

**NC STATE**



# **HOW WE WORK TASK FORCE REPORT**

The How We Work Task Force was created by the Post COVID-19 Innovation Steering Committee to examine the impact that the COVID-19 global pandemic had on our work culture and what was learned that should be considered as we prepare for the future of work strategy at the university by executing a transformational approach.

## Vision and Goals

The overarching vision of the COVID-19 Innovation Task Forces is “to organize university efforts and identify adaptations to improve academic, research, administrative and operational functional areas, while also improving university effectiveness in employee and student recruitment, retention and engagement.”

The proposals presented by the How We Work Task Force align with the NC State 2021-30 Strategic Goals #4 and #5. Goal 4 states: Champion a culture of equity, diversity, inclusion, belonging and well-being in all we do. Goal 5 states: Drive institutional effectiveness through transformative technologies, cutting-edge processes and actionable data.

The HWW Task Force has been specifically charged with:

1. Investigating flexible work arrangements to support the university’s mission and commitment to recruit and retain a diverse and talented workforce.
2. Fostering a highly engaged and productive work environment that values employee well-being and work-life balance. Ensure the university maintains its community culture and best-place-to-work environment.
3. Reimagining university space to the highest and best use as a university resource, which must be stewarded.

## Overall objectives

To provide employees with a highly productive and equitable work environment while promoting efficient use of university resources. Our recommendations are informed by the Office of Finance and Administration’s three fundamental principles of work: employee engagement, customer service and responsible stewardship. These principles, in conjunction with the 2021-2030 strategic values of excellence, inclusion, integrity, sustainability, community, freedom and collaboration, guided and fostered the philosophical foundation for the work of this task force. Based on this context, this task force has adopted the following guiding principles:

1. Continue to expand opportunities to support a diverse, equitable and inclusive university community.
2. Improve university operations, space management and flexible work policies (such as office and/or home), processes and metrics and the university’s effectiveness and utilization of university resources.
3. Promote and support a balance of collaboration, engagement, productivity, effectiveness and well-being for our university community.
4. Clearly and transparently communicate effectively and inclusively with our university community.

These principles led to the development of four broad thematic proposals. Each proposal describes tangible strategies for action or further study to address the university’s ability to meet the needs of a changing workforce.

Each HWW Strategic Plan Proposal below begins with one or more 2021-30 Strategic Plan Task Force recommendation(s) from the original 2019-20 strategic planning task force reports. The HWW Task Force strategies provided align with the listed recommendations in an effort to demonstrate the connection between the Strategic Plan objectives and lessons we have learned during this pandemic. The HWW Task Force strategies are intended to provide an overview of these lessons learned and the potential action steps that can continue to help us transform our workplace.

# HWW Strategic Plan Proposal 1

2021-30 Strategic Plan Task Force Recommendations: (1) Improve workplace strategies to maximize the health and well-being, productivity, and success of the campus's students, faculty, and staff; (2) Enabling more upward mobility within NC State, and (3) Identify shared goals to promote efficient use of resources.

## HWW Task Force Strategies

This recommendation illustrates the synergies between healthy working environments, productivity and workplace success that benefits both the university and the employees to achieve the university's strategic goals. It also addresses the importance of sharing and utilizing resources effectively and increased collaborative communication strategies. A perpetual theme of the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic is the importance of healthy living and good social practices to maintain the health of the individual and the community. Employee choice frequently impacts other members of the campus community. Employee health and well-being has a direct impact on their success and advancement at work.

1. Examine and revise internal practices and procedures to reduce, and/or eliminate where possible, structural impediments to internal promotions. Increase succession planning efforts and opportunities for SHRA and EHRA non-faculty to enhance progress towards career progression. As a long-standing issue, this can be exacerbated by biases that can emerge related to onsite versus remote work options.
2. Expand NC State's network of mental health programs and services for employees working with units that return to campus in-person or virtually, and better educate the university community on these new or expanded available resources.
3. Create professional workplace opportunities that empower employees to advance and develop skills that align with university and unit needs. Identify strategic staffing plans (on-site and remote) and foster employee engagement activities that build community, well-being and productivity within units and across the university.
4. Review and adopt best practices in design for sustainable, healthy environment initiatives to support in-person instruction, work, and living needs (including: indoor air quality; water quality; safety and security; infectious disease, etc.). As part of the Physical Master Plan, define key design elements that impact employee well-being and productivity and incorporate these in the design guidelines.
5. Review current equipment software use, and procurement policies/procedures to remove outdated/conflicting information related to the new remote working models to better support more flexible work arrangements.

## Resources

- Need funding, staffing and leadership commitment to support healthy environment initiatives and professional upward mobility.

## Metrics

- Monitor usage of mental health and support programs and increase offerings where possible.

## Communications Plan

- Increase awareness of new mental health programs and offerings, as well as professional development opportunities.



