

Office of Customer Experience

TELEWORK SURVEY INSIGHTS REPORT 2021

Listening to Employees to Shape the Workplace of the Future at USDA



Contact

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THE OFFICE OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE (OCX)

About the Work We Do



Who We Are

OCX's mission is to empower, enable, and collaborate with customers and employees to create innovative and human-centered solutions that deliver exceptional, consistent USDA services and experiences.

OCX partners with mission areas and agencies to improve the USDA experience by identifying and meeting the core human needs at the heart of every interaction.

Voices is USDA's Official Voice of the Customer Program

In alignment with Department initiatives and based on highlevel interest, USDA's Office of the Customer Experience (OCX) has launched a Department-wide Voice of the Customer (VOC) and Voice of the Employee (VOE) program.

The Voices program uses the 'Listen Better, Serve Better' framework to integrate customer feedback loop mechanisms into the way USDA delivers its most important services.

The Voices program and capability is meant to:

- LISTEN: by leveraging customer feedback (surveys, interviews, data banks) and broadening listening capabilities
- **LEARN:** by training and enabling USDA on how to take the next step in analyzing customer data
- **SERVE:** by partnering with Mission Areas to deliberately turn customer insights into action

If interested in finding more about this program, please email **CustomerExperience@usda.gov**.



TELEWORK SURVEY INSIGHTS REPORT 2021

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A People-First, Data-Driven Approach to Understanding the Employee Experience



Over this past year, USDA was challenged with responding to the sudden shift to a largely remote workforce and the uncertainty around how employees will respond to their return to the office.

In March 2021, Secretary Vilsack pledged to look at workplace flexibilities across the board. To reenvision USDA's workplace, we engaged with diverse groups-employees, supervisors (including senior leadership), labor unions, and advisory groups-to design and launch a survey to inform us on what work at USDA should look like in a post-pandemic future.

One of the core goals of the Telework Survey is to provide useful information to department and mission area leaders as they strive to develop a revised telework policy and identify actions to effectively address demands on the workforce. More importantly, the goal of the survey has always been to give all USDA employees a chance to have their voices heard.

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of insights gained from USDA employees to understand what they need to feel supported and be productive.

A department-wide communications strategy drove response rates up while the survey was active. Tactics included reminder emails, personal messages from leadership, newsletters, townhalls, and other digital forms of communications.

We managed to surpass our response rate goal of 40% (using the 2019 Governmentwide response rate for the OPM FEVS Survey as a benchmark) within a week after launch. Targeted communications emphasizing the importance of capturing all employee voices were critical in driving up response rates, especially with mission areas that saw lower response rates due to high proportions of telework ineligible employees.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The All-Employee Telework Survey was live from April 22 to May 7. During this time, USDA employees were asked about their experiences with telework; including benefits, challenges, and how they foresee the workplace will look in a post-pandemic future.

Invitations were sent to USDA employees via the OneUSDA email listserv with a total of 50,048 employees completing a survey for a response rate of 54 percent. Survey participants represent 8 Mission Areas and all Departmental Administration and staff offices.

To capture honest employee feedback, the survey was completely anonymous, meaning there are no identifying values that can link the information to an individual participant.

The survey consisted of 25 questions in total: 4 background questions, 17 questions for employees, plus an additional 4 for supervisors.

Themes included:

WORKPLACE ATTITUDES:

Identifies employee telework situations, future preferences, and attitudes towards telework and other workplace flexibilities

- WORK AND COVID-19: Assesses
 the availability of and employee
 need for policies, practices, and
 resources designed to support
 employee productivity and
 continuity of mission operations
- EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING:

Evaluates the need and availability of practices and policies designed to support employee well-being

work environment: Evaluates the impact of the pandemic on performance-related aspects of work and factors of the work environment

For the full list of questions, please see the Appendix.

	Employee Telework Survey	
agencies and their employee	es. This is why we hope to take h union partners, employees a	positive outcomes for both federal a holistic approach to a revised and supervisors, stakeholders and
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employee.	ished computers to login and o	
I have read the foregoing is		t the survey and submitting my
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Screenshot of the survey

AT A GLANCE

This past year has made a permanent imprint on the way workplaces operate, forever changing how and where people work. Though the world of work was slowly changing before COVID-19, the pandemic greatly accelerated that evolution and is requiring organizations like USDA to quickly learn and adapt to new ways of working.

The vast majority of employees do not expect a return to a pre-pandemic state of working. Survey results show a workforce that remains optimistic about their workplace and their interactions between colleagues.

High scores point to favorable employee perspectives regarding teleworking experiences. Low scores, which are equally as important, indicate aspects of agencies or offices where employees may perceive the need for change. Both areas can guide the Department as they make decisions and determine actions for improving the workplace and supporting their workforce.

A few brief highlights from the Telework Survey support overall perceptions of workforce resilience and performance:

Responses

50K+

Response Rate

54%

Number of unique responses to the survey–50,048 responses to be exact

Overall response rate based on the total USDA employee count as of May 2021 (93,563 employees, excluding contractors) *Source: OHRM*

Comments

125K+

Work-life Balance

92%

Total number of open-ended submissions to questions such as "What do you need for optimal success in working from home?" and "How does teleworking impact your well-being?" Employees who responded affirmatively to "Would telework grant you additional flexibility to create your own work-life balance?"-the highest rated question on the survey

Equipment Needs Met

78%

Support for Hybrid Model

76%

Employees who agreed that their USDA-issued equipment needs for telework were met

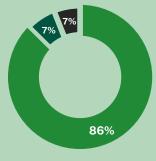
Percentage of employees who favor a mix of working both in-office and remotely

KEY METRIC 86%

of all employees viewed their shift to more telework as a result of the pandemic as successful.

Another 7 percent viewed it as unsuccessful, while the remaining viewed it as neither successful nor unsuccesful.

