



The Future of State and Local Communications and Collaboration Strategies



Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1	
Executive summary	3
CHAPTER 2	
The rise of digital transformation	5
CHAPTER 3	
Internal communications challenges	7
CHAPTER 4	
External communications.....	9
CHAPTER 5	
Priorities for unified cloud communications	10
CHAPTER 6	
Workforce of the future	11
CHAPTER 7	
About Avaya.....	13

Executive summary

For many state and local government agencies, the global health crisis spurred a worst-case communications scenario.

Not only were government agencies mostly unprepared to support a high number of remote workers, the aging communications infrastructure that supports them was exposed as inaccessible to the people forced into remote work situations.

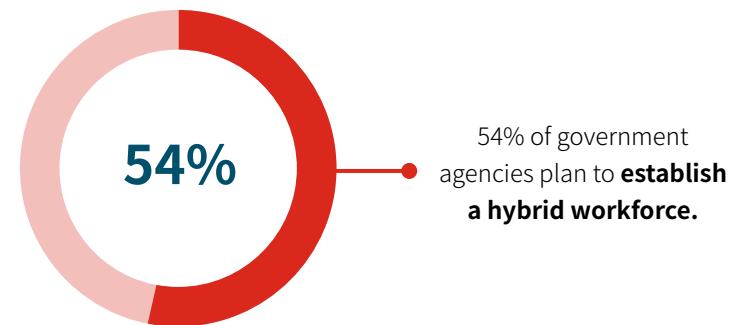
New research explains why that's an ongoing challenge for state and local government agencies. According to the findings, nine out of 10 agencies have transitioned to remote work since the global health crisis began and a plurality of agencies today indicate that greater than three out of four of their employees remain away from the office, a situation likely to last well into the future.

Prior to the global health crisis, only 8.7% of public sector respondents felt remote work was very important. Now, 91% do. That dramatic shift in perception signals significant changes in how agencies plan for and implement communications solutions in the years ahead.

While some government agencies reassess their approach (and commitment) to office work, **more than half of all agencies (54%)** plan to establish a hybrid workforce (with a significant portion of workers off-site), even though many currently lack the communications infrastructure to support that model.



Indeed, despite the vaccine rollout, many agencies will still mandate telecommuting for their employees. Several departments in Washington's **King County**, for example, extended telework through July 5, 2021. In **Meridian, Idaho**, a recently enacted policy enables employees to telework up to half of their allotted hours.





During the global health crisis, internal communications have increased in importance as agencies have recalibrated their communications and collaboration strategies. As a result of these trends, the communications preferences of these government agencies are increasingly digital—and headed for the cloud.

This has accelerated the timetable for government digital transformation and the need for agencies to improve how they support work from anywhere. That prioritization is catalyzing state and local government IT infrastructure plans. Providing secure access to communications from anywhere, at any time, and on any device is becoming a government imperative.

A survey of state and local government leaders was conducted to discover how public sector agencies managed both internal and external communications prior to and during the global health crisis. The objective was to better understand these agencies' evolving needs, challenges, and preferences related to unified communications and collaboration. The survey, yielded 144 completed responses in October 2020.

CHAPTER 2

The rise of digital transformation

Working practices saw the most change of importance, moving up 82.6%. Many agencies adjusted their business and IT processes to enable employees to work remotely and use mobile devices more securely.

As a result, the movement towards digital transformation was also accelerated. Unsurprisingly, the cloud is becoming a new center of gravity and investment. “There is a steady move in that direction, with a dramatic change in attitude as a result of the global health crisis,” said Teri Takai, Executive Director of the Center for Digital Government (CDG).



Digital transformation strategy importance¹

Before pandemic

30.6%

During pandemic

69.4%

¹Governing.com Digital States Survey 2020, October 2020

Looking back to before the global health crisis, just 30.6% of respondents characterized their digital transformation strategy as very important. Today the number has more than doubled to 69.4%.¹ Given that traditional communication channels were less accessible—or even unavailable, agencies increasingly recognized they needed to be available through digital channels.

The shift may be attributed to a confluence of factors:

- From a strategic standpoint, the cloud is where the vast majority of new development—and innovation—is happening, particularly in the communications and collaboration space.
- The cloud offers scalability and economic advantages matched by few state or local government data centers.
- The cloud represents the best method for government data collection and data sharing, such as public health information, during normal times or especially during a health crisis.



