

VOLUNTARY HOURS REDUCTION (VHR) PROGRAM

Effective January 12, 2021 through June 27, 2022

1. Purpose:

The purpose of the Voluntary Hours Reduction program (VHR) is to assist the County in managing expenses and reducing costs where a department's operational needs can support a temporary reduction to salary and benefit expenses. Additionally, the program may provide employees with flexibility to balance personal and professional needs during emergencies/disasters/ pandemics that occur during the program period. Employees may volunteer to temporarily reduce their current allocated Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) to Part-Time status by reducing expected hours worked for a specified time frame, and effectively reducing their pay and benefits on a pro-rated basis. Departments would have the ability to end VHR if operational needs required such change. Employees wishing to work less than their current allocated FTE on a permanent basis are not eligible for this program and should contact their department about a change in the status of their FTE (i.e. becoming a permanent part time employee).

2. Request Submission

An employee wishing to take VHR must submit a request for a specific number of hours/days he/she/they wish to take as VHR, on the VHR Request Form. The initial request must include a defined start and end date, not to exceed 6 months in length. All VHR requests are subject to the Department Head (which includes designee throughout this document) approval before becoming effective on the beginning of a pay period. An employee's election to participate in the VHR program is strictly voluntary; however, once an employee is approved to participate in the VHR program, the employee may only withdraw from the VHR program with department head approval. Department heads retain the discretion to withdraw approval for an employee's VHR schedule at any time, with a minimum of two weeks' notice to the employee. The last day of VHR must coincide with the last day of a pay period (i.e. the employee must return to their regular FTE on the first day of a pay period).

3. Employee Conditions

The Department Head may authorize a permanent or probationary employee to participate in the Voluntary Hours Reduction program subject to the following conditions:

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- a. VHR must be taken in increments of not less than one hour, and no more than 25% of the employee's allocated FTE. The maximum reduction per pay period for a 1.0 FTE employee is 20 hours. VHR for part-time employees cannot result in less than 0.50 FTE.
- b. Employees may not work a 9/80 schedule while participating in the VHR Program. Employee and Department Head will arrive at a reduced schedule that allocates time worked as evenly as possible during the two weeks of the pay period so as not to incur statutory overtime (Fair Labor Standards Act overtime is hours worked in excess of 40 hours weekly). VHR schedules should align with daily hours provisions in the employees applicable MOU/Salary Resolution so as not to incur daily overtime.
- c. Employees participating in VHR may not use accrued leaves during the eligible period in excess of their reduced FTE. Example – VHR reduced FTE is 0.80, equal to 64 hours, where total hours worked and accrued leaves used in a biweekly period may not exceed 64 hours.
- d. VHR is achieved through a temporary adjustment to the employee's FTE, therefore, accrual of all benefits, including vacation and sick leave accrual, service credit for retirement, cash allowance (if applicable), deferred compensation, and eligibility for holidays is based on the employee's reduced FTE and/or hours actually worked.
- e. Pro-ration for County contributions towards medical, dental, vision, basic life insurance, and Retiree HRA will be applied according to your specific MOU or Salary Resolution.
- f. Eligibility for merit increases, and seniority hours will be based upon time in paid status. Completion of probation will be based upon time in paid status (excluding overtime).
- g. While taking VHR, employees will receive pro-rated holiday pay in accordance with the applicable MOU or Salary Resolution.
- h. Employees who are not in a paid status are not eligible to apply for VHR. Employees participating in VHR, who go on approved leave, will have leave benefits applied based upon their reduced FTE hours under VHR and administered in accordance with the provisions of the applicable benefit program.
- i. VHR is contingent upon approval of the Department Head. The Department Head may decline an employee's VHR request at their discretion and determination of department operational impact.
- j. Participation in the VHR program must begin on the first day of a new pay period and approval must be received at least seven (7) calendar days in advance of the implementation date. The employee's VHR must be completed on the last day of a pay period, on/before the expiration of the VHR Program. VHR may not begin or end mid-pay period.
- k. An employee on VHR should not be assigned to work overtime, except in the case of a Sonoma County Board declared emergency.

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4. Department Conditions

- a. The main purpose of the VHR program is to assist the County in managing expenses and reducing costs. This is achieved through an employee voluntarily, temporarily reducing their allocated FTE for the duration of the agreed upon period. Departments that approve VHR requests cannot backfill the portion of the FTE reduction through assignment of additional hours worked by permanent, extra-help, or temporary staff or through the assignment of overtime. Employees participating in the VHR program should not be scheduled and/or working over their temporarily reduced FTE during the VHR program agreement period, except in the case of a Sonoma County Board declared emergency.
- b. The employee's schedule and work rules in the County's payroll and timekeeping systems must be updated to reflect applicable changes under the VHR program.
- c. Before approving any VHR request, departments will consider the impact the VHR will have on their ability to provide mandated and essential services as well as revenues and reimbursements. VHR requests should only be approved if the authorization of VHR will result in savings to the department after taking into consideration the net impact of those revenue reductions.

5. Term

This program will start on January 12, 2021 and expire on June 27, 2022. When the program expires, employees will revert to their former FTE.