Flexibility for Operational Success

Contributed by the Australian Federal Police
The Australian Federal Police (AFP) continues to promote flexible work arrangements while balancing the challenges faced by law enforcement agencies to achieve organisational and individual success.

In 2016 the Cultural Change: Gender Diversity and Inclusion in the Australian Federal Police report was released, which found flexible work is a key capability driver, with a need for cultural change to normalise flexible work.

Flexible work arrangements alter the standard working hours or work location normally expected for an employee. All AFP employees, regardless of their sworn, protective services officer or unsworn status, can apply for a flexible working arrangement.

AFP People and Culture Command Assistant Commissioner Debbie Platz said flexible work arrangements have advantages for organisations and individuals. “Flexible work arrangements are an important tool for building a productive workplace that balances organisational needs and personal circumstances in adaptive and inclusive ways.

“There are a multitude of benefits for flexible work arrangements, including enhanced productivity, greater team-work and performance, cost savings and strengthened operational effectiveness.”

“It is also important we recognise the correlation between flexibility and gender diversity – flexibility allows us to retain and develop talent.”

Since the release of the report in 2016, the AFP has taken action to address associated challenges with flexible work arrangements.

As part of the AFP’s ‘flex by default’ approach, all employees interested in a flexible work arrangement are encouraged to explore their options with their supervisor, regardless of their gender, role, rank, age or personal circumstances.

“It’s important supervisors and employees work together and openly discuss the flexibility options that fit best within their role and team to meet operational outcomes and support employee needs,” Assistant Commissioner Platz said.

Common flexible work options include part-time hours, flexible working hours or days, compressed working hours, job sharing, purchased leave and home-based or remote work location. They can be formal, informal or ad hoc, for a short-, medium- or long-term period.

“Arrangements like part-time hours or flexible working hours have been used for employees to meet family commitments. An example of flexible working hours is an employee who needs to work different shift patterns from week to week so they can share the responsibility for taking their children to and from school,” Assistant Commissioner Debbie Platz explained.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the adaptability of the AFP workforce; from March a portion of employees commenced home-based or remote work location arrangements, to ensure business continuity and social distancing. Supervisors and employees were provided additional support, including addressing the challenges with working from home during a pandemic.
In the United States, AFP Commander Americas Xenia Cotter has always supported a flexible work arrangement for her sworn and unsworn staff. A number of Federal Agents have been working from home on a full-time basis in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This has assisted in balancing members’ support to their families, contributing to their children’s on-line schooling lessons and participation in late night videoconferencing in the Australian time zone.

“The ability to support employees seeking a flexible work arrangement has been great – they feel supported, are more productive and can better balance their personal lives with their work commitments,” said Commander Xenia Cotter.