

# Telework:

## A growth strategy for rural Minnesota

*The Fergus Falls, MN story*



[ForwardFergusFalls.org](http://ForwardFergusFalls.org)



**Blandin Foundation™**  
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

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# Forward

Fergus Falls is proud to bring you this manual featuring our experiences, challenges, thought processes and “a-ha moments” concerning our local Telework Initiative.

In 2008, Fergus Falls - the self-proclaimed Telework Capitol of Minnesota - began a journey to earn that title, marketing itself to both businesses and individuals as telework friendly. Along the way we’ve learned a lot, much of which is shared in this manual.

Our journey will continue; our local telework initiative is ongoing. But at the end of the day, one size does not fit all. We understand that, so we invite your rural community to examine our efforts. We hope that our experiences and stories may spark discussions in your own community and perhaps one day lead to your own telework effort.

Thank you for your interest and feel free to contact us with questions!

*Forward Fergus Falls Telework Committee*

April 1, 2014



## What is Telework?



According to Wikipedia:

“Telecommuting, remote work, or telework is a work arrangement in which employees do not commute to a central place of work. A person who telecommutes is known as a “telecommuter,” “teleworker,” and sometimes as a “home-sourced,” or “work-at-home” employee. Many telecommuters work from home, while others, sometimes called “nomad workers,” use mobile telecommunications technology to work from coffee shops or other locations.”

These terms were first used by Jack Niles in 1973 while doing research at the University of Southern California. Niles has since gone on to author several books on managing teleworkers.

While the Wikipedia definition is adequate, we want to note that a telework definition can be very fluid. In our research, a telework situation may consist of working from home once a week - or once a month. One company in our region told us they use teleworkers, but their place of residence must be within an hour’s drive of headquarters. Another company has a small group of workers who telecommute from a single site.

**23.4%** of all new jobs are directly attributable to broadband

### » key facts

Strategic Networks Group, a Colorado-based company that has nearly 20 years’ experience helping communities with their technology investment options, reports that 23.4 percent of all new jobs created in the economies they have studied are directly attributable to broadband; 56 percent of businesses said that access to high-speed broadband was essential for remaining in their current location, and businesses that increase their utilization of broadband by 10 percent realize a 24 percent gain in revenue and a seven percent reduction in costs.

## Why Worry About Telework? Why Now?

### It’s All About the Role of Technology

This could be the longest part of our booklet, but it’s going to be one of the shortest parts.

This telework phenomenon, giving people the ability to work from anywhere, of living where one wants to live, not having to live where one needs to work - is all made possible by the digital age. Fast computers, high speed internet, monitoring systems and technological advances that continue to amaze have brought the necessary tools to the telework scene.

We will relay what we’ve been hearing these past few years: More companies see using teleworkers as both a way to save money (they don’t have to pay for physical space) and a way to tap into talent pools that wouldn’t have been available to them in the past. Technology allows people to live where they want to live!

Many companies and different levels of government are getting on the telework bandwagon. This is a concept whose time has come. It is a concept that is a megatrend! There’s no doubt in our own conversations with businesses, workforce consultants and in our own research that there are opportunities in this digitally-connected world.

Let’s take a look at some evidence.

### The Support of Government ...and Governments

In December, 2010, the Telework Enhancement Act was signed into law. It basically says that Federal executive agencies must have a policy that may authorize eligible employees to telework. In the fall of 2011, more than 168,000 Federal employees were teleworking.

One of the tenets of the Act noted that it provided a strategy to “ensure that essential Federal functions continue during emergency situations.”

In 2002, the European nations made a telework agreement, regulating working conditions, health and safety, training and worker rights. In 2010, officials in China, eager to reduce carbon emissions, created a provincial telecommuting pilot project in Hubei.

### » key benefit

We’re in Minnesota. There’s this thing called snow. Sometimes too much. A teleworker doesn’t have to test their winter driving skills when the weather outside is frightful. Safety is a good thing.



### » key website

The website [telework.gov](http://telework.gov) has sample guidelines, addresses employee security issues, discusses employee accommodations and various other topics. Check it out!

**telework.gov**

### A Trend, with an Asterisk

According to the Telework Research Network, 40 percent of U.S. employees hold jobs that could be done at home (50 million), and half of all U.S. businesses are home-based (16 million).

Of course, telework is not for everyone and we touch on that more in depth later in this book. If you dig into the statistics of the government sector, a sector that is promoting teleworkers, 40 percent of federal employees are eligible to work from home, but only 17 percent do so. Similarly, 36 percent of private sector employees are eligible but only 16 percent do so. This indicates vast room for improving both the telecommuting interface and for the numbers to increase.

The other side of that coin is that while a job may lend itself to telework, it may not fit the individual in the job. We all must acknowledge that telework is not a good fit for every person, nor is it appropriate for every job.

### Home-Based Workers

Data from the American Community Survey estimates that the working-at-home population grew 61 percent between 2005 and 2009. And while our own telework model focuses on people working for a company, having a home-based business works for many individuals.

So while there is plenty of evidence on the growth of telework, there remains incomplete data to more fully understand it. First, as President Obama's Council of Economic Advisors stated in 2010, there remains a persistent "lack of data on the prevalence of workplace flexibility and arrangements which makes policy-making more difficult." There is confusion about how to distinguish between part-time and full-time teleworkers, and workers that earn payroll vs. independent contractors.

One also must separate paid work telework (such as an official flex-time work arrangement) from non-paid telework (such as a teacher grading papers at home during the weekend). Telework's definition is so broad that perceptions vary dramatically.

But we're partial to our own definition as we emphasize people working for remote employers, who provide a steady paycheck for their employees. We found one quote in our research you may want to note. It comes from futurist Thomas Frey: "Instead of focusing on the whole company, economic development professionals may want to focus on recruiting key individuals who have the option to live anywhere."

That's where we're taking our own telework initiative and hope this manual is a roadmap or sparks discussions for creating your own.

**40%** of U.S. workers have jobs that could be done at home

### » key partner

**Blandin Foundation's Broadband Initiative:** Greater Minnesota has an extremely valuable partner in the Blandin Foundation, whose broadband initiative highlights the importance of high speed technology in our rural areas.

In 2005, the Blandin Foundation brought people together from across the state to imagine what it would take for Minnesota and its communities to fully take advantage of broadband technologies. Their vision and guiding principles have been driving the Foundation's work ever since:

*To ensure a high quality of life and a globally competitive future for its citizens, businesses and communities, Minnesota is committed to making the necessary investment to become a world leader in the universal deployment and use of ultra high-speed next generation broadband.*

Blandin Foundation believes that encouraging the use of broadband is a critical component for increasing the technological vitality of Minnesota's rural communities.

The Broadband Initiative funds innovative programs and works in partnership with others to:

- Increase awareness about the value of broadband
- Increase business and residential use of broadband in rural communities
- Increase public and private investment in rural broadband capacity

This is important work. Broadband is revolutionizing business, government, education, work and



lifestyles. By opening markets, it creates new jobs and gives new focus and hope to communities in transition. By making possible the export of services and skills, broadband puts workers into wage and skill competition with people around the globe. Absent adequate broadband access and technologically literate populations, rural communities will be unable to take advantage of the extraordinary benefits that ultra high-speed next generation broadband can provide (courtesy of the Blandinfoundation.org).



# The Fergus Falls Telework Journey Begins

Why does Fergus Falls call itself the Telework Capitol of Minnesota and what inspired the community to market itself as telework-friendly?

As Harold Stanislawski, the Director of the Fergus Falls Economic Improvement Commission, recalls, the process started in 2008 at the height of the recession.



Harold Stanislawski

"In 23 years of business development, I had never experienced a more difficult time for employees, employers, and the economy," he said. "As a micropolitan, we had to take a look and think how on earth were we going to help create payroll in our community when it appeared to have a shrinking list of employment options."

## Local Telecom's Important Role

At about the same time, Dave Bickett, CEO of the local telecom provider Park Region Telephone/Otter Tail Telcom (PRT/OTT), became a board member of the Minnesota Telecom Alliance. This association made members aware of the work-from-home megatrend as a way to promote business and expand opportunities for regional phone companies.



Dave Bickett

Park Region Telcom management and staff were the experts who understood the concepts and why communities needed to become more aware of high speed internet as a community asset. The connection between having high speed broadband and actually leverage that asset into economic development was led by Bickett and the Otter Tail Telcom staff.

In addition, the Blandin Foundation of Grand Rapids was already deeply involved in the promotion of broadband in rural Minnesota.

## » key idea

Identifying a community's assets from both an internal and external audience is vital to discovering how to take care of those assets, enhance them, change them, etc. When you think of "community assets" what comes to mind? The people? The land? The activities? Water? Quality of life? Availability of jobs? When's the last time community leaders had a good discussion about assets, and what outside influences (technology, economy, etc.) have had an effect on those assets? And you can be creative; every community brings up quality of life as an asset. What makes you unique? What gives your community its competitive advantage?

## » key concept

"Fiber to the Curb" - "Fiber to the curb" refers to the installation and use of optic fiber placed to the curbs near homes, neighborhoods or businesses as a replacement for the old copper telephone lines. This type of wiring gives you extremely high bandwidth which makes doing business very, very fast! It is essential for speed and reliability. Conduct some research into the bandwidth capacity in your own town or region, paying attention to both upload and download speed.

## Forward Fergus Falls

The final piece of the puzzle, again around that same economic recession time period, was when community leadership decided to embark on a journey of discovery, looking ahead and present-day goal-setting. Enter the Forward Fergus Falls initiative.

Forward Fergus Falls (FFF) is a community-based organization comprised of business leaders and concerned citizens who want to



provide momentum and direction for the future of the community. The effort focused on "destiny drivers" that provided measurable goals for the common good. The initial organizing of FFF began at the same time, with both Harold and Dave becoming involved in the process.

Initially, 16 drivers were identified in the three main categories of 1) Healthy Economy, 2) Everybody In (inclusion) and 3) Livable Community. Activities varied from creating jobs to helping revive the walkway by the Otter Tail River to putting more community members through the Blandin Foundation leadership training. Each driver was adopted by a small committee who worked on fulfilling the goals of their particular driver, often having monthly meetings, bringing reports back to the larger group and checking off accomplishments.

"When our discussions turned to identifying community assets, Dave noted that we had superb broadband capability and that fact, combined with the emerging and growing area of telework, may provide opportunity for Fergus Falls," Stanislawski said.

"The concept really fit into the challenge of creating jobs, and after a lot of discussion, the Forward Fergus Falls group adopted telework as one of the community's drivers."

So the Fergus Falls telework effort started simply as Community Driver #2: Market Fergus Falls as a telecommuting-ready community.

It was a very new concept and not everyone understood the idea or vision initially. After some research and education, the initiative made sense to the group and the groundwork began.

