



TRIPARTITE GUIDELINES ON FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENT REQUESTS





CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction | 03 |
| Types of FWAs | 04 |
| Requirement for Formal FWA Request | 05 |
| Principles for Proper Consideration of FWA Requests | 05 |
| Submitting Formal FWA Requests | 06 |
| Considering Formal FWA Requests | 08 |
| Communicating Decisions on Formal FWA Requests | 10 |
| Conclusion | 11 |
| Annex A – Template for Employee to Submit a Formal FWA Request | 12 |
| Annex B – Template for Employer to Respond to a Formal FWA Request | 13 |
| Annex C – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) | 14 |
| For Employers and Employees | 14 |
| For Employers | 16 |
| For Employees | 17 |



INTRODUCTION

1. Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) are an increasingly important part of inclusive workplaces. FWAs can be beneficial to employers and employees when implemented in a manner that suits both employees' and organisational needs. FWAs enable employees to work while juggling family responsibilities such as caregiving, which will become increasingly prevalent as our society ages. Employers who offer FWAs are also better able to tap on a greater pool of manpower and retain employees in a tight labour market. Singapore's experience with COVID-19 has also demonstrated the importance of FWAs as a way to ensure business continuity and resilience.
2. These Tripartite Guidelines on Flexible Work Arrangement Requests ("**Guidelines**") set out how employees should request for FWAs and use them, and how employers and supervisors should handle FWA requests. These Guidelines replace the Tripartite Advisory on Flexible Work Arrangements issued in 2014 and the Tripartite Standard on Flexible Work Arrangements launched in 2017. These Guidelines set the minimum requirements that all employers are required to abide by and recommend other good practices for employers to consider in relation to formal FWA requests. The Guidelines do not preclude employers from adopting more progressive practices, such as those listed on www.tafep.sg.
3. The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) and Ministry of Manpower (MOM) will make reference to this set of Guidelines in supporting the adoption of FWAs and handling cases related to FWAs.

TYPES OF FWAs

4. **FWAs** are work arrangements where employers and employees agree to a variation from the standard work arrangement. FWAs may fall into one or more of these three broad categories:



FLEXI-PLACE

where employees work flexibly from different locations aside from their usual office location (e.g. telecommuting, work-from-home)



FLEXI-TIME

where employees work flexibly at different timings with no changes to total work hours and workload (e.g. flexi-hours, staggered hours, flexi-shift, compressed work schedule)



FLEXI-LOAD

where employees work flexibly with different workloads and with commensurate remuneration (e.g. job sharing, part-time work)

A non-exhaustive list of FWA types under each category can be found at www.tafep.sg.

REQUIREMENT FOR FORMAL FWA REQUEST

5. Today, many employers and employees might already engage in discussions about how work arrangements can be adjusted to meet the needs of employees and the organisation. Existing formal and non-formal practices should continue if they work well for both employees and employers. It is important to maintain a harmonious workplace culture, based on trust and reciprocity.
6. Should the employer's existing process for requesting FWAs be absent or lacking, an employee may choose to put in a formal FWA request based on this set of Guidelines. In these Guidelines, a formal FWA request is one that is made in accordance with paragraphs 11 and 12 below. Every employer should have a process in place to properly consider such formal FWA requests. These Guidelines set out the basic requirements for a formal FWA request to be made and considered.

PRINCIPLES FOR PROPER CONSIDERATION OF FWA REQUESTS

7. When employees request for FWAs and when employers manage FWA requests, they should do so based on the following understanding:
 - a. When requesting for and using FWAs, employees should do so responsibly. Employees should consider the impact on their workload and performance, as well as the impact on their team and clients, where relevant to their job role.
 - b. As far as reasonably practical, employers should explore ways to accommodate FWA requests such as reviewing work processes or re-assigning work across team members, so that clients' needs can still be met, and the company remains productive.
 - c. Each FWA request should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and be viable from the business point of view. Where there are valid business grounds, employers are not expected to approve the same FWAs concurrently for all employees in the organisation.

