

GEARING UP FOR THE 'WORK-FROM-ANYWHERE' WORKFORCE

FedScoop Report

Agencies need to modernize how they manage and empower remote employees. The upshot: The promise of attracting better talent and improving public services.



Public sector leaders have a rare opportunity to recast the way they attract, retain and employ government workers and, in turn, deliver public services. But workforce experts say there's also new urgency to do so.

Employers in both the private and public sectors are confronting a sea change across America's workforce. As employees adapted to working from home — and experienced new flexibilities around when and where they worked — they also discovered greater latitude to seek out employers willing to offer more flexible work-life arrangements.

Several recent studies suggest that the uphill climb employers faced before the pandemic in finding and retaining talent will likely prove more challenging now. At the same time, the lessons learned in facilitating hybrid and remote work using collaborative video communications platforms offer public officials a fresh opportunity to attracting talent while also improving public services.

According to a recent [Future Forum Pulse survey](#), which polled 10,569 knowledge workers in the U.S., Australia, France, Germany, Japan and the U.K.:

- More than half – **57%** – say they are open to looking for a new job in the next year.
- **76%** want flexibility in where they work.
- **93%** want flexibility in when they work.

A [study](#) of 4,912 workers conducted in January by Momentive and Zoom, similarly found:

- Just over two-thirds (**69%**) of workers say it's important for them to be able to choose whether they work in-person, remotely or a hybrid model. That figure rose to **85%** among workers doing some or all of their job from home.
- Almost half (**45%**) say it's likely they would look for a new job if they weren't able to work from their ideal location.

Other research by the Society of Human Resource Management [found](#) that over half (52%) of 1,000 U.S. workers would choose to work full-time from home permanently if given the option.

As public sector leaders continue to wrestle with what the future of work looks like, organizational psychologists like Adam Grant [caution](#) that after generations of workers arranging their lives around their work, a growing number are starting to think, "It might be time to start planning our work around our lives."

Leaders at many public and private organizations may not be prepared.

"Studies show that many executives are holding on to the remnants of the past and failing to see this as an inflection point in the workforce," says Ella Washington, organizational psychologist, faculty member at Georgetown's McDonough School of Business and founder of Ellavate Solutions. "If employers don't pay attention and take action to re-create the best of what we've learned working virtually in the office and in hybrid-work environments, then opportunities for [talent gaps and inequity] could skyrocket."

From telework to work-from-anywhere

It's increasingly evident, though, that traditional telework arrangements and even recent efforts to support remote work are no longer enough to compete for top talent, suggests David C. Wyld, Merritt Professor of Management at Southeastern Louisiana University and author of a new [report](#) on remote work, published by IBM's Center for the Business of Government.

While the U.S. government, and agencies such as the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, have facilitated remote work for many years, the recent need to pivot and support remote work at scale has moved executives at NASA, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the General Services Administration, the National Science Foundation and elsewhere to [rethink how they operate](#).

"There is an increasingly common recognition amongst corporate leaders that the greater use of remote work arrangements is not only the smart thing to do but also the right thing to do," says Wyld. But it will also require developing a new management mindset (see sidebar), and it will demand greater attention to technology that can support remote and hybrid collaboration.

8 building blocks for managing a remote workforce

In a [report](#) chronicling changes across government agencies and the rapid transition to remote and hybrid work arrangements, Professor David Wyld at Southeastern Louisiana University highlights steps agencies should consider to better attract and manage talent in the post-pandemic workplace:

- Assure technical connections
- Emphasize communication
- Foster collaboration
- Manage and maintain the organization's culture
- Exercise the "right" kinds and levels of oversight
- Build physical spaces that facilitate a new way of working
- Manage with compassion
- Lead with strategic intent



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Source: [Future Forum Pulse Survey](#)

Improving public services

Embracing a work-from-anywhere (WFX) mindset, however, not only promises to give public sector organizations greater leverage to attract talent; it also promises to strengthen their ability to deliver public services more effectively and efficiently, argues Stephen Ellis, government solutions lead at Zoom Video Communications.

