

FLEX Flex News OPTIONS

Women's Bureau
U.S. Department of Labor
www.dol.gov/wb

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Issue 2

- Returnships@SaraLee teleconference on November 12th was recorded and the transcript will be available soon at: www.flexoptions.org
- "Business Continuity Preparedness: How Workplace Flexibility Can Help" Transcript Available

- Model Practices in Workplace Flexibility from Women's Bureau Regional Offices
- Free Workplace Flexibility Resources

November 12, Free *Flex-Options* National Teleconference

Returnships@SaraLee SM: Flexibility helps attract experienced, mid-career individuals who have been out of the paid workforce for a number of years

The last *Flex-Options* national teleconference, was on November 12, 2:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m. EST, featured the Returnships@Sara Lee SM program. Featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Forbes*, and on *NBC's Today* this program offered an innovative recruitment approach that uses flexibility to attract experienced, mid-career individuals who have taken a break from paid employment.

Returnships@Sara Lee is designed to provide opportunities for individuals to re-engage with the corporate world through flexibility and meaningful work, while also "testing the waters" prior to pursuing permanent roles. Participants also have access to relevant business, industry, job-specific, and technology education.

We were delighted to have the following speakers from Sara Lee join our teleconference:

Mark Demich, Vice President, Organization Development and Global Diversity & Inclusion, Sara Lee Corporation

Kathy Bayert, Senior Manager, Organization Effectiveness, Sara Lee Corporation and previous participant in Returnships@Sara Lee

This teleconference was recorded and the transcript will be available soon at: www.flexoptions.org

Teleconference Transcript and Summary Available:

Business Continuity Preparedness



For those who missed the September 10, 2009 national teleconference, "Business Continuity Preparedness: How Workplace Flexibility Can Help," you can access a [written transcript](#) of the teleconference. Featured speakers included Kathie Lingle, Executive Director, Alliance for Work-Life Progress; Lynette Chappell-Williams, Associate Vice President for Workforce Diversity and Inclusion, Cornell University; and Judith Coye, Senior Vice President, Employee Relations Manager, TD Bank.

Please remember to visit the [Flex-Options Project Events section](#) on the Website where all previous teleconference transcripts and key point summaries are posted. The *Flex-Options* project has hosted twenty-eight content-rich teleconferences, which include practical information and tips for employers, organizations, human resources professionals, and employees.

[The Regional Offices of the Women's Bureau](#) play a critical role in the success of *Flex-Options*. They serve on the front lines helping employers and organizations implement and improve workplace flexibility programs. They also work closely with the business community, government entities and other key partners to host events and forums that educate and spur dialog about ways to accelerate the adoption of workplace flexibility.

Flex-Options National Teleconference Calls Transcripts at www.flexoptions.org

Flex-Options Model Practices from Women's Bureau Regional Offices

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As part of our *Flex-Options* project, the Women's Bureau Regional teams partner with many companies to help them create more flexible workplaces. The following are brief overviews of model practices from companies participating in the *Flex-Options* program. We've included information on challenges, successes and lessons learned. Information on how to implement any of these options is available in our [Flex-Options Guide](#). Contact information is also provided for each Region for more information about the specific model practice.

Region I: L.L. Bean, Freeport, Maine

SUMMARY: After attending a *Flex-Options* event, outdoor clothing and recreation equipment retailer, L.L. Bean, formalized their Flexible Work Arrangement Guidelines, ensuring senior leader support and an appropriate level of consistency among workgroups. Given the rising price of gas at the time, telecommuting and working compressed work weeks were very well received by employees. Flextime continues to be relatively informal; however, guidelines regarding roles, responsibilities and eligibility are available.



CHALLENGES: Safety and ergonomic issues were initial challenges with telecommuting, but they quickly established guidelines and made them available to managers.

Contact: Jacqueline Cooke, Regional Administrator,
cooke.jacqueline@dol.gov

SUCSESSES: The company realized many program successes including increased manager support for flexible work arrangements, increased participation in telecommuting, positive response to no-meetings days, decreased travel costs for employees, and fewer environmental impacts.

LESSONS LEARNED: "Don't recreate the wheel." Learn from companies who have experience with flexible arrangements and who will share information and policies.



