



**Northwestern  
University**

**Approving University Officials:** Provost, Senior Vice President for Business and Finance

**Responsible Office:** Office of the Senior Vice President for Business and Finance

**Effective Date:** March 17, 2020

**Next Review Date:** March 17, 2023

## **Employees in Essential Functions and Positions**

### **Policy Statement**

This policy sets forth a framework for departments, schools, and units to utilize in determining those employees who work in functions and positions that are essential during a campus emergency. These employees provide services needed to maintain or protect the health, safety, or well-being of the University community, ensure continuity of key operations, and preserve and protect University property.

### **Purpose**

This policy provides guidance to departments, schools, and units regarding the identification, designation, and management of employees whose services are needed during campus emergencies, including those emergencies that require suspension of services, and/or partial or total closure of operations, or a partial or total shift to virtual/remote operations, and outlines management of related administrative matters during such emergencies.

### **Audience**

All Northwestern University Faculty and Staff and their supervisors.

### **Definitions**

<u>Term</u>	<u>Definition</u>
Crisis Management Team (CMT)	A team made up of executive and senior leaders (associate vice presidents, directors, and department administrators) throughout Northwestern who play key roles in maintaining continuity of services. The CMT utilizes the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) organizational structure to ensure unified command and enable effective and efficient incident management. Although centrally controlled, the actions of emergency responders are decentralized, executed through Northwestern's departments, schools, and units. The CMT Incident Commander and CMT members have the responsibility to all members of the Northwestern University community to prepare for potential or actual threats, emergency incidents, and disaster situations affecting normal operations.

<u>Term</u>	<u>Definition</u>
Emergency	Any unscheduled disruption of Northwestern’s operations due to events including, but not limited to, inclement weather, a natural or man-made disaster, the outbreak of pandemic illnesses, and/or any other unforeseen circumstances, including instances requiring suspension of services, partial or total closure of operations, or a partial or total shift to virtual/remote operations.
Emergency Operations Center (EOC)	The central physical or virtual space where the coordination of information and resources to support emergency management takes place, including on-scene operations, if applicable. When the EOC is established at a physical space, it may be transitioned from permanent to temporary facilities.
Essential Position	A position that has been designated as essential during a campus emergency, including an emergency closure or a partial or total shift to virtual operations. These are positions held by individuals whose job duties affect the security, safety, physical or virtual/remote operation of the University, or who are required to work in the Emergency Operations Center during an emergency, or through virtual/remote means, as stated above. A position may be designated as essential at any point during an emergency, even if not designated as essential prior to the emergency.
Essential Function	A functional area or department within the University that has been designated as essential during a campus emergency, including an emergency closure or a partial or total shift to virtual operations. A function may be designated as essential at any point during an emergency, even if not designated as essential prior to the emergency.

## **Policy Implementation**

This policy is intended to assist departments, schools, and units in identifying employees in essential functions or positions whose services are required during a campus emergency. Each department, school, or unit is responsible for determining which functions are essential, and how to staff those functions during an emergency or suspension of normal operations. Once the emergency staffing plan is in place, the department, school, or unit leader is responsible for designating essential positions and communicating the expectations and requirements to the designated individuals. Generally, employees in essential functions and positions are required to report to their designated work location to ensure the operation of essential services during an emergency or when University operations have been suspended. However, where applicable, there are some individuals who may be permitted to perform essential services virtually. These individuals will be identified in advance and notified by their supervisors accordingly.

Following is a list of identified functions or departments that are considered essential and critical to emergency operations at the University. This list is not intended to be all-inclusive and may change based on the specific circumstances of the event disrupting normal business operations. Not all positions within each of these units may be considered essential, for the purposes of this policy.

- Athletics & Recreation
- Center for Comparative Medicine (CCM)
- Emergency Response Team
- Emergency Management
- Environmental Health and Safety
- Dining Services
- Facilities Management
- Faculty Senate
- Financial Operations
- Global Marketing and Communications
- Health Services
- Human Resources
- Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) Office
- Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office
- Northwestern University Information Technology (NUIT) and other IT functions
- Office for Research Safety
- Procurement and Payment Services and Auxiliary Services
- Residential Services
- Risk Management
- Student Affairs
- University Police

Beyond those functions listed above, there may be employees working in other departments and functions within the University whose positions are also designated as essential. Department, school, or unit leadership will use the Essential Position Designation Form to communicate the designation during emergencies. Additionally, based on the circumstances surrounding the event, it may become necessary to bring in employees to work during an emergency whose functions and positions were not previously identified as essential during an emergency, and this is considered a requirement of the job when requested for the duration of the emergency.

Employees in essential functions and positions are required to provide updated contact information on an ongoing basis via the myHR self-service portal and via their supervisor to ensure they are reachable in case of a campus emergency in which their services are needed. In some cases, employees in essential functions and positions may be required to report for an unscheduled shift, reschedule vacation or personal floating holiday time, log into the University networks remotely, and/or work more than the regularly scheduled number of hours during an emergency. Employees in essential functions and positions are responsible for understanding which work assignments are critical and must be completed during an emergency.

### Communication

Until a decision is made by the Crisis Management Team regarding the extent of the emergency, all employees in essential functions and positions are required to work. Once the Crisis Management Team has made an assessment of the emergency, it will report which functions are considered essential and, if any essential functions are exempt from reporting to work, this will be communicated.

The Crisis Management Team will communicate the decisions of University leadership through various means, including updates to the [Northwestern homepage](#), the [campus-wide emergency notification system](#), and other university-wide communications.

#### Time and Pay Administration:

All employees who work during an emergency will be paid according to the standard policies of the University that are in effect during non-emergency situations, unless otherwise stated. All applicable employment policies remain in effect for those employees who report to work. Employees whose functions and positions are not designated as essential who report to work during an emergency may be temporarily assigned to other tasks and may be released to go home or approved to work remotely by their supervisor unless they are instructed to remain. Employees who work during an emergency will be paid according to their usual pay rate, including those situations where alternate responsibilities may be performed.

### **Consequences of Violating this Policy**

Employees in essential functions and positions are expected to come to work in emergency situations unless specifically excused by their supervisor or by a duly approved accommodation.

Failure to report for work (or to deliver work remotely, when applicable) as directed and to maintain work responsibilities during an emergency may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

### **Related Information**

Northwestern University Emergency Notification System:

<https://www.northwestern.edu/emergency-management/campus-safety-plan/notification-system.html>

Essential Position Designation and Notification Form:

<https://onbase-ss0.northwestern.edu/form/essential-position-designation>

### **Contacts**

The following individuals/offices can address questions regarding this Policy:

Office of Human Resources  
(847) 491-7505 (Evanston)  
(312) 503-2641 (Chicago)  
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### **History**

Policy Origination Date: August 11, 2014

### **Policy URL:**

<https://policies.northwestern.edu/docs/employees-in-essential-functions-and-positions-final.pdf>