- Better communicate the university's initiatives to employees in response to changes in services and programs. Adapt to the nature of changing services and readiness and create more effective communication initiatives and platforms to address employee needs and align with the university's goals.
- Promote sharing of effective solutions to broadly applicable university initiatives, processes and practices. Utilize University Communications or a similarly structured organizational unit to centralize and improve messaging across campus, with the goal of promoting collaboration and efficient use of resources to accomplish these varied university initiatives and common practices. During the pandemic, information was communicated by multiple sources and sometimes created unnecessary confusion or missed opportunities for collaboration.

## Obstacles

- The lack of higher-level positions to accommodate an internal promotion process. There is a lack of understanding that career advancement is not always a promotion or upward hierarchical movement.
- Resources needed to enhance skill development.
- Purchasing, ordering, and general procurement and product delivery protocols are not conducive to flexible work arrangements (e.g., inability to deliver to a residence).

## HWW Strategic Plan Proposal 2

2021-30 Strategic Plan Task Force Recommendation: (1) Develop equity-focused policies, programs and accountability practices by participating in the AAAS SEA\* Change program to systematically review with an equity lens and align NC State's collective efforts. (2) Reconceptualizing diversity and inclusion as a prerequisite for good decision making. (3) NC State must be diligent and innovative in its efforts to provide access, promote retention and enhance the success of all its students, faculty and staff.

\*AAAS SEA Change stands for American Association for the Advancement of Science STEMM (science, technology, engineering, math and medicine) Equity Achievement.

The impact of the pandemic magnified the disparities across a variety of marginalized populations. It is more apparent than ever that we need to work toward making sure that everyone feels a sense of belonging within our university as we humbly face and vigorously address identified inequities and strive to build an inclusive culture.

## HWW Task Force Strategies

1. Charge a team with submitting the first SEA Change STEMM Equity Achievement application to AAAS for review in 2022 in order to demonstrate a tangible commitment to fostering an equity lens in STEMM.
2. Incorporate the Five Questions for Equity Based Decision-making into all relevant aspects of the university, including development of policy, implementation of programs and evaluation of practices to advance equal opportunity for all faculty, students and staff. Utilize those Five Questions as a basic framework for decision-making across the university to increase the opportunities for more equitable and inclusive considerations into the development and implementation of temporary and permanent processes. The five questions are:
  - a. Was "this" (e.g., program, policy, communication, event, system, product design, meeting plan, etc.) designed with equity in mind?
  - b. Who is this designed by? For? With? Without?
  - c. Who benefits from this? Who is disadvantaged?
  - d. How can this be efficiently & effectively transformed to reduce bias, discrimination & inequity?
  - e. What opportunities does this afford to create greater equity and equality?
3. Investigate how a belongingness survey can be used to better utilize measures of engagement and belongingness into efforts to provide access, recruit, retain and promote faculty and staff.

## Resources

- Need annual membership to participate in AAAS SEA Change and professional staff resources to support the effort, coordination with SACSCOC Reaffirmation process, support of senior leadership coordination, and support of senior leadership to review and endorse the action goals recommended with the SEA Change application, as well as support over the next five years to measure progress towards the identified goals.

## Metrics

- Assess which key performance indicator metrics that drive workforce diversity for economic growth, reduce turnover and foster innovation and creativity should be better communicated.
- Implement a benchmarking strategy to advance innovative strategies, adopt best practices and identify breakthrough approaches which compare against institutional peers and aspirational institutions that help NC State make informed decisions, implement changes and monitor results.

## Communications Plan

- Develop a card with the Five Equity Questions listed and distribute it across the university. Propose incorporating these questions into employee training opportunities (such as Management Essentials).
- Utilize a strategy for communicating diversity related metrics, such as a diversity dashboard to include metrics such as majority headcount, new hires, separations, leadership percentage, etc.

## Obstacles

- Sufficient funding for DEI initiatives that are University-wide, versus continued siloing in colleges/divisions
- Timing
  - Awareness
  - Understanding needs
- Reluctance based on lack of understanding
- Legislative policies and changing political agendas
- Sustaining long-term momentum regarding these efforts;
  - Sustaining change management efforts and keeping change agents motivated and supported

## HWW Strategic Plan Proposal 3

2021-30 Strategic Plan Task Force Recommendation: Implement more flexible work strategies and schedules.

The COVID-19 global pandemic changed and continues to impact the way we work. Physical distancing requirements, adherence to public health guidelines and a genuine interest in reducing the risk of spreading the disease forced employees who could work remotely to quickly pivot to virtual modes. Those who could not work remotely had to learn new safety procedures and implement new methods of conducting work safely. As a result of the pandemic, numerous other employers have made significant changes in their work arrangements, suggesting that we must make modifications to be and remain competitive for talent. These changes resulted in the creation and adoption of new techniques and innovative break-throughs that can continue to inform and enhance the way we work. Strategies for flexible work need to incorporate broader options and flexibility that include flexible hours in scheduling, alternative work locations and hybrid flexible work options that do not disrupt programs and services to the student body and overall university functions.

