THE FUTURE GOVERNMENT WORKPLACE

Hybrid work is here to stay. Today's government workforces require collaboration tools that enable continuity of services from anywhere and support inclusive, productive workplaces for staff.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated an already emerging trend toward hybrid work for state and local government. In a Center for Digital Government (CDG) survey of more than 200 government leaders, nearly half of respondents said they plan to work in a hybrid work model where they alternate between remote and in-office work for the next 12 to 24 months.

Governments have many reasons for maintaining a hybrid workplace strategy. Nearly half of CDG survey respondents reported improved staff productivity as a top benefit. In addition, employees appreciate the time and cost savings of not having a commute. With more control over their schedules, employees also have

more opportunities to put their energy into time with family and friends and engage in other personal pursuits and creative endeavors.

But the hybrid work model also comes with challenges for state and local governments, particularly when connecting teams in different locations. Fifty percent of CDG survey respondents reported that when working in the office they prefer to connect with remote teams

in a conference room, training room or board room. However, more than half said the technology in these rooms is often difficult to use or that staff lacked sufficient training on how to use in-room technology. Fifty-five percent said these spaces are simply lacking in the technologies needed to effectively host a hybrid meeting.

Limited conference room technology can impact both the quality of staff work and their sense of office culture.

Nearly half of CDG survey respondents said they plan to work in a hybrid work model where they alternate between remote and in-office work for the next 12 to 24 months.

"Whether you are working at home or in the office, you need to be able to actively participate in meetings," says Scott Wharton, Vice President and General Manager of the Video Collaboration Group at Logitech. "Governments need to create a hybrid work environment that is flexible but still productive and inclusive."

Along with improved conference room technology, governments also need to ensure employees have the technology they need to be successful at home. Many staff lack the technologies needed to block out noises and distractions so they can be heard clearly and feel confident when they speak. Poorly lit environments make it a challenge to be seen clearly, while the use of integrated webcams can make workspaces uncomfortable and capture unflattering angles, making it easy to feel disconnected from teammates in hybrid meetings. Home offices also require stable and secure networks with ample bandwidth to ensure productivity.
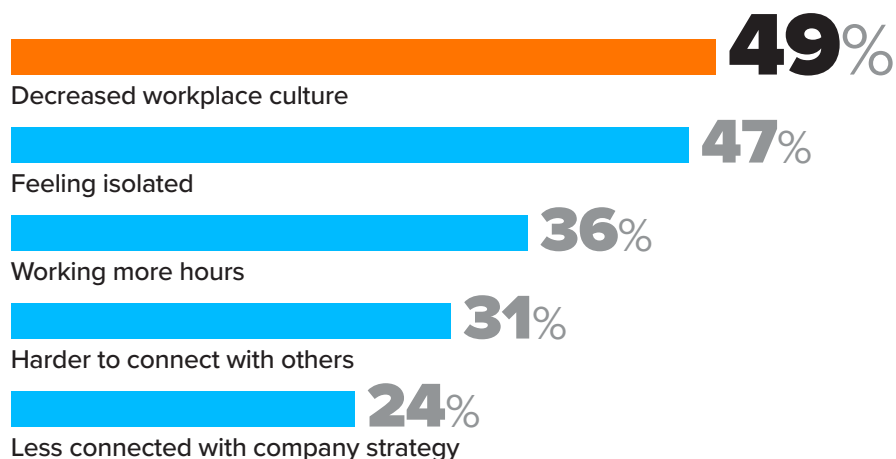
By implementing easy-to-use, standards-based video collaboration solutions, state and local governments can be empowered to seamlessly connect with remote employees, other agencies and constituents; optimize communication experiences; support equitable participation; and drive deeper productivity from anywhere.

A Collaborative Conference Room

Many conference rooms in state and local government buildings have either outdated audio/visual equipment or technology that is either difficult to use or incompatible with preferred unified communications (UC) platforms.

"One outdated but common method for running a hybrid meeting is placing a laptop at the end of the table in a conference room," Wharton says. "While many offices have used

What are the TOP DRAWBACKS you have observed from transitioning to a hybrid or fully remote working environment?

