

Enabled Telecommuting for 15,000 County Workers

Overview - Riverside County Information Technology (RCIT) was successful in enabling telecommuting for 15,000+ of its employees to ensure continuity of business operations for several departments (including its first responders) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Challenge - On March 19, 2020, Governor Newsom issued a stay-at-home order for the state of California. As a result, the County had to quickly adapt and resolve several telecommuting challenges. The County had an insufficient number of Virtual Private Network (VPN) licenses to support 15,000 teleworkers, lacked the ability for remote call/contact centers, and had insufficient computer hardware for our employees to take home.

Solution - Our Network Engineering team deployed and configured new firewalls to accommodate our telecommuter workforce. We increased our VPN capacity from 5,000 to 20,000 to enable our County teleworkers to safely and securely connect to our County network from home.

Our Voice Engineering and Support Teams implemented 24/7 remote call center capability from home (including mandatory recording) in support of many County departments. Additionally, we deployed a COVID-19 call center that our constituents utilized to schedule Coronavirus testing and to obtain test results. With the need to social distance, we provided call takers with the ability to take calls from home.

Our Field Support Team configured laptops and other portable devices with an approved county system image that included access to the tools that are normally available in the office coupled with a VPN client to establish a secure connection while working remotely.

In other situations where laptops and other portable devices were not readily available, staff were provided instructions and support from our Help Desk on installing the VPN clients on their personal computers to use as a bridge to connect through Remote Desktop (RDP) to their county workstations located in the office.

Our Infrastructure Team upgraded servers, storage, and memory to expand capacity on our Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) which provided County workers the means to access County resources remotely.

Our Help Desk provided documentation to county workers to assist them with access to Microsoft's cloud-based Office 365 products.

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Innovation - As cases began to increase in the US, we anticipated a shutdown would be imminent. Our staff took initiative and deployed and configured newly acquired devices that expanded our VPN access user base from 5,000 to 20,000. We anticipated that our customers such as Adult Services, Child Protective Services, Medical Center, and our own Help Desk would eventually need a solution that would allow them to work from home, thus we tested and developed a process that our users could follow to utilize a combination of existing tools to be able to take calls from their home offices.

In preparation for County employees to telework, our Field Support Services team pulled laptops from inventory and prepared the units for deployment. Our Help Desk staff tested various scenarios that users were most likely to experience while connecting remotely and developed documentation for each scenario to provide employees as they log on from a remote location. Within a short period of time, several thousand county employees were able to successfully access Riverside County systems remotely.

In March 2020, our Help Desk tested and verified that its own staff were equipped with the tools necessary to work remotely. In May 2020, our Help Desk staff successfully transitioned to work from home while managing over 9,000 customer calls during that month.

Results - Today, our VPN remote access solution is serving twice as many users as the previous solution. On average, we have 3,000 users utilizing VPN remote access daily. A second surge in COVID-19 cases occurred during the months of June and July that forced additional staff to telecommute. Having the ability to support 20,000 users allowed us to continue to conduct business as usual from home. We currently have agents from several of our departments taking calls from home and performing the same level of service as they would from a County facility.

Replicability - These solutions can be replicated with the appropriate equipment, applications, and innovative staff that works tirelessly to ensure your work force has the tools they need to perform their jobs during challenging times.

Project Contact - Gil Mejia, Assistant CIO, (951) 955-9799, GMejia@RivCo.org

Riverside County Information Technology, 3450 14th St., Riverside, CA 92501