Accelerating implementation of communications and collaboration solutions

Implementation plans have accelerated due to COVID-19

45%

Already implemented

35%

No plans

9%

Implementation plans have decelerated due to COVID-19

7%

Other

4%

The spark of interest in digital transformation may also reflect concerns about business continuity. Similar to the private sector, few public agencies anticipated the need to support communications between employees working remotely for sustained periods of time or, for that matter, conducting off-premises external communications with constituents.

It's clear that more state and local agencies recognize the importance of updating their communications solutions to deal with remote work. While nearly one in three state and local agencies have implemented communications and collaboration solutions, two in five agencies are accelerating their implementation plans.

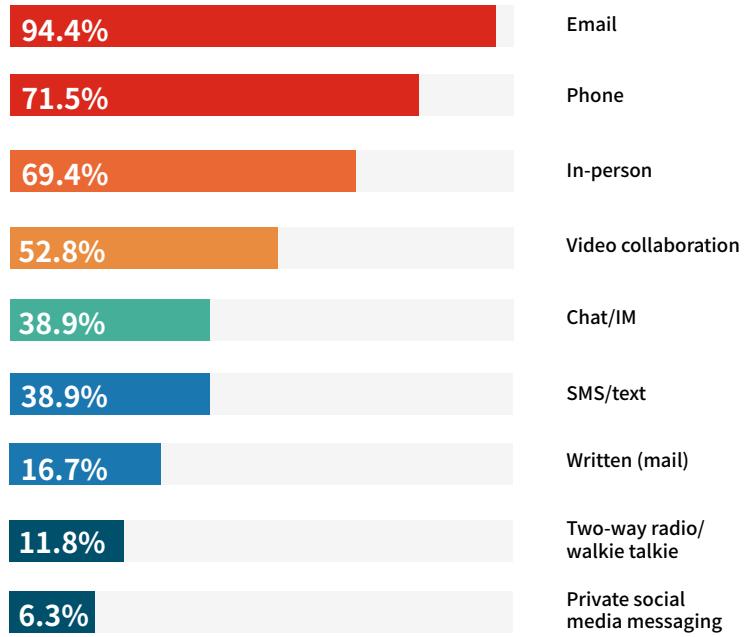
In accelerating their digital transformation plans, state and local government agencies are keeping pace with the private sector, which also experienced dramatic growth in cloud utilization.

Internal communications challenges

Whether a public sector agency fosters a top-down, siloed, or flat-style work culture, productive work streams necessitate reaching decision makers on a timely basis. Prior to the global health crisis, 37% of respondents felt internal communications initiatives were very important; now, 63% feel that way.



Internal communications preferences



That finding is an overt acknowledgment that work life has changed substantially in the work-from-anywhere era. Gone are the shared moments, spontaneous conversations over coffee, or quick brainstorms with nearby coworkers. In its place are scheduled video-based check-ins and extended team meetings to see how everyone is doing.

While state and local government workers may miss in-person encounters, they don't see video collaboration as the virtual equivalent. Possibly, that's because communication preferences are rooted in familiar habits; in-person, phone, and email have been around longer; and newer solutions (video, chat, SMS/text) are on the rise.

Presented with an array of internal communications methods, agencies opt for email, phone, and in-person over video collaboration. But our public sector survey respondents don't deny video altogether. They indicated a preference for video collaboration for internal (52.8%) rather than external (29.9%) communications.

Top internal communications challenges

Training

43.1%

Network/bandwidth limitation

36.1%

Ease of use

31.9%

Security issues

30.6%

Too many applications

20.8%

Given the rising popularity of communications apps, and the demographic weight of millennials in the workforce, chat and text services could be expected to gain much greater public sector traction in the coming years. What's the hold up? A lack of common communications platforms, which include provisions for message retention and security, may impede some agencies from shifting collaborative workflows to newer channels.

Our study found that work-from-anywhere policies presented agencies of all sizes with significant internal communications challenges, particularly in these areas:

- **Training:** Many employees had never worked remotely; not all were equipped with laptops or knew how to use a VPN. And few agencies were well-prepared to hold remote training.
- **Network/bandwidth:** Many video conferences were hampered by poor connectivity, low resolution, and interruptions due to inadequate home internet service.
- **Security issues:** When a particular video conferencing solution earned low marks for security, some government agencies opted to switch to safer alternatives.

