

# ALBANY BUSINESS REVIEW

## It's become expected: How Albany banks, credit unions are handling work from home



By [Chelsea Diana](#) - Reporter, Albany Business Review

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As more of the biggest banks are [pushing for employees to return to the office](#), local banks and credit unions are handling things a little differently.

Many Albany-area banks are considering a long-term hybrid or flexible work model. It's not something that would have been considered a few years ago, but expectations from employees, greater awareness of needed flexibility and the ability to recruit talent are demanding some work-from-home days.

Here's how three local banks and credit unions are thinking about remote and hybrid work:



Ballston Spa National Bank CEO Chris Dowd.

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[Chris Dowd](#), CEO of Ballston Spa National Bank, considered himself a traditionalist before the pandemic. Over the last two years, he's seen how productive employees can be while working from home.

While most of his employees went back to the office last summer, during the latest Omicron outbreak, only about 50% of staff has come into the office on a given day. Dowd expects to start allowing more people back into the office as the Covid-19 infection rate drops.

"It's hard to have a normalized work model in this environment, but we're pretty committed to a hybrid model," Dowd said. "I envision it varying on department and your position within the organization, not a one-size-fits-all approach."

Dowd said hybrid work plans will vary based on job responsibilities and tenure in position. Newer employees, for example, would need to be on site more.

"I think there's an expectation that's growing out there certainly that [flexibility] is part of whatever relationship with whatever company you're working for," Dowd said. "In some respects we've allowed a certain amount of flexibility with our staff because of the different responsibilities they have in their lives. As a smaller company, we're able to do that more readily than larger companies."



Tom Amell is CEO of Pioneer Bank.

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[Tom Amell](#), CEO of Pioneer Bank, was reluctant at first and didn't think that banks could operate remotely. He's softened on his stance and many of the Colonie bank's 230 employees are now working a hybrid model, where some employees are allowed to have flexibility in where they work.

"Employees across the region, and the country, are now expecting it," Amell said. "If you don't have a hybrid model in place, or don't have ability to work remotely, you have a disadvantage in attracting top talent. It's here to stay and companies that resist will struggle finding people."

He thinks it's a permanent shift to our mindset of employees. That being said, Amell doesn't see remote-only as being the best option.

"A couple of the larger banks announced a mandatory come back and that didn't go over very well," Amell said. "I don't believe long term that all employees will just want to exclusively be remote. We're humans beings, we desire personal interaction, we do have to get out of the house."



Michael Castellana is president and CEO of SEFCU.

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[Michael Castellana](#), CEO of SEFCU, was one of the first executives in the region [to send employees to work from home](#) in March 2020.

A lot has changed in the almost two years since — SEFCU now plans [to merge with CAP COM Federal Credit Union](#). Castellana expects hybrid or remote work to be part of the long-term plan for the combined company's 1,400 employees. The merger is expected to close sometime this year after regulatory approval and a CAP COM membership vote.

"We both [SEFCU and CAP COM] on all of our metrics had record years in 2021 and great years in 2020 all operating in a remote environment," Castellana said. "I don't anticipate going back to pre-pandemic methods because the methods worked well. We will absolutely need to focus on socialization and cultural development training and that will be so much easier in an environment where we don't have to deal with those issues [of Covid testing and branch closures] as during the pandemic."