

2020 CSAC Challenge Award Entry
Extending the Office to Workers' Homes
Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services Department (EHSD)

Overview - EHSD established a telework capability for our existing Call Center empowering staff to work from home exactly as they would in the office.

Challenge - In April of 2019, the department needed to consolidate space while maintaining a high level of service for the ever-increasing volume of calls into our Medi-Cal CalFresh Service Center (MCSC). With facility costs increasing and the need to attract talent with benefits such as the ability to work from home, the challenge was to implement teleworking. The challenge required policies, technologies, labor union support, and a method to ensure a successful process.

Solution - Using project management principles, we focused on developing a comprehensive set of requirements, including the following:

1. Voice technologies needed to mirror the worker as though s/he was in the office. This included phones supporting five-digit dialing, access to our Call Center's Automatic Call Distribution System (ACD), recording capabilities, and metrics to assess worker call statistics.
2. PC equipment identical to that in the office, including dual monitors, cameras, headsets, and microphones.
3. Software that enabled the remote station to function remotely, ensure the privacy of our customers and maintain the equipment configurations remotely.
4. Comprehensive policies and guidebooks for both staff and supervisors.
5. Establish an environment to validate the technologies and provide a simulation environment. This enabled staff to set up equipment and test it working in an internal "remote" environment, complete with detailed instructions, so that staff can take the equipment home and reassemble it in their approved work area at home.
6. With strong management support, we sought buy-in from the labor unions.

Working with the technical partners, we identified a multi-port VPN router that the worker could install at home, addressing the first three of the above requirements. The VPN connection provided a secure encrypted tunnel to EHSD's network. A Voice over IP (VoIP) phone connected to one of the ports enabled the teleworker to have a multi-line phone identical to the one at his or her desk in the call center. Additional ports attached the worker's computer to EHSD's network with the ability for standard tools to manage it remotely. A test station validated the configuration.

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We next focused on policy. Working with the labor unions, we developed policies for work hours, eligibility, workspace, workman's compensation and liability, as well as contingency plans. To be eligible for remote work, we included employee performance standards and network connectivity requirements. We developed a telework application and agreement.

We handled the implementation in phases. In December 2019, we tested this environment with five workers during a pilot phase. We set up test stations where teleworkers could assemble the equipment following detailed wiring diagrams, obtain a week of experience using the equipment, and then disassemble the equipment for transport to their home.

Innovation was a confluence of many factors. EHSD achieved the core mandate by eliminating the need for on-premises facilities. We protected privacy with a low-tech solution enabling workers to use dry-erase boards to make notes while on the phone with customers. Supervisors and managers use Microsoft Teams for collaboration and meetings to ensure frequent communication with staff. The cameras provide face time with supervisors and teammates. We used metrics management to ensure productivity.

Results - Following the pilot's success in December 2019, we replicated and rolled out the process for 28 staff members, including four supervisors, in late January and February of 2020. Using this same approach, we project adding more telework capability, including for other programs, by the fourth quarter of this year. By reducing the space needs and fostering remote work, EHSD is providing a higher level of customer service, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, benefiting the public during this critical time.

Replicability - Other counties can easily replicate this process using the policy and guide. The technology is adaptable to any county's infrastructure. Links to the [Telework Policy](#) and the [Telework Guide](#) are attached to assist in replication. In summary, this program has enhanced EHSD's customer service, helped address critical facility needs, improved employee morale and increased our ability to attract and retain staff.

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