SUBMITTING FORMAL FWA REQUESTS

Table 1: Summary of Process to Request and Consider Formal FWA Requests



Who can make a formal request for FWAs?

8. It is common practice for new employees to be put on probation, as it gives employers the opportunity to assess the employee's suitability for the job. All employees who have completed probation (duration as determined by their employer) can make a formal request for FWAs under these Guidelines.
9. Employers are not required to, but can:
 - a. State in job advertisements and interviews what their FWA policy or approach to FWAs is. This will help employers better manage jobseekers' expectations on what FWAs they can provide.
 - b. Consider FWA requests from employees on probation.

How should a formal FWA request be made?

10. Employers should have a process for employees to submit formal FWA requests (e.g. submit via work portal or via email to supervisor).
11. As part of the process, if the employer has stipulated certain requirements (e.g. format/template, required information) for making a formal FWA request, the employee should follow these requirements by default.

12. If the employer does not have stipulated requirements or process for an employee to make a formal FWA request:
- a. The employee could make a formal FWA request in writing. The request should include the following information:
 - i. The date of the request
 - ii. The FWA requested for, including its expected frequency and duration
 - iii. Reason for the request
 - iv. Requested start date and end date (if relevant)

The employee may use the sample template in **Annex A**.
 - b. If the employee's request does not meet the requirements in paragraph 12a, it is not a formal request and thus not covered under these Guidelines.
13. Employers are not required to but can communicate other information that can help employees assess their own suitability for FWAs:
- a. Types of FWAs employees can request for, including those that may be available as a default
 - b. Reasons why certain job roles might not be suitable for specific FWA(s)
 - c. Examples of why requests might be rejected
 - d. Expectations for the use of FWAs. Examples are as follows:

Table 2: Examples of expectations for responsible use of FWAs

Supervisors should communicate to the employee the expected work deliverables while on FWAs. This includes how the employee's performance will be properly evaluated while on FWAs, and what conditions need to be met for the employee to continue using FWAs.

Supervisors and employees should discuss how the employee will remain contactable during work hours while on FWAs.

Supervisors may review FWAs with employees, including those FWAs already granted, to assess the effectiveness of the FWAs and make adjustments where necessary to meet business and employees' needs.

14. Employers may refer to www.tafep.sg for a [sample FWA policy](#) and customise it according to their own needs.

CONSIDERING FORMAL FWA REQUESTS

15. Employers should refer to these Guidelines when handling formal FWA requests from employees.

Discuss FWA requests in an open and constructive manner

16. Employers and employees are encouraged to discuss FWA requests in an open and constructive manner, and come to a mutual agreement on how best to meet both organisational and employees' needs. Should there be any disagreement, it is best for employers and employees to address them through the organisation's internal grievance handling procedure as far as possible. Unionised employees can also seek advice and assistance from their unions. This will help maintain a harmonious and productive workplace.

Consider FWA requests properly

17. Employers should consider employees' FWA requests properly. When assessing an employee's FWA request, employers should focus on factors related to the employee's job, as well as how the requested FWA may affect the business or the employee's performance of the job. Employers may visit www.tafep.sg for resources on how to assess FWA requests.

18. Employers have the prerogative to reject employees' FWA requests, but this should be based on reasonable business grounds and not personal bias against FWAs. Some examples of reasonable business grounds for rejection of FWAs are as follows:

Table 3: Possible business grounds for rejection of FWA requests

Possible business grounds for rejection

- **Cost.** Leads to significant increase in cost burden to the employer.
- **Detrimental to productivity or output.** Leads to significant decrease in the quantity or quality of individual, team or the organisation's productivity or output, or negatively impacts the organisation's ability to meet customer needs.
- **Feasibility or practicality.** Not feasible or impractical due to nature of job role, or there is no capacity to change other employees' work arrangements, or requires the need to hire new employees, to accommodate the FWA request.

