

## Online Conferencing Improves Public Access to Meetings

Mojave Water Agency reaches broader audience by integrating online meeting technology into its network infrastructure.

### Summary

**Customer Name:**

Mojave Water Agency

**Industry:**

State water contractor

**Location:**

Apple Valley, CA

**Number of Employees:**

40

**Challenge:**

- Reduce need to travel throughout large geographic area
- Increase access to public meeting sessions with easy-to-use technology
- Gain efficiency and control costs with collaborative solutions

**Results:**

- Made travel more cost-effective for staff and constituents while improving productivity
- Enabled efficient collaboration with constituents and advocates
- Improved communication with stakeholders at both state and federal levels

**Solution:**

- Online meetings allow remote participants to control presentations
- Solution integrates easily with existing network infrastructure
- Web-based tools support conference recordings

### Challenge

The Mojave Water Agency (MWA) is responsible for managing the water resources of nearly 4900 square miles of high desert in California's San Bernardino County. One of 29 state water contractors, MWA works with government agencies, as well as water retailers and other private businesses, to help ensure a sustainable water supply for approximately two million residents living in more than two dozen cities and towns.

As the region's largest water management organization, MWA dispatches teams to monitor projects in the field, and also coordinates planning sessions and public meetings that require participation from people located across the area. "We cover a large area of the Mojave Desert," says Jesse Shelby, information systems manager at MWA. "We have to work closely with many different constituents, including members of the public and staff at other organizations, who are spread out all over our jurisdiction."

To enhance MWA's effectiveness and efficiency, Shelby wanted to reduce long-distance travel and make agency meetings more accessible for both employees and constituents. "We needed a solution that would make it a lot easier for everyone to collaborate on solutions that benefit the entire region," he says.

### Results

The scalable, cost-effective Software as a Service (SaaS) model has enabled MWA to extend its reach without overextending its budget. After implementing Cisco WebEx™ services in early 2009, MWA improved its efficiency while increasing participation from constituents across the state and at the national level. "Many public sector organizations face tighter budgets and need to be more efficient," says Shelby. "WebEx makes it easier for us to encourage contributions from people no matter where they're located."

MWA is now able to collaborate with other organizations more frequently and has increased communication with the agency's legislative advocates in both Sacramento and Washington, D.C. "We've had a lot of success persuading our advocates to attend our meetings on the web, and the feedback has been extremely positive," he says. "Rather than having to drive three hours through the middle of the desert or get on a plane to attend a meeting, now they can use WebEx to deliver their presentations online."

Shelby adds that shifting resources away from travel has enabled MWA staff to increase their focus on important local issues. "By using WebEx, we don't spend as much time traveling, so we have more time and resources to concentrate on concerns that are significant in our home region," he says.

WebEx® online collaboration is also making it easier for the general public to participate in MWA meetings. “We have four or five meetings that are open to the public every month, and we value getting feedback from as many people in the community as we can,” says Shelby. “However, residents may be too busy or live too far away to physically attend meetings.” To encourage more public participation, Shelby and his team now regularly send WebEx meeting invitations to community groups by email and even use it to record meetings. “We capture recorded versions of every committee meeting, so now we have another way we can make the session available to the general public,” he says.

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— Jesse Shelby, information systems manager, Mojave Water Agency

### Solution

When Shelby began searching for an online meeting tool, he considered several options. He chose Cisco® WebEx based on prior staff experience with the solution and its reputation for quality and ease of use. “Before we started using web conferencing at MWA, our general manager had participated in WebEx meetings and found them very effective,” Shelby says. “We already used Cisco for our network infrastructure, relying on Cisco technology for everything from routers to switches to security. So when it came time to invest in an online meeting solution, WebEx solutions integrated perfectly with the network that we already had in place.”

As Shelby and his team have deployed WebEx solutions at MWA, the agency’s advocates, constituents, and staff have been very receptive to using web-conferencing tools. “We can train people on how to use WebEx very quickly, so in just a few minutes people can log in and start delivering a presentation,” says Shelby. “Our constituents have been amazed at how fast they can learn to use WebEx. When we can offer new technology that enables so many people to experience that level of instant success, our board of directors pays attention.”

The desktop-sharing and file-sharing features in WebEx meetings have also impressed MWA stakeholders. “Before WebEx, if someone wanted to do a presentation, they would have to email a file, and we would need to manually advance the slides,” says Shelby. “Now, anyone can lead a meeting from any computer. Not everyone is a technical expert, nor do they want to be. They just want a solution to work, and WebEx works when we need it to.”

## Next Steps

In the future, MWA hopes to expand the use of WebEx services to involve even more constituents in its meetings. “One idea we’ve been exploring is a partnership with the San Bernardino County Museum to provide a distance education program about the region’s water,” Shelby says. He even actively encourages other state water contractors to consider the value of cost-effective SaaS solutions like WebEx. “My colleagues in the public sector are beginning to understand how this technology can help them meet their goals,” he says. “For a small agency like ours, SaaS is critical for keeping costs low.”

## Product List

Cisco WebEx

## For More Information

To find out more about Cisco WebEx, go to <http://www.cisco.com/web/products/webex/index.html>.



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