Remote
Culture

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Finding and supporting remote talent

stack**overflow**
TALENT

Many companies cluster together in tech hubs around the globe competing for the same few local talents. Yet not all top candidates are located here. Tap into the pool of distributed candidates now. Learn how to identify those who will succeed at remote work, how to interview remotely and how to keep your decentralized team happy and productive.

Table of Contents

How Stack Overflow has remote culture built in

While we now have offices in New York, London, Munich and Austin, Stack Overflow was born remotely and it still shows in our culture: we have 39% of our employees working remotely across 14 countries. And an even higher number on the engineering team, where 80 % work remotely. This is however not just something unique to our own culture, but a growing trend.

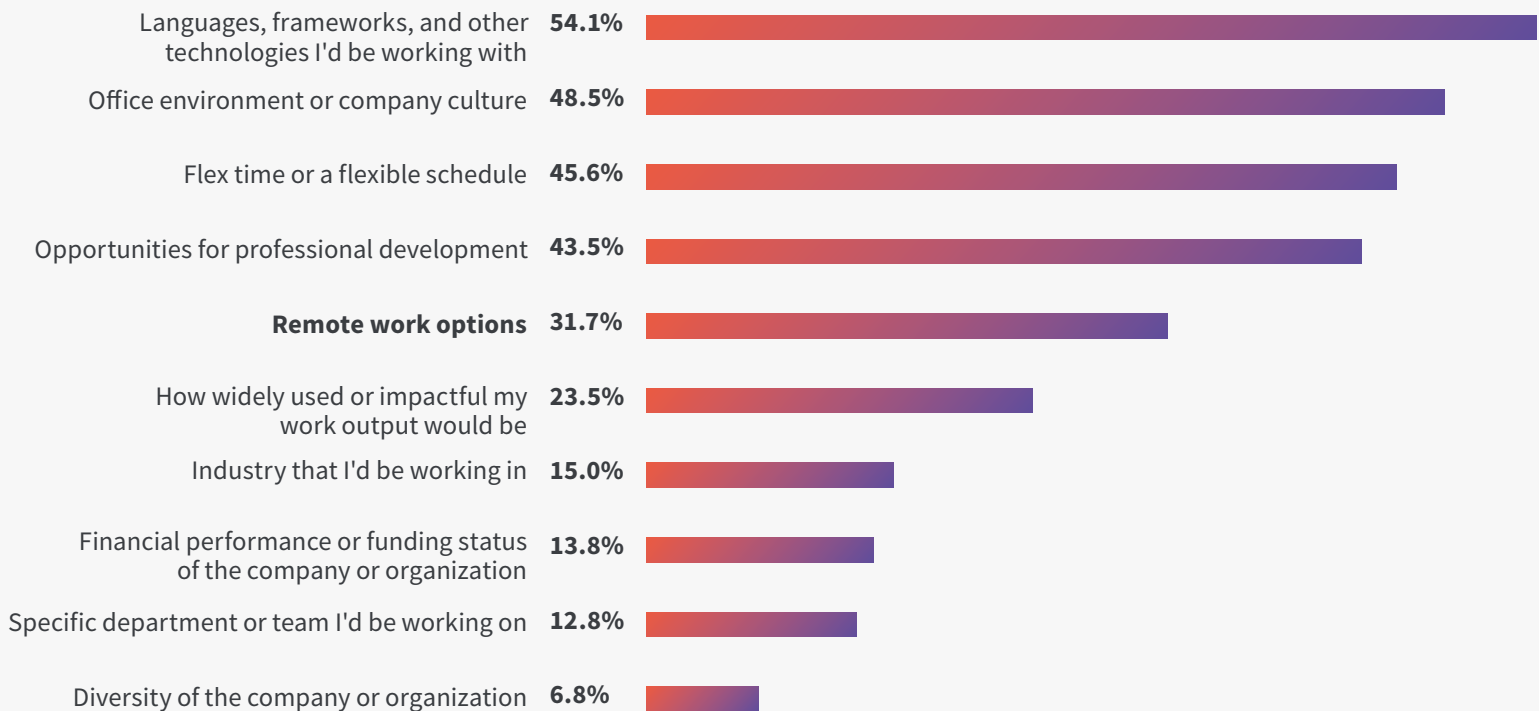# Why should you offer remote working options to developers?

Considering that 90% of developers are at least part-time employed, it's high time to think outside the box to meet your developer hiring goals. The most obvious opportunity to expand your recruiting reach? Offer remote working options to talented developers outside of your area.

Allowing developers to work from wherever they're located is a great way to grow your talent pool. However, it takes a lot more than simply declaring "our developers are everywhere" to effectively source, hire, and retain remote developers.

