

Kansas Remote Work Certification (Pilot)

Situation

Employment through much of the United States was impacted in interesting ways due to the pandemic. The pandemic taught us that remote work is an option, and such an option can allow workers to stay in place or live the dream of moving to rural areas to work and support their families. With widening broadband support in rural areas, and opportunities for expansion of businesses through remote work opportunities, the Remote Online Initiative supports both remote job seekers and employers in the areas of professionalism, communication, and teamwork in a distributed or hybrid work model.

The Remote Online Initiative educational programs are designed to equip workers with the tools and skills needed to work from home as a remote worker, freelancer, or entrepreneur (Remote Work Professional) and lead businesses offering, or considering, remote work options (Remote Work Leader). Specific objectives and outcomes for each module of the course are identified at the beginning of each set of modules. Each program consists of nine core modules, delivered in a self-paced, online format, and four interactive workshops.

Public Value

Remote Online Initiative Impacts:

Since October 2018, about 1,280 participants have completed the Remote Work Professional certificate course. An evaluation of short- and medium-term outcomes captured changes in participants' knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aspirations toward seeking remote employment.

Remote Work Professional Course:

Skills: On average, (52%) participants had high overall mean scores across all skills assessed. After completing the course, participants felt they had better abilities to - Balance their professional and personal lives. Solve problems. Use online technology. Work as a team member. After completing the course: On average, participants had high overall mean scores across all skills assessed. After completing the course, participants felt they had better abilities to: Manage their professional and personal productivity. Communicate digitally. Manage their careers.

Economic Impact: A second short survey was sent to all 587 graduates of the MRWP's September 2019 to August 2020 cohorts (N = 587). With a response rate of 40%, a total of 234 graduates completed the survey (n = 234).

- More than half of respondents (56%) was worth more than what they paid, by an estimated 41%. This indicates that participants that paid for enrollment thought personal benefits of completing the course outweighed the cost of registration.
- 27% of graduates have successfully found remote work.
- Of those that have not found remote work, 91% are confident in their ability to find remote work.

- Follow up communications with past students found that 167 participants have obtained remote work since October of 2018.
- Participants found that their remote work experience has allowed them a 38% increase in median salary.
- Commute times and savings have been impacted by their certification. 80% reduced the number of miles driven; average savings of \$997 per month on fuel; lower commutes have resulted in 3.34 metric tons of emissions per month.

Remote Work Leader Course:

Overall, 104 participants enrolled in the MRWL certificate course with 91 successfully completing the course. An evaluation of short- and medium-term outcomes captured changes in participants' knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aspirations toward creating remote work environments in their organizations.

Skills: After completion of the course, participants felt that they had better abilities to – influence a remote organizational work culture; communicate with employees that are remote; manage employee performance; inspire learning and development; manage conflict in a remote work environment.

Upon completion of the course:

- Almost all participants (99%) felt their value as a remote work leader improved.
- 94% felt more empowered to hire remote workers.

References Cited:

Utah State Remote Work Certification, 2021:

<https://extension.usu.edu/remoteworkcertificate/reports/ROIAnnualReport2020.pdf>

Outcomes

Short-Term (Knowledge):

- Participants will learn the skills required to function successfully in a remote work environment.
- Participants learn everything from effective communication techniques for team collaboration to specific software tools commonly used in telework settings.
- Assists participants in their preparation to search and interview for legitimate remote jobs, bid on online freelance jobs, or start an ecommerce business.
- Grow awareness of the benefits and opportunities of remote work for new and diverse audiences.
- Extension faculty and local units will become efficient and productive in their remote work requirements.

Indicators

- Kansas employers will seek out the remote work certification program offered by KSRE.
- Participants will be equipped with the skills necessary to perform high quality remote work.
- Participants will find themselves better able to communicate with colleagues and clients remotely.
- The number of Extension faculty and local units engaged in remote work and remote educational programming will increase.

Medium-Term (Behavior)

- Kansas employers, civic, government and other volunteer organizations will become aware that a remote work certification can benefit their organization.
- Kansas employers, civic, government and other volunteer organizations will exercise skills to identify individuals who will benefit from a remote work certification program.
- Kansas employers, civic, government and other volunteer organizations will address the need to evolve to meet changing needs within the community by utilizing a remote work certification.
- KSRE faculty will understand the need to increase their engagement with community and governmental organizations by coordinating and promoting the remote work initiative.

Indicators

- Kansas employers, civic, government and other volunteer organizations will embrace remote work skills through the certification program to enhance their capacity to identify and deliver on community-based issues.
- Kansas employers, civic, government and other volunteer organizations will exercise skills to identify and match those certified through the remote work program to agencies and projects important to the organization.
- Kansas employers, civic, government and other volunteer organizations will increase their ability to evolve to meet their community's changing needs.
- KSRE faculty will increase their engagement with businesses, community and governmental organizations.

Long-Term (Change in Condition)

- Kansas employers and job seekers seek out the program for utilization.
- Employers will be comfortable with the tool and will participate in virtual job fairs.
- KSRE will serve as a capacity-building partner for Kansas employers and job seekers.

Indicators

- Kansas communities will exhibit higher levels of remote employers and employees.
- Employers will more readily identify their role in remote work within Kansas and increase their commitments remote work priorities.
- KSRE will serve as a capacity-building partner for Kansas communities

Outputs

This program will be a blended certificate courses consisting of modules and online workshops facilitated by Utah State University and supported through promotion and teaching assistance through K-State Research and Extension. Online, self-paced modules allow the learner to enter the Canvas learning management system, review the materials, and then meet virtually at the online workshops to discuss the lessons, and collaborate on group projects.

Agents who adopt this Action Plan will participate in the Remote Online Initiative, promote the initiative to local businesses and residents, and serve as coaches/teaching assistants to Kansas residents that take the courses. Agents will be asked to identify businesses and residents that have an interest in remote work, and work with partnering agencies, such as the Kansas Department of Commerce Work Force, to engage job seekers to participate. One or more of the agent-identified organizations shall either be an organization that has no historical connection to Extension or that have not previously engaged with Extension.

For the 2020-2021 programming year, the program will feature two courses: Remote Work Professional, and Remote Work Leader. Each course is delivered monthly throughout 2021, but flexibility will be afforded to agents who need to adopt varying timelines. The course topics identified for development include:

Remote Work Professional:

- Module 1: Work Day
- Module 2: Communication
- Module 3: Workflow
- Module 4: Productivity & Time Management
- Module 5: Teamwork Module 6: Compliance
- Module 7: Critical Thinking

- Module 8: Virtual Careers
- Module 9: Remote Job Development

Remote Work Leader Objectives:

1. Critically assess their organization's current vision for the future
1. Create a plan to include culture-building in routine operations
1. Develop an effective communication agreement between remote employees and management
1. Design a performance management plan to address common challenges with managing remote employees
1. Create a conflict resolution chart
1. Develop a change management process to address barriers to organizational change
1. Design a strategy for addressing common barriers to remote employees' learning and development

Interactive Workshops

The program includes four live, interactive workshops, hosted via video call using free Zoom conferencing software. Workshops can be attended from any location with Internet access. Workshops provide an opportunity for participants to discuss career goals and review content from the modules in a virtual environment that mimics a real distributed team. Participation in all four workshops is mandatory for completion of the course.