For many employees and supervisors, their experiences during the past year completely changed how they viewed telework, virtual employment, and other workforce flexibilities.



Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Q9: My shift to more telework because of COVID-19 was successful. (Responding "agree" or "strongly agree") N = 50,048 respondents

PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW

The first figure below shows the response rates for mission areas, agencies, and staff offices.

Mission Area / Agency	Survey Responses	Response Rate
Departmentwide	50,048	53.5%
Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC)	13,297	58.3%
FPAC Business Center (FPAC-BC)	1,332	85.1%
Farm Service Agency (FSA)	6,359	57.8%
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	5,258	53.3%
Risk Management Agency (RMA)	348	89.5%
Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services (FNS)	1,232	85.5%
Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)	2,341	27.0%
Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP)	4,218	33.2%
Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)	1,143	26.1%
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)	3,075	37.0%
Natural Resources and Environment (NRE)	15,813	52.3%
Forest Service (FS)	15,813	52.3%
Research, Education, and Economics (REE)	4,279	51.5%
Agricultural Research Service (ARS)	3,166	46.0%
Economic Research Service (ERS)	247	100%
National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)	634	76.6%
National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)	2,917	69.4%
Rural Development (RD)	3,453	77.5%
Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs (TFAA)	630	83.9%
Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)	630	83.9%
Staff Offices (e.g. DA, NAD, OASCR, etc.)	2,917	69.4%
Prefer not to say	1,868	N/A

The second figure below shows the number of responses for the top 25 most common job series and the share of total responses that the job series represents.

0400 - Natural Resources Management and Biological Sciences Group 12,716 26,1% 0300 - General Administration, Clerical, and Office Services Group 9,428 19,3% 1100 - Business and Industry Group 5,355 11,0% Prefer not to say 4,120 8,4% 2200 - Information Technology Group 2,504 5,1% 0500 - Accounting and Budget Group 2,183 4,5% 0800 - Engineering and Architecture Group 1,927 4,0% 0200 - Human Resources Management Group 1,544 3,2% 1800 - Inspection, Investigation, Enforcement, and Compliance Group 1,389 2,8% 0000 - Miscellaneous Occupations Group 1,332 2,7% 1300 - Physical Sciences Group 1,061 2,2% 0700 - Veterinary Medical Science Group 845 1,7% 1000 - Information and Arts Group 678 1,4% 1500 - Mathematical Sciences Group 297 0,6% 2100 - Transportation Group 273 0,6% 1500 - Quality Assurance, Inspection, and Grading Group 214 0,4% 1600 - Medical, Hospital, Dental, and Public Health Group	Job Series	Responses	% of Total Resp.
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	3500 - General Services and Support Work Family	114	0.2%
4700 - General Maintenance and Operations Work Family 54 0.1%	1400 – Library and Archives Group	88	0.2%
	4700 – General Maintenance and Operations Work Family	54	0.1%

The third figure presents a breakdown by mission area, and a comparison of survey respondents to the total USDA workforce.

Mission Area / Office	Survey Respondents	USDA Workforce
Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC)	26.6%	24.4%
Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services (FNS)	2.5%	1.5%
Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)	4.7%	9.3%
Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP)	8.4%	13.6%
Natural Resources and Environment (NRE)	31.6%	32.3%
Research, Education, and Economics (REE)	8.5%	8.9%
Rural Development (RD)	6.9%	4.8%
Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs (TFAA)	1.3%	0.8%
Staff Offices (e.g. DA, NAD, OASCR, etc.)	5.8%	4.5%
Prefer not to say	3.7%	N/A

The agencies with the highest response rates are outlined below by agency size.

Small (<1,000 employees)

Medium (1,000-<4,999 employees)

Large (5,000+ employees)

100%

ERS FPAC-BC & FNS

58%

FSA

CORE QUESTIONS

Values represent the percentages indicating the respondents who "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" with the statement in the survey category. The core results are also shown by mission area and staff offices. Highest and lowest scores for each question are noted in green and red, respectively.

Survey Category	Dept.	FPAC	FNS	FSIS	MRP	NRE	REE	RD	TFAA	Staff Offices
Telework Experience										
My shift to more telework because of COVID-19 was successful	86	81	96	91	91	85	84	93	93	96
I have all the USDA-issued equipment I need in order to telework	78	72	84	89	84	77	82	79	76	91
How effective has USDA been at	performi	ng the fol	lowing a	ctivities	while su	pporting	telewor	king sta	ff?	
Collaborating on projects	56	47	73	61	67	51	57	68	67	77
Building relationships across teams	48	43	62	54	57	41	47	60	53	67
Training and career development	45	38	60	52	54	39	48	56	53	63
Onboarding new hires	37	30	55	48	50	28	45	43	45	59
IT support	54	52	51	67	49	50	51	65	61	77
Creating an equitable and inclusive work environment and culture	57	52	69	61	65	50	59	67	57	74
Supervisor-Only Questions-Tele	work Exp	erience								
My entire team has been able to successfully shift to a teleworking model	64	65	91	60	79	62	60	89	85	94
I would be interested in training courses that help me develop skills managing telework employees	57	66	74	63	67	58	52	78	83	70
In the future, physical office spa	In the future, physical office space will be important for my team because									
It will increase employee productivity	45	53	18	37	30	40	51	21	31	14
It will provide a space to meet in person	63	84	59	72	70	78	76	63	75	53
It will enable my team to collaborate more effectively	52	69	34	53	45	61	64	36	51	28
It will help with team building and work culture	57	73	48	58	56	69	68	43	67	40

KEY THEMES

The shift to increased telework has been an overwhelming success for employees.

Positive attitudes toward more telework are evident in results: the vast majority of employees and supervisors support more telework and expect to maintain a hybrid work model in the future.



Long live the office... but its role is set to change.

