

# Accelerating Digital Transformation



**N**etwork technologies — including advanced wireless and network connectivity solutions and services — are key for state and local governments to ensure operational continuity. The pandemic has made this strikingly clear and has accelerated long-sought-after digital transformation in the public sector. Secure, high-performing, resilient networks should underlie all the work governments do, especially during times of crisis. As state and local governments decide where to make investments, they can consider some of the following priority areas and potential solutions.

## **Remote Work and Collaboration**

Expanded remote work capabilities keep employees engaged with their colleagues and streamline the delivery of constituent services.

States may want to adopt cloud-based unified communications and workforce collaboration solutions and services that allow employees to securely and efficiently communicate in remote and hybrid environments. These solutions can provide call control, instant messaging and integrated voicemail capabilities that allow employees to receive messages via phone, email or text. This can also include audio and videoconferencing and enterprise mobility solutions, such as 5G-enabled smartphones and mobile device management solutions, that allow government IT teams to better manage

employees' company-issued mobile devices and mobile hotspots from a single portal.

Government organizations can leverage these solutions for example to host large, collaborative meetings with a cross-functional team multiple times a day. They can convene stakeholders across locations to share key continuity updates and sensitive information without jeopardizing compliance. With unified communications tools, agencies can increase collaboration and ensure employees have access to critical systems and information to better serve the public — whether they work inside or outside the office.

## **Emergency Management and Public Health**

First responders need a secure, reliable way to communicate with one another, with dispatch centers, and with other emergency management and law enforcement personnel. State and local health agencies also need the ability to quickly scale their services in response to increased citizen demand.<sup>1</sup>

Investing in state and local call center infrastructure by implementing remote connectivity options, scalable virtual contact centers, interactive voice response (IVR) services and videoconferencing solutions can help states provide responsive support to citizens. For example, with virtual contact centers, employees can serve the public

**In addition to responding to current disruptions, states and localities should invest now to move away from legacy systems and build their technology infrastructure for the future.**

remotely and take advantage of features such as virtual chatbots, multilingual outbound notifications, smart routing and simple scripting to better manage call volume. Organizations also can use these tools to forecast agent availability and scheduling, and to scale up or down the number of remote agents on duty to coincide with changing demand.

Several states, including Arizona, Georgia, New York, South Carolina and Washington, have used advanced network technologies in other ways. They've used these solutions to deploy portable cell sites at their Emergency Operations Centers, coronavirus mobile testing sites and quarantine locations, increasing their resiliency and responsiveness during a time of greater public need.<sup>2</sup>

## **Distance Learning**

To facilitate distance learning and school reopenings, state and local government, K-12 schools and higher education institutions are purchasing solutions to

improve their underlying IT infrastructure. These public entities are looking to deploy technologies such as mobile hotspots for students who lack internet access, to supply computers to these students and deploy content filtering solutions that create a safe learning environment for distance learners.<sup>3</sup>

Schools also can consider subsidizing data and wireless services for low-income students. In addition, schools can invest in audio and videoconferencing software, private IP services and wireless private networks for more secure connectivity, and unified communications and business messaging tools that streamline communication among teachers, administrators and staff.

One school district in Houston, for example, equipped 650 students with new wireless-enabled devices to ensure they have the necessary tools for distance learning.<sup>4</sup> The state of Colorado is expanding broadband access to tribal communities, while the state of Hawaii plans to allocate \$15 million to devices and connectivity.<sup>5</sup>

While only 4 percent of teachers lack access to suitable wireless connectivity at home, students in at least 7.15 million U.S. households aren't able to attend school online because they lack broadband internet access at home.<sup>6</sup> States can help schools improve connectivity and close these technology gaps and ensure more equitable access.

### **Broadband Expansion**

State and local governments have long acknowledged the critical need to bridge the digital divide; the pandemic has made

## **There's no one-size-fits-all solution for digital transformation and enhanced service delivery.**

it even more starkly clear that true digital transformation depends on universal connectivity and access. To address those equity issues, some states have recently stepped up their broadband expansion and digital inclusion efforts.

Vermont, for example, has created broadband grants to enhance connectivity for distance learning, telehealth and a range of other public services.<sup>7</sup> The state awards the grants to telecom providers to incentivize them to expand broadband service to underserved areas.<sup>8</sup> Tennessee, meanwhile, has appropriated more money for its Emergency Broadband Fund, which supports building out the state's broadband infrastructure, enhancing public WiFi access and expanding network connectivity to residents who lack broadband access.<sup>9</sup>

As Vermont and Tennessee show, there's no one-size-fits-all model for expanding broadband. States can explore several options, using input from key stakeholders and best practices from fellow government organizations, to determine which investments align best with the challenges they face today due to the pandemic and will serve them best in the future once the current public health crisis is over.

### **CONCLUSION**

The disruptions of COVID-19 have accelerated the need for digital transformation in states and cities

throughout the country. Public sectors organizations have a prime opportunity to move away from legacy systems and build their technology infrastructure for the future.

It's important for these entities to be strategic in how they deploy these resources. State and local governments should do a needs assessment to better understand their technology gaps and create a plan of action to target spending to these needs.

Now is the time to think not just about how digital transformation and contactless service delivery can help combat the pandemic, but also how states, cities and counties can lay the groundwork for achieving longer-term priorities.

Remote work, distancing learning, digital service delivery and a modern communications infrastructure aren't just symptoms of a global pandemic. They are integral to how agile, responsive governments should work. There's no time like the present for state and local governments to embrace modern technologies to confront the challenges their constituents face and to finally enact that long elusive vision of digital government.

#### Endnotes

1. <https://www.verizon.com/business/products/contact-center-cx-solutions/cloud-contact-center/virtual-contact-center/>
2. <https://www.verizon.com/about/news/public-sector>
3. <https://www.verizon.com/solutions-and-services/content-filters/>
4. <https://www.verizon.com/about/news/students-next-gen-technology>
5. <https://www.ncsl.org/ncsl-in-dc/standing-committees/education/cares-act-elementary-and-secondary-school-emergency-relief-fund-tracker.aspx>
6. <https://www.fundsforlearning.com/docs/2020/04/COVID-19%20E-rate%20White%20Paper.pdf> & <https://www.edweek.org/technology/teachers-without-internet-work-in-parking-lots-empty-school-buildings-during-covid-19/2020/04>
7. <https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/coverage-map/vermont>
8. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2020/11/states-tap-federal-cares-act-to-expand-broadband>

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