49% Decreased workplace culture

47% Feeling isolated

36% Working more hours

31% Harder to connect with others

24% Less connected with company strategy

Source: CDG Workplace of the Future Survey

this strategy, it is rarely effective. The audio is often poor quality, and larger teams cannot fit everyone in the field of vision."

Unsuccessful attempts to connect using room systems can take precious minutes away from a meeting.

> ❝ If you have to call IT in order to start your meeting, we're doing it wrong."

Richard Semple, CIO, Williamson County, Texas

Moreover, complicated audio/visual technologies can cause frustration among employees and tie up limited IT resources with help desk calls.

The goal for government IT leaders is to implement high-quality, easy-to-use videoconferencing solutions at a reasonable cost. They should look for intuitive room-based video collaboration solutions that standardize user interfaces across room environments to support experiences that are collaborative and inclusive.

The ideal videoconferencing solution delivers seamless connectivity and interoperability to a wide variety of UC platforms used by government workers. This provides the greatest flexibility while protecting investments as users' needs change.

Collaborative rooms should be designed so everyone in the room and remote participants can be seen and heard clearly. Any cameras in the room should ensure everyone is visible, support the desired fields of view, and optimize light balance and color to render natural-looking skin tones, even in dim or backlit conditions.

Microphones must be able to improve voice clarity by suppressing background noise and echo so even the quietest voices can be heard.

All staff should be able to share and view digital and analog content as well. Whether it's a PowerPoint from an individual's computer or content written on a whiteboard in a room, all meeting participants should be able to see and use the available tools to share knowledge and build on one another's ideas.

"When you can't see the whiteboard or you can't hear your colleagues,

you can feel like a second-class citizen on your own team," explains Wharton. By making technology intuitive and capturing both verbal and non-verbal communication, team members at work and at home can effectively collaborate and build trust.

Videoconferencing technology can also improve inter-office collaboration. When Williamson County, Texas, was organizing an annual fair and rodeo, for example, it held numerous meetings with offices across the county government ranging from parks and recreation to emergency management to the sheriff's office.

With improved videoconferencing technology, "everyone was able to meet and collaborate with ease, without the need to spend time traveling across the county," says Richard Semple, Chief Information Officer at Williamson County. "The ability to easily engage in cross-agency communication is invaluable."
Room-based video collaboration solutions like those used by Williamson County enable government workforces to efficiently meet virtually, while saving time and reducing costs.

> ❝ **Fortunately, we were able to implement 40 Logitech Room Solutions for Microsoft Teams and spread those out across our county. We've made incredible use of those conference rooms which are almost constantly booked with four or five people here and then another dozen remote.**❞

Richard Semple, CIO, Williamson County, Texas

The Ideal Home Office

At-home workers face their own unique set of challenges. For example, more than 40 percent of CDG survey respondents noted that one issue with participating in video meetings from home is the number of distractions in the home office.

Low-quality technologies in the home office do not only impact at-home staff, they also place a burden on employees in the workspace. For example, straining to hear and see at-home staff can contribute to videoconference fatigue, leaving employees exhausted by the end of a day of conferences.

External monitors, webcams, audio solutions with noise cancellation and even lighting technologies can improve the videoconferencing
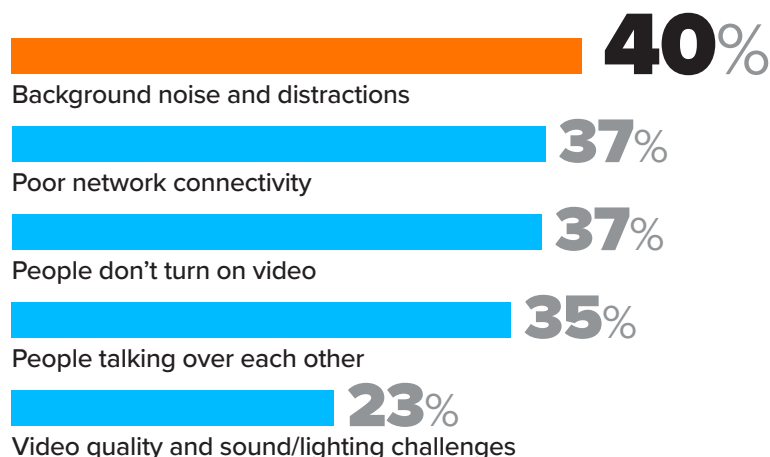
experience for both at-home employees and in-office staff.