Less than one in five employees say they want to return to the office as it was pre-pandemic. Meanwhile, 63 percent of supervisors say the office is important for in-person meeting space and team building and work culture—their top-rated needs for the office.



The future of work centers on people and their wellbeing.

Leadership must prioritize communication and support for their staff. USDA should work to establish healthy boundaries around when and how employees are expected to communicate, respond, and be available.

Our Approach

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the way we work, our expectations of work, and the workplace. To create a work environment that supports our employees and their well-being, we need to understand the fundamental value and mindset shifts that many of us have experienced over the past year.

Human-centered design is at the center of our approach.

We brought together every major group in the Department with a shared strategy for creating a workplace of the future that meets the needs of employees. Human-centric design, coupled with a structured approach to data analytics, will inform future policy and other workforce changes.

The report makes it clear that the Department needs to build agility into its future of work strategy to meet changing employee expectations of flexibility and productivity in the hybrid work model.

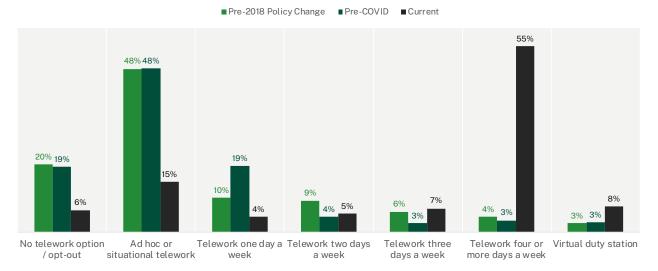
The data gives us a better understanding of the landscape, but it is not enough to inform our decisions alone. USDA is conducting other assessments into areas such as equity, space utilization, and policy, to form a more holistic view of the employee experience and guide better decision-making. As we move towards the normalization of a new work model, a strong relationship between our employees and department leaders will be key to USDA's success.

The COVID-19 Impact on Workplace Arrangements

The data collected helps us paint a picture that compares three separate time periods: 1) Prior to the 2018 Telework Policy Change, 2) Prior to COVID-19 (2018–early 2020), and 3) Present-Day (2021).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, employees had experienced a major change in workplace arrangements due to the 2018 telework policy announcement that reduced teleworking from 2 or more days a week down to only 1 day a week. Once the pandemic began, all mission areas and offices within the Department reported that the share of employees working remotely for 4 or more days per week increased significantly.

Telework Situations Over the Course of Time



Q5-7 (Abbreviated): How many days, on average, did you telework or are you currently teleworking?

Mission Areas that saw the greatest shift to a remote workforce from pre-COVID until now

Mission Areas that saw the smallest shift to a remote workforce from pre-COVID until now

+73%

is

+33%

+69%

RD

+57%

NRE

Percent change represents an increase in the share of employees who teleworked 4+ days between pre-COVID to present day

FSIS

Pre-COVID Work Environment Q12: "Prior to COVID-19, what did your work environment look like? Select all that apply." N=50,048 respondents













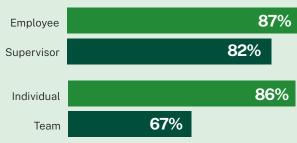
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The shift to increased telework has been an overwhelming success for the vast majority of employees—indicating a strong appetite for maintaining a hybrid work model.

Looking at the detail of the surveys, the experience of working from home varied according to factors such as job type, location, and seniority. Consistent across all mission areas and offices were the differences between employee and supervisor perspectives.

While telework has largely been a success story for employees, supervisors generally viewed telework less favorably than the people they manage. However, many managers cited that the past year changed their original perceptions of telework and has proven that telework can be successful.

% of Respondents with Successful Telework Experiences



Q9: My shift to more telework because of COVID-19 was successful.

Q21: My entire team has been able to successfully shift to a teleworking model. (Responding "agree" or "strongly agree")

N=37,011 employees; 13,037 supervisors

"Teleworking has provided room to breathe that I haven't felt in years."

Mission Areas with the largest share of employees with successful telework experiences

Mission Areas with the smallest share of employees with successful telework experiences

Values represent the percentage of employees who responded "agree" or "strongly agree" to "My shift to more telework because of COVID-19 was successful."

96%

FNS

96%

93%

Staff Offices

TFA

81%

84%

85%

FPAC

REE

NRE

Agencies or offices with the largest vs. smallest share of employees with successful telework experiences

Excludes groups with a sample size < 30 employees

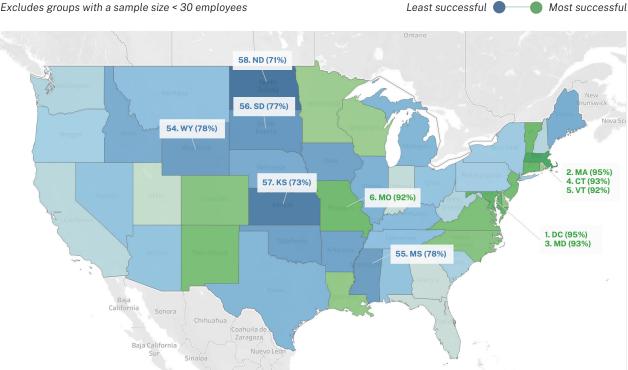
Most Successful Shift to Telework	Least Successful Shift to Telework
OCE (98%)	FSA (74%)
NAD (97%)	ARS (80%)
NIFA (97%)	NRCS (84%)
OASCR (97%)	FS (85%)
OBPA (96%)	ERS (91%)

Job series with the largest vs. smallest share of employees with successful telework experiences

Excludes groups with a sample size < 30 employees

Most Successful Shift to	Least Successful Shift to
Telework	Telework
0900 – Legal and Kindred Group	4700 – General Maintenance and
(96%)	Operations Work Family (61%)
0200 – Human Resources	3500 – General Services and
Management Group (96%)	Support Work Family (80%)
2200 – Information Technology Group (96%)	1900 – Quality Assurance, Inspection, and Grading Group (80%)
1500 – Mathematical Sciences	1600 – Equipment, Facilities, and
Group (95%)	Services Group (81%)
0500 – Accounting and Budget Group (95%)	0400 – Natural Resources Management and Biological Sciences Group (81%)

Excludes groups with a sample size < 30 employees



DC ranked first in both largest share of employees with successful telework experience (95%) and greatest number of responses by location (8% of total survey responses). The top five ranked locations by telework success were all situated in the east (Massachusetts, Maryland, Connecticut, Vermont). The honorable mention was Missouri ranked at #6 with a 92% telework success score-primarily driven by high scores from NIFA.