NOTE: The history of Forward Fergus Falls, the key drivers, meeting minutes and more can be found on its blog site, [www.forwardfergusfalls.org](http://www.forwardfergusfalls.org).

## » key partner

Your Local Telecom: Get to know your rural telecom folks! The Minnesota Telecom Alliance is a trade association that advocates and represents the interests of more than 70 small, medium and large companies that provide advanced telecommunications services like voice, data, wireless video, and high-speed Internet access to Minnesota's metropolitan and rural communities. Engage your local telecom leaders. Talk about telework and strategize on how to leverage what you have and how to make what you have better.



» case study

In the spring of 2009, Perry County, Tennessee - population 7,900 - had the second highest unemployment rate in the nation due to major layoffs and disappearing employers. There were barriers to recruiting new businesses, due to being remote...sort of off the beaten path. Sound familiar?

The community took up several efforts, but the one that caught our eye was their goal to create 100 internet-based jobs. As with many small towns, job opportunity was limiting, or lacked upward mobility. There was a need for long-term, better wage jobs. So Perry County brought together a collaboration of partners - the workforce investment board, the biggest town, county government - and created the Digital Factory.

The concept was simple: Train rural residents to do jobs that could be done remotely.

The Digital Factory went after funding to train unemployed people for computer programming and customer service work. They used

their social networks, media and luck to connect with several national companies who agreed to hire both full- and part-time workers, and certified the program's training. Faced with inadequate or non-existent internet connections at homes, they opted to leverage their educational training site into a work site. The site was equipped with phones, computers, printers and ...well, everything you would find in a telework hotel!

The effort's impact has people placed in jobs and increased local sales tax revenue. One of the challenges is to find the funds so the effort is sustainable. But in the short term, workers have new skills, living wage jobs and a future. As one of the developers says, "At the end of every day, we know we put people to work somewhere...This is an organic way of helping ourselves."

Source: *ED Now*, May 21, 2012/ Volume 12/ Issue 10



# The Telework Hotel - A Competitive Advantage

Google "telework hotel" and the Fergus Falls effort appears as the top three entries. It's not on Wikipedia. So what is a telework hotel?

Simply put, it's a place where people who want to telework can rent a space to do their work. This might be long-term, but it's designed as more of a "drop-in" or short-term work space. The availability of a secure back-up for a home office location is attractive for both the employer and employee.

"This was a unique aspect of our effort," Stanislawski said. "We knew we had good broadband access, but what about those who didn't have broadband to their house? We felt if telework was going to be a community driver, we had to pay attention to the 'inclusive' component of our Forward Fergus Falls initiative where anyone could engage in a telework situation. We wanted someone to be able to find a telework job who may have limitations or no high speed access at home.

"We were fortunate in that we had a local businessman who saw this as an opportunity," Stanislawski continued. "Like many communities, we had underutilized facilities in town. This business leader had the asset (building) and thought if telework was the norm, it could be a value-added service. There was nothing out there like that in our town."

## Community Input/Business Action

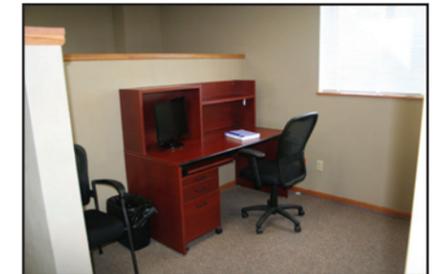
That's when the concept of telework hotel was created. There were discussions with the Forward Fergus Falls group, the Economic Improvement Commission and the building owners. "There was no blueprint to follow," Stanislawski notes. "It was created out of idea. The word 'hotel' was brought to the table by the group because we felt it would be normal to have turnover there. But it was a service we felt was absolutely essential."



Interior of Fergus Falls Telework Hotel

The idea was a place that would charge office space rent, but provided security, confidentiality, broadband access, a place to make copies, have virtual meetings, use a conference room...all the amenities of a modern day office.

It's important to realize that the Fergus Falls telework hotel was not just created for the good of the community, but the owners felt it was a sound business decision. "That's critical," Stanislawski says. "When you can get good buy-in from the private sector and they make the investment, that, in my judgment, is better than having the public sector do it. The private sector has the motive, not only common good, but they will put together a sound business plan to continue it."



Interior of Fergus Falls Telework Hotel



## Creative Thinking

However, Stanislawski notes the same concept could become reality through a number of means and it could look different in a number of ways. Perhaps some public spaces could be utilized. Maybe an existing business could promote extra telework space.

Stanislawski recommends every community take a look at such a concept as it adds credibility and authenticity. If something went wrong in the home office, a teleworker would have a place to go to potentially continue their work.

Today, the telework hotel in Fergus Falls is part of the Business Development Center. "To some extent, it has been a place that incubates new businesses and grows the economy," Stanislawski says. "Companies in

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software and insurance have looked at this and toured the facility. Major Fortune 500 companies have indicated interest. I hear over and over that this is a bell-ringer, that it makes a lot of sense. Right now we have people doing medical transcription there, working on IT, insurance companies, and non-profits. Managers of the Telework Hotel know there is expected turnover because that's what a hotel is."

There has been unexpected results from the effort to create a telework hotel. One unexpected result from the opening of the hotel in the Fergus Falls Business Development Center was that owners recently added a commercial kitchen where a snack food company has set up production. Some of the occupants have been surprising as well; think of being in the right place at the right time!

### Telework Hotel Action Items

Here are some action ideas to get your own telework hotel off the ground:

- If it's a good idea, get a few passionate people together who will work to get it done. There are key individuals in every community; engage them!
- Talk to your telecom leadership and hit the learning curve.
- Begin discussions in your community and learn who works from home now. Would they want an emergency work site? What job seekers and current workers can you engage about the effort?
- If you have empty spaces downtown, work with a building owner who might invest in the concept. Have them look at our website's Telework Hotel section.
- The local office supply business may be able to help with cubicles, computers, etc. Consider buying used equipment.
- If you look for start-up grants, strategize about the sustainability of your model. Your local Minnesota Extension business expert may be able to lend a hand.
- If you build it, will they come? That's a good question, but difficult to answer. Think of it like the city that purchases or builds spec property. Once you have it, make sure it's identified as a community asset.

### » key concept

If your community creates a telework hotel, don't forget about the potential users, especially those trying to land their first telework job. Encourage community members who are looking for work to tell potential employers that they have a backup plan in the form of an available telework hotel in case of a power outage or some other event (flood, fire) that prevents them from working in their home office.

### » key to success

Make sure your own telework hotel has a secure entrance and access by users/members 24/7/365. Your location has to be available when it's needed. Security needs to be both physical and online.



### » key concept

A telework hotel in and of itself may not be financially viable due to start-up costs and such. However, like the Fergus Falls model, becoming a business center with 1-or-2 person companies paying to rent space from month to month or year to year is a great match for a telework hotel. Plus, if there is already a business incubator in your area, adding the ability to telework in some shape or form may be a valuable asset to promote.



### New center caters to businesses

by Ryan Howard

Fergus Falls businesses now have another local tool at their disposal with the opening of the Business Development Center, at 1008 Frontier Drive.

The center, which has been up and running since late 2011, held its grand opening Wednesday at the end of the Forward Fergus Falls Telework Summit.

"The Business Development Center houses several entities," explained Doug Bartels, the center's executive director.

First it is the local home of multiple organizations, including Skyvision, Green Sneakers, and the local branch of the Red Cross.

Second, it houses the telework hotel, a spot where telecommuting employees can rent space to work away from work or home. Finally, it provides space to upstart and expanding businesses with a low level of risk.

Besides the space dedicated to tenants, said Bartels, "the rest of the facility is available for teleworkers (and businesses) on a day use basis, (or) week use, month use. Whatever. It's very flexible."

Businesses and teleworkers can rent private or semi-private workspaces, and conference rooms and training areas are also available (the training centers can also be used by companies looking to train local teleworkers).

The space is also equipped with cutting-edge telecommuting technology, allowing business owners or corporate employees to communicate seamlessly with co-workers in different offices or homes.

The center was created with the idea that every employee and every business has different needs for different spaces for different periods of time. The flexibility was a must of sponsor organization The Business Network Fergus Falls (TBNFF), which also offers mentoring and other services (including some legal and accounting help) through the center – to member and non-member businesses.

The business network is made up of various businesses in the city, all of which are committed to spurring business growth in town.

The incubation side of the Business Development Center caters to that hoped-for growth.



Ryan Howard/Daily Journal. Business Development Center Executive Director Doug Bartels cuts the ribbon at the center's Wednesday grand opening while several center staff and supporters look on.

"It's a place that's available for an upstart business to have meeting space, a private office, (and) access to such resources as fax, copying, printing (and) Internet," said Bartels.

It's also available for current businesses that need a temporary place to expand. Bartels used the example of a company that has just found a new market. Space can be rented from the center to temporarily house new employees and immediately boost sales while a more permanent setting is explored.

When TBNFF was planning the center, it wanted to focus on a new way of developing business in town – a way that took into account the mobile, independent, changing needs of a local business.

"People aren't locked into a long-term one-year location when they only need an office space for a week or a month," said Bartels.

The center also aims to minimize fears that some would-be entrepreneurs might have about starting a new business.

"We're trying to make it easier for someone who wouldn't normally take a risk," said Bruce Fuhrman, a TBNFF member and one of the center's planners.

If the center is successful, TBNFF hopes to license the idea to other communities and use that revenue to advance business development in Fergus Falls. The network has a passion for the community, said Fuhrman, and it wants to find new ways to help Fergus Falls grow.

"It's not just one person," he said. "It's our community coming together to make it happen."

To learn more about the center or learn how to rent space, call 998-4357 or visit [www.fergusfallstelework.com/Hotel](http://www.fergusfallstelework.com/Hotel).

To learn more about TBNFF, visit [www.tbnff.com](http://www.tbnff.com).



**OFFICE & MEETING SOLUTIONS**

Whether you need a temporary office setting with all the amenities necessary to accomplish your critical business tasks or a long-term office solution with access to optional business services, The Business Development Center works for you.

At The Business Development Center we're committed to helping make your business work for you!

Occupants benefit from the shared resources made available to everyone in the building as well as member businesses of The Business Network Fergus Falls (TBNFF). Member businesses of TBNFF strongly support the valuable efforts of The Business Development Center to enhance the business climate in Fergus Falls. Other community groups such as the Economic Improvement Commission and Forward Fergus Falls support The Business Development Center by holding regular meetings within the facility.

Being a part of The Business Development Center as an occupant not only gives you access to necessary business tools and resources it has to offer, but also provides an opportunity to meet key leaders engaged in developing business opportunities in and for the benefit of the community.