Region II: Gibbons, Newark, New Jersey

SUMMARY: Gibbons has been ranked one of the best law firms for women by *Working Mother* magazine for three consecutive years. The firm began its workplace flexibility practices when one of the first female equity partners challenged them to incorporate workplace flexibility as a business tool to reduce turnover costs. After several years, the firm began to realize significant cost savings. This helped create a sustainable environment as they fostered and invested in the career growth of female attorneys.

The employees of Gibbons have informal flexibility enabling them to shift their daily schedule whenever they need to as long as they are accessible via email, cell phone, etc. Others have formal flexible work schedules and many telework. The company has worked hard to create a very open culture that encourages workplace flexibility. Attorneys feel free to talk about flexibility and leaders from the top down participate.

Contact: Grace Protos, Regional Administrator,
protos.grace@dol.gov

CHALLENGES: A major challenge was the amount of time (five years) and energy it took before the firm realized a significant benefit from their workplace flexibility programs. Because the impact on their culture has been so positive, the firm believes strongly in mentoring other organizations to help them understand the value of a long-term investment in workplace flexibility.

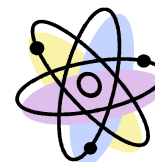
SUCSESSES: As a direct result of workplace flexibility, the firm has experienced increased employee morale, reduced turnover of women, equal utilization of flexible options by men and women, strengthened sustainability due to telecommuting, increased public recognition as a "best place to work" by *Working Mother* magazine and others, and decreased corporate spending.

LESSONS LEARNED: To ensure a successful outcome, a company must have a strong champion at the top who can lead the effort. A significant investment of time and money must be spent to attain significant results. When this investment occurs, an open and comfortable results-based work environment can be created.



Flex-Options Model Practices from Women's Bureau Regional Offices

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Region III: PECO Energy / Exelon Company, Philadelphia, PA

SUMMARY: The PECO Energy / Exelon Company employs 2,000 employees and is one of the country's largest producers of natural energy. Its Business Planning & Measurement and Office of Sustainability has implemented a long-range strategic plan of energy efficiency and conservation – working from the inside of the corporation to the impact its community. Its energy efficiency and conservation plan is evident in its workplace flexibility policies as well. Region III's Annual Small Business Summit & Flex-Options Technical Assistance Program presented the PECO Energy / Exelon Company as a "Regional Workplace Flexibility Expert and Best Practices Employer" for their latest expansion of workplace flexibility. The company's newly expanded "Flex-Time Policy" includes: standardized telecommuting, regular video conferencing with off-site employees, and other teleconferencing options to reduce travel and the negative impact on the environment.

Contact: Lucia Bruce, Regional Administrator,
bruce.lucia@dol.gov

CHALLENGES: While PECO Energy employees enjoy many advantages of the recent expansion in its "flex-time policy," employees are faced with new challenges of increased work demands due to reduced travel.

SUCSESSES: All employees participate in some way and are gaining benefits from the newly expanded "flex-time policy." Employees appreciate the personal benefits of great flexibility – more time with family; less time traveling, and better work and personal life balance. Employees are also measurably more engaged. The company has also established a reputation as a best place to work because of its well-known commitment to employee satisfaction which has created a perception of "security and stability in an otherwise unstable environment."

LESSONS LEARNED:
"Happy employees create a happy bottom line." Enough said.



Region IV: City of Atlanta, Georgia

SUMMARY: In February 2008, the Honorable Mayor of Atlanta, Shirley Franklin, began a partnership with the *Flex-Options* project. At the time, the City courts had successfully implemented teleworking, and several other City departments were engaged in occasional telework; however, no formal policies or systems were in place. The Mayor spoke at a *Flex-Options* event and the Women's Bureau team partnered with the Clean Air Campaign to help educate the City departments about flexible work options. Even with the Mayor's support, gaining manager buy-in was challenging until the City experienced a \$50-60 million budget deficit. In response, telework was mandated and 8,000 employees were moved to a four-day work week to prevent layoffs. Because of the ground work laid by the Clean Air Campaign through the *Flex-Options* project, the City was able to quickly implement compressed work weeks. These actions resulted in 4,000 fewer cars on Atlanta roads every Friday during peak hours, significantly reducing the City's carbon footprint and operating costs. The City also implemented job sharing and part-time work. Realizing the need to organize all flexible workplace options under one umbrella, the City developed an educational brochure which is distributed to all new employees.