Ellis says that over the past two years, federal, state and local government organizations that deployed Zoom's video communications platform — initially to facilitate collaboration between remote workers and partners — quickly discovered how Zoom's capabilities also enabled new and more innovative ways to serve their constituents.

The platform, for instance, allowed the Omaha City Council and many other local governmental bodies to attract a wider circle of citizens to participate in public hearings and [broaden engagement](#). U.S. courts, including the Texas Judiciary, discovered Zoom's platform could speed up court cases — by allowing experts, law enforcement and others to testify remotely — and improve the overall court experience for citizens. And government employees, working across different departments and from different locations, were able to collaborate over public policy issues more effectively.

Ellis believes public sector officials are just beginning to realize the full potential of unified video communications and collaboration platforms like Zoom — and how in turn, they can improve public services and public safety.

Instead of municipalities sending engineering teams to inspect roads, bridges, utilities and other infrastructure, "it would be a lot easier and faster to have qualified video crews bring live or recorded video images to a network of civil engineers and other experts to assess what needs to be done and prioritize repairs," he suggests.

"Or think about how it could help first responders. In California, for instance, when there's a lost child on the beach, police will use drones to help in the search. What if they had multiple people looking at the drone footage? Instead of bringing 10 responders to the beach, they might redeploy nine of them to look elsewhere," he says.

He points to other examples where the ability to gather people quickly, wherever they are, can play a crucial role in public safety — such as when a school system faces a potential active shooter incident. Zoom's platform makes it possible to quickly establish a virtual command center to communicate with law enforcement and local officials and make better real-time decisions.

Empowering a WFX workforce

One advantage in particular of Zoom's platform is its ability to operate in low- or limited- bandwidth areas, according to Ellis. Another is how it can facilitate live video discussions across disparate communications systems and devices typically used by first responders. But it also offers other technical advantages that public sector CIOs will appreciate, says Ellis, including the ability to:

- Support centralized identity and access management controls.
- Deliver audio, video and data through a single, unified communications platform.
- Scale quickly and securely in the cloud.
- Meet a host of government security requirements, including FedRAMP and the Defense Department's Impact Level 4 Guidelines.

The Future of Work

Federal officials are already recasting the technical and policy groundwork to support more permanent adoption of remote work. The Office of Personnel Management, for instance, released new [guidelines](#) in November on "[the future of work](#)" to better meet the government's "human capital needs and improve mission delivery."

OPM cited multiple benefits for facilitating a remote workforce longer term, including:

- Retention of highly talented employees who must move outside of an agency's geographic location for personal reasons.
- Recruitment of employees outside an agency's geographic location with specialized skills, who may not want or be able to relocate for personal reasons.
- Agency cost savings related to locality pay, real estate, and other facility expenses, paired with

employee cost savings related to commuting and local cost of living expenses.

- Increased employee productivity and engagement, and greater ability to support continuity of operations.
- More attractive job opportunities for individuals with mobility-related or other qualifying disabilities.

But establishing modern technology platforms to facilitate remote work also provides another benefit: It helps make agencies more attractive to current and prospective employees. According to the Future Forum's findings, people who work at companies they describe as technology innovators report much more positive work experiences, with respondents reporting:

- **177%** higher scores than average on overall satisfaction.
- **160%** higher scores on work-life balance.
- **117%** higher scores on flexibility.
- **60%** higher scores on access to resources and people.
- **58%** higher scores on productivity.

One of the challenges ahead, acknowledges Ellis and other workforce experts, is the importance of understanding and addressing the different needs of employees working remotely, in-office, and in hybrid circumstances.

"I think we've gotten to a new balance, and we don't want to unbalance it and go back to the old telework model," he says. "We also need to find a way to avoid a two-track workforce, where Class A employees have flexibility and Class B people are tied to a physical space. So the goal is to build flexibility for everyone. And that's where technology can play a key role."

[Learn more](#) about how Zoom Video Communications can help government empower the work-from-anywhere workforce.

This report was produced by FedScoop and underwritten by Zoom.