## HWW Task Force Strategies

1. Support approval of a university regulation on flexible work arrangements and other forms of alternative work assignments (such as home-based assignments and flexible scheduling) that enables increased agility regarding flexible working schedules and use of alternative work locations in a manner that benefits the university.
  - a. A university work group has developed a draft of a flexible work arrangement regulation for which this task force has provided feedback. The HWW Task Force supports the implementation of a regulation that will increase flexibility as a method of addressing recruitment and retention issues that are negatively impacting our ability to retain and compete for critical talent.
2. Support the creation and distribution of operational guidelines for managers and supervisors to assist in the development of consistent and equitable implementation of flexible work arrangements, which include an annual review of the arrangements that could be aligned with employees' annual performance review cycles.
3. Integrate technological and space needs into flexible work solutions to maximize productivity and resource efficiency. This includes, but is not limited to, increased utilization of virtual meeting platforms and shared project resources such as Zoom, Google Meets, Microsoft Teams, etc.

## Resources

- Need leaders at all levels of the university structure to consistently and enthusiastically champion flexible work schedules in order to achieve a cultural shift within the university community that widely encourages work-life integration.
- Enhance the climate and well-being survey processes to gather data on faculty and staff leaving university employment due to concerns regarding workplace flexibility.
- Need funding to address space and technology needs to integrate hybrid meetings and other virtual platforms in more on-site locations.
- Develop and provide training for supervisors on successful strategies for managing full-remote, hybrid-remote and teams with alternative work schedules that promote efficiency and productivity.
- Develop and provide training for the workforce on new tools and technology.

## Metrics

- Quantify utilization rates of alternative work arrangements annually. Measure the perceived value/satisfaction annually.

## Communications Plan

- Utilize senior administration (Chancellor and the Post COVID-19 Innovation Steering Team Committee) to communicate the commitment to flexible work arrangements and work-life well-being and balance while meeting the university's overall business needs and productivity goals.
- Clarify expectations and information on the resources provided by the university to support alternative work options based on employee-driven requests for flexibility versus management directives.
- Develop messaging, education and operational guidance for the campus community to ensure that teams are not only effective but engaged and connected to the university.

## Obstacles

- Resistance from managers who have more traditional views of work environments.
- Balancing physical presence with remote presence to maintain an active and engaged campus culture.

# HWW Strategic Plan Proposal 4

2021-30 Strategic Plan Task Force Recommendation: (1) Create a supportive campus environment where all indoor and outdoor spaces are designed, built, and renovated with health, productivity, equity and social connection in mind; (2) Identify shared goals to promote efficient use of resources; and (3) Share best practices in multiple realms of the university's mission.

## HWW Task Force Strategies

Provide a future-focused work environment that will not only enable experiences that attract and retain top talent but will also help to reduce operating costs, optimize space and operations and improve employee productivity and experience.

As the university embarks on a new Physical Master Plan, the consultant's scope of work has been guided by the HWW Task Force discussions that include further investigation into the lessons learned from the pandemic related to the functional use of campus space, flexible work arrangements and the importance of healthy building design. We have learned that highly flexible spaces (e.g., flat floors, moveable furniture, higher ceilings, robust infrastructure, etc.) were most easily adapted during the pandemic; moreover, highly-adaptable spaces provide great value moving forward. Space that can easily be changed will enable us to more efficiently meet the needs of new initiatives and future changes in the way we work. Flexible, activity-based space provides the most productive and engaging work environment. Furthermore, the pandemic revealed that rented space can rapidly change from an asset to a liability when funding streams that cover lease payments and/or operation and maintenance costs dry up. We also learned the importance of functional outdoor spaces for gathering, studying, dining, holding classes and socializing.

1. Perform a campus-wide interior space analysis as part of the new Physical Master Plan with the goal of improving space utilization. The analysis should consider not only national best practices and metrics but the incorporation of various factors and conditions specific to NC State.
  - a. Perform peer benchmarking to gather information with respect to NC State's peer and aspirational institutions in a variety of areas, such as current space on campus; space standards; space use policies; and use of metrics for the productivity of teaching and research space. While every institution is unique, this data will help inform decisions and provide information about possible innovations at other institutions.
  - b. Develop new space standards/guidelines\*\* to be used for high-level planning purposes for different types of space (e.g., instructional, research, office, meeting, study, etc.). Consider functional work requirements, task-based functions (e.g., collaborative, focus, social, etc.), activity-based workplace environments and flexible work arrangements.
    - i. \*\*See the existing [Space Standards and Programming guidelines](#).
  - c. Develop guidelines for best practices in design of sustainable, healthy work environments.
  - d. Repurpose or reduce underutilized space to better meet the university's strategic needs and budget
    - i. Develop tools to monitor and evaluate space utilization for office, conference and learning spaces.
    - ii. Remove scheduling restrictions and/or centralized scheduling applications to better utilize space, especially conference rooms across campus.
2. Include an analysis of campus exterior spaces and recommend opportunities to enhance functionality and flexibility in the Physical Master Plan. For example, sheltered or covered seating during the pandemic was used for dining, teaching, etc.
3. Analyze new workplace strategies and weigh options as new space guidelines are developed. The HWW Task Force recommends performing a Flexible Workplace Pilot Project with diverse university units (with different

