

# The New Collaboration Experience: Putting People Back in the Center of Government

Over the last decade, government has been automating processes that don't require people, such as filing taxes and renewing automobile registration, to increase service levels.

The next frontier is improving experiences involving people, within an agency, between agencies, and with citizens. "To continue increasing service levels and decreasing costs, government needs ways to empower a mobile and geographically dispersed workforce to make higher quality decisions, faster and more cost-effectively," says Gerald Charles, Jr., executive advisor and public sector director of the Internet Solutions Business Group, Cisco.

## Collaboration Matures

Agencies are now empowering the workforce with collaboration tools that help accelerate group decision-making and innovation. "Not so long ago, collaboration typically remained within one agency, and the primary tool was email, used to send documents for comments to a few other people," says Lynn Lucas, director of collaboration solutions, Cisco. "Now collaboration increasingly occurs across agencies, and workers need to share richer information with more people. The goal is better, more timely decisions."

The new collaboration experience extends:

- **Beyond email:** Agency employees are now likely to collaborate with voice and video as well as document sharing. Some of the collaboration tools currently used within government are business video (Cisco TelePresence, video telephony, Cisco WebEx), instant messaging, and Web 2.0 tools such as blogs, wikis, and team work spaces. "Knowing whether someone is available and how they prefer to be reached before you reach out to them, the capability called 'presence,' saves time and accelerates decision making," Charles says.
- **Beyond agency walls:** Mobile government workers are using new types of devices, such as smartphones, to securely collaborate from wherever they are, including home, a citizen's office, or a military theater. Today's IT solutions can follow the mobile worker to any location while maintaining the same security policies enforced in the office.
- **Beyond the agency:** Interagency collaboration is increasing, aided by business video. "Being able to see people you might never meet in person helps to develop trust, an essential component in distributed decision making," Lucas says.
- **Beyond servers:** Government workers no longer need to limit their information sources to agency databases. "Now they can make more timely decisions by also accessing information directly from video surveillance cameras, environmental sensors, building energy-management systems, and other network-connected devices," says Charles.

## Mission Benefits

The new collaboration experience supports a wide variety of agency missions by enabling:

- **Faster day-to-day agency decision making:** As an example, an employee responding to a citizen inquiry can view coworkers' presence information in the online directory to locate an expert who can actually talk at that moment, click to ask a question with instant messaging, and click again to escalate to a rich-media collaboration session combining voice, video, and web.
- **Better citizen and business interactions:** Constituents can visit a government web portal that has presence, skills, and responsibilities integrated into its directory listing and click to chat with instant messaging or connect to a live agent.
- **Enhanced disaster preparedness:** Decision makers can meet face to face with their peers in other offices without the delays of travel, using Cisco TelePresence, video telephony, or Cisco WebEx. In the event of inclement weather or pandemic, employees can collaborate effectively from home, helping to ensure continuity of operations.

## Foster a Collaborative Culture

To realize the potential of collaboration for more efficient and effective government, agencies need tools, processes, and a supportive culture. "Successful collaboration definitely requires a cultural shift," says Lucas. Employees who already use collaboration in their personal or professional lives are likely to embrace it immediately. Others will be influenced by the enthusiasm of their peers and by policies encouraging use.

Some best practices for maximizing the mission value from collaboration include:

- Develop clear initiatives and governance around collaboration, publicizing both the efforts and the impact.
- Ensure that agency leaders use collaboration processes and technology.
- Encourage early adopters, supporting slow or false starts as well as successes.
- Encourage bottom-up efforts with top-down support and policies.
- Provide training for employees at all levels of the agency.
- Implement policies to stimulate use of collaboration tools, such as mandating the use of video telephony or meeting solutions in place of certain trips.
- Hold managers accountable for uptake of collaboration tools. Develop metrics, such as number of trips avoided.

To read a white paper on developing an agency culture that supports collaboration, visit:  
[www.cisco.com/en/US/solutions/collateral/ns340/ns856/ns870/C11-533734-00\\_collab\\_exec\\_guide.pdf](http://www.cisco.com/en/US/solutions/collateral/ns340/ns856/ns870/C11-533734-00_collab_exec_guide.pdf)




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