If the added benefit of widening your talent pool beyond your location isn't enough to convince you to offer remote working options, consider how the hiring landscape has changed:

- A study by the Harvard Business Review found that remote workers were not only happier and more productive, but were far less likely to quit.
- The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that remote work is more prevalent than ever, with 38% of workers in management, business, and financial operations saying that they did some or all of their work at home.
- In a study of 500 managers, supervisors, and executives, 15Five found that 37% of companies have a main office with some people working remotely.
- In the 2019 survey among almost 90,000 tech workers around the globe 32% said, that the option to work remotely is one of the highest-ranking factors, that would make them choose a job.

Most Important Job Factors for Technical Talent

Languages, frameworks, and other technologies I'd be working with	**54.1%**
Office environment or company culture	**48.5%**
Flex time or a flexible schedule	**45.6%**
Opportunities for professional development	**43.5%**
Remote work options	**31.7%**
How widely used or impactful my work output would be	**23.5%**
Industry that I'd be working in	**15.0%**
Financial performance or funding status of the company or organization	**13.8%**
Specific department or team I'd be working on	**12.8%**
Diversity of the company or organization	**6.8%**

79,371 respondents globally;
top 3 factors selected

We asked respondents to picture themselves comparing two jobs with the same compensation, benefits, and location, and consider which characteristics would most influence their choice between the two.

What makes remote work so attractive?

Remote work is no longer a perk to offer only if you're feeling generous. Developers have no shortage of career options, and when they decide they'd like to spend more time with the families or simply shorten their commutes, they also have plenty of remote work opportunities to choose from.

Remote jobs are more attractive. While remote is not for everyone, those candidates that prefer to work from a home office or co-working space nearer to them, will be likely to give an employer a hard pass if they are not offering it. Since it is still not the norm to offer remote work, this means the competition is smaller. We are seeing on Stack Overflow that job listings that do offer remote work have a xx higher apply rate.

Your developer creates their ideal work environment At Stack Overflow, we strongly believe that a developer needs (a) a private office, (b) flexible hours, and (c) a short commute. With remote workers, you can check off all three. Give them the tools they want to be successful, let them set up their workspace just how they like it. Whether it is a yoga break, walking the dog, sneaking in that power nap your employees can work in a way that helps them recharge most effectively and get into the flow more easily.

Test if developers are the right candidates for remote

Hiring remote developers is a skill. Even if you have a handful of top-notch technical hires under your belt, there are a few unique qualities in developers who work from home that you need to find. And it's up to you to ask the right questions to determine if a candidate would be productive from home.

Here are a few interview questions for remote candidates to help get you on the right track.

1. Do you have previous remote work experience? Especially in the case of a developer who would be remote for the first time, find out how he or she imagines adjusting to this style of work.

2. What tools have you used previously for collaboration and remote work? The most productive remote developers juggle two things well: finding a sustainable rhythm to write code from the comfort of their homes and communicating openly with their teammates.

3. How do you track your projects and time effectively? You'll want to know what hours the candidate prefers to work (and take note of their time zone if there are differences between team members) and how this aligns with their direct reports and team members.

4. What does your work environment look like? Developers need minimal distractions to effectively get their work done (most prefer private offices for this reason). Ask them if they have a quiet space to work. Inquire if they have a comfortable desk and chair. Find out what type of system setup they have, and make sure they are provided with all the tools they need to get their job done effectively.

Keep your remote developers happy

Understand the challenges of working from home

It would be easy to assume that working from home is the dream. However, even for developers who prefer to work remotely, there are certain things they have to work through that developers in the office simply don't have to worry about.

To make sure you're offering the types of perks they actually care about, here are a few common challenges of working as part of a remote development team.

1. **Even introverts miss out on things that happen naturally in the office.** Think about all those times your colleagues get up from their desks for a quick cup of coffee or a game of ping pong. People who write code from home don't have the luxury of doing that with other people—and eventually, they'll start to feel as if they're on a remote island if you lose sight of this reality.

2. **Nobody is around to micromanage you.** Sure, nobody likes to be micromanaged. But think about all those times when you're able to simply walk over to someone to ask a quick question. Remote developers just don't have that option, which can be a challenge in itself.

3. **Communication is hard**. If you have a small engineering team, it's easy to ensure that everyone knows everything. However, if you're spread out all over the world with developers working remotely from their homes, it's easy for things to get lost in the shuffle. And again, remote developers don't have the luxury of hearing things in passing around the office.

4 tips for keeping remote developers in the loop

Every company's engineering team will have some unique needs that dictate the types of benefits it offers and the ways it keeps them in the know, but there are some things that you should do regardless to ensure your remote developers have the support they need. Here are a few tips to make your remote developers feel included in the day-to-day happenings at your company.

1. If one person has to dial into a video call, everyone dials in from their desks. At Stack Overflow, we have people working remotely on a number of teams. So we have a rule: if one person is dialing into a video call, everyone else does the same. Why do we do this? It's incredibly uncomfortable for one remote employee to join a meeting in which the rest of their team has congregated in a conference room.

