

Telework: A Critical Broadband Application in the New Economy November 18, 2008

Since the 1970s telework, the use of digital technologies to allow people to work remotely, has been touted, debated, piloted, and used as a work strategy. And although its use has grown, it has not reached its full potential.

A strong argument can be made that leadership in telework is important to Washington's competitiveness. This is evident by a combination of economic, environmental, demographic, and workforce trends that support the potential for telework as an integral part of positioning for the New Economy.

- Volatile gasoline prices
- Climate change interest and initiatives
- Transportation challenges
- Demands for workplace flexibility (from working parents to retirement-eligible staff to X/Y generations)
- Growth in digital technologies availability and use make it easier

Other states have implemented policies, even established programs to help increase telework and broadband services. In the Governor's Executive Order for the Commonwealth of Virginia, a new Office of Telework Promotion and Broadband Assistance was established. The order also states, "A key success factor for the adoption of telework is the availability of affordable broadband level telecommunication services. Because of the critical role broadband plays in the deployment of advanced application such as telework, widespread access to broadband services is critical to the economic well-being of the Commonwealth of Virginia." Washington must act now so we are not left behind.

Applications drive the adoption and use of broadband services. Telework is an application that not only increases the use of broadband services but provides advantages for individuals such as saving time, reducing expenses, and balancing work/life while offering benefits to employers and society.

Employer/Business Benefits

- Expands talent pool
- Increases productivity – improves work processes
- Boosts technology skills and use
- Decreases human capital expenses
- Insures business continuity
- Provides compliance for clean air regulations
- Demonstrates good corporate citizenship
- Expands business offerings and innovation opportunities to support remote workers

Community/Society Benefits

- Reduces traffic congestion through transportation demand management
- Lessens dependency on foreign oil
- Supports environmental requirements and initiatives
- Redistributes wealth (i.e., employment opportunities for rural residents, seniors, disabled)
- And yes, increases demand and use of broadband as well as other digital technologies

Leveraging efforts such as the High Speed Internet Strategic Working Group recommendations, Kitsap Telework Pilot Project, Commute Trip Reduction, the Governor's Climate Action Team, public/private research, as well as working with business associations, economic development organizations and others, Washington will be a leader in the New Economy. Washington State University has a long, successful history of supporting telework implementation dating back to 1989 and welcomes the opportunity to assist individuals, organizations, and communities use broadband technologies to create and retain value-added, family-wage jobs.

Monica L. Babine
Senior Associate for Telework
Division of Governmental Studies & Services
Washington State University Extension & College of Liberal Arts
babinem@wsu.edu
425.827.8015