1008 Frontier Drive  
Fergus Falls, MN 56537  
218-998-4357 ph.  
218-739-4879 fax

**THE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER**



**A Business Resource Facility**

- Telework Hotel Suites
- Private Offices & Private Office Suites
- Shared Reception Service
- Fax, Copy, Print, Internet, Phone
- Access to Business Services
- Semi-Private Work Stations
- Technology Equipped Training Room
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- Business Development Resource Library

**Resources that work for your business.**

All inclusive: Wireless Internet, Shared Reception, Whiteboards, Phones (conferencing). Access to: fax, copy, mail, and other business systems and services.



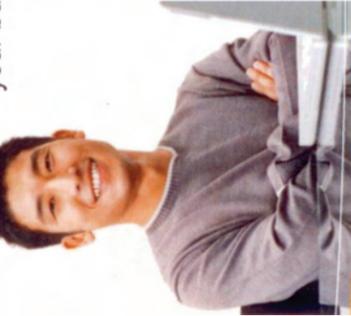
**BUSINESS SOLUTIONS**

**COMMUNICATION SOLUTIONS**

**TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS**

**SUPPORT SOLUTIONS**

flexible solutions for your business needs



The Business Development Center, Fergus Falls, offers a range of business solutions to meet the growing needs of businesses in the area. Businesses can choose from private office space to semi-private work stations, all with access to resources needed to help build their business. Access to basic business systems such as phone, internet, fax, copy, and mail make it easy to conduct business. Meeting rooms are also available for holding important board meetings, committee meetings or to meet with clients or staff. The Business Development Center also comes equipped with a training room that can be used to develop staff, educate volunteers, or to grow a business by presenting valuable products or services to prospective customers.

These resources are available for businesses, entrepreneurs, or teleworkers needing temporary work space or those needing additional space for adding call center work force staff, etc. The Business Development Center can be used for a wide-range of business development activity and can be utilized in many different ways by businesses or individuals needing temporary workspace and resources; whether it's a small start-up company of one, an individual needing temporary telework space in the telework hotel or a business that needs a bit of extra space during a time of transition, The Business Development Center can help.

**WE'RE COMMITTED TO WORKING WITH A DIVERSE CUSTOMER BASE. HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?**  
Welcome to our resources, we want to help put them to work for you and your business...

**THE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER**

**Conference Rooms:**

- Small – Free and open to all.
- Large – \$50 a day / \$25 half day.

**Training Center – \$25/hour:**

- 10 seat training facility
- Laptops
- Projector

**Private Office Suite:**

- Daily Use – \$35/day
- Weekly Use – \$150/week
- Monthly Use – \$500/month

**Private Office:**

- Daily Use – \$25/day
- Weekly Use – \$120/week
- Monthly Use – \$350/month

**Semi-Private Work Stations:**

- Daily Use – \$10/day
- Weekly – \$20/week
- Monthly – \$150/month



\* Prices subject to change.



102 East Lincoln Avenue  
Fergus Falls, MN 56537  
218-739-5294 \* 800-726-0095  
www.coopersinc.com



## Fergus Falls Telework Initiative

### Solutions For Setting Up Your Home Office



From a basic desk to a custom built workstation with everything at your fingertips—Cooper's designs your space to fit your needs.

Benefits & Features:

- ◆ Ergonomically correct workstation
- ◆ Ergonomic seating
- ◆ Locked files and storage for security
- ◆ Cost effective solutions
- ◆ Business computer systems
- ◆ Multifunction Copier/Printer/Scanner solutions
- ◆ FREE layout and design
- ◆ Local service and support



Local office supply business offers telework solutions

### » key statement

Bernadine Joselyn, director of public policy and engagement at Blandin Foundation, and a member of the Governor's Broadband Task Force, wrote about the critical need for broadband in late 2013. Here are some highlights:

The Blandin Foundation has supported rural community leaders' efforts to bring home the full benefits of broadband for 10 years. Our mission -- strengthening rural Minnesota communities - is broad (pardon the pun), so why focus on broadband, you may ask?

The answer is that we recognize broadband as the indispensable infrastructure of our age. We believe that without the availability of ultra-high speed broadband and the ability to use it, rural communities cannot survive, let alone thrive.

The disparity between urban and rural broadband access is real and persistent. A recent Connect Minnesota report indicates that 74.5 percent of Minnesota households can access fixed and mobile broadband at speeds of at least 10 Mbps download/6 Mbps upload. That is an improvement of almost five percent since April of 2013. However, the coverage map also makes clear that access at those speeds is uneven and metro-centric. Earlier Connect Minnesota reports show a

troubling seven percent difference in urban versus rural broadband adoption rates.

Perhaps not coincidentally, there is also a disparity in our state between urban and rural economic recovery and growth. The Twin Cities have long been the state's economic epicenter, but the gap

between the metro area and the rest of Minnesota is widening.

We see that in rural communities whose leaders invest time and energy to improve broadband access, it is becoming that "secondary driver," for economic development – and for education, health care, civic engagement, and quality of life. Increased use in rural areas helps build the demand that supports the business case for greater broadband deployment in rural communities.

It makes good business sense all the way around – money spent on broadband adoption and deployment in rural Minnesota (and everywhere else) is a good investment.

And, we may note, leads to JOBS!

### » key legal advise

The Fergus Falls law firm of Pemberton Law presented at the first telework conference. They presented advice for local businesses looking to engage in a telework option for employees.

Much advice is available through human resource organizations and simply searching on the internet for employee policy, sample handbooks, etc...

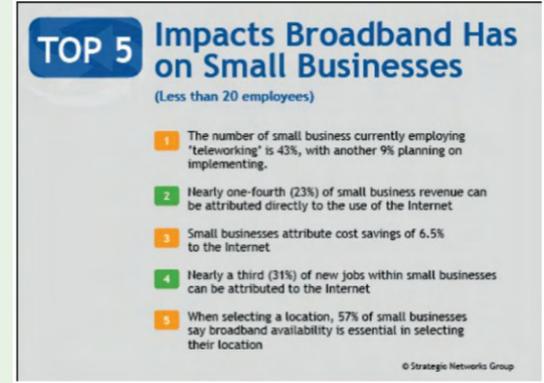
Some of Pemberton Law points included...

– The key is going to be to address, at the front end, as many of the contingencies as you can and then maintain open communication from that point forward.

– The three most important pieces an employer will need to begin a telework presence are:

- Policies
- Application
- Agreement

Watch for examples of these items on our website in the future.



# Telework Marketing and Support

We have been fortunate in Fergus Falls to have great partner support on community initiatives by our local traditional media. Since 2008, we've run awareness campaigns resulting in more than \$100,000 worth of advertising, mostly through the generosity of local media.

Organizers also asked for and received grants from both the Blandin Foundation and West Central Initiative early on in the process. This helped pay for the development of a website, alleviated expenses for holding two day-long telework conferences, and was used to enhance media coverage.

Of course, the bottom line is "does it work?" Are we helping to create jobs in this region? We'll discuss results and outcomes later, but first we'll look at marketing strategies and tactics we used to promote our own initiative.

## Telework Option on Minnesotaworks.net

Minnesota's largest database of jobs and job seekers is managed by the Department of Employment & Economic Development (DEED). The site, [www.minnesotaworks.net](http://www.minnesotaworks.net), has an option for employers to list their job with a "telecommute" option. In the same way, job seekers can look for those telecommute jobs.

The Minnesota Telecom Alliance takes full credit for this feature on the state's website as they brought the idea to DEED management. As the site was soon undergoing upgrades, the timing and value for both job seekers and employers was duly recognized and the change made.

## Going Through the Airwaves

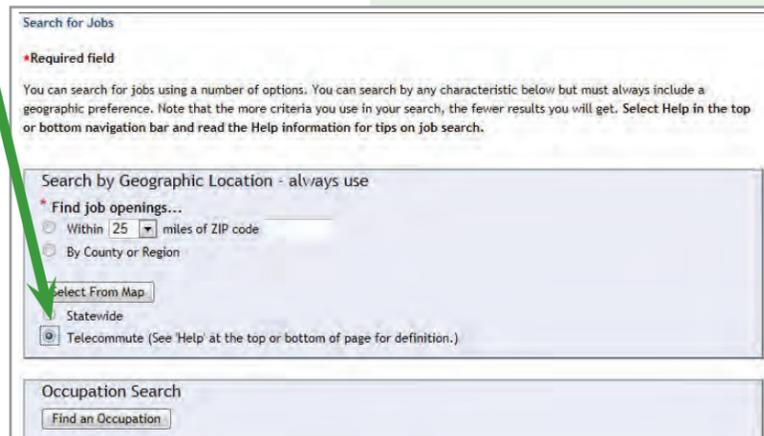
Management at Lakes Radio in Fergus Falls has really helped promote the telework initiative with news stories, on-air interviews and public service announcements. Station manager Doug Gray grasped the potential benefits for the region and embarked on an incredible ongoing campaign on all five of the firm's stations.

The most prominent of the radio efforts was the creation of a "Telework Minute" campaign. A telework jingle was purchased to provide the "Fergus Falls Telework Minute" (sounds better with music) opening and ending to the spots. The jingle, a professionally-produced piece, was one expenditure of the Forward Fergus Falls Telework Initiative budget. Lakes Radio staff then used the 30-second spot to highlight job opportunities.

Gray estimated that the initiative received more than \$100,000 worth of radio campaign exposure. As of March 2014 the Telework Minute is still filling public service airtime.

### key idea

While most job seekers are aware of [www.minnesotaworks.net](http://www.minnesotaworks.net), they may not think of using the site to look for telework jobs. There is no cost to use the site for both job seekers and employers who issue W-2's. Job seekers can register and search for jobs from any Internet-enabled computer, their local library or WorkForce Center. Employers should check with their Business Services Representative ([mn.gov/deed/](http://mn.gov/deed/)) for help in exploring telework.



## LAKES Radio

KBRF 1250 AM KZCR Z-103 KPRW 99.5 FM KJK 1020 AM KJK 96.5 FM

Listen to the Telework Minute jingle on the [www.FergusFallsTelework.com](http://www.FergusFallsTelework.com) website.

## Outdoor Media

Fergus Falls has a unique arrangement with a local outdoor advertising vendor that will provide at-cost billboard placements. We've had a "work at home" billboard featuring the various logos of partners, we've partnered with individual businesses to promote their telework hiring needs and "Fergus Falls is a great place to do business" featured someone working on their laptop by a lake (see below) - again emphasizing the quality of life aspect of doing business here.

Signage in general should be worked out on the local level, whether it's signage on your location or billboard promotions in the region.



Outdoor advertising in the Fergus Falls area for telework positions. Courtesy of Newman Outdoor.

### key media tip #1

While identifying "real teleworkers" in your region, ask ahead of time for permission to give their contact information to the media. There are strict confidentiality and privacy issues that need to be cleared ahead of time. When the Fargo television station arrived at the Fergus Falls Telework Summit and wanted to visit the home office of a teleworker, the organizers were able to provide that information, resulting in a great evening news piece. If your teleworkers are working for major companies, they need to be aware of their firm's media policies.