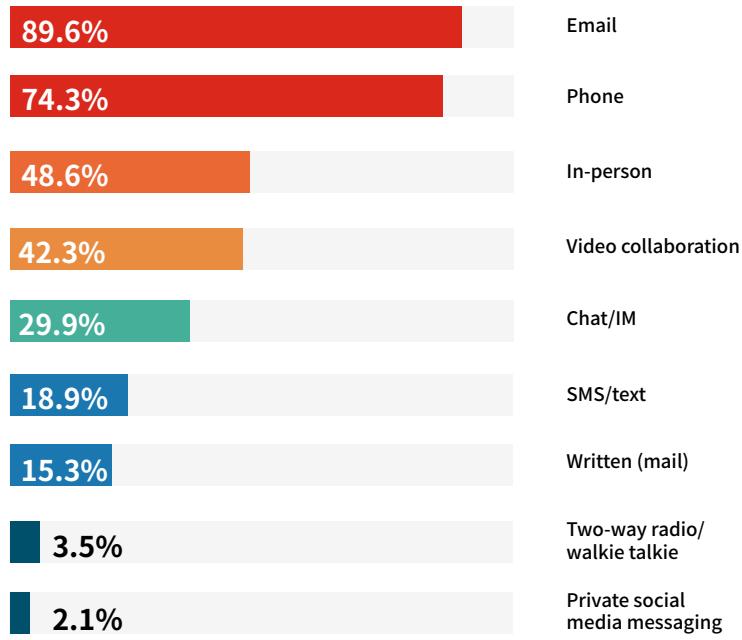


External communications

Within weeks of the global health crisis, many state and local officials enacted communications plans that dictated protocols and procedures for constituent communications. Employees followed remote work procedures—setting off a chain of technical support issues detailed above. However, the normal business of partner and constituent communications was often subject to delays due to restrictions such as work-from-home orders and facility shutdowns.



External communications preferences by government agencies



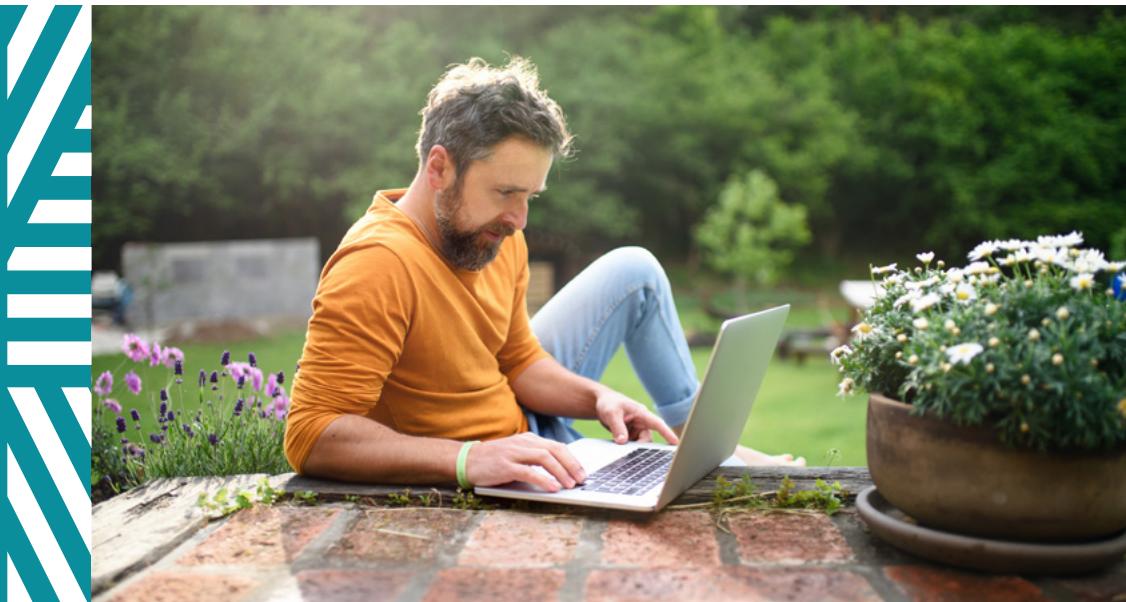
Prior to the global health crisis, constituent engagement and communications were deemed very important by 43.3% of the state and local agencies that participated in the study. Today, that number has climbed to 56.7%, reflecting an awareness of the heightened demand for public sector services.

