



Telework and Continuity of Operations

Different goals, common technologies

When the commander of a Navy recruiting district in Pennsylvania got a promotion that involved relocating to Washington, D.C., he decided his family had moved enough—roughly every two years. So he went to D.C. alone. But in 2008 when an opportunity arose to join a telework pilot project called Virtual Command, the 36-year Navy veteran quickly jumped on it. With a virtual private network (VPN) connection to the Navy’s secure network, a Navy-issued laptop, and a cell phone, he now works from his home office in Pittsburgh and continues to oversee 15 people.

This example, in which the Navy saves relocation costs, illustrates why telework in federal, state, and local government agencies is growing steadily. Advanced by fiscal, environmental, lifestyle, and Continuity of Operations (COOP) considerations, telework may also revitalize government workforces by attracting a new generation of workers lured by a flexible work arrangement.

The COOP connection is vital to the growth of telework because keeping critical government services available in emergencies is a high priority with budgets attached. Telework can hitch a ride on COOP spending, since they share common elements.

This document outlines the factors spurring telework in government agencies, identifies some challenges in telework, and explains how Adobe addresses the technology requirements of telework.

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Why telework is catching on in government

From the aggressive telework program of the U.S. General Services Administration to Georgia’s tax credits for private sector telecommuting programs, agencies at all levels of government are embracing telework for a variety of reasons. They include:

Continuity of Operations: Keeping critical government services up and running in a disaster or other emergency remains a key objective at every level of government. Requirements for COOP are aligned with those of telework: Both need workers distributed geographically and equipped to carry out government business. To the extent that COOP requirements reflect telework requirements, COOP funds can help finance telework programs. Telework represents the “everyday use” capability of a COOP plan, testing its robustness.

One of government’s largest COOP/telework initiatives is at the U.S. Department of Defense, where always-on operations, security of information, and the ability to audit for compliance are paramount. Not all COOP instances involve disasters. In Minneapolis, for example, Hennepin County government relied on its telework program to maintain a “business as usual” operations during the Republican National Convention in September 2008.

Going green: Often directed by public policy, agencies seek to adopt environmentally sensitive policies and practices. Telework reduces the carbon footprints of agencies and their employees. Because processes are usually automated, teleworkers use less paper. Telework makes fiscal sense too, with its relatively short payback period on investments. And it addresses other issues on the public agenda, particularly energy conservation and traffic congestion.

Traffic and commutes: Telework takes cars off the road during commute hours. Benefits accrue not just for teleworkers but also for commuters, who experience less traffic congestion. It also reduces the cost, time, and stress of commuting. Sun Microsystems, which has had a telework program for 14 years, has found that teleworkers give back to the company about 60% of the time they save by not commuting. In Arizona, state teleworkers drive 5.25 million fewer miles and endure 181,000 fewer hours of stressful driving every year. The California state government estimates that its telework programs eliminate 180 tons of air pollution annually.

Reduced need for office space: When employees work from home, agencies need less office space for employees, saving public money. In 2006–07, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) hired 1,200 examiners, enough to fill a ten-story office building. It signed not a single new lease, relying instead on one of the most successful telework programs in the federal government. In fiscal 2008, 54% of USPTO’s employees were eligible for a telework program. Among those eligible, nearly 83% chose to telework, many full-time. USPTO, not coincidentally, attracted and retained patent examiners at record levels. It uses a practice dubbed “hot desking,” keeping 200-plus desks for teleworkers to use when they come to the office, as they must periodically.

Nor is it an accident that the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) has the most aggressive telework goals of any federal agency—GSA procures real estate for federal agencies, including 14 drop-in telework centers for federal and private sector workers in the Washington, D.C., area. In Loudoun County, Virginia, county inspectors are issued notebook PCs with VPN capabilities and broadband cards so they can handle their inspection duties without returning to the office daily. When leases expire, the county hopes to save \$95,000 by leasing less office space.

Federal workforce issues: Telework addresses several critical workforce needs for government. Federal recruiters hope that the flexibility of telework will aid in recruiting the best and brightest young workers, who otherwise might be turned off by the structure of government jobs. The National Association of State Chief Information Officers found that telework is an increasingly important bargaining chip with Gen Y workers. At the other end of the age spectrum, telework might motivate retirement-age workers to stay on, at least part-time, so the agency can tap their experience.

Anecdotal research in both the public and private sectors reveals that telework boosts productivity. A 2008 study at the National Science Foundation found that 87% of managers who telework reported that teleworkers’ productivity increased or remained the same as those who worked full-time from agency offices. In another project, more than 100 Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) employees who telework experienced a 27% increase in productivity over their time in the office.

Work-life balance: A “soft” benefit of telework is its how it affects government employees’ lives. Skipping a stressful commute clearly helps workers and their families balance work with the rest of their lives. On the job, reduced stress may lead to greater creativity. Finally, telework gives agencies a tool to retain valued employees who relocate because of a spouse’s new job or for other family reasons.

Policy and legislative drivers: Public Law 106-346 requires federal agencies to provide all eligible federal employees with the option to telework. Congress debated three other telework bills last session, and the Obama administration seems likely to boost federal telework.

