

EMPLOYER TEMPLATE

The Distributed Team *Operating* Manual

A team across four timezones does not need more meetings. It needs a written way of working that everyone can read at 9am wherever they are. Fill this in once, and put the summary in every listing.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- The overlap policy
- Decision records
- The meeting budget
- Hand-off rules and the working day
- Response-time and availability norms
- The tools map
- The one-page team charter

Why write it down

Every team has an operating model. In a co-located team it lives in habits nobody has to explain. In a distributed team, the habits do not transmit: the person in Manila cannot overhear how decisions get made in Berlin, so they guess, and the guesses diverge. A written manual is not bureaucracy; it is the only way the model exists at all for the people who are not in the room, which is everyone.

There is a second reason. The sync mode, overlap hours and presence expectations you write here are the policy fields on an EnRoute listing, and they are the top tier of evidence the Geo-Flex score reads. A team with a clear manual publishes clear listings, scores honestly, and gets applicants who already know how the team works.

HOW TO USE

Work through the sections with the team, not for it. Each ends with a filled-in policy. Section 7 collects them on one page. Review it quarterly; retire anything nobody follows.

01

The overlap policy

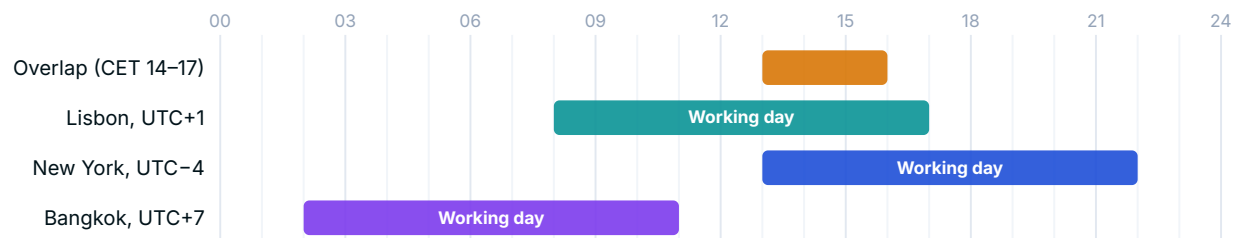
How many hours, anchored where, and what happens outside them.

Pick one of four modes, and write down what it means in practice. This is the single decision that most shapes who can work on the team.

MODE	MEANS	WHO IT EXCLUDES
Fully async	No required overlap. Meetings are opt-in and recorded. Decisions in writing with deadlines.	Almost nobody. Requires the discipline in sections 2 to 5, or it becomes chaos.
Overlap hours	A number of hours per day (typically 2 to 4) when everyone is online, anchored to a zone.	Anyone for whom those hours are the middle of the night. Say the anchor zone.
Timezone band	Everyone lives within a UTC range (e.g. -3 to +3).	Everyone outside the band. Honest and simple.
Core hours	Fixed hours in one zone, like an office without the office.	Everyone not in that zone's daytime. Fine for a team that needs it; state it plainly.

Example: a three-hour overlap anchored to CET, seen from three cities

The overlap is 14:00–17:00 CET. Lisbon works 9–6 and is fine; New York starts early; Bangkok finishes late.



Our mode: ☐ fully async ☐ overlap hours ☐ timezone band ☐ core hours _____

Overlap hours per day _____ Anchor zone _____ Band (UTC from / to) _____

Outside the overlap, people are expected to _____

Exceptions (on-call, customer-facing roles, launches) _____

02 Decision records

A distributed team is only as good as its record of what was decided and why.

When a decision is made in a meeting, half the team was asleep. When it is made in a chat thread, it is lost by Thursday. A decision record is a short entry, in one known place, that says what was decided, by whom, why, what was rejected, and when it will be revisited. It takes five minutes and it is what lets someone in another timezone act on Monday morning without a call.

The record

- **Date and owner.**
- **Decision**, in one sentence.
- **Context**: the problem, in two or three.
- **Options considered**, one line each, including the one chosen.
- **Why this one.**
- **Who was consulted**, and who can object by when.
- **Revisit date**, if any.

The rules

- One place for all of them (a doc, a wiki page, a channel with a template). Not scattered.
- Anything that changes how someone else works gets a record.
- A decision made live is written up by the person who made it, the same day.
- Objections go on the record, not in DMs.
- Records are never edited after the fact; a new record supersedes.

Where our decision records live _____

Who owns the format _____

What counts as a decision that needs a record _____

03 The meeting budget

Meetings are the scarcest resource on a distributed team, because the only hours they can happen in are the overlap.

Set a budget: how many hours of live meetings per person per week the team will spend inside the overlap. Then design the meetings that fit, and cut the rest. A meeting earns its place if it needs live interaction (a decision with real disagreement, a retrospective, a relationship) and cannot be done as well in writing.