Contact: Paulette Lewis, Regional Administrator,
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CHALLENGES: Manager resistance, economic situation, budget shortfall, lack of a comprehensive city-wide policy, scheduling non-exempt employees, technology and security concerns, and impact on promotions.

SUCSESSES: Employees are more positive and energetic; productivity increased by 20 percent; a serious budget crisis was averted; savings on energy and fuel were realized; jobs were saved; absenteeism decreased; office hours Monday through Friday were extended improving customer service; and implementation of policies and practices helped the City move beyond a commitment to sustainability to create a culture of sustainability.

LESSONS LEARNED: Use incentives to encourage participation, such as mass transit rebates and gift card drawings offered by the Clean Air Campaign. Hold contests between departments. Engage employees in helping resolve challenges. For example, when human resources was struggling with creating 4-day work week schedules for non-exempt workers, the employees formed a committee and designed their own workable schedules. Conduct diagnostics to identify challenges. Pilot initiatives. Identify critical job elements and success indicators. Ensure executive support. Train employees and managers.

Flex-Options Model Practices from Women's Bureau Regional Offices

As part of our Flex-Options project, the Women's Bureau Regional teams partner with many companies to help them create more flexible workplaces. The following brief overviews are continued.



Region V: Sara Lee, Downers Grove, Illinois

Contact: Nancy S. Chen, Regional Administrator,
chen.nancy@dol.gov

SUMMARY: The Returnships@Sara LeeSM program is designed to attract experienced mid-career individuals who have been out of the workforce for a number of years and who are interested in returning. This is a largely untapped talent pool consistent with Sara Lee's consumer profile.

Designed as internships for experienced professionals, Returnships allow candidates to re-engage with the corporate world through flexible, meaningful work and to "test the waters" prior to pursuing permanent although not necessarily full-time, roles. Returnships offer a discreet task or role that can start and stop on specified dates and be evaluated both by the manager and "Returnee." Engagements are a minimum of 20 hours per week for four to six months. Returnship employees were offered flexible work options. To maintain a sense of equity and foster positive team relationships, Sara Lee re-launched its workplace flexibility options (compressed work weeks, nontraditional start/stop times and remote work for all employees).

CHALLENGES: Prior to launching the program, Sara Lee CEO Brenda Barnes required each senior level staff member to commit to a minimum of five positions. Manager resistance to the program was strong. Barnes' vision and commitment to the program were critical for its success.

LESSONS LEARNED: The whole team needs to be well informed about the program. Managers must accommodate the Returnship individual's flexible schedule while allowing them to gain the job experiences they need. Roles need to be as clear for Returnship positions as for regular job. Structured feedback sessions between participants and managers during the Returnship are critical.



SUCSESSES: Sara Lee received 10,000 unique visits within two months on its Returnship Web page with 400 completing an application for 12 positions. Of the original 12, eight transitioned to regular employees, with five accepting part-time jobs and three accepting full-time jobs. Managers, many of whom initially resisted the program, are supportive of a program expansion which is underway. (Learn more by attending the *Flex-Options* teleconference on November 12.) Desired outcomes of an ongoing program include: **Attract** and deploy top talent through non-conventional means ~ **Provide** opportunity for "returnees" to contribute while they – and Sara Lee – evaluate cultural fit ~ **Retain** a flexible, diverse workforce enabling talent to grow and contribute ~ **Create** a competitive advantage ~ **Have** leadership in place that mirrors consumer demographics

Region VI: City of Little Rock and the Arkansas Governor's Work-Life Initiative

On August 25, 2009, Region VI Women's Bureau hosted The Arkansas *Flex-Options* Forum in partnership with the City of Little Rock and the Arkansas Governor's Work-Life Initiative.

Contact: Beverly Lyle, Regional Administrator,
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Model Practices highlighted by panelists included:

[Flex in the City](#) – The Houston government/business initiative designed to encourage employers to utilize flexible work options to reduce traffic congestion and commute times. In addition to encouraging employers – particularly those in the central business district – to utilize flex, the City has been working to time traffic signals to reduce waits at stop lights during heavy commute traffic times.

San Diego – The San Diego Regional Association of Governments [iCommute](#) (formally Ridelink) programs are designed to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution and save gas and energy. The programs encourage the use of alternative commuting such as carpools, vanpools, biking, telecommuting, public transportation, and flexible work schedules. They offer a free starter kit for companies interested in a commuter benefit program.

