



Tackling Telework: What the New Normal Looks Like for State and Local Governments

MARKET TRENDS REPORT

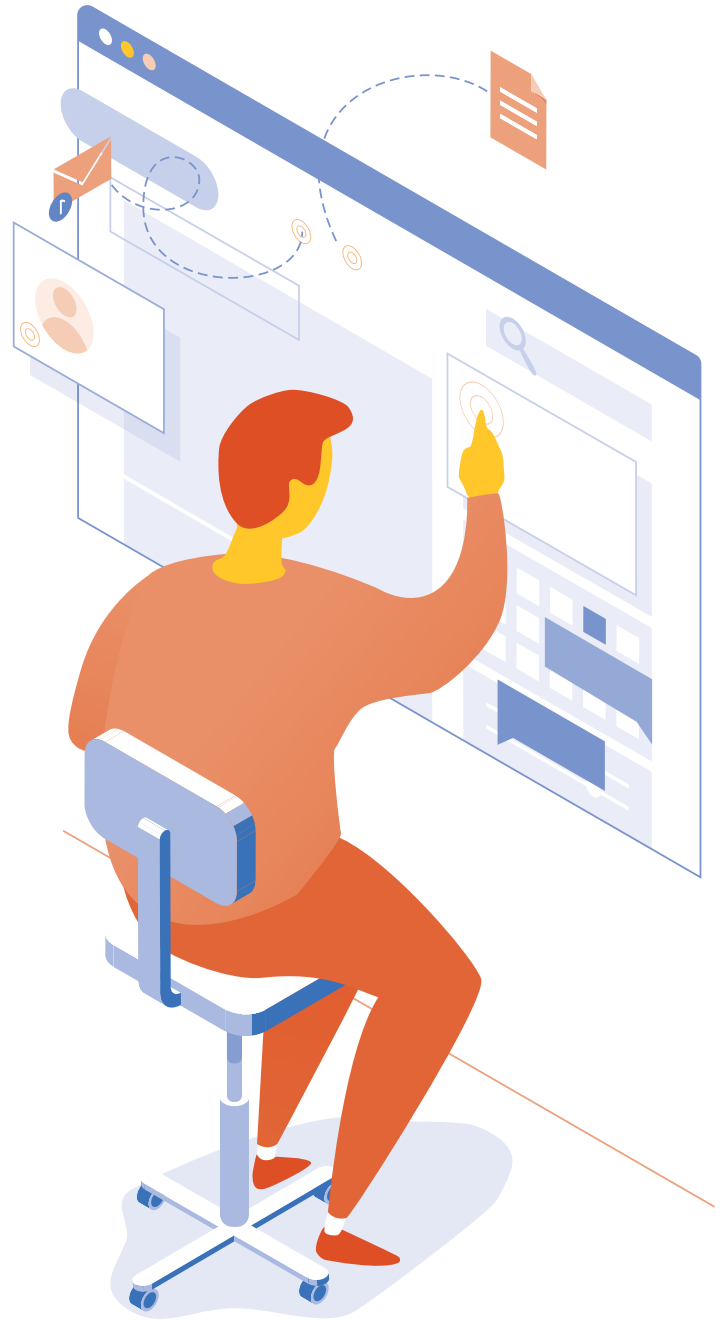


Executive Summary

Governors' stay-at-home orders in response to the coronavirus pandemic led many state and local government agencies to shift almost overnight from primarily in-person operations to remote work. That meant IT managers had to ensure employees had the technology and access to data and applications they needed to collaborate and do their jobs virtually.

This was especially important for critical management operations such as finance and human resources (HR) – activities that are traditionally heavily onsite. Now, with several months' hindsight, officials are able to assess how well prepared they were to support those essential operations – and what they need to do to fill in gaps the experience exposed.

GovLoop surveyed 91 public sector employees, primarily at the state and local levels, about their pandemic preparedness. In this report, we look at how state and local agencies can get and stay resilient in this new normal. We also provide insights from Ray Elwell, Market Advisory Program Manager at Workday, a provider of enterprise cloud applications for finance and HR.