Locations with the smallest share of employees with successful teleworking experiences were situated in the Midwest. North Dakota, Kansas, South Dakota, Mississippi, and Wyoming fared the worst amongst all locations.

Areas not pictured above, but may be of interest, include:

Alaska (86%), Hawaii (88%), Overseas (90%), and Puerto Rico (88%)

Anticipated Telework Arrangements Post-Pandemic

Results suggest there are three major types of employees:

"I miss interacting with people."

About one-tenth of employees were stressed by the telework environment and can't wait to return to the office and have face-to-face interactions.

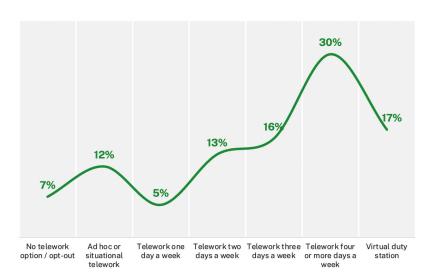
"Not looking forward to returning."

Another one-third of employees were invigorated by the telework environment and are dreading a return to the office.

"A mix of both would be ideal."

The rest of employees look forward to some flexible combination of in-person and telework (or remote work) in which they might be in the office 2-4 times per week.

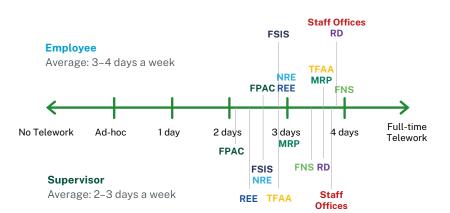
Telework Frequency Expected Post-COVID



Q8: If your role were to qualify for telework, how often would you prefer to telework once COVID-19 is no longer a concern? N=50.048 respondents

76% of all employees favor a hybrid work model post-pandemic.

Employee v. Supervisor Avg Telework Days Expected Post-COVID by Mission Area



Once the pandemic is no longer a concern, employees desire 3-4 telework days a week while supervisors desire 2-3 days.

Employees situated in large mission areas (FPAC, NRE) with a high proportion of consumer-facing roles generally want more days in the office than at home.

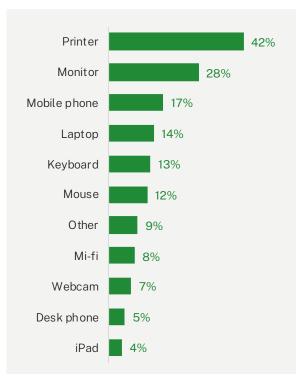
Mission areas that experienced the greatest shift to remote work as a result of the pandemic (FNS, TFAA, RD) have a strong appetite to continue this mode of working post-pandemic.

Anticipated Telework Needs Post-Pandemic

Technology established itself as a successful enabler of telework. By and large, agencies were able to continue to operate efficiently because of platforms like Microsoft Teams or Zoom. However, with employees dispersed among

multiple locations and home offices, USDA will need to invest in better technology, tools, and equipment to meet the needs of a hybrid workforce.

Equipment Needs for Telework



Q11: Which of the following government-provided equipment would better support your telework set-up? N=50,048 respondents

For many employees, the lack of a printer (with scanner capabilities) was a minor inconvenience.

Many employees saved printing files for a trip to the office once a week. A top suggestion was to let people print from their home printers with a preapproved list allowed on the USDA network.

Employees without governmentissued phones are getting calls from customers during off hours.

Keeping work calls on a separate line will establish better boundaries between work and personal lives.

A strong, stable internet connection was cited as a top need, especially for those in rural areas.

Issues with connectivity or slow speeds when connected to VPN impacted employee productivity and added undue frustration. One popular suggestion was to provide a stipend for network services to allow all employees to take advantage of increased flexibility.

In a postpandemic era, teleworking employees want...

Genuine support and trust from leadership at the local level

Employees want USDA's long-term commitment to telework and other flexible work policies. Despite a successful year of teleworking, there are still misconceptions and distrust about it. "Teleworking does not mean I am not a team player."

Agreements that allow for flexible hours and flexible locations

Telework agreements may explicitly state the specific days/hours of the week when an employee must be available and specific locations where an employee can work. Having more flexibility in the time and/or location would increase work-life balance.

Clear expectations of the norms of teleworking

With teleworking, it can be difficult to create blocks of "non-work" time that are ever so present in the office. Some examples of these in-office activities are coffee breaks, chatting with colleagues, and going for a walk around the office. These activities tend to be viewed as "unproductive" when teleworking. Guidance on the new norms of teleworking would be helpful in creating a work from home environment that achieves optimal success.

Guidance on how to manage hybrid meetings

Establishing best practices for hosting hybrid meetings and taking the time to help people get used to the new system of teleworking would be invaluable. **USDA needs** to enable those who aren't physically present in collaboration spaces to interact naturally and productively with those who are. Additionally, training on how to make these types of meetings more effective will be beneficial to all employees.

A proxy for the day-to-day "water-cooler" interactions that foster a sense of belonging and build relationships

There is a lot of **opportunity for new solutions that deliver more realistic, engaging, human-centric experiences**. While nothing can replace the real-world interactions that most people crave, technology can make interactions between in-office and virtual colleagues even more efficient.