With a few exceptions, such as mass emergency notifications in urban areas, instant digital communication methods such as SMS or chat have yet to become a preferred means of external communications for state and local government agencies. This is one area where the government is behind the curve; for instance, many consumers commonly receive text notifications that their restaurant to-go order is ready for delivery or pickup.

External communications are vital to agencies anytime, but especially during a health crisis, it's essential to provide reliable and secure communications platforms that can help foster and ensure public trust and cooperation.

Priorities for unified cloud communications

Among many key reasons why cloud has become a central focus for state and local government agencies, support for remote work and mobility are now seen as an imperative. Prior to the global health crisis, just 9% of agencies considered the cloud very important; now, a whopping 91% do.



Most important factors in evaluating UCaaS solutions

Reliability

70.8%

Security

65.3%

Ease of use

53.5%

Cost

46.5%

Return on investment

29.2%

Although cloud-based solutions have been widely available for the last 15 years, such services—particularly for mission-critical apps—remain new to state and local government agencies. But that appears to be changing, rapidly. A [Government Technology article](#) asserted that: “In the COVID-19 crisis, cloud and software-as-a-service proved their utility, their versatility, and scalability.”

A Center for Digital Government survey from 2019, referenced in the same article, reported that between 11–20% of systems were in the cloud, but that going forward the numbers will rise upward of 40% at the county and city levels, and above 50% at the state level.

Will unified communications and collaboration platforms delivered as a service share in that surge of cloud interest? Reliability may turn out to be the most popular driver of interest. Considering the most important factors in evaluating unified communications and collaboration solutions, the respondents may be thinking: what can we least afford to see go wrong?

Workforce of the future

One lasting impact of the global health crisis is that many agencies now recognize they can remain productive in work-from-anywhere conditions. A majority (53.5%) of respondents indicated they would enable a hybrid work environment, in which a significant number of employees alternate between working from home or at the office. For many public sector agencies, that may mean more of the same in terms of where the work is conducted, but for IT planners in particular, it may necessitate shifts in supporting how teams communicate and collaborate.



This is more likely to be the case at the state or county levels, rather than in a city, town, or village, which generally have fewer resources.

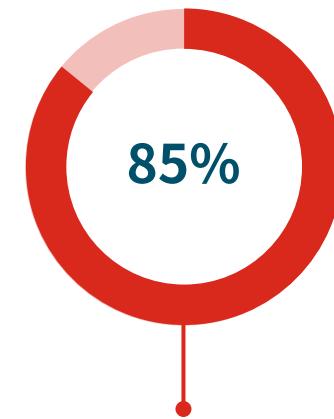
	State	County	City
Fully remote	1.9%	0%	2.1%
Fully in office	7.7%	11.1%	37.5%
Hybrid	90.4%	88.9%	60.5%

Among the initiatives that may be viewed differently post-global health crisis is office and location management. Pre-global health crisis, only 29.4% of survey respondents considered this very important, but now, 70.6% of respondents place it in that category. Is that because offices seem less relevant in a work-from-anywhere era? Quite possibly workplace views have changed and along with them a commitment to fixed CapEx assets such as offices or on-premises PBXs.

Undoubtedly, COVID-19 has forced enormous workforce management and work style changes for public sector agencies. Accelerating digital transformation will set the stage for successful hybrid work initiatives and improve the public sector's ability to govern productively even as officials work from anywhere.



In a large survey of public sector workers conducted after the global health crisis began in the spring of 2020, **85% of respondents** who did not work at home before COVID-19 indicated that they **want to continue the present arrangement**, at least part of the time. Such a move will place greater emphasis on collaborative telework and may spur agencies to rethink the way they equip and train public workers.



85% who did not work at home before
want to continue working from home

As state and local government agencies begin to adopt unified communications, they will find it easier to foster real-time collaboration, which will improve decisionmaking, productivity, and business continuity even when on-premises work is deemed unsafe. Public sector workers will benefit from a more consistent, reliable, and sustainable communications system that enhances both the quality and timeliness of agency interactions and collaboration.



Stay Connected:



About Avaya

Businesses are built by the experiences they provide, and every day millions of those experiences are delivered by Avaya Holdings Corp. (NYSE: AVYA). Avaya is shaping what's next for the future of work, with innovation and partnerships that deliver game-changing business benefits. Our cloud communications solutions and multi-cloud application ecosystem power personalized, intelligent, and effortless customer and employee experiences to help achieve strategic ambitions and desired outcomes. Together, we are committed to help grow your business by delivering Experiences that Matter. Learn more at www.avaya.com.