BY THE NUMBERS

27%

of survey respondents said they were still working from their job sites full-time.

Source: [GovLoop Survey](#)

46%

of respondents said they were fully remote.

Source: [GovLoop Survey](#)

50%

of respondents said management functions such as enterprise planning and finance continued without interruption when offices closed.

Source: [GovLoop Survey](#)

24%

of respondents said their agencies experienced challenges and that fixing them is a top priority.

Source: [GovLoop Survey](#)

68%

of respondents said they received the same level of support and services when they switched to remote work.

Source: [GovLoop Survey](#)

53%

of respondents said their continuity of operations plans (COOPs) changed drastically or somewhat since the pandemic started.

Source: [GovLoop Survey](#)

Telework is more common at state agencies (64%) than local ones (19%).

Source: [State and Local Government Workforce: 2020 Survey](#)

64%

of local government chief information officers said the IT department received strong support during the pandemic.

Source: [The Computing Technology Industry Association's "IT Operations and Support: COVID-19 and the Local Government IT Response" report](#)

60%

of local government CIOs said at least half their IT staff is teleworking.

Source: [CompTIA's "IT Operations and Support: COVID-19 and the Local Government IT Response" report](#)

THE CHALLENGE

Reacting vs. Preparing

Endorsements of and efforts toward enabling telework aren't new: Government agencies at all levels have increased their support for telework over the last 10 years. Still, some government operations, including financial and HR, have traditionally been designed for onsite work, requiring wet signatures on paper documents, for instance. The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the shortcomings of that approach.

When agencies temporarily shuttered in response to the coronavirus, their business offices still had to ensure workers, contractors and vendors were paid, and that hiring processes continued even though that meant showing up to offices to review and forward papers. The GovLoop survey found that less than half of respondents have been fully remote since the pandemic struck.

A main reason for that was concern about what telework would mean for employees' access to financial and HR systems. Will they have internet access? Will they be able to

access agency systems remotely? Will they use personal or agency-issued devices? And how will they get the right people to sign off on all those paper documents?

"Governments can't just shut down and wait it out," Elwell said. "If you look at what's going on nationally with the economic conditions, we can't just say, 'Our payroll process has to be on-premise and we need six people to run it, so you'll get paid eight or 10 weeks from now, when we're able to get back to work.' It's just not possible."

The key issue is preparation verses reaction. Twenty-five percent of respondents said they were unprepared or woefully unprepared for remote work this time around. As a result, IT managers reacted, unable to rely on disaster recovery and continuity of operations plans to guide them. Many of those plans are based on the idea of having to move from an office to an emergency operations center, not employees' homes.

THE SOLUTION

Untether Workers From the Office With Cloud Solutions

It's clear that agencies need to adapt – and not only for the current pandemic but to be ready for whatever comes next. To do that, agencies need to replace legacy technologies with modern, cloud-based solutions that enable them to extend operations to wherever employees are.

Cloud can support remote workers today and in the future because it offers the flexibility and scalability that government agencies need to shift operations quickly. What's more, it facilitates access and communication, eliminating the need for those ink signatures and digitizing paper-based processes so employees, for example, can switch from paper to digital time cards that supervisors can sign electronically and automatically pass to the payroll team to process.

This also lays a foundation to revamp COOPs.

"Traditionally, I think governments have looked at COOP as just a document that says, 'If this event happens, here are the 12 things we need to do to be able to respond effectively,'" Elwell said. "But it's actually more than that. It's a bigger process. Reacting and planning really aren't the same thing."

Reacting is what IT managers did in March. Now, they are taking a step back to reassess the planning element with the benefit of recent lessons learned. The result will be COOPs that incorporate short- and long-term remote work capabilities based on cloud infrastructure that enable more agency functions – finance and HR, among them – to seamlessly move online for any disruption to normal operations, be it from a natural disaster or a second wave of COVID-19.

