NOT?

43 PERCENT

of employees said their agency was not fully prepared for maximum telework, but **36 PERCENT** said their agency was ready.

ONE PROGRAM, MANY BENEFITS.

Other than health and safety, NTEU members highlighted additional benefits of telework:



In their own words

Here’s what members had to say about the personal benefits of telework:

“I have a hearing disability. I am able to use my speakers to communicate with vendors without disrupting my co-workers. Telework has been a blessing to me in order for me to perform my job to the best of my abilities.”
Bureau of Fiscal Service employee, WV

“My health has improved, I get to see my kids and am happier, more focused. This means I am a better, more productive employee.”
IRS employee, Ga.

“I feel like I have a life now after work by not having to endure 1.5 hours to commute back home.”
Securities and Exchange Commission employee, Va.



Tony Reardon
National President

Safe Return: It's Not Just About Telework

The questions have already begun. When will federal agencies call everyone back into the workplace? When will federal buildings be fully reopened to 100 percent staffing levels? When will maximum telework end?

For the first time in 14 months, it feels like agencies are starting to at least consider answering such questions with something other than, "We have no idea."

We are not aware of imminent full reopen dates but it is clear that agency leaders are planning for the return to the workplace. At NTEU, we are doing the same.

Here is our bottom line: A federal agency cannot function unless employees feel safe at work, so we will not accept any compromises in health and safety standards.

Our best bet for safety in the workplace is to get federal employees vaccinated against COVID. Frankly, providing vaccines to their workforces is something that federal agencies should have done late last year when vaccines first became available. But few of them did. Now we are in a stronger place and vaccines are widely available so we need employees to make that appointment for their health and for their coworkers. To really put this pandemic behind us, we need to follow the science and work together to take the steps that will allow us to move forward.

From the beginning, NTEU urged agencies to provide administrative time to employees for vaccine appointments. I believe it is important to remove barriers or disincentives to receiving a vaccine and that is what we are working toward. Many agencies did just that, offering up to four hours of administrative time. Recently, the Office of Personnel Management released guidance to implement the 600 hours of emergency paid leave for COVID-related issues included in the American Rescue Plan. Among other things, that paid time can be used for vaccinations. In the guidance, OPM encouraged agencies to not only provide time for vaccinations but also to provide up to two days of administrative time to deal with any adverse reactions employees may have from the shot. We are following up on that suggestion to add our encouragement to that suggestion.

Your place of duty may never look the same, nor should it. Just as this pandemic has changed the way we live, it has also changed the way we work.

Whether you've been teleworking or reporting to work in person or a combination of both, ramping back up to full in-person operations is going to be a different experience for everyone, depending on your job, your health, your community and your family.

There is no one-size-fits-all prescription for all federal workers, which is why we have to fight for new and expanded flexibilities and options.

Telework has been a lifesaver for thousands of federal employees and we now have proof that government can function and the taxpayers can be served in a remote work environment. It is a bullish market for telework right now, as agency leaders, White House officials and employees endorse expanded telework options post-pandemic. We will capitalize on that support and grow telework programs across government, giving more people access to partial or full-time telework.

At the very least, telework should be a tool to help keep our offices from being crowded, the elevators from being cramped, the roads from being clogged and the conference rooms from being packed.

There should also be a robust offering of alternative work schedules, including flexible and compressed work schedules that allow employees to build a work schedule that accommodates their needs, with or without telework.

Corporate America and academia are all wringing their hands about the future of work, and whether we can still be productive if some of us are on laptops at the dining room table or working a 4/10 schedule or a maxiflex.

At NTEU, we say the debate is over. The future of federal government work is one that keeps employees safe, maintains productivity and gives everyone the flexibility they need to navigate the post-pandemic world.



NTEU MISSION

To organize federal employees to work together to ensure that every federal employee is treated with dignity and respect.

NTEU Bulletin

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ISSN 0279-540X
Nonprofit U.S. Postage Paid
Washington, DC USPS 595-1400
Printed on recycled paper.

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Chapter 66 Wins Hundreds of Hours of Overtime Back Pay

At NTEU, some of the most important fights we take on don't make big headlines. They happen in workplaces around the country where local chapters are helping individual employees resolve problems.

"Every case that we take on as stewards has the potential to seriously impact a person's life," said Chapter 66 (IRS Kansas City Service Center) Steward Erik Wheeler. "So, we fight hard, stay strong and even if it takes years, we never give up."

The chapter needed this kind of perseverance and tenacity for a two-year battle with the IRS to secure employees the back pay they were owed.

