

Enterprise Videoconferencing Solution

Information Communications Technology Initiatives



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Executive Summary

The Oklahoma Department of Human Services launched an IT Optimization initiative that has transformed the way the IT infrastructure is managed and services are delivered using a hosted unified enterprise videoconferencing solution. The solution benefits statewide training, meetings and administrative court hearings by permitting DHS staff, Oklahoma judges and Oklahoma citizens to participate remotely. The installation of this solution helps DHS operate with greater knowledge, efficiency and effectiveness. The tool also meets federal mandates on timeliness such as family team meetings, case staffing, hearings and training.

After successfully installing more than 50 locations throughout the state, not only are Child Support Services and DHS legal teams using the product for meetings, training and hearings, but Adult and Family Services and Child Welfare Services are scheduling training and meetings with the equipment as well. This is truly turning into an enterprise solution for multiple DHS programs.

The enterprise videoconferencing solution reduces the number of administrative judges needed at any given time, allowing them to focus resources elsewhere.

Videoconferencing for meetings and training reduces staff travel time and the costs associated with mileage, per diem and lodging for DHS. Oklahoma citizens can use the technology to participate in administrative court hearings by attending from a PC or mobile phone from any location.

The new solution will provide \$2.1 million in cost savings over the next six years as well as 22,400 employee hours saved per year due to reduced travel time. Nearly one-third of all Oklahomans receive DHS services and increasing DHS employees time to dedicate to Oklahoma citizens is immeasurable. DHS's primary focus is Oklahoma citizens in need and transforming the way business is done to emphasize greater efficiency for those citizens. The enterprise videoconferencing solution is a tool that will support this charge.

Concept

Problem

DHS has various divisions spread throughout the state. Some of the critical units are Child Support Services, Child Welfare Services, Adult and Family Services, and the DHS legal team. The majority of meetings, training, hearings and visits require staff to travel to centrally located sites. DHS staff can spend hours every day traveling statewide accruing expenses to conduct or participate in hearings, training and meetings. Not only can this be costly it, in turn, reduces valuable productivity time for DHS staff.

When an administrative law judge needs to reschedule a hearing, dockets must be canceled, creating more work for DHS staff. Rescheduling can waste Oklahoma citizens' time as they may need to reschedule time off to attend on another day. Also, when hearing a domestic violence case, all parties must be separated for the victim to testify freely without intimidation from the alleged abuser.

In addition, CWS is required to maintain a certain amount of contact between children and parents and also conduct a certain number of family team meetings and case staffing. This is extremely difficult to do when families are located throughout the state or even in other states.

Hearings: Hearings are held daily across the state in 37 of the 42 Oklahoma CSS offices. Customers and administrative law judges must travel to these offices with only one chief judge, two full-time judges and 15 contract judges to handle these hearings statewide. Each docket takes a judge approximately three to six hours to hear. Citizens must travel to the CSS office to meet in person with their caseworker or appear in person before the administrative law judge because most hearing information is shared via hard copy. Travel has proven to be a costly expense for citizens, judges and CSS staff.

Training: The current process for training in the Department of Human Services is blended. The training personnel manages program and staff training. This means training is taking place every day across the state. Personnel must schedule the training facilities, build the curriculum and announce the training. Once the schedules are filled, the instructors and attendees must travel to centralized locations to conduct the service. Travel has proved to be costly for attendees and instructors.

Meetings: The team-oriented structure of DHS contributes to the various meetings held daily across the state in shared meeting rooms. Therefore, rooms must be scheduled in advance. Meeting coordinators must search for open rooms that match with attendees' schedules. Most meetings are with people from other locations, so once attendees

accept the meeting invitation, they must travel to that location. Travel has proved to be costly for employees who must attend. Several staff members who attend training and meetings are not exempt and incur additional compensation time, which is expensive to the state and conflicts with the staff's time to fulfill their core duties.

Solution

A successful enterprise videoconferencing solution would allow staff to participate in hearings, training, meetings and visits without excessive travel across the state and improve agency communication and collaboration and provide cost savings by utilizing virtual methods for court hearings, simultaneous training, meetings, visitations and case staffing.

An enterprise project was proposed to provide a videoconferencing solution or product that would be beneficial to all service divisions of DHS. The proposed solution was based on similar technology being used successfully by other states.

The first step for the state was the implementation of the hosted videoconferencing solution for the local DHS offices in Oklahoma City as a pilot, followed by several additional sites all over the state for videoconferencing. A total of 50 locations were identified for video endpoint deployments for improved accessibility, enhanced business processes, reduction of travel, more effective communication and innovation.

DHS purchased Avaya's Scopia video as a service software and necessary equipment for the videoconferencing solution. Once purchased, DHS contracted vendor Global Interactive Solutions to implement the solution including installation, training and support.

