

# How to Experiment with a Four-Day

**Resource Type:** Articles

**Topic:** HR Risk and Employment Practices

Many workplaces are experimenting with some version of a four-day workweek to help address issues around work-life balance, burnout, and employee retention. Research on four-day workweek trials looks promising, but also identifies challenges. Here are some things to know if you decide to explore this option.

## Variations on a Four-Day Workweek

**The 32-hour, four-day workweek:** Results from trials in which employers cut a full day of work from their schedules, without making up the hours elsewhere, look promising.

**The 40-hour, four-day workweek:** Workers put in 40 hours a week, typically over four 10-hour shifts rather than five 8-hour ones. The employer gets the same number of hours worked as it would in a five-day workweek, while employees have a 3-day weekend every week.

**The 9/80 work schedule** (also known as the “nine-day fortnight”): Over the course of two weeks, all team members work a total of 80 hours across nine days. Employees get a 3-day weekend every other week. The work happens through a combination of 9-hour days and 8-hour days. Employees might work nine hours each Monday through Thursday. On the first Friday, they’d work eight hours. They’d get the day off the next Friday and the cycle would begin again.

## How to Plan, Test, and Iterate a Four-Day Workweek

**Set a strategy.** Why is your nonprofit trying this? What goals do you hope to achieve? How will you know if the experiment’s working (or not?) Consider productivity and success metrics before you experiment!

**Ask, don’t assume.** Ask employees how they would feel about variations on a four-day workweek, what they’d hope to gain from the change, and what would be a dealbreaker for them. Discuss basic questions like these in conversation, rather than endless or anonymous surveys.

**Obtain legal advice.** Adjusting the workweek may bring labor laws into play in some states. Check your state’s regulations for overtime and how many hours an employee can work per day before overtime pay is required. Under California labor law, for example, a compressed workweek with shifts of more than 10 hours may require that non-exempt, hourly employees be compensated for overtime.

**Sync schedules.** Most experts advise giving knowledge workers the same regularly scheduled off days and times, so people aren’t pulled into off-hours messages from those on duty. Many experts say working a Tuesday-Friday schedule is most productive. Involve every team or department in planning your workweek schedule to sync up as well as possible.

**Pare back tasks and meetings.** Some tasks will need to fall by the wayside, especially if you’re shifting to a 32-hour workweek. Look for places where team members unintentionally duplicate each other’s work; those are tasks you can cut. Conduct a one-question pulse survey at the end of meetings to check on the value of the meeting. Cancel regular meetings for which there is a minimal benefit. If you can’t bring yourself to cancel

meetings, make them shorter. Consider how you can make decisions in an inclusive way without calling a meeting.

**Communicate.** Let clients and other constituents know your new working schedule, how to reach team members in emergencies, what constitutes an emergency, and how they can troubleshoot on their own when your team isn't available.

**Shift gradually.** The shift to a new, more flexible schedule can often take six months. There are many ways to do it, but some organizations begin with a bite at the apple, taking a weekly half-day.

**Prepare to iterate.** Talk regularly with employees about how the shift is going and what adjustments need to be made. The shift will likely result in some stressful "cram times" to fit necessary tasks into the new schedule. Prepare employees accordingly. Make sure supervisors are equipped and prepared to have these conversations gracefully and effectively; this effort may require skills they haven't been required to use yet.

## **Resources**

- [6 Lessons for Businesses Considering a Four-Day Workweek - Insider](#)
- [How to Move to a Four-Day Workweek - LinkedIn](#)
- [The Smart Way to Shift to a Four-Day Workweek - Bloomberg](#)
- [What Leaders Need to Know Before Trying a Four-Day Workweek - Harvard Business Review](#)