### key media tip #2

In this immediate media age be sure to collect, document and share any news features or media pieces about your own telework efforts. Some of those pieces are ageless. Save copies of the videos and hard copies of the news media.

### key media tip #3

Holding an event to launch your effort or an event to recognize some progress is a good way to engage the media. While you should strive to get ongoing coverage, an event or reached goal is a good way to "sell" it as a media story!

### key media tip #4

Leverage any advertising dollars through cooperative ads. If you have a billboard going up, perhaps a local business would help pay for their sponsorship of the effort.

### Telework Summits

The Fergus Falls Telework team hosted two day-long conferences to help attendees better understand the growth of telework. Top companies such as United Health, Microsoft, and Wells Fargo were represented by either a manager or a teleworker. The local Pemberton Law Firm presented legal information aimed at helping businesses establish a telework policy.

Using video technology, the founder of Flexjobs.com fielded questions and talked about the growth of telework from her home office in Colorado. The use of remote technology in healthcare was another topic, along with an in-person appearance by the founder of a company trying to bring offshore jobs back to America.

Panel presentations from teleworker managers and a group of people doing work from their homes helped shed light on their experiences.

More than 250 people were involved in the planning, presentation and participation of these summits. Another conference is in the planning stages for the spring of 2014.

### Newsworthy Efforts

There have been multiple media stories in the local and regional newspaper, and on the television news broadcasts from Fargo. Framing the story for the media is crucial and needs more discussion than we have available here. Engage the local media; because your region is different than ours, you'll have to know what works for you.

Our Telework Summits brought in news coverage. The TV reporter wanted a first-hand interview with someone working from home, so we provided the contact information. It was more of a regional event; events generally can get coverage in the media.

The following pages feature articles and advertng that have appeared in local and regional media.

**Telework Summit**  
Fergus Falls  
March 16, 2011

**What is Teleworking?**  
Any work done by regular employees outside of a traditional office setting.

**Why Telework?**

- Savings in premises costs
- Productivity increases
- Flexible working strategy
- Better balance of work and family

**Why Telework Here?**

- Fiber to the Curb & Broadband Speeds up to 50MB
- One of the best places to live: access to the lakes, arts & culture, and a solid workforce

**Welcome to the "Telework Capitol of Minnesota!"**

The City of Fergus Falls and Park Region Telephone/Otter Tail Telecom are working together to foster a new one-of-a-kind telework-friendly community and region. The region boasts a skilled labor force, beautiful natural surroundings, a thriving arts and culture scene, and a state-of-the-art communications network.

Advanced infrastructure includes fiber to the node, fiber to the curb, and fiber to the home technologies. Because of this highly advanced infrastructure, companies are enabled to enhance the quality of life for area residents and provide an optimum location for businesses.

Great efforts are also underway to provide quality conditions for teleworkers and a community-wide telework-friendly environment including wifi locations and telework conferences, like this Telework Summit!

This Summit is sponsored by Forward Fergus Falls, Otter Tail Telcom, West Central Initiative, the Fergus Falls WorkForce Center/Minnesota Department of Employment & Economic Development, Fergus Falls Economic Improvement Commission, and The City of Fergus Falls.

### key idea

Call centers value our Midwestern accent, or lack thereof, and the work ethic of our region. Remember those assets when approaching out-of-state or regional firms who hire people to conduct customer service from their home offices.



Published March 16, 2011, 09:09 AM

### Telework Seminar in Fergus Falls aims to get people to work from home

Fergus Falls, Minn. (WDAY TV) - Hundreds of jobs in our area are being moved out of the work place and into people's homes. A new push by employers to create Telework, or jobs that can be done from home, is not only gaining ground around the country, but right here at home.

After spending some time with his family, Jake Krohn is off to the office, lucky for him it's only a flight of stairs away.

JAKE KROHN - Works from Home: "I mean to be able to go downstairs for lunch, and see my 2-year old boy, and eat with the family, that's really fun."

Krohn works for Carnage Melon University in Pittsburgh as a Web Developer. After a short time living there, his family decided it was time to move back home.

Jake Krohn: "I talked to my employer and convinced him to let me keep my job and do it from home."

Just across town in Fergus Falls, nearly 100-people are trying to jump in to what Jake is already doing. The first ever Telework seminar in Fergus Falls is trying to recruit people to work from home. City leaders estimate 3-to-400 people in town already do Telework for some outside company.

HAROLD STANILAWSKI - Fergus Falls Economic Improvement: "Now you can conceivably get your paycheck from Atlanta, Georgia and work in Otter Tail County, how cool is that."

Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Dakota says it has 300-job openings for Teleworkers. Microsoft in Fargo has about 48, a growing trend that many are taking advantage of, if they haven't already.

Jake Krohn: "There's fundamentally no difference for me to be working at an office in Pittsburgh or an office in North Dakota or Minnesota."

Don't expect all jobs to be "In-sourced" to the home and that workforce camaraderie to go away.

Harold Stanislawski: "Oh I think there will always be jobs where your attendance at the office is going to be required."

Experts say technology is making it easier to do work normally done at the office in your home. They also cite gas prices and a rough economy for people looking for more convenient opportunities like Telework.



A new push by employers to create Telework, or jobs that can be done at home, is not only gaining ground around the country, but right here at home.



### All Telework and a Little Play: Remote Employment Could Boost Rural Minnesota

Jennifer Vogel March 21, 2011, 8:30 AM



Since telecommuters often can toil from anywhere, a whole lot of people are banking on the notion that the workplace of the future will be located in farmhouses, home kitchens and on small town Main Streets. At a telework summit on Wednesday in Fergus Falls, a full day of presenters made a good case that the transition is already underway.

Fergus Falls, which has had robust fiber internet since the late '90s and dubs itself the "telework capital of Minnesota," uses technology to the hilt.

In the public schools there, some teachers film their lectures and place them online, so students can watch lessons at night and work on problems during class. They use touch pad computers to teach reading; the teacher reads a book into the touch pad slowly, at medium speed and then quickly so the student can listen along while perusing an electronic book. They also have students write papers in Google Docs so teachers can monitor real-time progress.

The Internet has made it possible for Fergus Falls schools to teach remote students, via its IQ Academy Minnesota; many never set foot inside a classroom. "This is how you fight declining enrollment," said schools superintendent Jerry Ness of the two-year-old program. "We have teachers from all over the state teaching our students from all over the state. Public schools aren't used to competition. We're used to collaboration. Now what's happening is these school



**FORWARD FERGUS FALLS MINNESOTA**  
Telework Initiative

FlexJobs is an innovative, professional job service to help you find the best flexible jobs available, including telework jobs, safely and easily. Every job is hand-screened and legitimate. **Guaranteed.**

**FlexJobs allows you to find great flexible job listings -- quickly, easily and safely.** In the current economy, more than ever, it's important to use the best tool available to help you find legitimate, professional job listings faster, so ideally you can get a job faster and without the worry of scams. FlexJobs is that tool.

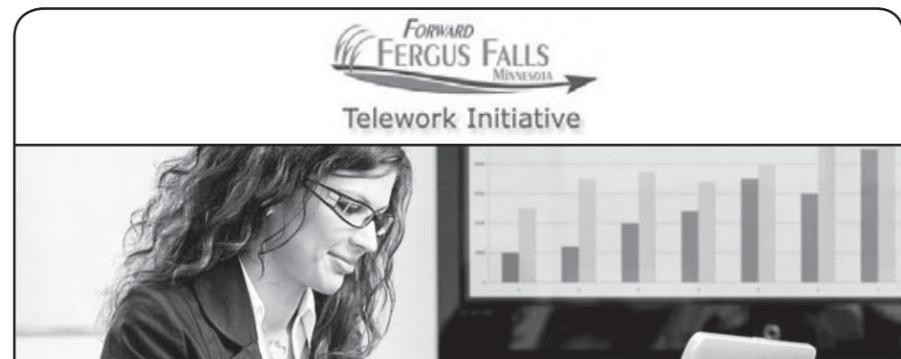
Visit the Flexjobs website to view all their current listing of telework jobs available at: [www.flexjobs.com](http://www.flexjobs.com). You can also find helpful telework information at the Fergus Falls telework website at: [www.fergusfallstelework.com](http://www.fergusfallstelework.com) or you may call our office to speak with Harold Stanislawski at 218-332-5428.

*Below is a sampling of more than 80 current telework job openings available on the state's Minnesotaworks.net website; there is no cost for job seekers to register, just search for "telecommute" jobs.*

- Best Buy – Geek Squad Covert Agent - Dispatcher Job
- Best Buy – Geek Squad Covert Agent - Fulfillment
- Connections Academy – High School Science Curriculum Content Editor
- CLIENTS First Consulting, LLC – Website Content Professional
- Covenant Business Group – B2B Marketing Assistant

The Fergus Falls telework initiative is a joint effort between the Fergus Falls Economic Improvement Commission and Forward Fergus Falls.

Newspaper ads that ran in This Week's Shopping News advertising available jobs on [www.flexjobs.com](http://www.flexjobs.com).



**FORWARD FERGUS FALLS MINNESOTA**  
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*The following is a sampling of current jobs available at [flexjobs.com](http://flexjobs.com) including the company name*

- Desktop Support / SMB Companies, LLC
- Customer Service Representative / TeleTech@Home
- Healthcare Director / Aetna
- Bid Manager / Xerox
- Director Reporting and Data Analysis / Well Point

Visit the Flexjobs website to view all their current listing of telework jobs available at: [www.flexjobs.com](http://www.flexjobs.com). You can also find helpful telework information at the Fergus Falls telework website at: [www.fergusfallstelework.com](http://www.fergusfallstelework.com).

The Fergus Falls telework initiative is a joint effort between the Fergus Falls Economic Improvement Commission and Forward Fergus Falls.

8/29/12

The Forum, 7/2/11



**Lynn Swenson is surrounded** by family photographs as she does some of her work for Microsoft from her home in Horace, N.D.

# HOMEWORK

## More local businesses offering work-from-home arrangements

By Tracy Frank  
tfrank@forumcomm.com

FARGO – Lisa Le used to dread commuting from her Moorhead home to her Fargo job, especially in the winter.

So when the self-proclaimed hombody heard about a new work-at-home pilot program Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Dakota was working on for Noridian Mutual Insurance Co., she readily volunteered.

"For me, it's just so much less stressful to work at home," Le said.

Le is a provider service representative for Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Dakota. She helps health care providers with questions about things like benefits claims or approvals.

When a provider calls, the call could go through to someone in the Blue Cross Blue Shield building in Fargo or to someone like Le, who takes calls in her home.

BCBSND started the telecommuting pilot last spring as a way to help recruit and retain employees and as a way to make sure work can still be done if the building is inaccessible or shut down due to a disaster, said Lisa Johnson, director of the customer contact center.

