Summary

Telework within the Bureau of Reclamation Lower Colorado Region Office

In 2010 the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey was taken of all employees of the United States Department of the Interior (DOI). Two questions embedded within this large survey addressed participation and satisfaction with the Department’s Telework program. Telework is a working status where employees perform job duties at an approved worksite other than their primary work location. The survey indicated that telework participation in the Bureau of Reclamation Lower Colorado Region (BORLCR) was significantly lower than the Department of Interior’s department-wide average. It also indicated a low level of satisfaction with the Telework Program within the Region.

A team of researchers from The University of Nevada, Las Vegas were invited by management to observe, assess, and offer recommendations. While the original survey highlighted low rates of reported participation, the researchers discovered that data capturing actual participation rates in the office did not exist. It was determined by the research team that the first step to improving participation would be to observe the functional telework policy, compare and contrast it with the Department of the Interior standards, and offer recommendations to generate data necessary to develop an updated telework policy by management.

The DOI encourages all of its agencies including the Bureau of Reclamation to participate in the Federal Telework Program. According to TEAct, “The term ‘telework
‘or ‘teleworking’ refers to a work flexibility arrangement under which an employee performs the duties and responsibilities of such employee’s position, and other authorized activities, from an approved worksite other than the location from which the employee would otherwise work” (Telework n.d.) Although the concept of a flexible work arrangement has been around since the 1930’s, it was not until the 1970’s when it was reintroduced and the term “telework” was coined by Jack Nilles (Jala n.d.)

On December 9, 2010 the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 (TEAct) became law. By this act, each executive agency of the Federal Government is mandated to establish a telework program. The law specifies requirements for the program and establishes implementation within 180 days of passage. The Department of the Interior, one of the executive agencies in the Federal Government, must comply with telework program requirements.

The UNLV research team met with BORLCR representatives to determine what telework data is available, to understand applicable telework requirements, and to record the BORLCR telework process. Appendix A provides a graphical representation of the BORLCR telework process. After developing the BORLCR telework process, the team evaluated the DOI telework guidelines and TEAct to identify the requirements of each. After identifying requirements, the team performed a gap analysis to determine the BORLCR’s level of compliance with both governing documents.

While the BORLCR fails to achieve compliance in many of the TEAct areas, it must be kept in mind that many of the requirements of the TEAct were put into place after the initial observational flow and do not represent a failure on the part of the Lower
Colorado River Basin Office. In fact, with this report and managerial scrutiny, this office is maneuvering for rapid and complete compliance with the TEAct of 2010. Moreover, the TEAct distinguishes between the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Reclamation’s responsibilities. The entire Federal Government is adjusting to the new standards.

The recommendations made by this group include creating an employee eligibility list, tracking actual participation by creating a renewal policy for employees choosing to telework. It is also recommended that a database of employee status be created which tracks whether a telework arrangement is in place and in use. The accumulation of data from these improved systems will illuminate trends not currently identifiable and allow management to track TEAct compliance and measure the successes of subsequent efforts to encourage telework participation.