Washtenaw County – The Washtenaw County initiative is focused on creating a workplace that promotes employee satisfaction and great customer service. Flexibility is an element of this strategy which is based on employee feedback and management involvement.

[Delta Dental of Arkansas](#) – This insurance company offers creative use of flexible work options in a call center work environment. In addition to normal 8 to 4:30 work schedules, a range of flexible schedules are offered, as well as telecommuting.

[Cross, Gunter, Witherspoon & Galchus, P.C.](#) – This Little Rock law firm offers a variety of flexible work options to their employees. Employees who choose part-time schedules can continue to advance on the track to partnership. Other forms of flexibility offered include compressed work weeks and flex-time. The firm has been named a recipient of the Governor's Work-Life Balance Award every year since 2006, earning Gold for the past two years.

[PricewaterhouseCoopers \(PwC\)](#) – This global accounting firm has offices in Little Rock. PwC is widely recognized for their innovative use of flexible work options with programs such as Flexible Fridays and a full range of formal flexible work options.

Flex-Options Model Practices from Women's Bureau Regional Offices

As part of our Flex-Options project, the Women's Bureau Regional teams partner with many companies to help them create more flexible workplaces. The following brief overviews are continued.



Region VII: DeMars Pension, Overland Park, KS

Dorothy A. Witherspoon, RA,
wITHERSPON.DOROTHY@dol.gov

SUMMARY: Faced with downsizing due to the economy, the company's human resources director attended a *Flex-Options* seminar and learned about using workplace flexibility as an alternative to layoffs. After considering work flow, customer needs and insurance coverage requirements, the company implemented reduced work schedules for all employees from July 1 through Dec 31, 2009, enabling everyone to keep their jobs

CHALLENGES: The biggest challenge was ensuring that employees would have continued benefits coverage with the reduced work schedules.

SUCSESSES: All employees kept their jobs.



LESSONS LEARNED: By attending the seminar, the HR director was introduced to new ideas about addressing a critical staffing situation. With resources provided by the *Flex-Options* project, she was able to turn a layoff situation into a job retention program.

Region VIII: Colorado Department of Labor and Employment

SUMMARY: The Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, Telephony Operations implemented a telework program in 2009 to:

- Reduce commuting impact on the environment and employees
- Offer a work-at-home option on snow days
- Reduce costs through employee retention, more efficient office space design, decreased energy consumption, greater production/efficiency, and reduced absenteeism
- Provide flexible work options for employees including work-at-home, part-time and flexible hours
- Comply with the Mayor's emphasis on a [Greener Denver](#)
- Utilizing a phased approach, currently 109 employees in downtown offices and 30 in outline offices telecommute two or three days a week. Telecommuting has been so successful within the Department that it may be available to all employees next year.

Contact: Frances Jefferson, Regional Administrator,
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CHALLENGES: Keeping the team connected. Understanding that telework is not for everyone.

SUCSESSES: Front line managers have commented that staff productivity has increased, employees have saved on commute time and fuel, department costs have decreased due to eliminating the need for additional office space, and absenteeism has decreased

LESSONS LEARNED: Production levels should be comparable regardless of whether employees telework or not. Managers and staff need to establish realistic time estimates for any task completion. Managers should prepare a report identifying telework pilot trends, challenges and solutions for executive management review.



Flex-Options Model Practices from Women's Bureau Regional Offices

As part of our Flex-Options project, the Women's Bureau Regional teams partner with many companies to help them create more flexible workplaces. The following brief overviews are continued.



Region IX: American Lung Association of California

Contact: Jenny Erwin, RA,
erwin.jenny@dol.gov

SUMMARY: The American Lung Association of California found itself in an ironic situation when asbestos was discovered in the ceiling of their building. While clean-up was being accomplished, the Association established a full-time remote workforce to ensure business continuity.

CHALLENGES: The organization went virtual fairly quickly with few policies in place to ensure effective communication and management. The majority of employees worked remotely from home while the building was renovated. Some reported feeling isolated while working virtually. For those who could not work from home, a safe environment was established at the worksite in a newer section of the building that did not contain asbestos.

SUCSESSES: During the renovation, the organization was able to keep their team employed and continue its work. Since the building reopened, employees have been able to incorporate work-at-home options in response to a variety of needs for flexibility.

