

# Navigating Toward an Inclusive Future of Work:

## Challenges and Opportunities for State and Local Governments



The pandemic has accelerated changes in the government workplace that will last far beyond the short-term return to physical offices. In this Q&A, **Mike Witzman**, Systems Engineering Director for Cisco's U.S. State and Local Government and Education, describes how governments can prepare for constituent and employee needs in the “next normal.”

### »» What will government workplaces look like over the next six to 18 months?

The return to office is going to be gradual, but the biggest caveat is that it isn't a return to what we had. There is a new normal – governments are already saying they'll need less space, and in the future, may need to flex back again. But there are also long-term benefits to the hybrid workplace. Governments can use this trend to tap broader talent pools, which is already happening in higher education and other sectors.

### »» How will governments need to modernize their IT infrastructure to manage hybrid work environments?

When your employees work from anywhere, it fundamentally changes traffic flows. You are managing and accountable for apps and services delivered over the Internet. You need to keep the security policy centralized, but the controls must be distributed and largely delivered from the cloud, using capabilities like Secure Access Service Edge (SASE).

Within their physical infrastructure, governments may need less space – but they will require more technology in that space. Density monitoring is here to stay at the floor and room levels, and can be integrated with smart lighting to ensure offices are empty before

sanitizing surfaces with UVC light. We also expect most meetings going forward to have at least one remote participant. Buildings will need to be refitted to create flexible, secure and efficient video-enabled workspaces that can easily adapt to the needs of a constantly changing group of workers.

### »» What are the priorities as governments continue to offer and expand digital service delivery?

We see cities and states adopting portals with capabilities like secure single sign-on as opposed to an agency-by-agency approach. One of the biggest trends we're seeing now involves modernizing contact centers. States and cities are gaining efficiencies and new capabilities by deploying a single cloud contact center platform they can tailor to serve all agencies. Introducing the right mix of self-service chatbots – driven by machine learning – with trained staff is enabling agencies to reach and serve more constituents. State and local governments are also actively working to bridge the digital divide to ensure government and critical private services like telehealth benefit all constituents.

### »» How will governments manage workforce and leadership development in a hybrid work environment?

Like everything else, recruiting and workforce development has moved online. There is a degree of burnout when everything is done the same way. Augmenting self-paced video training with instructor and expert-led live sessions increases engagement and learning. At the same time, continuing education has moved to self-paced microcredentialing and microcourses, and that is accelerating.

### »» What can government leaders do now to prepare for longer-term changes?

We're shifting from digital service delivery as a supporting mechanism to the primary one. Governments must build a solid, secure platform they can evolve over time and scale as needs change. Incorporating emerging technologies like 5G, edge compute and sensors will make the experience for remote workers seamless, no matter where their daily journey takes them. It will also increase visibility and automation to make physical government spaces safer and more efficient.

Because of the pandemic, all these things have been shown to be possible. Now we need to accelerate them.



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