Johnson said that while BCBSND hasn't reached its goal, the company is striving to provide the technology needed to allow employees to work outside the building.

The telecommuting option will save the company money by saving building space. Also, technology needed for telecommuters is less expensive than what's needed for office workers, Johnson said.



**Lisa Le, a provider service representative** for Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Dakota, works from her south Moorhead home, where she helps health care providers with questions about things like benefits claims or approvals.

**Online**  
► [www.teleworkresearchnetwork.com](http://www.teleworkresearchnetwork.com)

By the end of the year, the company expects to have 10 telecommuters, said Mark Tschider, vice president of claims and the customer contact center.

"From the company standpoint, it allows us to reach out to a new workforce," he said. "People today are looking for flexibility from their employers."

An estimated 20 to 30 million peo-

ple currently work from home, or telecommute, at least one day a week, according to Telework Research Network, an independent research and advisory firm that specializes in telework and workplace flexibility.

The number of Americans who worked from home or remotely at least one day a month for their employer increased from 12.4 million in 2006 to 17.2 million in 2008, the research firm stated.

Jodi Wical, Sanford Children's

### Telecommuting to save money

Working from home or telecommuting helps save time, fuel, and money.

According to Telework Research Network, an independent research and advisory firm that specializes in workplace flexibility, if the 50 million Americans who could work at home did so two and a half days a week:

- The nation could cut Gulf oil dependence by 60 percent, save \$40 billion at the pumps, and reduce greenhouse gases by 78 million metric tons each year.
- By cutting out commute times, employees would gain back two and a half weeks of wasted time each year.
- Businesses would save over \$200 billion in real estate, electricity, absenteeism and turnover.

### Working from home not for everyone

Telecommuting, or working from home, is becoming a popular trend. But it doesn't work for everyone. While some people enjoy the flexibility of not going into the office each day, others may find they have a difficult time staying on task, especially if they are trying to juggle other household chores.

- Here are some tips for working from home:
- Lay out a formal work schedule that's appropriate for you and your family and stick to it.
  - Turn off the TV. Your business needs your full attention.
  - Work somewhere sheltered from distractions. Create a home office that allows you to feel like you are actually going to work.
  - Don't try to do everything. When working from home, you have to be able to prioritize and say no to some of the non-essentials.
- Source: Mindy Lilyquist, About.com

Fergus Falls Daily Journal 3/17/13

# Living here, working anywhere

Telecommuting growing in popularity locally

By Darla Ellingson  
Daily Journal

Born in Breckenridge and raised in Dent, Tony Kimball could be considered a pioneer in telecommuting, after leaving the Supercomputer Center in Minneapolis and taking his job with him in 1991. When Fergus Falls got an Internet service provider in 1994, he was able to move back here with his family.

Currently Kimball works for Bloomberg L.P., based out of New York, consulting on hedge funds and lending, designing trading strategies and estimating credit risk.

"I love my work and I'm extremely well paid, but it is not something I could otherwise do in Fergus Falls," Kimball said.

Kimball isn't alone. There are about 350 teleworkers in Fergus Falls, and the number is growing, according to Fergus Falls Economic Improvement Executive Director Harold Stanislawski.

Telecommuting is on the rise, news that major companies such as Yahoo and Best Buy are re-evaluating their telework positions.

After news that Best Buy was pulling back teleworkers, Stanislawski contacted a local teleworker for the company who reported that while some workers in operations were required to work on site because of the nature of their job, people in his area of technical support were continuing to telecommute.

Stanislawski said he has been in talks with major companies, such as Blue Cross Blue Shield, to expand job opportunities. But while the Twin Cities touts easing traffic congestion as one of the top benefits, Stanislawski puts new job creation at the top



Jake Krohn has created a flexible lifestyle that allows him to work from home, from his rented office, or from a variety of Internet hotspots like Cafe 116. Krohn appreciates that family time he has daily with his son (pictured in background). Darla Ellingson/Daily Journal

of the list.

"Let's say a couple moves here for a job — if the spouse can't find work, they may leave the area," said Stanislawski, who has been championing the concept through Forward Fergus Falls and the Telework Initiative. He feels it is imperative to add to the job base of the region.

A basic concern for employers is whether or not telecommuting employees will really be working. Stanislawski said research is overwhelming in proving that on average employee productivity actually increases with telecommuting.

"One of my greatest problems is knowing when to stop work-



Mary Robertson reviews telecommuting opportunities for the Economic Improvement Commission's Telework Initiative on flexjobs.com, and sends out weekly job opportunities to interested potential employees via e-mail. Darla Ellingson/Daily Journal

ing," said Kimball, who works from home in Fergus Falls part of the week and in Manhattan part of the week. "The greatest advantage is having family time and being there for the entirety of the process of my daughter growing up."

Jake Krohn also took his job with him when he moved to Fergus Falls from Pittsburgh. Working for Carnegie Mellon University, Krohn used to go an

office to do his computer work. He started telecommuting as a lifestyle choice when he and his wife started their family.

"There was some initial resistance (about telecommuting), but not a deal breaker," said Krohn, who telecommuted for four years.

Eventually Krohn felt he wanted to be more connected to

See **Telework** — Page 3

## Individual Company Promotions

The phone rings and a company wants to hire teleworkers in your area. What now?

Fergus Falls has had such experiences. We engaged those companies and put them in touch with the local WorkForce Center. We gave them the contacts for local advertising and helped put a billboard up at no cost.

For your own community, there are resources that can be leveraged to help companies fill their talent needs.

A free collaborative billboard gave Doherty some help hiring teleworkers for their Bluestem project. Doherty hired and trained a total of 100 people from the Alexandria/Fergus Falls, MN area to work in at-home call center agent jobs for their client, Bluestem Brands, Inc.

» key news event

Fergus Falls is one of seven communities nationwide to be honored with the title Smart Rural Community by NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association, which cited Fergus Falls’ advanced communications services and collaboration with local leaders in Economic Development and Telework as keys to its success.

At a gathering of more than 1,000 leaders of rural telecommunications providers hosted by NTCA, Fergus Falls was honored with an award for deploying advanced technologies to enable innovation in the areas

of economic development and commerce, education, enhanced health care, government services, security and energy use. Fergus Falls efforts were judged against those of dozens of other communities nationwide by a panel of experts from the fields of telecommunications, software and technology services, education, health care and finance.

“Fergus Falls is a prime example of the power of a broadband connection and a steadfast commitment to growth and prosperity,” said NTCA Chief Executive Officer Shirley Bloomfield. “Not only are the people of Fergus Falls charting their own path to a more prosperous future, they are also creating a road map for many more communities across the country to follow suit. I commend the people of Fergus Falls for these extraordinary efforts.”

The NTCA Smart Rural Community initiative recognizes and celebrates the efforts of rural telecommunications providers and their communities to deliver technologies that make rural communities vibrant places in which to live and do business. The goal of the initiative is to foster the development of Smart Rural Communities throughout rural America by recognizing trailblazers and providing resources to assist broadband providers and connected industries.

“We are pleased and excited to accept this award,” said Park Region Telephone and Otter Tail Telecom CEO Dave Bickett. “We have worked hard with our local leaders to ensure that our area residents in all our service areas have access to advanced communications and the many benefits those services enable.”

The Telework Initiative, done in cooperation with the Fergus Falls Economic Improvement Commission, is simply one example of the potential offered by advanced communications.



9/1/13 Fergus Falls Daily Journal article



» Some types of jobs that lend themselves to Telework!

- Accountant
- Actuary
- Architect and drafting
- Bookkeeping, accounting and auditing clerks
- Building inspector
- Burglar and fire alarm installer and repairer
- Buyer (retail trade)
- Cartographer (map maker)
- Ceramic engineer
- Chemical engineer
- Chemist
- Civil engineer
- Clerks, general office
- Commercial artist
- Computer programmer
- Computer repair
- Computer systems analyst
- Computer software engineer
- Contract administrator
- Copy editor/website editor
- Copywriter/website writer
- County agricultural inspector
- Dietitian consultant
- Economist and market research analyst
- Electrical/electronics engineer
- Environmental health specialist
- Fashion designer
- Field service representative
- Financial analyst
- Food product sales representative
- Health physicist
- Human resources manager/professionals
- Industrial engineer
- Instrumentation technician
- Insurance adjuster, examiner and investigator
- Insurance claims processor
- Insurance sales agent
- Insurance underwriter
- Interior designer
- Labor relations specialist
- Landscape architect
- Lawyer
- Legal secretary
- Librarian (research)
- Loan officer
- Manager, general and top executive
- Manufacturers’ sales representatives
- Mathematician
- Mechanical engineer
- Medical secretaries
- Medical transcriptionist
- Meeting planners
- Meteorologist
- News reporter/blogger
- Office machine repair person
- Paralegal personnel
- Physicians and surgeons
- Physicists
- Online post secondary teacher
- Production and material coordinator
- Production planner
- Psychologist
- Purchasing agent
- Real estate appraiser
- Robotics engineer
- Secretary
- Securities broker
- Social worker
- Statistician
- Surveying occupations, land
- Tax preparer
- Technician illustrator
- Technical writer
- Telephone service representative (utilities)
- Telephone solicitor/sales/customer support
- Title officer/title searcher
- Tool designer
- Travel agent
- Typist and word processing technician
- Urban planner

# Finding a Telework Job

Let's be clear: Any regional telework initiative is about opportunity, awareness and education. Job seekers in your region, or people looking to relocate to your area, have more employment options if telework is added to the opportunity mix. Local employers can expand their talent pool by looking outside the region.

**In our research, we feel the most telework job potential would be in customer service, healthcare, insurance, IT, finance, online education and sales.**

For job seekers, the fact remains that it's a lifestyle/workstyle that isn't suited for everyone. Not every job is suited to be done remotely.

Yet it's still a viable option for someone with marketable skills. Plus there are opportunities for both low- and high-skilled individuals.

"It's a changing workforce," Stanislawski says. "Telework has a place for anyone of any age and most skill sets. Considering the demographic situation in our rural areas, telework can be an interesting option for retirees who want to get back into workforce because they still have valuable skills. There's work for beginning workers, those with IT or healthcare backgrounds; anyone can jump on this bandwagon because in our experience, companies are willing to hire at both ends of the spectrum."

Here's a **Top Ten List** for job seekers featuring advice given to us by the telework managers we've connected with and in our own work with the Fergus Falls Telework Initiative.

- 1) Did you find a great job that matches your skills, but would require you to move? And that's not an option? Do the ASK! Ask if the company would consider a work-at-home arrangement, or maybe it's a case where you would be at the company for a few weeks before moving your office back home. How flexible is the company for good talent?
- 2) If there's a telework hotel or if your community creates resources for teleworkers, mention it in your cover letter.
- 3) Connect with your area WorkForce Center and ask about Creative job Search. It's an award-winning workshop that helps job seekers in all facets of finding work.
- 4) You have to have computer skills. There are no-cost and low-cost options for getting more comfortable with computers including community education classes. Check with your public library, too.
- 5) Do you have good time management skills? There are certain qualities a teleworker needs besides the skill set you bring to the job. Do some online research to see if it makes sense for you.