The videoconferencing technology requires only a network connection with a minimum of 10 Mbps speed using a peer-to-peer and multipoint-conferencing facility. The video conferencing solution works on desktops, laptops and mobile devices with standard and high definition video.

GIS provided the cloud service where the video files are archived and stored for retrieval and auditing purposes. The hosted video solution also includes recording and a bridging service that is managed and kept up-to-date by the cloud provider. The bridge solution allows for "one to many" setup where multiple users can join the bridge at one time and all participants can see each other in one screen.

Video Conferencing Main Features

- Able to handle a one- to six-hour video conference.
- Includes pan and zoom functionality.

- Ability to record virtual sessions with archival and retrieval capability through a cloud-based service.
- Communication is available for one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many participants.
- Multiple sessions are possible at one time.
- Ability to schedule videoconference session via Outlook with moderator code and PIN.

The videoconferencing solution allows the tools to connect and work together and deliver savings in terms of travel, time and cost avoidance by eliminating spending on other less effective collaboration tools previously in place.

The project on the business side was a joint effort between DHS Legal and CSS staff as well as the Office of Management and Enterprise Services Information Services and the product vendor staff. Training processes and procedures for operating and troubleshooting equipment were developed and taught. This partnership was a valuable asset for the project.

Significance

Aside from travel, the other communication method previously used was Microsoft Lync, which was mostly affected by network saturation at remote sites. No alternative solutions were approached from an enterprise perspective.

“Thank you for everything you did to get this started for us. I am excited to start using it.”

The deployment of the Avaya Scopia approach, as a result of IT optimization, allowed the state to provide solutions in a new and different way. The method allows for more affordable adoption, savings in travel and time, as well as cost

avoidance for other collaboration tools. In addition, standardization enables more effective and seamless communications between state entities and users.

With the new video and accessibility solutions in place, meetings with other states and outside parties can now be easily conducted. Video is not only enhancing day-to-day communications, with the ability to see facial expressions and body language, but it also allows for the use of American Sign Language, helping the agency meet accessibility and federal mandates.

The new video conferencing solution will provide \$2.1 million in cost savings and avoidance over the next six years. Also, time previously used for travel provides an additional 22,400 employee hours per year for other tasks. Nearly one-third of all Oklahomans receive DHS services and increasing DHS employees time to dedicate to Oklahoma citizens is immeasurable.

“The installation and setup of equipment went well and the staff from OMES and Avaya were helpful in answering our questions.”

Impact

The impact of gaining efficiency and reducing costs is self-explanatory. Traveling to Oklahoma City, Guymon or Poteau for a meeting can often be costly. Solutions that allow the government to move at the speed and efficiency of business enables the government to serve citizens and businesses more effectively.

“We have successfully used many of the features with videoconferencing including the document camera.”

The ability to schedule a videoconference session via Outlook allows the state to better leverage collaboration technology. Being able to access the conferencing solution from many devices with an internet connection meets the efficiency standards our citizens expect.

With the cloud capabilities offered by the videoconferencing solution, upgrades and new features can be deployed to the entire enterprise at once. Using a cloud solution allows the state to focus on serving citizens and business, and not on maintaining or updating outdated technology needed to deliver the solution.

The state’s videoconferencing solution originated within government. Government is typically a follower and not a leader in such innovations. In speaking with a vendor, Oklahoma discovered that Texas is using a comparable model. Federal agencies and others are also exploring the option, and many private corporations are also leveraging a similar solution. The effect of videoconferencing transcends industries across the country.

Improved Group Collaboration

The team-oriented structure of human services means that many decisions require insight and approval from different Oklahoma state agency employees and citizens

alike, but also from other states as well. Virtual technology allows communication and collaboration with coworkers and partners, regardless of their current location.

Reduced Travel Expenses

Travel expenses are significantly reduced by allowing staff to participate in training, hearings and meetings without having to travel across the state.

“The staff here found it to be easier to use than expected and have enjoyed the learning process.”

Increased Productivity and Efficiency

The video conferencing solution improved productivity by allowing more impromptu, face-to-face contacts, and speeding the reunification process for the caseworker by enhancing their ability to solve problems easier and faster. For the Office of Administrative Hearings, judges now can facilitate cases and see out-of-state parties' and witness' demeanor over video. For all divisions, this eliminates many hours of downtime and days away from the office for training. The result is decreased worker frustration and increased customer satisfaction.



A mock hearing with Judge Barry Stafford and Judge Cherrilyn Mclane at the Bethany Child Support Services office illustrates DHS videoconferencing capabilities. (Photo provided by OMES employee Pervez Khan)