



Recovering from COVID-19, State and Local Governments Embrace Virtual Collaboration Tools

MARKET TRENDS REPORT



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Executive Summary

Soon after the COVID-19 pandemic began, government agencies took the unprecedented yet necessary step of enabling large-scale remote work. At first, many employees of state and local agencies lacked resources for securely adapting established workflows to at-home work environments. In those first weeks and months, agencies scrambled to provide workers with laptops and mobile devices, broadband access, virtual-private networks (VPNs), and other tools needed to advance missions.

To get better at remote work, agencies delivered computers and other equipment to employees, established more VPNs, and expanded Internet capacity. Eventually, the public sector's remote workforces seemed to be up and running. In late March 2020, when Google did a quick survey of remote workers, 60% of displaced government employees said they had the resources needed to do their jobs, said Jeff Brown, Strategic Business Executive at Google Cloud.

Digging deeper, the survey asked government workers if they had access to 100% of the resources and tools they need to do their jobs. Only 12% of respondents said they did. The survey's developers concluded that remote workers had access to basic email, calendars and other ubiquitous workplace tools, yet they lacked more sophisticated functionality that would enable them to truly work together. Most respondents couldn't access or collaborate on work products stored on servers residing a couple of levels down in the infrastructure.

"That was a clear sign that things need to improve," Brown said.

Workers need effective collaboration tools that support them wherever they are and make it easy to assign tasks, collaborate, communicate, meet, schedule meetings and share documents. The goal is to get the job done and advance the mission — securely and at scale.

To learn more about how agencies can provide productivity tools in support of mobile government workers, GovLoop teamed with Google, the Internet services and products company, which provides a suite of cloud-based collaboration tools.

By the Numbers

121

The number of emails the average office worker receives every day.

89%

of workers say videoconferencing reduces the time required to complete projects or tasks.

62 million

Number of enterprise-focused mobile app downloads during the week of March 14 to 21, 2020, the highest number ever seen.

39%

of employees think that people in their organization don't collaborate enough.

85%

of employees are not engaged or are actively disengaged at work.

86%

of employees and executives cite lack of collaboration or ineffective communication as the cause of workplace failures.

75%

of employers rate collaboration and teamwork as "very important".

\$34 billion

Estimated annual business losses attributed to poor work conferencing practices that lead to lost productivity and time.

Remote Work Highlights Need for Seamless Collaboration

THE CHALLENGE: A MASSIVELY MOBILE WORKFORCE

Abruptly shifting tens of thousands of government workers from office buildings to remote work locations has illuminated the challenges of implementing new work arrangements, while also exposing longstanding systemic inefficiencies that bedeviled government employees long before the appearance of the novel coronavirus.

The pandemic has also challenged state and local governments' business assumptions and their delivery of services and benefits. Traditionally, government workers and recipients of government services — child welfare, licensing, permitting and public health, for example — completed those transactions at brick-and-mortar government offices, a practice the pandemic disrupted.

“Overnight, they're no longer available because obviously we were sheltered in place,” Brown said. “The biggest piece I'm seeing is, how do I set up virtual assistants so I can actually schedule a meeting with you and talk to you face-to-face? How do I update something so that I don't have to go into the office? How do I schedule for a lot of people so that they get the services they're used to? How can I do that quickly and proficiently?”

When the pandemic hit, government agencies that deliver critical services, such as healthcare, responded quickly to provide telehealth options and other remote accommodations. “It's time for us to do the same things for other services,” said Brown, noting that in some states, the Department of Motor Vehicles still don't accept online payments.

Before switching to telework, onsite government workers were of two minds: “strapped to a desk or in the office and engaged,” Brown said. For both groups, learning to use tools that support collaborative work hasn't always been a seamless process. Eager to bolster remote work capabilities, some agencies took a shotgun approach, adopting redundant tools and one-off solutions that don't integrate well with other applications. Shadow IT crept in. At times, efficiency and security suffered.

THE SOLUTION: COLLABORATING SECURELY IN THE CLOUD

As many state and local government employees continue to work remotely, government has an opportunity to confront those longstanding collaboration challenges, exacerbated by the pandemic, and provide employees with the collaboration tools they need to get the job done, efficiently and effectively. At a time of financial uncertainty, state and local governments are looking for productivity tools that won't bust their budgets.

Governments work with private and sensitive information — financial, tax and health data — and will benefit from the cutting-edge security features built into cloud-based collaboration suites, Brown said.

One example is context-aware access, which provides granular access control policies to apps based on attributes such as device security status, IP address, location and user identity. For example, it will block a user who makes multiple login attempts from geographically disparate locations. Other key features include two-factor authentication and encryption of data in transit and at rest.

To further strengthen security, agencies want robust collaboration tools with mobile device management solutions that audit, install and configure security patches. With on-premises solutions, patching is much more difficult.

“Most significant breaches happened through an attack on an on-premises server or database,” Brown said. “The other significant breaches tend to come from phishing or obtaining a user's credentials to then access internal systems, but again, these can be prohibited and blocked with solutions like two-factor authentication and context-aware access, included with Google Workspace. “

Robust security also makes possible robust, real-time collaboration, including file sharing and management. With the right tools, government workers can share documents with colleagues and designate specific permissions, including access that lasts for an hour, a day, a week or indefinitely.