LESSONS LEARNED: Not all employees wanted to, or could, work from home. Some required a quieter environment to be productive. Communication policies and established protocols may have helped boost productivity for some.

Region IX: Cox Communications, San Diego, California

Contact: Jenny Erwin, RA,
erwin.jenny@dol.gov

SUMMARY: Cox Communication's Cyber Agent program was initiated to relieve overcrowding in their call center by relocating experienced, high-performing staff members to work from home. Over 100 customer service representatives are now home-based. All agents work a split shift, which enables greater coverage of the busiest hours for customer inquiries. During the San Diego wildfires in 2003 and 2007, the Cyber Agent program supported Cox Communications' ability to keep its customer service department staffed and serving customers while the company's onsite call center had to evacuate and shut down for several days. Cox is evaluating program expansion as part of its regional strategy to reduce the organization's carbon footprint.

CHALLENGES: Initially, agents experienced technology challenges with a new call recording tool. They quickly learned to be creative troubleshooters; however, some unexpected expenses did occur prior to discovering best practice solutions. In the few instances where at-home agents were not meeting performance expectations, managers found it difficult to rescind their cyber status. Managers also found it difficult to develop agents when they weren't present in the workplace.

SUCSESSES: The Cyber Agent program met Cox's need for additional workspaces for new employees. The program improved call response time and retention of experienced staff. Employees with lengthy commutes report less stress and greater satisfaction with their work. Employees with medical needs have been able to maintain employment with the work-at-home option.

LESSONS LEARNED: Although the program began in response to a specific economic challenge, it has become a solution for other business challenges, including the retention of experienced staff to cover peak customer service hours and continuity of operations during unpredicted natural disasters.

Region X - Structural Design, Everett, Washington

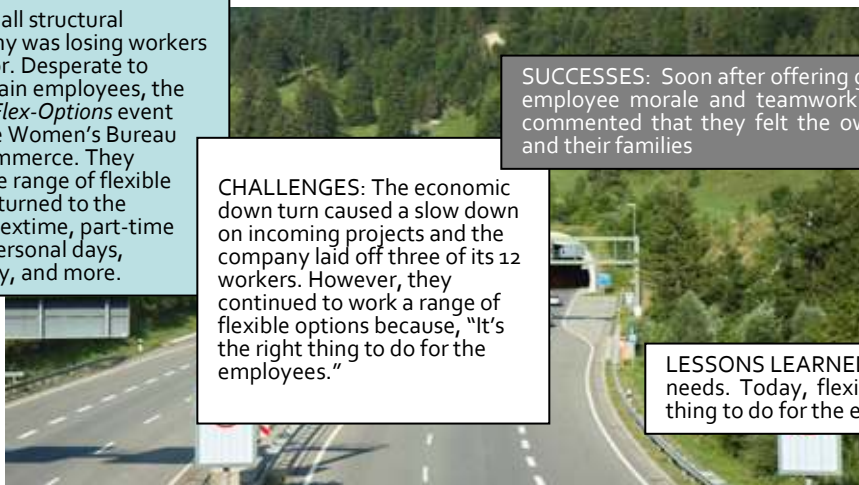
Contact: Betty Lock, Regional Administrator,
lock.betty@dol.gov

SUMMARY: This small structural engineering company was losing workers to a large competitor. Desperate to discover ways to retain employees, the owners attended a *Flex-Options* event co-sponsored by the Women's Bureau and Chamber of Commerce. They learned about a wide range of flexible work options and returned to the workplace to offer flextime, part-time work, job sharing, personal days, emergency flexibility, and more.

CHALLENGES: The economic down turn caused a slow down on incoming projects and the company laid off three of its 12 workers. However, they continued to work a range of flexible options because, "It's the right thing to do for the employees."

SUCSESSES: Soon after offering greater workplace flexibility, employee morale and teamwork improved. Employees also commented that they felt the owners cared more for them and their families

LESSONS LEARNED: Employees have diverse needs. Today, flexible options are "the right thing to do for the employees."



