

## Unified Communications Shared Services: Easier Collaboration, Enhanced COOP, Lower Costs

Federal government agencies are looking for opportunities to simplify processes and unify work across agency borders and within lines of business. Eliminating areas of cross-agency redundancy—from payroll processes to communications services—can help to improve operational efficiency, enhance continuity of operations (COOP), reduce costs, and improve the constituent experience. Among the shared services with the biggest impact is shared unified communications services, used for voice, video, and Web collaboration.

### Why Share Unified Communications Services?

“When each agency has a separate Centrex service or PBX system, interagency collaboration is impaired and costs increase,” says Chris Shenefiel, federal government industry solutions manager, Cisco®. For example, in some government agencies, employees currently cannot reach each other with four-digit dialing or forward voicemail, let alone take advantage of advanced unified communications capabilities such as seeing whether employees in other agencies are present and how they want to be contacted. Another disadvantage of siloed communications systems in government are the typical 24- to 72-hour delays for provisioning voice and collaboration services when employees join the agency or move offices. And costs increase because each agency must maintain its own IT staff with specialized voice skills.

In contrast, when multiple government groups share unified communications services, employees in any location can quickly access the people, tools, and content they need to make informed decisions—regardless of where the resources are located. Employees in different agencies or agency groups can view each other’s phone numbers, presence, and communications preference information on the built-in screen of their IP phones, and reach each other on the preferred device with a single click. “Unified communications shared services facilitate efficient, effective information sharing while also alleviating staff training, network management, and application maintenance concerns,” says Susie Kalousis, vertical market manager for national governments, Cisco. “Ease of collaboration with other agencies also supports COOP during disasters by connecting those who know with those who need to know.”

### Adding Up the Savings

Unified communications shared services reduce costs, as well. According to a 2007 AT Kearney study, governments that adopt shared services save up to 50 percent on IT spending.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, an TechConsult study reports that, on average, organizations that implement a hosted IP telephony service reduce the cost of moves, adds, and changes by 37 percent, toll charges by 23 percent, maintenance costs by 10 percent, and voice communications staff by 30 percent.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> AT Kearney, “Shared Services in Government 2,” 2007

<sup>2</sup> TechConsult GmbH, Managed IP Telefonie Services, 2006.

## Flexible Options for Sharing

The Cisco Unified Communications Shared Service is a complete, partner-based solution providing cost-effective, multi-tenant unified communications services that are shared within or between agencies and government organizations. Agencies have a choice of deployment options to address their needs for control and security:

- The equipment can reside on the agency premise or the service provider network operations center.
- Agencies can share a unified communications server cluster with other agencies to reduce costs, or have a cluster dedicated to them if required for security.
- The agency IT group can manage the solution internally or outsource management to a shared service provider.
- Agencies that share the system can manage certain tasks locally while delegating others to the managing agency or shared services provider. For example, agencies have the choice to perform their own telephone-extension moves, adds, changes, and deletes or out-task to the shared service provider.

## Automated Provisioning

A major source of cost savings from the Cisco Unified Communications Shared Service is automated provisioning and dial-plan creation. Sophisticated automation software from Cisco partners like VisionOSS can reduce the time to provision 10,000 phones from one person-year to 60 hours. "When agencies that share a unified communications service have 15,000 or more phones, automated provisioning capabilities reduce the per-phone monthly costs to less than they would be if the agencies managed the unified communications system manually," Kalousis says.



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