A gradual transition back into the office

With the pandemic, there was no opportunity for a gradual transition. It happened overnight and everyone had to adapt. With the transition back to the office and into a hybrid model, taking time to support that transition will be valuable and help set everyone up for success. Clear communication of timelines, expectations, and guidelines is critical to a smooth transition.



The fact that my employer allowed me such flexibility made
me feel more responsible for producing quality work in
timeframes desired as I was so utterly grateful!

Employee v. Supervisor Perspectives

Findings show that a large number of **managers are** struggling with the effective management of teleworking employees, with this translating into feelings of distrust and micromanagement among direct reports. The pandemic forced many leaders to make the transition from in-person to remote management quickly.

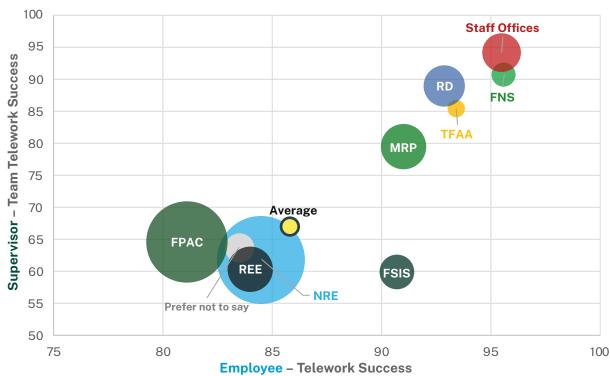
While many groups such as those within the staff offices or FNS have adapted successfully, many positions are not well-suited for telework and have presented overwhelming challenges for both supervisors and their teams.

As a result, some supervisors are finding their roles more

difficult than ever before. Generally, managers viewed their team's overall shift to telework as less successful in comparison to how individual employees viewed their own telework success.

At the end of the day, telework agreements exist between a specific employee and their supervisor, meaning that managerial support of telework is critical to an individual's overall work experience. Variability in the implementation of agreements raise concerns about equity. However, employees remain optimistic about the future of work and expect to retain some of the flexibility they've experienced over the past year.

Employee v. Supervisor - Shift to Telework Success



Bubble size indicates # of responses

Q9: My shift to more telework because of COVID-19 was successful.

Q21: My entire team has been able to successfully shift to a teleworking model (Responding "agree" or "strongly agree")

N=37,011 employees; 13,037 supervisors

3 out of 5

supervisors indicated they would benefit from training on how to manage teleworkers.

Supervisor Top Concerns about Managing Teleworking Employees

Q25: "Which of the following concerns do you have about managing teleworking employees? Select all that apply" N=13,037 respondents



42%



Difficulty in managing people I can't see



26% Teamwork will suffer



Difficulty in evaluating teleworkers



22%Employee productivity



20% Security risk

Equitable Implementation of Telework Agreements is a Top Priority

Themes identified from open-ened comments to Q14: "What do you need for optimal success in working from home?"

Telework agreements....

exist between a specific employee and their supervisor.

What employees are concerned about:

"What happens if I suddenly switch from having a generous manager to one that's less excited about telework?"

Telework agreements....

may explicitly mandate specific days/hours of work.

What employees are concerned about:

"Will my supervisor tell me that I can only telework on MWF per my signed agreement?"

Telework agreements....

may explicitly state where the work must be done.

What employees are concerned about:

"What if I wanted to work from a location that was not on the originally approved agreement?"

Four Ways Forward to Build Trust Between Supervisors & Employees

Practice what you preach starting at the highest level.

Leaders need to send a strong signal about USDA's genuine commitment to flexible work practices. Supervisors who embrace the use of telework drive positive cultural change, especially in situations where managers have historically reflected a skeptical or hostile view of telework.

Train supervisors on how to manage their employees more effectively from a distance.

Simply telling supervisors to trust their employees isn't enough. Rather, they need to learn new ways of communication, delegation, and empowerment to provide their team with greater autonomy over their work methods. Supervisors should be educated about the potential benefits of telework to reduce mistrust and understand the difference between checking up as a way to micromanage vs. checking in on employees to provide guidance.

Maintain a commitment to communication.

Good change management starts with clear and consistent communication. Supervisors and employees need to have a common understanding of the new rules of engagement and norms of telework. Above all, leaders need to focus on the outcomes they expect to see rather than the inputs, while employees need communication and feedback to ensure that they feel connected to the team.

Use equitable performance evaluation practices.

There should be no significant difference between managing the performance of a teleworker and in-office employee. This standard, alongside clear performance expectations, must be widely upheld throughout the organization.

Long live the office... but its role is set to change.

Supervisors still highly value physical offices. Nearly half of all supervisors (47 percent) desire to be in the office at least 3 days a week once the pandemic is no longer a concern.

Moreover, three-quarters of all supervisors believe the office is important for meeting space, while over half also consider the office important for team building and work culture and effective team collaboration.

Ranked in order of importance, the purpose of an office according to supervisors...

#1 It will provide a space to meet in person

#2 It will help with team building & work culture

#3 It will enable my team to collaborate more effectively

#4 It will increase employee productivity

Q24: In the future, physical office space will be important for my team because... (Responding "agree" or "strongly agree")

N = 13,037 supervisors

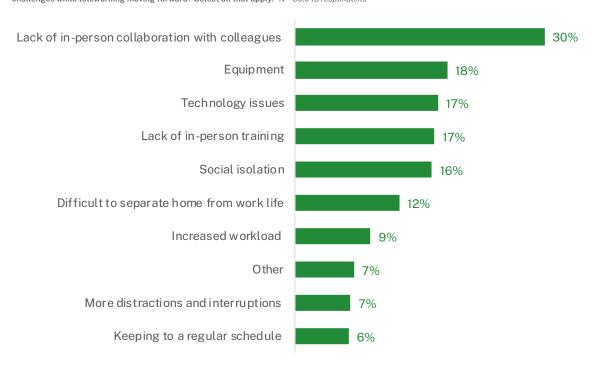
"What is missing is the ability to have the informal interactions that build relationships, communication networks, and interpersonal connections that support morale, resiliency, and trust."