19. Employers should not reject FWA requests for reasons that are not directly linked to business outcomes. Examples of unreasonable grounds for rejection are as follows:

Table 4: Examples of unreasonable grounds for rejection

Examples of unreasonable grounds for rejection

- Management does not believe in FWAs.
- Supervisor prefers to have direct sight of employee in office so that he/she can see if they are working, even though the employee has consistent satisfactory work performance.
- It is the organisation's tradition or custom to not have FWAs (e.g. staff have always been required to be in office during regular office hours, do not want to start allowing FWAs as other employees may request too).

20. Employers may refer to **Annex B** for an example of how a formal FWA request could be responded to.

COMMUNICATING DECISIONS ON FORMAL FWA REQUESTS

Communicate the decision in a timely manner

21. Employers who receive a formal FWA request should provide a written decision within **two months** from receiving the request. This means that employers should engage the employee on any clarifications and discussions on the request, as well as communicate the approval or rejection of the request, within two months.
22. If the request is **rejected**, employers should include the reason for rejection in the written decision.
23. Employers are encouraged to discuss alternatives with the relevant employee(s) if the FWA request is rejected.

CONCLUSION

24. This set of Guidelines shapes the norms and expectations around FWAs. For effective and sustainable implementation of FWAs, fostering a workplace culture based on trust and open communication is crucial. Everyone has a role to play. Together, we can create more inclusive and productive workplaces, where employees give their best at work and at home, and businesses harness the full potential of our workforce.



Services for Employers

TAFEP, the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF), the Institute for Human Resource Professionals, the Association for Small and Medium Enterprises, and SME Centres provide tools and resources, including training workshops, advisory services, and educational materials, to help organisations implement FWAs.



Services for Employees

Employees whose employers did not adhere to the Guidelines (e.g. employer did not properly consider their formal FWA request) can approach TAFEP, the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) or their respective unions for advice and assistance.

Annex A – Template for Employee to Submit a Formal FWA Request

An employee can use this template to make a formal written FWA request to his/her employer under the Tripartite Guidelines on Flexible Work Arrangement Requests, if the employer does not have their own form or process for FWA requests.

Date: _____

To: <Insert your employer's name>

I would like to request a variation to my current working arrangements.

Current work arrangement

Working days: _____

Working location: _____

Starting time of work: _____

Ending time of work: _____

Requested flexible work arrangement (FWA)

Working days: _____

Working location: _____

Starting time of work: _____

Ending time of work: _____

Frequency of FWA: _____

Details on requested FWA:

<Use this field if you need more space to elaborate on the requested FWA or if the requested FWA is not related to a change in time or location of work>

Start date of FWA: _____

End date of FWA: _____

Reason(s) for request: _____

I would appreciate your decision on this request within 2 months of the date of this request as per the Tripartite Guidelines on Flexible Work Arrangement Requests. You can find more information about the steps you need to take to respond to my request on TAFEP's page at www.tafep.sg.

I am happy to discuss this request at a time that is convenient and I am also willing to work with you to make sure that this arrangement works effectively for both the organisation and me.

 Name and Signature of Employee

 Date

Annex B – Template for Employer to Respond to a Formal FWA Request

Name of Employee: _____

Department: _____

Name of Supervisor: _____

Description of flexible work arrangement:

| Arrangement | Day/Week | Location |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Example: Telecommuting</i> | <i>Every Monday and Thursday</i> | <i>Any location outside of office, in Singapore</i> |

Reason(s) for request:

Impact on work, team, and clients, where relevant:

Outcome of request (select one): Approved / Rejected

Supervisor's justifications for outcome:

For Approved Request

Agreement on specific work expectations i.e. outcomes & standards for accountability, work quality and timeliness:

Proposed commencement date for flexible work arrangement: _____

Duration of flexible work arrangement (e.g. xx months): _____

Date for next review of flexible work arrangement: _____

Name & signature of Employee

Date

Name & signature of Supervisor

Date

Annex C – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

For Employers and Employees

1. What is the difference between a formal and non-formal FWA request?

Today, some workplaces are using either formal or non-formal ways to process FWA requests by employees. These could be in either written or verbal form. Such practices should continue if they work well for both employees and employers.

