K-State ramps up efforts to support training for remote work in Kansas

Remote Online Initiative classes available throughout the state

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Not too long ago, working from home was a rarity for employees in most organizations.

Then came a global pandemic.

“Remote work exploded and I don’t think we’re going back to the way it used to be,” said Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development. “Remote work is going to continue to be a part of our economy.”

Wilson is part of a Kansas State University team that has formed a partnership with Utah State University to offer month-long online classes in Kansas that will provide certification as a remote work professional or remote work leader.

The Remote Online Initiative classes are available to anyone. Scholarships for the classes are available to residents in Marshall, Washington, Clay and Dickinsom counties thanks to a grant from NetWork Kansas through the North Central Regional Planning Commission.

Earlier this year, Wilson released results of a survey on remote work indicating that nearly one-half of respondent organizations currently employ remote workers. In addition, more than 80% believe remote work will continue, and more than 90% indicated the number of remote and hybrid workers will remain the same or increase.

“And so from a rural development standpoint, we’re looking for opportunities for people who choose to live in rural communities and can take advantage of the tools of technology to work remotely and successfully with potential employers and clients,” Wilson said. “To do that, you need the tools of technology and you need training.”

Deb Ohlde, the strategic development advisor with the North Central Regional Planning Commission, has worked part-time remote and part-time in the office for nearly 30 years. She recently took the class and said, for her, it was a checklist of things companies should think about when implementing remote work for its employees.
“There are definitely impacts in terms of how you handle asynchronous communication,” she said. “How do you handle privacy or confidentiality issues where company or client paperwork may be in someone’s home versus in your main office.”

Ohlde said employees also face new challenges.

“We all feel like we’ve been doing zoom meetings for a long time now, but there are still folks who are not as comfortable with the technology,” she said. “The classes are a great opportunity to practice some of the most well-known tools that are used by people who are working remotely.

“I also think that people will find that they will enjoy talking with and hearing from the cohort that is in their class. Each person has a different perspective…I think hearing from those people helps to propel the individual worker and the business to a higher level of performance more quickly.”

Wilson credited the Dane Hansen Foundation for its “pioneering work” in establishing online training for remote work in northwest Kansas. He said the K-State Research and Extension Community Vitality team is working to offer training in parts of the state where it is not currently being offered.

“People have lifestyle choices, and you know when you think about some of the things that happen in our world – even after 9/11 (22 years ago) – we witnessed people saying that what’s important to them is their family, their home, their life, their safety,” Wilson said. “And maybe they don’t want to fight the everyday traffic, maybe they don’t want to worry about the concentration of people.

“And so many are choosing a rural lifestyle, where they find safety, good schools, good neighbors, clean streets, wide open spaces, recreation and opportunities to have an impact on the community. If we can create more opportunities for people to live in those places, and enjoy the benefits of economic prosperity through remote work, then we want to encourage that.”

Registration and more information about the Remote Online Initiative is available online at www.kansasremotework.com. The cost is $199 for the remote professional course and $249 for the remote work leader course.

FOR PRINT PUBLICATION: Links used in this story
Remote Online Initiative, https://kansasremotework.com

Network Kansas, https://www.networkkansas.com

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