Free Resources: Model Practices

And How-to's in Workplace Flexibility

The *Flex-Options* Program

Through its [Flex-Options](http://www.flexoptions.org) program (www.flexoptions.org) the [U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau](http://www.dol.gov/wb) has become a leading resource for helping employers and organizations implement and improve workplace flexibility programs. The project has helped more than 800 organizations – employing nearly 1.1 million people – create more flexible workplaces. The program has helped businesses launch nearly 2,000 workplace flexibility practices. Working with business leaders across the nation, Flex-Options has hosted more than 400 flexibility workshops and events. The bi-monthly teleconferences have drawn 4,500 participants from nearly all 50 states. With timely and practical resources, the Flex-Options Website receives an average of 20,000 monthly visitors. Please visit the [Flex-Options Website](http://www.flexoptions.org) today to learn more about model practices, review summaries and transcripts of informative teleconferences, and access resources to help you implement and manage workplace flexibility options....and more!



The *Flex-Options* Guide

The second edition *Flex-Options Guide* is a popular, free tool developed by the U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau. The updated Guide covers the latest information about workplace flexibility, and new model practices to help business leaders, managers and employees develop and implement flexible workplace solutions. The Guide spells out flexibility definitions, benefits and common approaches; shares tools to get started; and includes templates so companies can easily create guidelines for flextime, compressed work weeks, job sharing, part-time work and telecommuting. The Guide also includes "Manager Tips: The Fundamentals of Creating a Flexible Workplace" and "Reviewing and Implementing a Proposal." Employees will find tips for considering and proposing a flexible work arrangement.

Guide to Bold New Ideas Making Work Work

In a time of high unemployment and widespread cost cutting, a surprising number of organizations around the country are raising the bar in developing effective and flexible workplace practices. Hundreds of these ideas are captured in the free [2009 Guide to Bold New Ideas for Making Work Work](#), compiled by the Families and Work Institute (FWI).

Despite the recession, a May 2009 nationally representative FWI study found that 81 percent of U.S. employers are maintaining and 13 percent are increasing the flexibility they offer. In fact, many report they are using flexibility as a tool to manage through the recession. Bringing that and other trends into tangible focus, Bold New Ideas features 260 award-winning employers from around the country by geography and by innovative practice, allowing readers to search for organizations in their industry or area, or find examples of best practices of effective and flexible workplaces from around the nation. All of the employers are 2008 winners of the Alfred P. Sloan Awards for Business Excellence in Workplace Flexibility, presented each year through a partnership among FWI, the Institute for a Competitive Workplace and the Twiga Foundation. The award is unique in that applying employers must score in the top 20 percent of employers nationally to be selected as winners and two thirds of the winning score is based on employee experiences as reported through an employee survey.





Workplace Flexibility: Innovation in Action

In 2007, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation funded a working retreat on workplace flexibility, which was proposed and organized by Alliance for Work-Life Progress at World-at-Work. The event brought together two dozen flexibility practitioners from both higher education and private industry to represent a new “think tank” format for the work-life field.

This free publication is a tangible result of this “meeting of the minds.” It is designed to provide readers with a rich collection of the resources contributed by retreat participants. It offers testimonies to alleviate organizational concerns, gives facts to counter common but erroneous myths, and presents options for introducing organizational skills that are needed to create a fluid, flexible work environment that delivers the agility required to survive in today’s fast-changing economy.

Sloan work and Family Research Network, Boston College

The Alfred P. Sloan Work and Family Research Network is the premier online destination for information about work and family, including workplace flexibility. The Network serves a global community interested in work and family research by providing resources and building knowledge. Current, credible, and comprehensive, the Network targets the information needs of academics and researchers, workplace practitioners, state public policy makers, and interested individuals. It is the place to find high-quality research and reports, case studies, easy-to-read summary sheets and briefs, and work-family topic pages—all in one location.

Workplace Flexibility 2010

Workplace Flexibility 2010 is a research, outreach and consensus-building enterprise located at Georgetown University Law Center. Workplace Flexibility 2010 engages in the following activities:

Expands the knowledge base regarding workplace flexibility.

The legal staff of Workforce Flexibility 2010 objectively analyzes ways in which existing laws and practices either hinder or support flexibility. Areas of study include labor, employment, anti-discrimination, tax, and health and benefits.

Translates academic research into accessible formats.

The policy staff of Workplace Flexibility 2010 provides policymakers and the media with accessible summaries of quantitative & qualitative research documenting the needs for flexibility and the costs of workplace inflexibility.

Engages stakeholders in new creative thinking.

The legal, political, and policy staff of Workplace Flexibility 2010 engage leaders from business, community groups, unions, family groups and other potential stakeholders to help define the contours of a new national policy on workplace flexibility.