Best Practices for Cultivating Collaboration

The best solutions for advancing productivity effectively break down silos to securely connect colleagues, promote collaboration and increase effectiveness. Here are key areas of functionality to consider:

Email



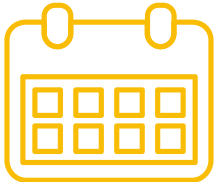
- Smart reply functions that anticipate replies, making email exchange more efficient
- Machine learning (ML) that blocks phishing attempts and eliminates 99% of spam
- Elimination of email silos to simplify government processes
- Creation of real-time work groups in email to facilitate document editing and videoconferencing
- Unlimited email storage in the cloud
- Functions for creating and assigning tasks in email

File management



- ML that predicts users' needs and suggests files to retrieve
- One-step file sharing and assignment of privileges
- Ability to read and edit more than 150 file types
- Easy creation of file drives with access restrictions
- Password-secured file exchange of documents, spreadsheets and presentations, with time-limited access

Scheduling



- Ability to arrange meetings without opening a calendar
- Streamlined meeting management that allows quick inclusion of colleagues to meetings in progress
- Smart function that checks the availability of email participants to schedule meetings

File sharing



- Cloud-native productivity tools make it easy for team members to collaborate on documents, maps, spreadsheets and other work products

Video apps



- Secure online video sessions, with access protected by an anonymized code to eliminate video bombing
- Closed captions and speaker identification to assist attendees with hearing and vision impairments
- Broadcasting capability allowing streaming to 100,000 viewers



Case Study: Improved Delivery of Essential Services

Robust collaboration tools improve efficiency and lower costs, enabling government workers to improve delivery of services and fulfillment of agencies' missions.

Seamless processes ultimately benefit recipients of government services. The same robust tools that help agencies' employees do their jobs — email, collaboration on work products, file management and videoconferencing — also make it easier for constituents to schedule appointments, apply for permits and licenses, comply with pandemic-monitoring programs, etc.

To slow the spread of the coronavirus, the Iowa Department of Corrections made the difficult decision to discontinue in-person visits at state prisons. Eager to offset the impact of healthcare policy on prisoners' well-being, the department arranged for no-cost video visitations. Using a Google site created to manage visits, family members and friends can

click on the name of a facility and the name of the prisoner and choose an available time slot on a Google calendar. The system confirms that the applicant is on the prisoner's visitation list, generates an email confirmation and arranges for a 30-minute Google Meet videoconference at the appointed time.

In Eagle County, Colorado, health officials took steps to reduce transmission of the coronavirus and limit its impact on the region's healthcare system. County officials set up a Google site and a Google Form to capture symptoms of residents concerned that they might have contracted the virus. An epidemiologist reviews the information, arranges a video consultation or telephone call, collects more information, and continues to monitor the patient, taking appropriate action if their condition changes.

HOW GOOGLE HELPS

Whether working remotely or in the office, government employees are more efficient and effective when supported by a secure, robust set of integrated, cloud-based collaboration tools. Google Workspace brings together in one place all the essential functions that teams need to collaborate, communicate and create. Google Workspace seamlessly combines documents, meetings, messaging and tasks. Everything is in the cloud and secure. And then there's file management. Backed by the world's most popular and powerful search engine, Workspace users will always find what they need.

“Google's mission statement is to make things as easy as possible, to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible, and useful, and it's essentially the same thing when you think of these collaboration tools,” Brown said.

To learn more visit: about.google

Conclusion: Collaboration Can't Wait

The pandemic revealed fundamental truths about government. First, agencies' and employees' response was impressive and, at times, heroic. At every level of government, thousands of workers stepped up and became remote workers without missing a beat. They did whatever was necessary to continue doing their jobs and fulfilling their agencies' missions.

The experience also has revealed IT shortcomings. Scattered to the winds, many government workers discovered that they didn't have access to the collaboration tools they needed to engage with colleagues and perform their duties at a high level. The IT collaboration gap had always been there, but before COVID, it was obscured; government office workers had relied on physical proximity to their teammates to compensate for the lack of adequate collaboration tools.

With the gap now plain to see, government agencies have an opportunity and an obligation to adopt cost-efficient collaboration tools that will save time and money, an opportunity that budget-constrained agencies will be hard-pressed to ignore.



ABOUT GOOGLE

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.

Since our founding in 1998, Google has grown by leaps and bounds. From offering search in a single language we now offer dozens of products and services—including various forms of advertising and web applications for all kinds of tasks—in scores of languages. And starting from two computer science students in a university dorm room, we now have thousands of employees and offices around the world. A lot has changed since the first Google search engine appeared. But some things haven't changed: our dedication to our users and our belief in the possibilities of the Internet itself.

For more information about this report, please reach out to about.google.



ABOUT GOVLOOP

GovLoop's mission is to "connect government to improve government." We aim to inspire public-sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 300,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to connect and improve government.

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