Limitations of Telework

Q17: "Considering what you've learned in the last year of teleworking, what do you foresee being your biggest challenges while teleworking moving forward? Select all that apply." N = 50,048 respondents



Lack of in-person collaboration with colleagues was cited as the top concern for nearly all mission areas.

The only exception was RD-in which equipment concerns topped lack of in-person collaboration as the biggest concern.

Lack of support from management and peers was cited as one of the top concerns in the other category.

Other concerns include the lack of interactions with customers, difficulty in access physical files, and equity for all employees in the implementation of telework agreements.

Nearly half of employees have no concerns about telework in the future.

2 out of 5 supervisors have no concerns about telework in the future.

Major equipment and technology issues impact employee productivity while teleworking.

Open-ended feedback highlighted issues with internet or VPN connectivity and outdated or missing equipment as factors impacting productivity.

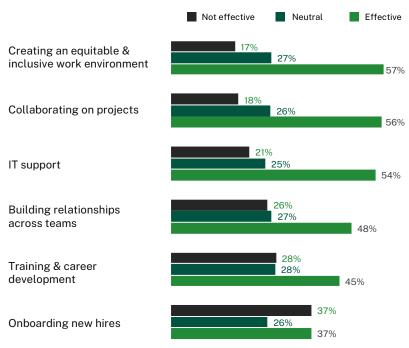
Telework's Effect on Traditional Work Activities

The survey asks employees to evaluate the impact of the pandemic on six aspects of the work environment. Results indicate that the nature of digital interactions greatly detracts from the quality of onboarding and trainings that are attempted virtually.

As more employees work from home, it will be up to management to invest in collaborative and better technologies to facilitate people's personal productivity and to also focus on ways to foster a sense of belonging and purpose. USDA needs to significantly rework onboarding approaches which focus heavily on creating social capital, not merely the virtual delivery of orientation materials.

Office form and function are going to have to change. The physical office will play an important role in fostering collaboration and reinvigorating or sustaining social networks.

Effectiveness of Work Activities During the Pandemic



Q19: How effective has USDA been at performing the following activities while supporting teleworking staff? (Responding 1-5 scale of "not very effective" to "extremely effective")

N=50.048 respondents

Most Important Factors of the Work Environment

Q18: "As we consider the future of work and telework, which of the following are important for you? Select all that apply." N=50,048 respondents



52%

Accessing equipment and documents easily/ securely



44% Camaraderie and team building



Training and career development



42%Trust



38%
Collaborating on projects



34% Face-to-face meetings

Among those who expect telework to increase post-pandemic

Accessing equipment/documents was the most important factor impacting their work environment, followed by trust and camaraderie.

Among those who expect telework to decrease post-pandemic

Having face-to-face meetings with colleagues was the most important factor, followed by accessing equipment/documents.

Employee Productivity

Supervisor Perceptions of Employee Productivity

Q24: In the future, physical office space will be important for my team because... it will increase employee productivity. (Responding "agree" or "strongly agree")

N = 13.037 supervisors



Employee Viewpoint

via open-ended feedback to Q15: "How does teleworking impact your well-being?" and Q20: "Is there anything else you would like to share with USDA leadership?"

Over 7,000 employees said their productivity increased because of telework.

- - -

Fewer distractions, more time available due to a lack of commute, and a better work-life balance were all conductive to a more productive environment.



"The pandemic has been hard in many ways, but one shining light has been that USDA was forced by the circumstances to jump into a 21st century model that I think has opened everyone's eyes to how incredibly productive we can all be working from anywhere in the country. Everyone has pulled together, challenges of figuring out telework have been minimal. I think virtual employment is the way of the future. It would further rural development, climate, and equity goals, while providing federal employees with a work-life balance that has never existed."

When returning to the office, employees want...

More space designed for collaboration and connection

Areas should allow for learning and training, coaching and mentoring, and other collaborative activities without disturbing others. Breakout rooms or conference rooms should be freely available. Meanwhile, concerns from employees about being in close quarters with their colleagues, or about working in outdated/unsafe spaces not conducive to working effectively, should inform decisions about space utilization.

To be engaged in the process or decisions about work

When a large part of the office environment involves individual workstations (36 percent of employees stated they worked in cubicles prior to the pandemic), it is going to be very difficult from a practical perspective to shift the ways in where work gets done. Employees and supervisors suggest that engagement at the staff level on how to balance telework with office, hoteling, field, and virtual environments can potentially lead to low-cost, productive solutions.

One fact is for sure: employees do not want to default back to pre-pandemic norms where work consists of daily in-person meetings.





"It's kind of ironic that during our largest global pandemic, my overall mental and physical health is the greatest it's ever been during my professional career."

Benefits of Telework Speak for Themselves

In response to the open-ended question "How does teleworking impact your well-being?," employees reported that telework has:



Led to massive improvements to physical and mental health and wellbeing



Saved individuals thousands of dollars per month in fuel, childcare, food, and other expenses



Allowed more time to be productive at work without having the stress of the commute



Granted individuals more quality time with their children, family and friends

Implications on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Flexible work policies are a tool to attract and retain diverse, skilled, and higher caliber talent

"Virtual employment could dramatically improve inclusivity, equity, and diversity in the workplace. As a working mother with a working spouse, it is difficult for me to relocate for job opportunities, and my career has suffered as a result. The freedom to pursue promotional opportunities at USDA still feels limited to those who can relocate their families, and this needs to change. Virtual employment and increased telework would allow people who cannot move – particularly those with family responsibilities, or who cannot afford to live in the expensive DC metro area-to advance in the organization and increase representation at higher levels of the organization."