"When government IT leaders purchase audio/visual technologies for at-home employees, they aren't just doing it for the employees receiving the tools," Wharton says. "They're doing it for everyone else."

Other distractions can be visual, such as a cluttered workstation. A universal docking system can help employees clean up their workspaces to increase productivity.

Docking system features such as call light indicators, which can alert family members or coworkers to when an employee is on a work call or conference, can help further reduce distractions and interruptions. It can also help reduce costs by eliminating the need to replace docking stations when laptops are updated.

Procuring the Best Solutions for Your Office

Not all videoconference solutions are created equal. Many come with a hefty price tag or a long implementation process, or both. Government leaders should consider the following qualities when looking for the right solutions for their offices.

Purchase room solution kits. If your office has multiple conference rooms, adding extensive built-in conferencing technology to each room might not be financially feasible. Consider room solution kits that include everything you need to add life-like video and studio quality audio to any size conference room

What are the TOP CHALLENGES you face in video meetings when working from home?

40%
Background noise and distractions

37%
Poor network connectivity

37%
People don't turn on video

35%
People talking over each other

23%
Video quality and sound/lighting challenges

Source: CDG Workplace of the Future Survey

with a consistent user experience. These cost-effective solutions are easy to install, deploy and manage. If real estate and facilities are undecided, these reconfigurable systems can be installed on a mobile cart to meet today's needs with the ability to be installed in conference rooms later — protecting IT investments. If your office has a variety of different sized conference rooms, preconfigured room kits take the guess work out of formerly complicated room configurations, enabling an organization to scale at its own pace in a manageable way.

Find a cost-minded partner.
The CDG survey revealed the primary challenge state and local governments face when trying to purchase audio/video and conferencing solutions is cost. Because of budget limitations, many government agencies lack easy access to necessary funds or are not aware of stimulus and grant funding available to support IT investments. Agencies should look for a technology partner capable of guiding them through strategies to unlock funding for IT investments. The right partner can point toward methods for covering costs, including potential funding opportunities.

Find an easy-to-use solution. To solve user interface challenges in conference rooms, IT leaders need to make it easy for users to connect and share content. Look for room solutions that include intuitive room control that is simple for all staff to turn on and utilize without extensive

training or support. When Semple was looking for a conferencing solution for Williamson County, he was adamant the tool be easy for staff to use.

"My rule was that, if you have to call IT in order to start your meeting, we're doing it wrong," he says.

Look for integrated tools. Because communication platforms and technologies are always changing, choose standards-based solutions that are interoperable with the collaboration platforms preferred by staff. "Look for vendors that allow you to switch between platforms," says Wharton. "This is helpful for future-proofing; it ensures that if your office makes a change in the future, the conference solution will still work." If the solution integrates with existing platforms, governments can also more easily get the tool up and running.

An Equitable Workplace
A key benefit to improved audio and visual technology is that it gives all staff an opportunity to feel included and engaged in the office.

According to the CDG survey, two of the most cited concerns about the hybrid environment were a decreased workplace culture and a feeling of isolation. Giving remote employees the opportunity to be active participants in meetings drives engagement and community. Having the right tools gives them the confidence to speak up and be effective and productive in communicating from wherever they work.

With high-quality tools such as a webcam to improve lighting and a headset to block out noise, remote workers can improve communication experiences and feel like they are in the room with their in-office colleagues.

Not only can the right technology help staff feel included, but it can also help public sector entities recruit and retain a more diverse and younger workforce. With the right tools, government jobs can be offered to people who live a bit further outside of expensive downtown city centers (where town and city halls typically reside). This gives governments the opportunity to attract workers with the right skills to provide government services that might not have previously applied to a public sector job.

A strong workplace culture coupled with a less-frequent commute can attract new employees, leading to a potentially larger, more diverse pool of workers.

As Semple explains, "most employees want to feel they are part of a team. We can leverage these technologies to foster an inclusive team culture and give employees the sense that they are all working together to reach common goals."

This piece was written and produced by the Center for Digital Government Content Studio, with information and input from Logitech.