working styles and levels of readiness) that considers lessons learned from the COVID-19 in-state remote, hybrid, and flexible work arrangements to align them with space needs. Collaborate with each unit to determine if a permanent remote, hybrid or flexible work scenario is feasible and identify space modifications that are needed.

- a. Create a diverse and inclusive project team to conduct focus groups that centers on employee needs and concerns that enhance performance and productivity.
- b. Develop a space planning guide and metrics for equitable, flexible work options.
- c. Ensure equity and campus culture impacts are addressed utilizing the Five Questions for Equity Based Decision Making, the University of North Carolina System's Employee Engagement Survey and the NC State Staff Wellbeing Survey.
- d. Provide conceptual designs with a focus on employee productivity, cost efficacy and space efficiency.
- e. Identify space that can be repurposed for other needs (e.g., university growth, reducing lease space costs, etc.)
- f. Identify associated technology needs for changes in space use.
- g. Provide guidelines for future development phases.

## Resources

- Use the University Space Committee as a resource for review and approval of space guidelines, standards and metrics.
- Require funding for the Flexible Workplace Pilot Project. Minor space and furniture modifications identified in the pilot would be prioritized with other university needs.

## Metrics

- Quantitative space metrics: New space standards will be used as a high-level planning tool at the college or division level to determine space overages or deficits by space type by comparing existing space inventory to calculated space needs per the standards.
- Qualitative space metrics: Consider conducting a workplace survey to establish a baseline for future survey comparison.

## Communications Plan

- Strategies 3 and 4 will be completed as part of the Physical Master Plan. That plan's formal campuswide kickoff is in September 2021. Numerous campus involvement opportunities (workshops, task forces, surveys, website feedback, etc.) are available throughout the process. The anticipated completion is December 2022.
- The Flexible Workplace Pilot Project is recommended to start fall 2021 and is dependent upon consultant funding. The anticipated timeline for planning is approximately four months with the University Space Committee's oversight and approval of options and guidelines.
- Update and implement the University's Space Principles to reflect flexible work arrangements.\*\*\*
  - \*\*\*See the existing [Space Principles](#).

## Obstacles

- The cost and equity of implementing best-practice designs, especially with respect to retrofitting existing structures.



# Closing

The world as we know it is constantly changing and evolving. As a global community, we perpetually impact each other. The COVID-19 pandemic altered NC State's patterns and practices as we made difficult decisions to protect the Pack and preserve the mission of this land grant university. This task force report outlines areas for improvement and continued reflection around our work environment and our work culture. To successfully implement the proposals provided in this report, the university must provide designated funding, staffing and commitment from senior leadership to bridge the gap between what we should do as a campus community of innovation and transformation, and what we actually do.

This report is respectfully submitted by the How We Work Task Force.

## How We Work Task Force Members:

- Lisa Johnson, Task Force Co-Chair, University Architect, Office of the University Architect
- Ursula Hairston, Task Force Co-Chair, Assistant Vice Chancellor, HR Strategy (Became co-chair upon the departure of Marie Williams, Associate Vice Chancellor, Human Resources, on 6/22/21)
- RaJade Berry-James, Chair of the Faculty, Associate Professor, School of Public and International Affairs, College of Humanities and Social Sciences
- Adrian Day, Assistant Vice Provost, Finance and Planning, Office of the Provost
- Margaret Erickson, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Operations, University Human Resources
- Pat Gaddy, Past Chair of Staff Senate, Administrative Assistant, Office of Information Technology
- Jennifer Garrett, Associate Director, Organizational Design, Equity and Talent, Universities Libraries
- Peter Harries, Dean, Graduate School
- Sumayya Jones-Humienny, Associate University Architect, Office of the University Architect (Assisted co-chairs with the leadership of this Task Force)
- Alicia Knight, Associate Vice Chancellor, University Real Estate and Development
- Ken Kretchman, Director, Environmental Health and Safety, Environmental Health and Public Safety
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The logo consists of the words "NC STATE" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters, centered within a solid red rectangular background.