Benefits of a diverse team may be harder to access if colleagues are unable to interact with one another informally

"The 'inclusion' part of 'diversity and inclusion' will be difficult to attain if colleagues never meet informally." USDA should consider increasing opportunities to bring all virtual employees together and granting new hires the chance to meet with their team. These opportunities ensure working relationships are maintained and foster a sense of belonging and purpose to the team.

Telework and other flexible work policies must accommodate the diversity of the workforce

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) issues are the most significant issues with telework. For example, many employess in rural areas struggle with obtaining solid internet connectivity—an issue that is compounded if it is cost-prohibitive.

USDA leadership must consider "the privileges wrapped up in who can and cannot telework or virtual work, and who can or cannot succeed (or be supported in succeeding in) teleworking or virtual working" if they are to ensure DE&I throughout all levels of the organization.

Looking Towards the Future

Our collective experiences over the past year will shape the future of work for the better. Thanks to the data we've gathered from this survey and the ideas generated, we are confident that USDA is equipped to tackle the complexity of the challenge and where workforce trends are headed.

Going forward, employees' safety and well-being must be supported and tailored to the specific needs of each agency or office.

- Leadership must prioritize **communication and support** for their staff. A commitment to clear,
 frequent communication and the establishment of
 support structures for employees are needed to
 shape the workplace into one that is more diverse,
 equitable, and inclusive.
- Reducing the cognitive overload brought on by the increase in the number of emails, meetings, collaboration tools, etc. is critical to maintaining a good work-life balance while teleworking. Overall well-being can suffer not because of a struggle to maintain work-life balance, but rather the lack of time away from work.
- When employees may work widely varying hours from widely varying locations, USDA should work to establish healthy boundaries around when and how employees are expected to communicate, respond, and be available.

The major objective of the Telework Survey is to incorporate the diverse perspectives of employees as the Department paves a way forward for the workplace of the future. Results in this report provide a jumping-off point for deeper analysis, since results by individual agencies or offices will vary.

The workplace is not standing still; it's changing rapidly. We need to navigate the future of work with the agility to adapt to changes throughout 2021 and beyond.

This is no mean feat as there are three considerable targets in sight: one, enable hybrid work; two, empower and engage employees wherever they work; three, manage and sustain long-term planning for our Future of Work strategy.

Many initiatives are being implemented, with others in the works. To ensure our approach remains agile and to continue to provide the best workplace environment for whatever lies ahead, we will continue to seek input through multiple avenues from those who know USDA the best-our people.

We have the opportunity to shape the USDA of tomorrow into something more just, equitable, and inclusive using a people-first, data-driven approach.

"My experiences during the past year completely changed how I viewed telework and virtual employment. While I couldn't have imagined teleworking so much prior to COVID-19, during the past year I've been able to be more productive and collaborate effectively with a broad set of my colleagues while maintaining a really strong work-life balance.....Now I view telework, virtual employment, and workforce flexibilities as a major productivity tool that can also result in a more equitable and inclusive work environment."

APPENDIX A: SURVEY

Survey Questions

- 1. To help us gather organization information, please indicate which mission area and agency or office you represent.
- 2. To help us gather geographic location information, please indicate the state of your official duty location.
- 3. Please specify the city of your official duty location.
- 4. Please indicate your job series.
- 5. Prior to the 2018 telework policy change at USDA, how many days, on average, did you telework?
- 6. After the 2018 policy change and prior to COVID-19, how many days, on average, did you telework?
- 7. How many days, on average, are you currently teleworking?
- 8. If your role were to qualify for telework, how often would you prefer to telework once COVID-19 is no longer a concern?
- 9. My shift to more telework because of COVID-19 was successful.
- 10. I have all the USDA-issued equipment I need in order to telework.
- 11. Which of the following government-provided equipment would better support your telework set-up?
- 12. Prior to COVID-19, what did your work environment look like? Select all that apply.
- 13. Would telework grant you additional flexibility to create your own work-life balance?
- 14. What do you need for optimal success in working from home?
- 15. How does teleworking impact your well-being?
- 16. Prior to COVID-19, what were your biggest challenges with teleworking? Select all that apply
- 17. Considering what you've learned in the last year of teleworking, what do you foresee being your biggest challenges while teleworking moving forward? Select all that apply
- 18. As we consider the future of work and telework, which of the following are important for you? Select all that apply
- 19. How effective has USDA been at performing the following activities while supporting teleworking staff?
- 20. Is there anything else you would like to share with USDA leadership about telework, virtual employment, or other workforce flexibilities?
- 21. Are you a supervisor or do you currently manage one or more employees?
- 22. My entire team has been able to successfully shift to a teleworking model.
- 23. I would be interested in training courses that help me develop skills managing telework employees.
- 24. In the future, physical office space will be important for my team because...
- 25. Which of the following concerns do you have about managing teleworking employees? Select all that apply

APPENDIX B

Response Breakdown by Question

Department-wide results are noted in this section. The sum of percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Telework Situation

5. Prior to the 2018 telework policy change at USDA, how many days, on average, did you telework?	Responses	% of Responses
My job must be performed at a specific location and is therefore not eligible	8,048	16%
Ad hoc or situational telework	19,444	39%
Telework one day a week	4,033	8%
Telework two days a week	3,736	8%
Telework three days a week	2,402	5%
Telework four or more days a week	1,810	4%
I was assigned to a virtual duty station	1,033	2%
Not applicable–I was not with USDA at that time	9,212	19%
Total	49,718	100%

Notes: The sum of percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Non-responses are not included these results.