The case began in the fall of 2018 when members began approaching Wheeler with concerns about being denied overtime opportunities. After some investigating, the chapter discovered that the agency denied 21 night shift employees the opportunity to work up to 20 hours of overtime over the course of five pay periods. NTEU immediately filed a grievance asserting that the IRS violated the contract article requiring that overtime be divided equally and fairly among qualified employees.

The overtime announcements were in several programs, including Accounts Management Research Hold (AMRH), which

all the employees were trained in and certified to work. Some of the employees had even worked AMRH cases immediately after the overtime period at issue ended. So, when the

"This case exemplifies the critical day-to-day representational work skilled chapter leaders are performing to ensure management adheres to our contract and employees are treated fairly."

—NATIONAL PRESIDENT TONY REARDON

IRS claimed that the employees were not qualified to perform the overtime duties because they had worked no or very few AMRH cases in 2018, NTEU wasn't buying it.

"The agency violated the rights of the employees by not distributing the overtime equally between qualified employees. They allowed day shift employees to work the overtime while refusing to allow the night shift the same opportunity," said Chapter 66 President

Shannon Ellis. "We need the operations to be consistent, we need them to be fair and the employees deserved to be paid for the overtime they were denied."

After requesting more information, NTEU found IRS documentation showing that a dozen day shift employees who had not worked any AMRH cases in 2018 were offered the overtime work during the same five pay periods. At the same time, NTEU could not find any refresher training that might explain the disparity in assignments.

Armed with its findings, the chapter met with management, which agreed to pay only three employees a small portion of the 100 hours of overtime back pay owed to them. NTEU declined the agency's paltry settlement offer and sent the case to arbitration.

After two years, NTEU prevailed after receiving a favorable arbitration award requiring the IRS to provide each of the impacted employees up to 100 hours of overtime back pay

"A contract is only as good as its enforcement," said National President Tony Reardon. "This case exemplifies the critical day-to-day representational work skilled chapter leaders are performing to ensure management adheres to our contract and employees are treated fairly."

NATIONAL TREASURY EMPLOYEES UNION - FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION September 30, 2020 and 2019

	2020	2019
ASSETS		
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 5,462,050	\$ 3,791,422
Receivables		
Membership dues	1,807,171	1,507,826
Group insurance plan fees	16,104	330
Due from chapters	177,426	129,129
Other	45,644	111,000
Inventory	56,292	54,014
Prepaid expenses and other assets	457,387	264,339
Total current assets	8,022,074	5,858,060
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Investments	33,005,445	35,814,863
Deferred compensation and insurance annuity investments	1,858,695	1,595,235
Property and equipment - net	5,385,313	742,505
Deposits	791,777	169,321
Total non-current assets	41,041,230	38,321,924
Total assets	\$ 49,063,304	\$ 44,179,984
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Accounts payable and other accrued expenses	\$ 660,157	\$ 1,136,432
Accrued salaries and vacation	3,137,074	2,522,266
Payable to chapters	524,000	440,369
Premiums payable to insurance underwriters	353	3,121
Membership dues received in advance	-	44,583
Income taxes payable	25,069	54,577
Deferred gain on sale-leaseback	132,544	-
Other current liabilities	6,080	6,080
Total current liabilities	4,485,277	4,207,428
LONG-TERM LIABILITIES		
Deferred gain on sale-leaseback	-	1,723,068
Deferred compensation	1,858,697	1,598,332
Deferred rent incentives	5,551,919	587,121
Total long-term liabilities	7,410,616	3,908,521
Total liabilities	11,895,893	8,115,949
NET ASSETS (without donor restrictions)	37,167,411	36,064,035
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 49,063,304	\$ 44,179,984

STATEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES for the years ended September 30, 2020 and 2019

	2020	2019
REVENUES		
Membership dues	\$ 30,816,080	\$ 29,478,114
Attorney fees recovered	711,071	659,887
Group insurance plan fees	15,774	20,104
Interest and dividends, net of investment fees	2,095,198	2,086,208
Net realized and unrealized gain (loss) on investments	(949,079)	(979,954)
Other	189,951	105,023
Total revenues	32,878,995	31,369,382
EXPENSES		
Employees' compensation and benefits	23,413,494	22,088,733
Travel	615,470	1,271,422
Depreciation and amortization	122,398	145,539
Payroll taxes	1,321,776	1,239,390
General office	495,659	720,382
Rent	4,937,576	3,825,560
Professional services	736,016	604,163
Bulletin printing and mailing	227,049	235,739
Telephone	207,345	194,746
Postage and delivery	111,410	138,457
Research publications	277,743	238,968
Legislation and public relations	238,131	238,119
Data processing	348,391	241,878
Printing	116,701	113,303
Promotion and publicity	222,759	400,287
Convention	1,449	538,374
Total expenses	33,393,367	32,235,060
Change in net assets before other income (expense)	(514,372)	(865,678)
OTHER INCOME (EXPENSE)		
Gain on sale of property	1,590,524	1,547,778
Income Tax	27,224	(54,577)
Other income (expense), net	1,617,748	1,493,201
Change in net assets	\$ 1,103,376	\$ 627,523
NET ASSETS		
Beginning of year	\$ 36,064,035	\$ 35,436,512
End of year	\$ 37,167,411	\$ 36,064,035



Members Volunteer to Support FEMA's Disaster Call Center

Federal employees are there for the American people every day, but they often take on additional roles in times of disasters.