BEST PRACTICES

4 Ways Cloud Supports Remote Work

The non-medical response to the coronavirus has put the spotlight on IT, particularly government agencies' need to provide essential services without disruption. To make those changes, Elwell offered four best practices:



1. Five years ago, talk of **cloud** in financial and HR offices was virtually unheard of, but today, those conversations are more common. “Now that cloud technology has become more accepted in the government industry, we see organizations that are only going to the cloud. They’re not looking to on-premises solutions,” he said. Agencies that were most successful with remote work during the pandemic had cloud, rather than on-premise, applications.



2. Agencies also need to invest in cloud services such as **software-as-a-service and platform-as-a-service solutions**, which enable employees to focus on mission-critical technology, rather than maintaining outdated systems.



3. What’s more, **outsourcing disaster recovery and COOP operations to cloud providers** is less costly than handling them yourself, not to mention that many agencies say they can’t match the system access that cloud vendors can provide, Elwell said.



4. Lastly, they need to implement **mobile technologies** that allow employees to handle tasks with a tap of their fingers. “Having that access so that I can request time off on my phone or see my schedule on my phone ... those are the kinds of things where technology can really stabilize and make an organization more effective,” Elwell said.

All of these go a long way toward improving HR and financial functions’ resiliency. “We look at resilience as a standard operating procedure,” Elwell said. “One of the things we see organizations doing is relying on systems to do things that were manual.”

CASE STUDY

Las Vegas Valley Water District



The Las Vegas Valley Water District, Southern Nevada Water Authority and Springs Preserve were in better shape than many government agencies when work shifted online. That's because the three organizations that deliver safe water to more than 1 million people had been using Workday's cloud-based Human Capital Management suite for three years.

As a result, a majority of employees, especially those who work in the field, were accustomed to entering their hours via a smartphone; they don't even have computers, said Lou Reinbold, HR Manager at the Las Vegas Valley Water District, Southern Nevada Water Authority and Springs Reserve. The same goes for supervisors who approve those submissions and those who handle payroll and benefits.

"We're able to have one centralized application that does a lot of these core HR functions and financial functions in one place, and so employees are used to using it," Reinbold said. "They know that if all their pay information is still available to them, they can get to it from their phone, they can make all those changes."

What's more, the organizations had already begun moving away from paper processes by implementing digital signatures and automated routing, further enabling critical operations to continue uninterrupted when things changed.

Still, the shift strained the infrastructure, Reinbold said. "If we truly had to have every employee log in to our network, we wouldn't have had the capacity if we had to use VPN connections," he said.

Workday's solution allayed his security concerns, too. That's because it sits outside the on-premise network, and access requires two-factor authentication. "That lessens the need for offsite employees to connect to a computer onsite because it is cloud-based," Reinbold said.

"The biggest reason that we were able to pretty seamlessly go remote within a day and a half or two days was just the technology that we have in the background,"

- Lou Reinbold, HR Manager at the Las Vegas Valley Water District, Southern Nevada Water Authority and Springs Reserve

The result is that more people than he expected have been able to work remotely, seamlessly and securely. "The biggest reason that we were able to pretty seamlessly go remote within a day and a half or two days was just the technology that we have in the background," he said.

Learn more: www.workday.com

Conclusion

Government’s ability to provide services seamlessly has never been more important, and public servants stepped up to ensure that critical management operations remained in place.

Government leaders must look at how COOP and disaster recovery plans account for long-term displacements – something legacy technology simply can’t support.

Cloud services offer the flexibility and scalability that government agencies need to shift operations quickly. Plus, cloud facilitates workers’ ability to access applications and networks from wherever they are. For the HR and financial departments, replacing paper-based processes with digital documents and e-signatures sets the stage for modern operations not just in dire times, but all the time.



ABOUT WORKDAY

Workday is a leading provider of enterprise cloud applications for finance, HR, and planning. Founded in 2005, Workday delivers financial management, human capital management, and analytics applications designed for the world’s largest companies, educational institutions, and government agencies.

Learn more: <https://www.workday.com/en-us/industries/government.html>



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.

For more information about this report, please reach out to info@govloop.com.



1152 15th St. NW Suite 800
Washington, DC 20005

P: (202) 407-7421 | F: (202) 407-7501

www.govloop.com
@GovLoop