## » key idea

One of the challenging aspects of attracting workers to a rural region is the availability of jobs for a spouse. That can be a key factor in the family decision to relocate. And our rural communities need relocating! To compete for talent, a telework initiative in your rural Minnesota community can assist that spouse in finding online work through resume coaching, skills matching and identifying opportunities. Talk to your local WorkForce Center about their resources, too.



- 6) Don't look at working from home from your kitchen table. You need to create professional workspace. There's plenty of online help to guide you. Then see #5.
- 7) Be flexible. One manager said they hire teleworkers, but they have to live within an hour's drive of the company's location. Other firms require some weeks of training before letting workers head out on their own.
- 8) Prove yourself. If you're the first one in your firm to telework or if your firm has had a bad experience in the past, offer to prove that it works. Maybe you start off with a half day in your home office, or maybe you fulfill a project by working from home. Employers want results for your efforts; provide good results from a telework situation and you'll be on your way. Another way to prove yourself or try the concept is through a staffing agency. They may be looking for temp-to-hire workers or on-call workers, or people they can place in full-time jobs. Kelly Services and Doherty are two such firms; search for others.
- 9) Be aware of scams. There are so many legitimate work-at-home options with reputable companies, firms you've heard of, that to respond to some random email or clicking a "work at home" ad on a website is not necessary and probably not a very good idea. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. And never pay to apply or pay a fee for a "list of at-home jobs." If you're curious about the "stuffing envelopes at home" or doing some other trivial task for lucrative amounts of cash, realize that the work you do will NEVER be good enough to warrant giving you money for your work. You will never win with these scams.
- 10) Do the research. We're only scratching the surface of tips for finding a good online job. There are job seeker tips, manuals and other information online. Ask for help from your local library or WorkForce Center, too.

## » characteristics of good telework employees

- Have a high level of skill and knowledge in dealing with work-related responsibilities.
- Demonstrate a high level of independence.
- Goal and/or task-oriented.
- Well-established and self-motivated.
- Require minimal supervision.
- Require minimal office socializing.
- Want to telework.
- Have jobs with portable tasks.

## » benefits of teleworking

### Employer

- Increased productivity
- Competitive recruitment advantage
- Employee retention
- Improved employee morale
- Decreased staff turnover
- Promotes compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Continuity of operations

### Employee

- Improved work environment with fewer distractions
- Increased job satisfaction
- Decreases stress
- Increased flexibility
- Decreased costs associated with work and travel
- Increased safety in home and community

### Community

- Decreased air pollution
- Decreased gas consumption
- Decreased rush hour traffic
- Less dependence on foreign oil
- Increased potential for economic development and payroll; money coming into the community from outside

## TELEWORK PILOT PROJECT



## WSDOT Employee Telework Pilot Project Phase 2.2 Final Report & Pilot Summary

### Executive summary

WSDOT continues to explore the benefits of an expanded telework program and its suitability within WSDOT office cultures. The first two phases of this comprehensive pilot project determined that offering employees the option to telework fosters a more efficient and satisfied workforce, fits their office culture and reduces vehicle carbon emissions, energy consumption and personal leave time. Built on the previous phases, Phase 2.2 further tested how available tools and technology enable productive and accountable computer-based work performed remotely.

Based on results, Phase 2.2 was a success, even though it fell short of the pilot's participation goal.

- Fourteen of 17 participants reported they were just as or more productive while teleworking.
- One participant who self-reported "less productive" determined telework was not a right fit for their work style. The other two participants were unsure, one of which noted he had only teleworked once during the pilot.
- Nine supervisors reported telework employees were just as (8) or more productive (1) while teleworking. One supervisor reported telework employees are less productive. Nine others were unsure.
- In a post survey of 64 of employees, 31 (50 percent) stated an option to telework would make them enjoy their jobs more, while 23 (38 percent) others were unsure.
- Of 25 supervisors, 17 (68 percent) reported telework boosts morale, while five (20 percent) were unsure.

- Seventeen supervisors reported telework helps employees concentrate on difficult tasks.
- Eleven out of 13 telework supervisors have a positive opinion of telework.
- Ten out of 13 telework supervisors reporting using the telework report.
- One participant reported using less leave (Annual, Sick, LWOP and TSRA) due to telework. The rest reported using similar amount of leave as before.
- Participants saved money and time from traditional commuting. Total value of fuel cost saved during pilot: \$1,272. \*\*
- Total value of time savings during pilot: \$5,919.\*\*\*
- Participants reduced energy consumed in the office and transportation emissions from their commute. Energy saved at WSDOT facilities: 36,837 kWh.

\*\*Includes participant recorded commute data during the pilot. Participants analyzed as a group rather than individually. Participants were inconsistent in recording trip calendar data. Fuel savings based on \$4 per gallon and average trip miles; time savings based \$21.90 per hour and average commute time.

\*\*\* Based on pilot commute data from 10 participants.

\*\*\*\* Calculation revised from previous phase (did not calculate hours the equipment was off and therefore underestimated the savings). Captures energy use by monitors, PCs and laptops based on surveys and commute data.

We collaborated with a Washington State Department of Transportation project manager who shared this resource with us.

# Identifying Your Local Talent

One of the challenges we have in our own communities is trying to get a sense of the talent pool available for both local employers and outside businesses who want to hire.

The development of the Fergus Falls Talent Community is one effort to address that challenge.

The cities of Fergus Falls, Brainerd, and Crookston, Minnesota, received a grant that was administered by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) with financial support from the Otto Bremer Foundation, to create local "talent communities." The Talent Community is a website where employers looking to hire can use social media to connect to persons with specific skills levels. These individuals may or may not be looking for work, but that's what makes the social aspect of the process so powerful.

In the same manner, Talent Community members can research and connect with businesses, again using social media.

The key to this community is the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC), a nationally-recognized credential that measures an individual's reading, math and problem solving skills. Individuals must have the authentic credential and businesses must realize the potential of persons having that skill assessment.

What makes it so powerful is that the parent company of the NCRC is ACT, the same company that provides a college entrance exam. Some years ago, companies noted that if ACT could tell how someone would do in college, were they able to use the same process to predict how someone would do in a job? ACT has now profiled (or identified) the specific skills needed in thousands of different occupations.

Future workforce for the region is critical to the success of our communities and the Talent Community concept is an attempt to define the existing talent better for our employers.

Fergus Falls leaders consider their Talent Community ([www.fergustalent.com](http://www.fergustalent.com)) a work in progress, but it will provide a competitive advantage in helping provide a more accurate picture of the local workforce for outside companies. Consider having the NCRC available for companies who want to assess the talent in your area.

The NCRC assessment is available through the local WorkForce Centers. Businesses that want to know more can contact their local Business Services Representative through the DEED website ([www.mn.gov/deed/](http://www.mn.gov/deed/)).

### » key idea

Engage your school alumni! Is there a school foundation or alumni group? Who puts together the class reunions? Let them know about your telework initiative and invite them or people they know to check it out. One advantage in engaging this audience in conversations is that you don't have the "what's it like to live here" education piece. There may be updates to what alumni remember, of course.



### WHAT IS THE NATIONAL CAREER READINESS CERTIFICATE?

The **NCRC**, issued by **ACT** (yes, the college entrance exam folks), is a nationally-recognized credential that measures **essential workplace skills** and **reliably predicts workplace success**.

Looking for a pool of certified talent? **More than 3,500 individuals** in Northwest/West Central Minnesota have earned their certificate.

**Shouldn't your business be looking to find and interview these skill-proven candidates?**

The **NCRC** credential is:

- Evidence-based and portable
- Industry-recognized (**40 states** have statewide programs or regional efforts)
- **Certifies essential skills** important for workplace success
- **Awarded at four levels: Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum**



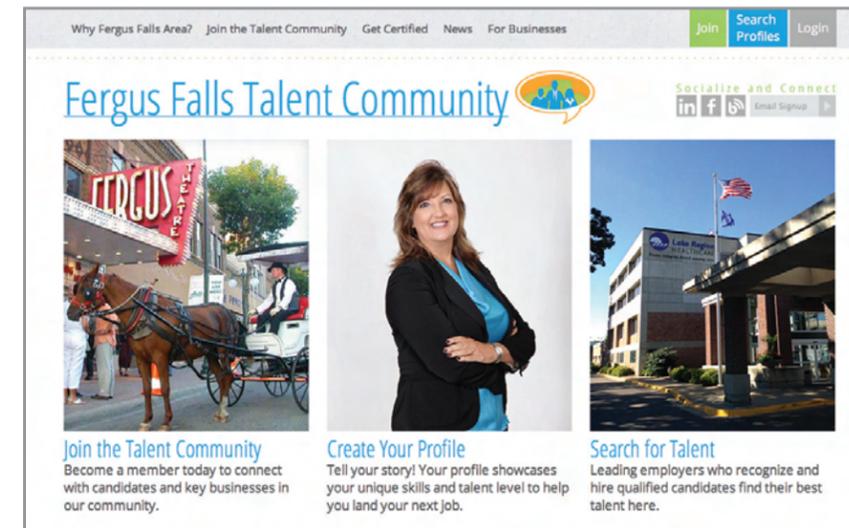
The **NCRC** exam uses **real-life** examples to measure “real-world” skills in these three areas\*:

- **Locating Information**
- **Reading for Information**
- **Applied Mathematics**

**More than 76% of ALL profiled jobs REQUIRE competencies in these areas!** The assessment questions are based on situations in the everyday work world.

*As an employer, you can “recommend” or “recognize” the NCRC credential and use it alongside other selection criteria such as education, academic credentials, work experience, background check, interview performance, etc.*

**Will you be a part of this effort? Ask for the NCRC credential in your help wanted ads!**



## Join the Fergus Falls Talent Community

*Seriously, do it!*



Job seekers who have the **National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC)** should use their certification to join the **Fergus Falls Talent Community**. In minutes, you'll be able to use your NCRC verified skills to connect with employers who know the value of your credential.

- No cost to join. Fast, fun and free!
- Able to “tell your story” and showcase your job skills using social media and direct contact with businesses
- Simply having the NCRC shows you go the extra mile, helps you “stand out”
- Learn about businesses, their culture, why people work there, etc. Find out more!

[www.fergustalent.com](http://www.fergustalent.com)



### Fergus Falls Talent Community Provides Big Boost to Onboarding Process

The Fergus Falls Talent Community provides an immediate benefit for businesses who wish to enhance or even begin their “onboarding” process.

“Employers whose end game is to develop people for long and successful careers within their company want to start the onboarding process as soon as possible,” says Rick Schara of the Fergus Falls Talent Community. “Employees who become fully engaged contribute more to a company’s success.”