2. Be proactive about virtual social events. From a technical standpoint, it's up to your engineering managers to ensure remote developers have the support they need to do their jobs well. From an HR perspective, you can take the initiative to create social events that your remote developers can join. A few examples include virtual beer bashes, trivia nights, or even just sessions for developers to share what they're working on outside of work.

3. Don't give up on email just yet. Email is still alive and kicking. In fact, it's still the best way to keep everyone accountable for typing out updates and sharing them with the entire team. Here at Stack Overflow, the engineering team sends out a weekly status update to the whole company with a high-level overview of what they're working on, which keeps everyone from getting isolated from one another.

4. Be open to continuous feedback from remote developers. The best way to make meaningful changes to how your remote developers interact with the employees at your headquarters is to listen to their feedback. Developers tend to be opinionated about a lot of things, including whether or not they feel included in company happenings. Make time for them to express their feelings about their general well-being as a member of the company, and make changes based on their feedback whenever possible.

How to make developer interviews work remotely

It's becoming more and more obvious that offering remote working options will help companies meet their hiring goals in 2020. In fact, 32 % of developers who responded to our survey 2019 said that the flexibility to work from home is one of their biggest job priorities. However, it takes much more than simply making the decision to hire remote developers to attract the types of candidates you need. To help you stand out in a crowded market, here are a few tips to help you build trust with your top candidates.

Give Them the Right Information in Advance

Of course, you should make a habit of giving all candidates a fairly thorough idea of what to expect as the interview process begins. But it's important to identify the specific details that remote developers could be concerned about. These might seem like nitpicky things to you, but giving them a heads up about the people they're scheduled to meet with and even your company's preferred video conferencing software can go a long way in gaining their trust during the interview process. If you're ever in doubt about how to create a positive candidate experience for an applicant, don't be afraid to ask them if there are any additional questions you can answer.

Hold Yourself Accountable for Consistent Communication

Even if you have a strict "video-only" policy when you recruit and hire remote developers, the fact remains that these candidates won't get the opportunity to meet you in person. And while you can reassure them that you'll stay in touch, it's only natural for them to feel as if you've vanished if you don't hold yourself to a certain timeline. In many cases, it might seem like a better option to go silent than to reach out to them without an update. But a simple email to say that you're still waiting on more information goes a long way in gaining their trust throughout the interview process.

Don't Assume They Have Extra Availability to Schedule Interviews

When it comes to remote developers in particular, it's all too easy to assume that they can simply shift their schedules to accommodate yours. As important as it is to ensure that your current employees don't feel like outsiders, it's just as important not to make sweeping generalizations about a candidate's calendar. If you're more rigid about interview times with a remote candidate just because of their perceived "flexibility," you run the risk of damaging all the work you've done to build a relationship with that person up to this point.

How to prep successful developer interviews remotely

Everyone has their own opinions on the nuances of interviewing developers, but interviewing candidates virtually presents its own set of challenges. Here are a few tips to help you effectively evaluate remote developers and create a best-in-class remote interview experience.

Before the interview

- Let them know what to expect. Not only do developers hate brainteaser questions, they also wish more employers would tell them what types of technical concepts they should be prepared to discuss.

- Test your video conferencing software. For starters: make video interviews your default for every stage of the interview process. You can use anything from Google Hangouts to Skype to zoom. But more importantly, find some time before your interview to ensure that your video conferencing software is working properly. This will help you avoid making a developer feel as if he or she is in the wrong place when it comes time for the interview.

- Reserve a conference room. Even though you can hop on a video call from your desk, it can be incredibly rude to make a candidate discern what you're saying as your colleagues are talking at their desks. Reserving a conference room reduces external noise and shows developers that your time with them is a priority.

During the interview

- Test your video conferencing software. Again. A virtual interview can get complicated really quickly if you're scrambling to ensure that your software is working properly. Leave yourself a few minutes before any virtual interview to test the software one last time—and once you do, hop into the call a little early to avoid making the candidate wait.

- Introduce candidates to the team. While this might require that candidates wait between rounds, it's important to remember that developers want to work with other talented people. Including your current developers in the virtual interview process gives them the opportunity to talk shop about the projects they're working on and their opinions on the latest technology trends.

After the interview

- Over-communicate with candidates about everything. Even when you're punctual during the interview process, it's only natural for virtual candidates to feel like they're being left in the dark if you're not communicating consistently. Whether you have details about another round of interviews, or simply need to reach out because you have no updates yet, over-communicate with remote developers throughout the interview process.

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Stack Overflow Talent offers comprehensive
recruiting tools, from job postings to job
searches to employer branding strategies as well
as personal support that will, along with these
tools, help you achieve your recruiting goals.
This guide is only one of many insights that will
help you on your path to recruiting expertise.

Talk to an expert ▷