

# Future of work benchmarking

How agencies are returning to the office and planning their future

In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, many federal agencies adopted a more flexible working model, including maximizing telework. During this time, agencies found they were able to successfully meet mission needs in a more remote posture. To build on this success, agencies across the federal landscape are now planning and implementing increasingly hybrid models that balance the needs of the organization with those of its workforce, support daily operations as well as long-term strategy, and allow for flexibility and adaptability in an evolving regulatory environment.

Pursuant to OMB memorandum M-21-25, issued June 10, 2021, all Federal Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Act agencies published plans for reentering the office and the future of work, outlining post-reentry plans and policies.

## Benchmarking analysis

Grant Thornton conducted a benchmarking analysis using a representative sample of published federal agency reentry and future of work plans. Our objectives were to:

- Identify key trends for agency future of work plans across four pillars: Workforce, Workspace, Operations, and Technology
- Provide a snapshot of how federal agencies are adjusting to the post-COVID-19 work environment and planning ahead
- Inform how other agencies can develop their own plans, in support of the President Management Agenda's strategy to "reimagine and build a roadmap to the future of Federal work"

## Future of work agency scale\*

### Pre-pandemic organization

Much of the organization plans to operate in a similar fashion to how it did before the start of the pandemic.



### Flexible organization

The organization increased the flexibility of its operations in response to COVID-19 and plans to maintain some of these changes in a post-covid world.



### Future-ready organization

The organization is exploring innovative ideas for permanently reorganizing its operations compared to pre-pandemic norms.



#### Cabinet law enforcement agency

A large portion of the Agency cannot work remotely.

#### Cabinet law enforcement agency

A large portion of the workforce cannot work remotely. Some of the support functions will continue to work remotely.

#### Cabinet benefits & services agency

Large portions of the Agency will continue to work remotely, while other parts (hospital system) do not have that option.

#### Cabinet regulatory & assistance agency

A large portion of the Agency will continue to maintain flexible work schedules and work remotely.

#### Cabinet fiscal agency

Portions of the Agency cannot work remotely, but a large portion is exploring innovative FOW options (large portions of the workforce remote, flexible schedules, 4-day work weeks).

#### Independent executive agency

Agency has employed broad FOW efforts that affect nearly all of the organization.

\*Agency reentry plans were initially submitted in July 2021. Since that time, with the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and additional executive orders, agencies may have changed their approach to reentry and future of work.

## Results

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to future of work due to differences in mission needs, cultures, and the unique nature of an agency's business. The analysis revealed that:

- 4 out of 6 agencies are promoting flexibility for their workforce
- 5 out of 6 agencies are reevaluating workspace needs
- 5 out of 6 agencies are investing in technology to promote collaboration

## Key trends

Through the review of reentry and future of work plans, Grant Thornton identified the following common trends, strategies, and actions underway across agencies:



### Workforce

- **Greater flexibility with mission success:** Provide employees with greater work flexibility as the pandemic subsides, while continuing to achieve the agency mission.
- **Strengthened recruiting & hiring:** Revamp employee recruiting and hiring practices to better compete for talent in a hybrid work environment.
- **Commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA):** Focus on providing equal opportunities to employees across working arrangements.



### Operations

- **Telework & remote work policy updates:** Codify changes to remote work policies, allowing for increased remote flexibility.
- **Customer collaboration:** Align remote work policies to customer needs and service delivery requirements, allowing for employees to work in-person, as needed, to meet agency objectives. Explore new technologies to improve the customer experience.
- **Adjustments to internal processes:** Reevaluate and adjust internal processes such as onboarding and performance management to optimize employee experience.



### Workspace

- **Hoteling:** Evaluate opportunities to increase hoteling stations to further reduce physical space.
- **Reduction in leased facilities:** Examine options for reducing physical presence in leased spaces and consolidate onsite employees in owned spaces to reduce costs.
- **Reconfiguration of hybrid operations:** Create an environment that supports in-person and remote employees working together.



### Technology

- **Platforms in use:** Make common collaboration technologies, including Microsoft Teams and Webex, the standard for employees and conference room setups.
- **Uniformity across agencies:** Acknowledge that technology will need to be updated to best meet future of work objectives. However, there was little consistency across agency plans around specific items or actions that will be taken to do this.

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