



# Fiscal First Aid Quick Reference

## Moving to a Four-Day Work Week

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### Introduction

Increasingly, governments are seeking new ways of structuring operations to enhance productivity and efficiency while allowing for flexibility and employee satisfaction. When revenues are under stress, the alternatives that make sense will also tend to lower expenditures for personnel costs as well as for materials and services. One way to accomplish this is instituting a four-day work week.

The benefits of the decision must outweigh the negative consequences. Many organizations implement a four-day week aiming to lower facility energy use and costs, reduce the participating employee's costs for commuting, and lower employee and government auto emissions related to the traditional five day week. An additional expected benefit is increased employee work/life balance satisfaction. But the four-day week is also likely to necessitate closing some functions to customers on a day when services had been available.

### Steps to Take

When instituting a four-day work week, there are steps that should be followed.

- I. **Categorize all departmental units with regard to how viable it would be to set up schedules for a four-day week.** Not every department is suitable for alternative scheduling (e.g., (jail, police services, emergency dispatch). In fact, unless all budgeted positions are filled, even units that otherwise might be suited to alternative scheduling may suffer from an inability to cover business needs under a four-day work week approach. This evaluation requires the input of department directors, managers, and supervisors.
- II. **Once the initial categorization is complete, test the opinion among line workers to gauge how they will accept the change.** Effects on work life, home life, child care and school needs, transportation options, and other factors must be taken into consideration. Some departments will realize at this point that worker limitations constrain their ability to participate.
- III. **Gather opinions from the customer base.** The views of both internal customers and, just as important, external customers – the public – need to be accurately measured at the outset. Measuring how customers use the services under a standard schedule may reveal the weaknesses in a four-day week plan design.
- IV. **Determine which departments will participate and how their schedules can be constructed.** Some variations may be possible even for departments that must adhere to a five-day standard schedule, if shifts can be staggered. This will accomplish some but not all of the original aims of a program.
- V. **Communication to those who will go to the four day week and those who will remain on a standard week schedule is critical,** as is engagement with the leadership of affected bargaining groups to obtain their initial support of a pilot program. Challenges may surface, and union leadership must be as flexible as management in dealing with these situations as they arise. Creating memoranda of agreement to bridge the period of the pilot program is the clearest way to delineate understandings about what a change in schedules will require from all parties.



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- VI. **Create and disseminate implementation guidelines to departments and to the working staff affected by a change in schedule.** Distribute the guidelines to internal customers as well, to demonstrate what changes in other departments may bring to those who aren't on the alternative schedule. These changes will include lack of access to certain internal services and lack of access to certain management staff on closure days. Closure of facilities may affect departments that aren't located in those specific buildings; for instance, loss of access one day each week to locker rooms or shower facilities for those who come to work by bicycle or who exercise during their lunch hours. The implementation guide must be complete and include all major issues identified.
- VII. **Projections of expected results will help frame the arguments for and against pursuing an alternative work week schedule.** Expectations of energy savings, fuel costs savings, overtime incurred, employee commuting hours and miles curtailed, and other outcomes will be valuable in the subsequent evaluation process.
- VIII. **Use measurements to bring information from all participating sectors and provide metrics on operational environment issues** (demographics of employees, customer counts, methods of transacting business, etc.). Inquiries should cover all affected parties and uncover both practical and perceptual reactions to the program. It may be important to contract this evaluation out for impartial analysis that will withstand skeptical scrutiny of the results.
- IX. **Prior to the effective date of the program start, make available as many channels of communication as necessary, and make employees and the public aware of the changes ahead.** This may include FAQ postings on the Web site, press releases, and communication with radio and television news outlets to make sure outside customers are aware of the changes; visible messages on the entity's Web site; and customer awareness messages in each affected office (that the office will be closing one day a week but will have longer operating hours on the open days). It will also be useful to have customer comment cards available for affected customer to respond.

### **Clackamas County's Experience**

Clackamas County, Oregon, implemented a four-day work week for approximately 830 of the county's 1,800 employees in November 2008. The program was a one-year pilot to test the practicality and effects of a transition to four-day week – on costs, services, and employee work and home life. Although many issues were raised as possible impediments, in general, the program has been deemed successful. In September 2009, following a year-long study of the program (performed by the Executive Leadership Institute at Portland State University) and after reviewing the program evaluation white paper, county commissioners approved making the four-day week the standard for the departments already in the program. A description of the yearlong evaluation methods and results follows.

## **Evaluating Success**

Measurement is critical before, during, and after the trial period, and going forward, if the program becomes institutionalized. To gain a full understanding of the effects both in advance of



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experience and as a result of experience, consider opinion sampling at intervals during the pilot period and afterward, if the program continues. The evaluation needs to address:

- I. Customer service and citizen reaction.
  - A. Does service suffer, stay the same, or even improve?
  - B. What types of customers were least favorably disposed toward the changes?
  - C. Do changes in hours affect productivity, in the customer's view?
  - D. Do customers see benefits?
  - E. Did longer service hours on the days the function is open make up for closure days?
- II. Operational outcomes.
  - A. Did cost savings meet expectations? Are there any unexpected benefits?
  - B. Did changes in energy consumption, miles traveled, and overtime worked occur? Did they meet, exceed, or fall short of projections?
- III. Employee experience.
  - A. Do employees generally like or dislike the alternative work week, and for what reasons?
  - B. Are reactions linked to age, family make-up, job type?
  - C. Did employees save money, and did they make other transportation arrangements to commute, and drive less on the extra day off?
  - D. Is there a difference in management employee perception from that of line staff?

The methods of public and employee opinion sampling are important. In recent years, telephone sampling has been changed because of cell phones, caller identification, and the change in household employment patterns. Expert outside telephone survey consulting is likely the best approach rather than an in-house approach. In-house methods will be effective for customer card survey onsite – online survey of employee opinion is effective for those employees with computer access through their daily work. It is likely that such an employee survey will draw a large statistical sample, giving credence to results, especially if those results are evaluated and reported by a third party.

### **Evaluating the Four-Day Week in Clackamas County**

During the trial period, the four-day work week pilot project in Clackamas County, Oregon, was evaluated numerous times for effectiveness and impact on both customers and employees.

#### **Evaluation Project:**

July 2008	Initial employee opinion survey ( <i>pre-pilot program</i> )
November 2008	First employee survey ( <i>first week of pilot program</i> )
January 2009	First round of employee focus groups
February 2009	Dependent care focus group
April 2009	Second employee survey, customer satisfaction survey
May 2009	Potential odometer survey, mid-year report due
June 2009	Second round of employee focus groups
July-August 2009	Supervisor/management survey
September 2009	Final employee survey
November	End of pilot – final report from Portland State University



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Undertaking a change in work schedules affects a large number of both participant and non-participant staff and customers. A full-scale examination and preparation is critical to successful implementation and evaluation.