However, if the workplace does not have stipulated requirements or process for making an FWA request, an employee could make a formal FWA request based on the Tripartite Guidelines on Flexible Work Arrangement Requests. The request should be made in writing, and include the following information:

- a. The date of the request
- b. The FWA requested for, including its expected frequency and duration
- c. Reason for the request
- d. Requested start date and end date (if relevant)

The employee may use the sample template in **Annex A**.

Annex C – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Formal requests that do not meet the above requirements will be deemed invalid. Examples of formal and non-formal FWA requests are as follow:

Table 5: Examples of formal FWA requests

Formal FWA request

Illustration:

An employee sends a text message or email to her supervisor stating: "I would like to request to change my daily work hours from Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm to Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm, so that I can send my five-year-old son to school in the morning. I request for this arrangement to begin on 1 Jan 2025 and end on 31 Dec 2025."

Whether the request above is considered valid depends on whether the employer has a process in place for employees to make formal FWA requests:

Scenario A: The employer has a process for employees to submit formal FWA requests via their HR portal.

Although the request above was made in writing and included the information required under these Guidelines, it is not considered a valid request as the employee did not submit it via the HR portal as stipulated by her employer. The employer may wish to remind the employee of the process for making a formal request and encourage her to resubmit it using the proper channel (HR portal, in this case).

Scenario B: The employer does not have a process for employees to make formal FWA requests.

This is considered a formal FWA request as the employee made the request in writing, and included details on the frequency and duration of requested FWA, as well as the reason for the request. As the request is made via a text message or email, the date of the message is also documented.

Annex C – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Table 6: Examples of non-formal FWA requests

| Non-formal FWA request |
|---|
| <p><i>Illustration:</i></p> <p><i>An employee speaks to her supervisor in the office or over the phone: "I would like to request to change my daily work hours from Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm to Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm, so that I can send my five-year-old son to school in the morning. I request for this arrangement to begin on 1 Jan 2025 and end on 31 Dec 2025."</i></p> |

This is considered a non-formal FWA request as it is not made in writing. The employer can choose to process the non-formal request and respond to the employee's request. However, if the employer does not have an existing process for the employee to submit FWA requests, and the employer does not accept such non-formal requests, the employee can submit a formal FWA request based on these Guidelines.

For Employers

2. Does the employer have to offer FWAs to employees?

The Guidelines do not require employers to offer FWAs to employees. However, employers are encouraged to do so. There are many benefits to FWAs – for instance, employers would be better able to attract and retain talent, and employees on FWAs such as flexi-load can supplement full-time manpower planning.

3. How can employers clearly communicate their process for employees to make formal FWA requests, what FWAs are available to request, and expectations for usage of FWAs?

Employers may refer to www.tafep.sg for a sample FWA policy and customise it according to their own needs.

4. Can employers reject a request on the basis of the reason for requesting an FWA?

Employers should assess requests for FWA and respond to them based on business-related grounds.

Annex C – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

For Employees

5. Will an employee's career prospects be affected if he/she takes up FWAs?

It is useful for the employee to have an open discussion with his/her supervisor to understand the latter's expectations on work performance and deliverables before taking up FWAs. Supervisors should continue to abide by the Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices and adopt fair and objective appraisal systems. Supervisors should appraise employees on FWAs based on their achieved outcomes and objective performance criteria which are fairly applied.

Nonetheless, certain types of FWA may result in a change in the work scope and responsibilities of the employee. For such instances, the employees are encouraged to have a candid conversation with their supervisor on the feasibility of this option, the expectations and deliverables before embarking on the FWA.

6. Would the employee be eligible for work injury compensation if he/she gets hurt outside the office while working?

The employee may be eligible for compensation if the injuries sustained arose out of and in the course of work. Nonetheless, the employee should be mindful of the hazards that may exist while working outside the office and take reasonable care of his/her own health and safety while doing so. Employers should also take reasonable efforts to educate employees on ensuring their safety when working outside the office.