How telework reinforces Continuity of Operations

One key challenge for COOP plans is testing readiness for a disaster.

Teleworkers test COOP readiness daily, addressing three critical questions:

- Does the technology work on the remote site?
- Do employees know how to work remotely?
- Do teleworkers know what to do in an emergency?

For the Telework Exchange’s telework calculator for government employees, visit www.teleworkexchange.com/calc-select.asp.

Success factors for telework

- Executive leadership
- Clear policy direction
- Cross-agency collaboration
- Flexibility
- Standard telework agreements
- Focus on metrics
- Openness to serendipity

Source: Telework Exchange

Issues in telework

The security of government data is the most serious telework issue agencies must address. Sensitive information can be inadvertently sent to an unauthorized person, stolen (when a laptop is taken), or maliciously released. At remote sites, teleworkers create, edit, and manage electronic documents that must be handled and transported securely. A robust security infrastructure that addresses security at the document level is critical, and it must be persistent, dynamic, and transparent.

Telework also requires changes to an agency's work culture. The top concern for agencies is how supervisors manage teleworkers, according to research by the Telework Exchange, a public-private telework advocacy group. Training managers and teleworkers in goal-oriented approaches (rather than presence-oriented) to facilitate independent work is a key step in altering the work culture. Agencies also must decide which jobs are appropriate for telework and which individual employees are best suited to work remotely. Especially in the early stages of a telework program, careful selection can enhance success. Teleworkers also must collaborate remotely with coworkers and deal with potential isolation without face-to-face contact.

Technology requirements

Between an agency and its would-be telecommuters, the base infrastructure (network and hardware) for telework is largely in place. Most government employees have PCs, and many have laptops. At defense agency DISA, 90% of PC purchases are now laptop, encouraging telework as the agency moves its headquarters 30 miles. VPNs to protect communications between telecommuter and data center are widely available.

Broadband Internet access, a key enabler of telework, reached 54% in the United States in 2008 and will grow to 77% by 2012, according to technology researcher Gartner. Most potential teleworkers already have monitors, printers, and keyboards for their PCs at home, and some even own scanners and fax machines. Cloud computing, particularly hosted applications or Software as a Service, allow government workers to access the software and data they need as easily from home as from their agency desk. Telework may create new demands for IT technical support.

How Adobe solutions enable telework

Beyond those base requirements, Adobe solutions provide tools for telework to succeed. Free Adobe® Reader® and Adobe Flash® Player software give users the foundation to protect documents, create captivating presentations, and hold web meetings. Because Reader is installed on 94% of PCs shipped worldwide and Flash Player on 99%, teleworkers can reach across boundaries to work more securely using software already installed on their PCs, a huge advantage over IT competitors. Home office to data center, mobile worker to government customer, online to offline—these lines disappear with Adobe technologies.

Adobe's web conferencing technology, Adobe Acrobat® Connect™ Pro, keeps teleworkers in touch with coworkers and constituents. Unlike other web conferencing tools, it does not require any additional downloads or plug-ins because it's built on the Flash technology already on over 98% of PCs worldwide.

Acrobat Connect Pro software can be used for remote collaboration, critical for daily office operations, as well as for eLearning or remote training. Compliance and control are key differentiators. Administrators can turn specific features on or off across an entire corporate account, such as the ability to share screens or applications. Settings also allow administrators to save or delete all chat transcripts, record all meetings or block recordings, and create notices and disclaimers on the login page that users must accept before meetings. In addition, bandwidth-friendly Acrobat Connect Pro offers persistent spaces that remain unchanged between meetings, video, VoIP, whiteboarding, and breakout rooms.

Adobe Acrobat Pro software allows workers to compose documents with multiple content types—text, spreadsheets, photos, 3D drawings, and more—and circulate them for shared reviews. Commenting tools support this asynchronous collaboration, and Acrobat Pro also supports redaction, an important feature in government. Access rights to control who sees the document are easily assigned and managed.

Thanks to Adobe's family of LiveCycle® ES software, teleworkers can participate in paperless work processes on an anytime, anywhere basis. Teleworkers, like their in-office colleagues, get the benefits of data capture and dynamic forms while online or offline from Adobe LiveCycle Forms ES software. Unlike paper-based processes, automated processes don't break when a workforce disperses.

Adobe LiveCycle Rights Management ES software enables agencies to apply security policies that specify who can see specific documents, what they can do, when, and for how long. LiveCycle Rights Management ES even audits usage and allows authors to update security policies anytime, even after a document is distributed.

Adobe Live Cycle Process Management ES software lets managers orchestrate human-centric processes for both teleworkers and colleagues inside the agency firewall. Through the software's component-based architecture, users can streamline, integrate, and protect end-to-end processes that unify people, systems, documents, business rules, and web services—quickly and flexibly.

Government agencies need a usable solution for telework. Leveraging Adobe technologies enables government employees to work anywhere, anytime—plus it makes them more productive and efficient working in the agency's office.

Telework is a promising work practice that achieves multiple goals for government, including Continuity of Operations. Telework isn't just a way to reduce commuting costs; it's a strategic advantage. When the office is everywhere, the telework initiative has succeeded.

For more information

For more details about Adobe solutions for telework, visit www.adobe.com/government.



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