

A Progression on Harnessing Technology to Meet Special Needs and Ensure Accessibility Progression

The Role of Telecommuting as a Career Enabler for Technical Communicators with Disabilities

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The proposed 2002-2007 Strategic Plan for the Society for Technical Communication (STC) has a strategy to extend the availability of online technical communication resources. Specifically, Strategy 1.2.8: Study and report on the use of telecommuting in the field of technical communication, both by independent contractors and by technical communicators who work for employers; and as a means of increasing employability of practitioners with special needs.

The Special Needs Committee (SNC) focuses on assisting people who have special needs, such as low vision, hearing loss, low mobility, cognitive difficulties, and other challenges. At present, the SNC consists of 21 people. We have submitted a petition to become a Special Interest Group.

The SNC wants to develop a resource guide (notebook) for technical communicators with special needs who want to start telecommunicating and need to convince management of the advantages of telecommunicating. To do this, the SNC will request a research grant from the Society for Technical Communication (STC) to study the potential use of telecommuting for enhancing the employability of technical communicators with disabilities that limit travel. The STC offers a merit grant for creative services that benefit chapters or STC as a whole.

Requirements for a merit grant, the SNC must:

- Demonstrate initiative, effective leadership, and member support.
- Provide background sufficient to justify the grant.
- Specify purpose, amount requested, planned disbursements, and completion date of activity.
- Submit grant to director-sponsor a brief report outlining the use of the funds, and the effects and benefits derived from the activity.

Leadership

SNC members will provide the leadership necessary to submit this proposal and, if grant, to develop a resource notebook. Government Section 508 supports activity.

Background

A literary review is necessary to establish 1) what has been done or is known about telecommuting and need the grant will address, and 2) where we see the gap.

Telecommuting has been widely addressed for several years. One group that hasn't been targeted is people with special needs. We will need to cite many sources.

The Telecommuting SIG has a listserv, stctelecommute-1, that addresses the needs and interests of telecommuters, potential telecommuters, and their managers.

Ideas for Convincing Clients

People who telecommute can:

- Save the client money by providing their own office space, supplies, equipment, such as a computer with special adaptive equipment, voice-activated software, or an ergonomically-designed office.
- Be more productive from their own office where there are few distractions, such as noisy work environment.
- Be available for meetings and teleconferencing.
- Work for a trial period so that client can evaluate results.

Grant Amount/Completion Date

At this time, the amount request has not been determined.

The SNC will submit the grant to director-sponsor in the third quarter of 2002. The completion date for the resource notebook is anticipated to be first quarter 2003. Within one year after receiving the grant, the SNC will submit a brief report outlining the use of the funds, and the effects and benefits derived from the activity.

Note

At the 49th STC Annual Conference, the STC Board voted to accept the SNC's petition to become a Special Interest Group (SIG). For more information regarding the Special Needs SIG, see www.stc.org/committees/special_needs.