

Instead of eight days a week: Four-day workweeks

Soaring energy costs have taken their toll in many ways, and municipal budgets have not escaped the impact. One cost-control method that several cities and towns have implemented (and which others are exploring) is a move to a four-day workweek.

Q: What are the features of a four-day workweek?

A: Such schedules generally result in extended hours on four days to make up for an extra day off. While employees have longer workdays, they benefit by not having to spend transit costs (gas, etc.) on the fifth day. A municipal employer gets to adjust heating or air conditioning, save on costs for lighting, and, particularly for larger municipalities, benefits from reduced traffic volume.

Q: What complications does a four-day work week present for municipalities?

A: While extended work hours can result in additional time for citizens to come to a town hall when their working day is over, it does result in one less day of access during the week to conduct business during normal hours. Some municipalities have decided that service demands preclude this option, while others have tried to find compromises such as keeping certain high-public traffic offices (e.g., tax collection, town clerk) open all week, with partial staffing two days a week (while this may take away some of the energy benefit to the employer, the employees still save on travel costs one day a week). Also, language in collective bargaining agreements concerning shift lengths and hours of work, generally, may require renegotiation.