In February, IRS employees answered the call to help in the aftermath of the severe winter weather that swept through the southern United States. The storm brought a historic cold wave, blizzards, ice and tornadoes, causing lengthy blackouts for more than 9.9 million people in the U.S. and Mexico, most notably the Texas power crisis.

When the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was overwhelmed with calls to its helpline, the agency turned to the IRS for volunteers for backup.

This was not the first time FEMA has reached out to NTEU-represented agencies for help. Following national disasters, FEMA often approaches agencies to ask for volunteers to temporarily staff its emergency helpline. And who better to help than skilled, experienced IRS employees who assist hundreds of taxpayers every day on the phones?

"For many years, NTEU Chapter 284 has had members who work with FEMA, and many employees enjoy the hands-on with helping those in need," said Chapter 284 (IRS Atlanta Campus) President Shenetha Releford-Dickey. "The FEMA computer system is easy to navigate, and the callers genuinely appreciate the help they are receiving during the crisis."

Chapter 97 (IRS Fresno Service Center) President Jason Sisk said his members who volunteer for FEMA find the work rewarding. And as a

past FEMA volunteer, Sisk has firsthand knowledge.

"We normally get plenty of volunteers and those who've done it find the work and assistance we provide very fulfilling," he said. "It's important to us to provide timely help because many impacted taxpayers are left without power, running water or even a place to stay depending on the related disaster."

This time around, IRS employees helped callers secure urgently needed generators, vouchers for temporary lodging, supplies and other essentials. Employees also helped storm victims sign up for financial assistance and update information in their case files.

"It was a great experience again assisting people in need," said Roxann Vaughn, Chapter 284 steward.

This partnership between FEMA and the IRS is an example of how the government can tap into the specialized skill set of its employees to better serve Americans.

"During times of disasters, joint agency assistance is needed to help make the process easier and to not bring additional undue stress and burden to those affected," said Releford-Dickey.

More recently, the Department of Health and Human Services solicited volunteers from its own workforce, as well as other federal agencies to serve one- to four-month details at the southern border. Employees are helping HHS care for and place unaccompanied children who cross into the U.S. with sponsors.

When IRS Lags in Promotions, Chapter 37 Took Up the Cause

It started with a message from one member.

Last fall, Chapter 37 (IRS Cleveland) President Martin Allen received an email from a member expressing concern over delays to his Personnel Action Request (PAR). That email was quickly followed by other messages from employees who reported similar delays with promotions and other PAR actions.

"We quickly realized something was not right," said Allen. "Because the time of year, of staff teleworking, and of course, the pandemic, our Chapter 37 team wanted to find a way to reach members and nonmembers with the issue. And we had to determine how many people needed help."

The chapter contacted the Acting Director for Accounts Management, who confirmed that the employees were due for grade increases — but it fell to individual managers to process the requests. The pandemic and other factors had delayed the PAR actions an

additional four to six weeks or longer. That was not acceptable to NTEU.

When it became clear that the PAR delays were not isolated incidents, Allen, Chapter 37 Vice President Brian Mitchell and several stewards turned to social media to reach impacted employees — some of whom did not realize they were harmed. The chapter launched a Facebook campaign outlining the PAR process, and sharing resources and information on how NTEU can help employees.

"With all the challenges of navigating work during the last year, we felt it our duty to guide them through," said Martin.

Through its outreach efforts, the chapter identified more than 50 employees who reported issues with their PAR forms.

With this information, the chapter filed a mass grievance requesting that the IRS expedite PAR actions and conduct a thorough

investigation to determine the scope of the problem.

The IRS agreed to NTEU's requested remedies, and employees in Cleveland are already seeing their PARs expedited. The chapter's efforts were rewarded with several new members joining the union.

"This really was a group effort at our chapter," said Martin. "We had fantastic stewards on the frontlines as a resource to help people, and our vice president excelled at connecting with people through social media."

"When an employee receives a promotion through years of dedication and hard work, they should not be subjected to delays because their manager fails to take timely action," said National President Tony Reardon. "NTEU will do everything necessary to ensure that career-ladder PAR actions are processed in a timely manner so deserving employees don't have to wait for what they earned."