Several companies in this region pair up new employees with “ambassadors” whose job is to help acclimate and coach the new hire. This is critical as research by the Marshall School of Business at the University of Southern California shows that half of all turnover happens during the first few years of employment. “It’s very important for companies to get off on the right foot with new employees,” says Marshall researcher Gerald Ledford.

Until now, most onboarding efforts take place after the new employee steps foot in the door. But what if there were a way to more fully engage that same candidate prior to actually hire?

For the first time, business members of the Fergus Falls Talent Community will have that opportunity. By engaging in the social media tools provided by the Talent Community, employers can begin the workplace values education process immediately with potential candidates.

Mentors and peers play a critical role in the ongoing success and education of a new employee. The Talent Community allows that interaction to take place earlier in the process than ever before.

» **NCRC testimonials – given May/June 2013**

**Nathan Johnson, PioneerCare  
(Fergus Falls Area Healthcare)**

“I think it’s safe to say this is a turbulent time in healthcare in terms of work force. We use the NCRC exam really for two things right now at Pioneer. One, for recruitment into our CNA training program, and second for our employee scholarship programs. We end up with top talent (when using the NCRC in their recruiting and training process).

“Historically, Pioneer has offered the CNA training for many, many years, and it’s not uncommon for us to turnover at least 75 percent of that class of 10 within a year, or a year or two. So recently we’ve seen marked improvements since we’ve deployed this new process which includes the NCRC exam. And now we’re seeing anywhere from zero to 30 percent turnover which is excellent.

“PioneerCare is really starting to focus on career development opportunities for our workforce, to grow our own, if you will. The Dept. of Human Services has an excellent scholarship program for nursing home employees. Through that program, we issue about \$40,000 in career ladder scholarships each year at Pioneer. And when a participant makes an application to that program, they are required to take the NCRC exam in addition to other steps in our process.

“It’s been a pretty successful screening tool for us and so the next thing that we’re looking at is in our homemaker positions, which is kind of a universal caregiver-type position. We looking at implementing that into our recruitment and hiring process as a prerequisite.”

**Lakeland Mold, Steve Lackner  
(Brainerd Area Manufacturer)**

“Putting people through the NCRC test has basically raised the skill level of the folks on the shop floor and the leads on the shop floor have noticed that. They’ve told me that they’ve seen a better quality of employee, both technically and socially, as the result of using the NCRC.

“We hire both direct and from staffing agencies. If we’re going to be hiring direct, we’ll recruit from both online and through the newspaper, then we’ll get hopefully many resumes and applications that we can look through. Then I’ll sort them and bring people in for interviews. Once we get that narrowed down, then everyone is required to take the NCRC test. With the staffing agency - we use that for some of our beginning positions – we also require that the staffing agencies use the NCRC and put people through that as well before we’ll consider them for employment.”



**PioneerCare Sponsored  
CNA Training**

**Begin your new career in healthcare after just a few weeks of training!**

PioneerCare and MState-Fergus Falls are partnering to provide Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training for people ages 18 and older interested in a caregiving career.

**Timeline to Your New Career:**

**Now:** Schedule your Interview and Shadowing Experience at PioneerCare Center. Try out a shift before classes begin. Complete and pass the background check. Complete the NCRC Assessment through the Minnesota Workforce Center. Call Pioneer at 218.998.1500 for details.

**January 25:** Training begins. Class will meet as follows:  
**Friday, Jan 25:** 4:00 pm - 9:30 pm  
**Tuesday, Jan 29 & Wednesday, Jan 30:** 4:00 pm - 9:30 pm  
**Tuesday, Feb 5 & Wednesday, Feb 6:** 4:00 pm - 9:30 pm  
**Saturday, Feb 9:** 8:00 am - 1:30 pm  
**Tuesday, Feb 12 & Wednesday, Feb 13:** 4:00 pm - 9:30 pm  
**Tuesday, Feb 19 & Wednesday, Feb 20:** 4:00 pm - 9:30 pm  
**February 21:** PioneerCare Orientation - 4:00 pm - 6:00 pm  
**February 23-24:** Clinical Experience - 6:00 am to 4:30 pm  
**Early March:** Complete and pass the CNA exam!

All training expenses are paid for those who successfully complete the program and become a CNA-certified caregiver at PioneerCare. Students pay the cost of the certification exam.

Join our neighborhood teams where the focus is on person-centered care. We are committed to creating a home-like environment where deep, meaningful relationships connect our residents, families and staff.

**PioneerCare offers competitive pay and benefits including shift differentials, 401K, credit for experience, paid time off and more. Contact us today to get started!**

PioneerCare Center | 1131 Mabelle Ave S | Fergus Falls  
 Phone 218.998.1500 | Fax 218.998.1580  
 Application materials online at [www.pioneer-care.org](http://www.pioneer-care.org)

**PIONEERCARE**  
 An Equal Opportunity Employer

» **good telework habits**

- Take teleworking seriously.
- Complete job tasks in your designated workspace.
- Have some type of ritual to begin and end your day.
- Maintain a consistent schedule on teleworking days and remember to take breaks throughout the day.
- Plan your teleworking tasks at least a day ahead of time.
- Keep a log of work completed on telework days.
- Let family members, friends, and neighbors know when and how often you may be interrupted. Strive for minimal interruptions.
- Communicate regularly with supervisor and office staff.
- Stick to all deadlines.
- Maintain or increase your level of performance.
- Attend department and group meetings.
- Keep your supervisor informed of your progress.
- If teleworking is not working out for you, talk to your supervisor.



Source: WSDOT telework handbook

# Hiring Teleworkers - The Business Side

In our years of talking to businesses about telework, and interviewing managers who have teleworkers on the payroll, one theme stands out: It's all about expanding the talent pool. If you can't find the talent you need in your backyard, technology enables you to connect to and hire remote talent.

One of the biggest firms our initiative works with is United Health. The second largest private employer in Minnesota, United Health has a huge remote work force – more than 20,000 teleworkers throughout the United States...plus some in Canada. The Minnesotaworks.net telecommute search option brings up dozens of openings for United Health.

At the time of this writing, we've been told another big Minnesota firm is doing a pilot project with at-home customer service clients. Following a 4-week training, more than 100 new employees packed up their training computers and set-up shop in their homes. These employees make \$10 an hour and will be eligible for benefits. The parent company is assessing whether this makes sense to their bottom line; if it does, stay tuned – there may be hundreds of openings coming back from a foreign country.

Concerning bringing jobs back to the USA, one firm we've worked with specializes in just that. Rural America Onshore, started by entrepreneur Christopher Hytry Derrington, is working with firms to find talent in the country. Businesses can then use technology to connect with that talent. Derrington spoke to the audience during the first Fergus Falls Telework Summit. Here's a quip from their website:

*A minority-owned company, Rural America OnShore Outsourcing enables customers to cut project and labor expenses by up to 40 percent by using lower cost, rural-based professionals providing a superior outsourcing alternative so businesses need not send projects offshore nor use expensive urban vendors.*

## Healthcare and Telework

One of the hiring sectors that has been expanding their reach using telework technology is healthcare. With an aging demographic and people wanting to stay in their homes longer, healthcare facilities are using technology to provide remote services to seniors. The phenomenon is also apparent in other medical areas from surgery to psychological evaluations.

Mary DeVany, Outreach Director for the Great Plains Telehealth Resource & Assistance Center, administered through the University of Minnesota, was a keynote speaker for a telework summit. Her presentation was entitled: "Telework: Why Telehealth is critical for rural communities."

"Healthcare often plays a foundational role in communities as they strive to maintain a strong economic presence," DeVany said. "What happens if a community isn't able to attract the providers it needs, whether it be because of size or simple availability? The utilization of telehealth services is one option to consider when addressing these challenges," she said.

### » key concept

#### The Lure of Telehealth

**Providers:** It's important for community leaders to realize that managers in government are starting to be approached by companies claiming to improve the bottom line by providing social services, counseling or other services via the internet.

Some private Minnesota companies are already offering telehealth or social services to residents in rural areas through teleconferencing...and even just the telephone. Part of the challenge, as mentioned in this section, is finding professional, qualified and licensed staff to provide the required services.

Innovative firms in populated areas realize if they can offer telehealth services in your region, they can easily compete on price - which can be music to the ears of agencies looking to get more for less and save taxpayer dollars. While there may be a short-term cost savings, there are costs to communities who lose in-person professional offices.

Make sure your community is engaged with the healthcare providers about telehealth possibilities and consequences.

## Staffing Firms Hire Teleworkers

One of the surprising facets of our telework research is that temp agencies, or staffing firms, sometimes have a separate division that recruits and places work-from-home agents. One of those firms, Kelly Services, has been staffing and managing home-based contact center agents nationwide since the mid-2000s. Their virtual contact center solutions provide an innovative solution to the challenges faced in contact center staffing.

When Fargo Kelly Services manager Arnell Becker spoke at the telework summit in 2012, the firm had **more than 1,000 flexible home-based agents**.

Another staffing agency, Doherty, has been ramping up its recruitment of at-home workers through an arrangement with a client who hires customer service agents.

### » key concept

**Hire a Veteran:** We want to remind firms that Veterans make great hires. Some of the healthcare and IT positions are especially attractive to Veterans. Start by calling and asking for the Veteran's employment representative at your local WorkForce Center.



# Finding Workers or Jobs

## Why We Like Minnesotaworks.net

Jobs on this site are from legitimate employers who pay into the unemployment insurance account. That means that the employers will issue a W-2 at the end of the year, rather than an “independent contractor” form 1099. As the state’s largest database of jobs and resumes, there is ample reason to start here to find work.

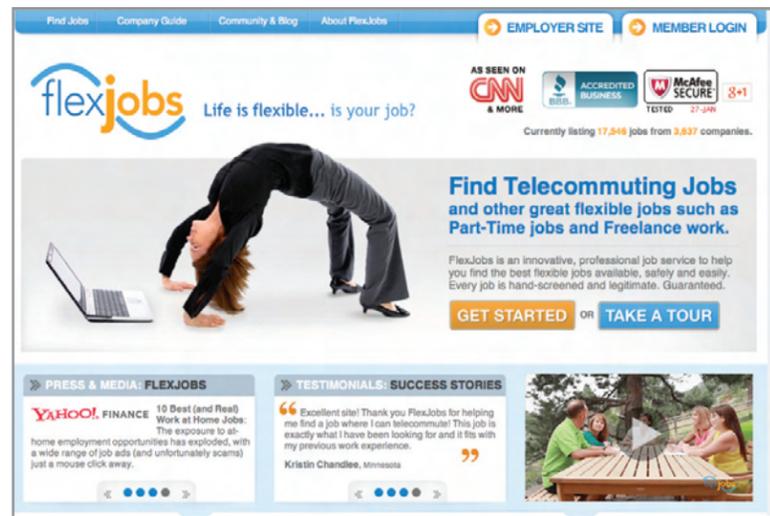
To find a telework position on Minnesotaworks.net, use the “telecommute” search option, and also change the option of “jobs posted in the last X days” to ALL from the default of jobs posted in the last 30 days.