MEETING	PURPOSE	LENGTH	CADENCE	ASYNC ALTERNATIVE
Weekly team sync	Decisions with disagreement; blockers that need two people	30 min	Weekly	Written weekly summaries; the sync only discusses what they raised
1:1	The person, not the work	30 min	Weekly	None; keep it
Demo / review	Show shipped work; feedback	30–45 min	Fortnightly	Recorded demos with written comments
Retrospective	What to change	45 min	Monthly	Async board for a week, then a short live discussion of the top three
Planning	Commit to the next period	60 min	Per cycle	Written proposals first; live only to resolve conflicts
All-hands	Context from leadership; questions	30 min	Monthly	Recorded, with written Q&A open for a week

Meeting design rules

- ☐ Every meeting has a written purpose and a pre-read sent 24 hours before, in the earliest attendee's timezone.
- ☐ Every meeting is recorded and produces notes within the day; a decision made in it gets a record.
- ☐ Recurring meetings rotate the inconvenient hour, or are held twice.
- ☐ Anyone can skip a meeting they have contributed to in writing.
- ☐ A meeting with no decision and no pre-read is cancelled by whoever notices.

Our budget: live meeting hours per person per week _____ Rotation rule for the bad hour _____

04 Hand-off rules and the working day

Work moves around the clock only if it is handed off. The rule is simple: at the end of your day, the work you touched is in a state someone else could continue, and the note saying how is where they will look.

End of day, every day

- ☐ Tasks updated to their real state
- ☐ A hand-off note on anything in progress: where it is, next action, what is blocked, what I need from whom
- ☐ Questions for other zones sent, with a deadline in their time
- ☐ Decisions I made alone recorded
- ☐ Tomorrow's first task chosen

The working day

- People set their own hours inside the policy and publish them on their calendar.
- Deep-work blocks are respected; nobody is expected to reply inside one.
- The overlap is for what needs live people; it is not the whole day.
- Nobody is expected online outside their published hours, and leaders model it.
- Public holidays are the person's local ones.

Where hand-off notes go (the artefact, the task, a channel) _____

Where people publish their hours _____ Holiday policy _____

05

Response-time and availability norms

The anxiety of distributed work is not knowing how fast a reply is expected. Write it down.

CHANNEL	USED FOR	EXPECTED RESPONSE	OURS
Task or ticket comments	Work-related questions and updates	Within the recipient's next working day	
Team channel	Announcements, questions to the group	Same working day, if addressed to you	
Direct message	Quick coordination; never decisions	Within a few working hours, inside their day	
Email	External, formal, or long-lived	Within two working days	
Phone / urgent channel	Outages, safety, a customer on fire	Immediately; used rarely, and only for that	
Decision record	Objections to a decision	By the deadline on the record	

- ☐ "Urgent" has a definition, written here, and a channel of its own.
- ☐ Nobody is expected to read chat outside their published hours.
- ☐ Status indicators mean what they say; nobody is judged on a green dot.
- ☐ A message sent at the sender's 11pm is expected to be read at the recipient's 9am; scheduling it to send then is a courtesy.

Our definition of urgent

06

The tools map

One tool per job. The map says which.

JOB	TOOL	RULE
Tasks and status		
Documents and decisions		
Chat		
Video and recordings		
Code / design / the work itself		
Calendar and hours		
Passwords and access		
Where a new person starts		

07 The one-page team charter

Copy the filled-in policies here. This page goes in the onboarding pack and, in summary, in every listing.

Team _____ Last reviewed _____ Owner _____

Timezones we span _____

Overlap policy (mode, hours, anchor) _____

Where decisions are recorded _____

Meeting budget and the meetings we keep _____

Hand-off rule _____

Response norms and what "urgent" means _____

Tools: one line _____

Presence: retreats per year, where, who pays _____

THE LISTING PARAGRAPH (WHAT A CANDIDATE READS ABOUT HOW WE WORK)

PUT THE CHARTER'S POLICY FIELDS INTO THE LISTING

Sync mode, overlap hours, anchor timezone, retreats: these are the Geo-Flex policy fields on EnRoute's posting form. Filling them from the charter means the listing scores on what the team actually does, and the badge says "from the employer's stated policy". The Job Post Template Pack maps every field.

EnRoute Jobs

A clear way of working is a recruiting advantage.

Listings that state their overlap policy score higher and attract candidates who already fit. Post with the policy fields filled in and let the Geo-Flex score show it.

POST A JOB

enroutejobs.com/employers

EMPLOYER RESOURCES

enroutejobs.com/employer/resources

PRICING

enroutejobs.com/employers#pricing

MORE FROM THE LIBRARY

- The Geo-Flexible Hiring Playbook
- The Job Post Template Pack
- The 90-Day Remote Onboarding Plan
- The Remote Interview Scorecard Kit
- The Working Async Handbook (for your team)

All at enroutejobs.com/publications

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