## Why We Like Flexjobs.com

One of our favorite telework websites is www.flexjobs.com. The founder, Sara Fell, presented at our conference. The unique aspect of Flexjobs.com is that its key customer is the job seeker. Most websites require a fee from employers to list their jobs; Flexjobs gives value for a membership fee. As Fell explains, the time it takes to locate different jobs (plus the jobs listed on the site are legitimate) are part of the value of membership.

There are always membership discounts available, too. A full year’s membership can be purchased for around \$35-\$40 with discounts.



### » key concept

The number of hand-screened, professional, and flexible option jobs on flexjobs.com reached 20,000 in March of 2014. These 20,000 jobs offer a variety of work flexibility. As Flexjobs notes, people want work flexibility for many reasons, and the job listings reflect that.

So there are many other websites that the Fergus Falls Telework Initiative

could recommend, but why has Flexjobs remained our favorite for the past few years?

1. Every single job is hand-screened for legitimacy (no small feat, especially for work from home jobs, where there are dozens of scams for every real job).
2. Every job is professionally-oriented (something people can put on a resume towards a career path).

3. Finally, and maybe obviously, every job offers some type of work flexibility (a telecommuting option, freelance contract, or flexible, alternative or part-time schedule).

Also note that Flexjobs.com offers telework research and job seeking tips for anyone to see. We encourage you to check it out.

# Outcomes

We’d love to have hard and fast numbers to measure results, but for many reasons it’s difficult to put it together. Will estimates help you? Our own Otter Tail Telcom estimates they’ve provided office support for more than 300 addresses.

There’s some regional data that the DEED Labor Market Analysts can provide. One piece of data is “in-flow” and “out-flow” of jobs. They look at people employed in a selection area (usually a county) and determine where people live and if they are employed outside of the area where they live.

Our goal here is not to overwhelm with numbers; we’re not the crunchers. But you can look at existing data and perhaps make some assumptions both immediately and through time.

## Where You Work vs. Where You Live

Our DEED analyst provided the “where you work vs. where you live” numbers for Otter Tail County. Since 2008, the statistics show that the percentage of people living in the county but employed outside the county increased from 35.5% to 42%. Those numbers were pretty stagnant in the years before that (starting from 2002).

It is not certain that this was the result of our telework efforts, but those are real numbers and it means someone’s salary originates outside the county.

Most of our outcomes seem to be anecdotal. We had a Fortune 500 company ask for our help in finding teleworkers. We’ve had individuals thank us for finding work. There’s been so much positive feedback from job seekers, employers and others. In fact, we’ve heard enough from our contacts to feel this is a promising effort and one that could be part of an economic development strategy in other communities. Hence, the creation of this manual.

The biggest challenge in measuring success, Stanislawski points out, is confidentiality. “There are confidentiality and privacy issues that prevent us from talking about certain successes,” he says. “I will say that there are more great stories in this effort than we can talk about. And we are continuing to hear from companies whose interest in relocating to Fergus Falls is piqued when we throw in the telework asset we have.”

### » key concept

A huge challenge for teleworkers is having a social network. Consider using social media to connect teleworkers in your area. Form a teleworkers club. Arrange monthly “meet & greet” sessions. Invite teleworkers to become members of service clubs and community organizations.

### » Overall Impacts of the Telework Initiative

- Established Telework Hotel/ Business Incubator = \$400-\$450K in payroll
- Have major insurance company looking at hiring more teleworkers from our region.
- Attracted two major fortune 500 companies who have hired teleworkers and created at least four new jobs
- Deals pending for more telework jobs within regional companies
- **Telework (full/part-time) job estimates in the Fergus Falls area = 350+ and growing with an estimated payroll of over \$9 million.**



## » checklist for building a telework-friendly community

- ✓ Have in hand a thorough assessment of your community
  - Take a hard look at your community and conduct a SWOT analysis: identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Make predictions based on current data, technology, etc., that affects your region. Will that local business have the employees it needs to compete 10 years from now? Can you get a handle on the labor pool? What are the top hiring industries? How entrepreneurial are those firms?
- ✓ Develop strong relationships with key allies
  - Bring partners into the conversation. Are there nearby towns/ townships that should be involved? Do you know the telecom providers, the local WorkForce Center managers, the staffing services? What are their thoughts and how can they help?
- ✓ Create a stakeholder team to identify emerging opportunities for telework
  - There is plenty of evidence that telework continues to grow. Who in your community has a stake in that trend? What can they bring to the table? Your team will be unique; build on that fact.
- ✓ Authenticate sources of telework jobs
  - Which businesses in your community would step up and expand their talent pool by initiating a telework component – even if it's only one or two jobs! Identify legitimate telework positions in your region and nationally; provide that information to job seekers. Stress the red flags of telework scams.
- ✓ Identify your broadband capabilities, barriers to adoption, technical assistance sources and address security issues
  - Document the reach of high speed internet in your region. Use maps and data and measure actual broadband speed vs. advertised speed. Address barriers to adoption such as security (#1 barrier) and reliability. Identify resources for technical assistance. Will your local internet providers give assistance on other systems? Can you measure broadband satisfaction by end users? Who can provide infrastructure for your efforts?
- ✓ Network with local, regional, state and national organizations including education
  - Get to know the workforce, training and economic development representatives from the state, the local utility, and the office of broadband at the state level. Engage the leaders from education, both locally and regionally; how can customized training respond?



Talk to the initiative foundations, private associations and support sources. What resources are out there and who provides experience, information, financial assistance? Is there a “Google in shoes” in your region who can point the way (and be part of your team!)?

- ✓ Create a plan to educate teleworkers; engage the library, create seminars
  - How does a resume look for someone looking to telework? What do they need in their home office? Check out our section devoted to job seekers for some good ideas. And don't forget to tell job seekers they should leverage the community resources you will be providing for teleworkers such as networking events, the telework hotel, etc. If you have a library, work with them to developed a shelf with telework readings, studies, statistics, resources, etc. Can they provide a seminar or meetings for teleworkers, or community discussions on the topic?
- ✓ Identify private sector key partners
  - One of the great success features of the Fergus Falls Initiative is the Telework Hotel. Can this be duplicated in your community through the private sector? Is there potential space in town that could be used for telework or backup for the home office? Who in your community sees the potential and will step up?
- ✓ Seek future funding for your initiative
  - Once you have your team, your vision, your work plan in place, where do you go for funding? Keep in mind the funding aspect of your local initiative because at some point you will find great opportunities, so keep funding sources at hand. Yes, you will find ways to conduct no-cost marketing, you will have in-kind donations, etc., but there will likely be a point where your team will need funds for that next step.
- ✓ Evaluate, monitor progress, make changes and be in it for the long haul
  - How are you doing? Did you meet your goals (hint: start small!)? What's working and what isn't? Do you have a way to collect feedback from your stakeholders?
- ✓ Market your effort
  - Make sure people know about the benefits of teleworking from your region. What makes you unique and what resources does your community have for teleworkers? How do you measure being “telework-friendly?” Publicize your successes, create social networks and websites to provide information, etc. This is a great project for a marketing class or youth group, but make sure it gets done!



# Keep Telework in Perspective

This is a manual about telework, but you need to keep your perspective.

**“Telework is never going to overtake people who show up for work,”** Harold Stanislawski says. “It’s not intended to do that. Also, telework is not for everyone and it was never intended to be. But it’s one of the emerging facets of growing economies and one that we need to understand.”

As in any employer-employee relationship, there’s going to be change. The allure of working from home may last a long time or evaporate in a heartbeat. The factors that go into a home-based office may not work, or the skill set doesn’t lend itself to a remote work setting.

There’s always a need for physical labor, too, as much of Minnesota’s rural economy is hands-on; think agriculture and manufacturing and even healthcare. You aren’t going to harvest a crop from your desktop computer (at least not yet). However, that day may not be that far off!

## Looking Ahead

By several measures, we feel the Fergus Falls Telework Initiative has been and continues to be successful. It is one of the tools in our region’s development strategy.

But where do we go from here? What more can be done?

One of our goals is to share what we’ve learned. Other rural areas of Minnesota have unique assets, different labor pools and people who want to innovate. We hope the experiences and lessons from the Fergus Falls Telework efforts, as touched on in this booklet, will spark discussions in your own community, and talks that will lead to action.

The one challenge we all face is a lack of resources. It may be limited broadband. It could be great ideas that need funding. “We can’t get apathetic about the effort,” says Stanislawski. “We have to keep promoting it and keep learning and understanding the trends of workforce in our country. We need to educate ourselves on where technology is at and where it’s going. It’s only going to get better and faster. This is a true megatrend.

“Technology will make telework even more pronounced than where it is today,” he continues. “We need to keep our eye on the prize. If you want to grow payroll in your community, create more options. Stay on this horse and it will not let you down at the end of the day.”



Economic developers should, in particular, consider telework as a local growth strategy. “Today what we see in economic development,” Stanislawski continues, “is that brick and mortar is always going to be necessary, but employers and business owners today want to maximize what they have. They are looking for more profit, without spending resources on capital expenses. Telework has a play in that.”

### So Now What?

Where do we go from here? More important perhaps is where do YOU go from here?

This needs to be said again. Telework is NOT going to ever overtake people who show up for work. Telework is not the right choice for everybody. It was never intended to be.

Yet recognizing that telework is viable and real is important. Identifying and providing resources to teleworkers and businesses is sound economic development practice.

Good luck in your own journey!

### » thank you

A special thank you to

- The Blandin Foundation
- Otto Bremer Foundation
- West Central Initiative
- The City of Fergus Falls
- Otter Tail Telcom and Park Region Telephone
- The Fergus Falls Economic Improvement Commission
- The local WorkForce Center
- Rural Minnesota CEP
- The Fergus Falls Chamber of Commerce
- Lakes Radio
- The Fergus Falls Daily Journal
- The Midweek
- AHEC
- Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED)
- Our local DEED Business Services Representative
- UnitedHealth
- Newman Outdoor Signs
- Microsoft
- Eggen Group Marketing
- Forward Fergus Falls and the telework committee, Nancy and Mary, and all the individuals who contributed with their ideas, experiences and wisdom.



[ForwardFergusFalls.org](http://ForwardFergusFalls.org)

c/o Fergus Falls Economic  
Improvement Commission  
112 Washington Ave E.  
Fergus Falls, MN 56537  
218.332.5428



100 Main Ave.  
Underwood, MN 56586  
218.826.6161

230 W. Lincoln Ave.  
Fergus Falls, MN 56537  
218.998.2000



112 Washington Ave E.  
Fergus Falls, MN 56537  
218.332.5428