6. After the 2018 policy change and prior to COVID-19, how many days, on average, did you telework?	Responses	% of Responses
My job must be performed at a specific location and is therefore not eligible	8,498	17%
Ad hoc or situational telework	21,353	43%
Telework one day a week	8,607	17%
Telework two days a week	1,944	4%
Telework three days a week	1,174	2%
Telework four or more days a week	1,507	3%
I was assigned to a virtual duty station	1,254	3%
Not applicable – I was not with USDA at that time	5,248	11%
Total	49,585	100%

Notes: The sum of percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Non-responses are not included these results.

7. How many days, on average, are you currently teleworking?	Responses	% of Responses
My job must be performed at a specific location and is therefore not eligible	3,204	6%
Ad hoc or situational telework	7,288	15%
Telework one day a week	2,220	4%
Telework two days a week	2,682	5%
Telework three days a week	3,445	7%
Telework four or more days a week	27,217	55%
I am assigned to a virtual duty station	3,750	8%
Total	49,806	100%

Notes: The sum of percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Non-responses are not included these results.

8. If your role were to qualify for telework, how often would you prefer to telework once COVID-19 is no longer a concern?*	Responses	% of Responses
I would not want to telework	3,306	7%
Ad hoc or situational telework	5,757	12%
Telework one day a week	2,644	5%
Telework two days a week	6,738	13%
Telework three days a week	8,013	16%
Telework four or more days a week	14,846	30%
I am currently assigned to a virtual duty station	1,375	3%
I would like to be assigned to a virtual duty station	7,369	15%
Total	50,048	100%

Note: The sum of percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Telework Experience

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9. My shift to more telework because of COVID-19 was successful	64%	22%	7%	4%	3%
10. I have all the USDA-issued equipment I need in order to telework	47%	30%	7%	11%	3%

Notes: The sum of percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. "N/A" responses were removed from these results.

Equipment Needs

11. Which of the following government-provided equipment would better support your telework set-up?	Responses	% of All Responses
Laptop	6,354	13%
Webcam	3,331	7%
Desk phone	2,298	5%
Mobile phone	8,067	16%
iPad	1,840	4%
Mi-fi	3,504	7%
Monitor	13,057	26%
Keyboard	5,919	12%
Mouse	5,470	11%
Printer	19,631	39%
Other	4,400	9%
None, I have everything I need as an option	14,260	28%

Note: The sum of the percentages will add to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one response option.

Pre-COVID Work Environment

12. Prior to COVID-19, what did your work environment look like? Select all that apply.	Responses	% of All Responses
Cube	17,951	36%
Shared office	14,349	29%
Private office	13,962	28%
Home office	3,046	6%
Field location	3,756	8%
Other	1,885	4%

Note: The sum of the percentages will add to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one response option.

Work-life Balance

13. Would telework grant you additional flexibility to create your own work-life balance?	Responses	% of Responses
Yes	43,384	92%
No	3,625	7%

Notes: The sum of percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. "N/A" responses were removed from these results.

Telework Challenges

16. Prior to COVID-19, what were your biggest challenges with teleworking? Select all that apply	Responses	% of All Responses
Lack of in-person collaboration with colleagues	7,825	16%
Difficult to separate home from work life	4,608	9%
More distractions and interruptions	3,332	7%
Keeping to a regular schedule	2,392	5%
Increased workload	1,811	4%
Social isolation	3,681	7%
Technology issues	7,655	15%
Lack of in-person training	3,187	6%
Other	8,314	17%
Equipment	8,140	16%
I did not have any challenges	24,580	49%

Note: The sum of the percentages will add to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one response option.

17. Considering what you've learned in the last year of teleworking, what do you foresee being your biggest challenges while teleworking moving forward? Select all that apply	Responses	% of All Responses
Lack of in-person collaboration with colleagues	13,922	28%
Difficult to separate home from work life	5,827	12%
More distractions and interruptions	3,114	6%
Keeping to a regular schedule	3,002	6%
Increased workload	4,212	8%
Social isolation	7,621	15%
Technology issues	7,960	16%
Lack of in-person training	7,766	16%
Other	3,272	7%
Equipment	8,492	17%
I do not foresee any challenges	20,496	41%

Note: The sum of the percentages will add to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one response option.

Factors of the Work Environment

18. As we consider the future of work and telework, which of the following are important for you? Select all that apply	Responses	% of All Responses
Collaborating on projects	18,885	38%
Accessing equipment or documents easily/securely	25,920	52%
Face-to-face meetings with colleagues	17,203	34%
Training and career development	21,194	42%
Camaraderie and team building	22,116	44%
Other	2,418	5%
None of the above	4,860	10%
Trust	20,819	42%
Inclusive work environment	14,372	29%

Note: The sum of the percentages will add to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one response option.

Effectiveness of USDA Work Activities

19. How effective has USDA been at performing the following activities while supporting teleworking staff?	Extremely effective	Somewhat effective	Effective	Somewhat ineffective	Not very effective
Collaborating on projects	28%	28%	26%	13%	5%
Building relationships across teams	23%	25%	27%	16%	9%
Training and career development	21%	23%	28%	18%	10%
Onboarding new hires	18%	19%	26%	21%	17%
IT support	28%	27%	25%	14%	7%
Creating an equitable and inclusive work environment and culture	29%	27%	27%	11%	6%

Notes: The sum of percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. "N/A" responses were removed from these results.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
22. My entire team has been able to successfully shift to a teleworking model.	36%	31%	12%	13%	8%
23. I would be interested in training courses that help me develop skills managing telework employees.	22%	39%	24%	9%	6%
24. In the future, physical office s	pace will be impor	tant for my team b	oecause		
It will increase employee productivity	20%	21%	28%	17%	14%
It will provide a space to meet in person	34%	42%	14%	5%	6%
It will enable my team to collaborate more effectively	27%	32%	22%	11%	9%
It will help with team building and work culture	29%	36%	19%	8%	7%

Notes: The sum of percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. "N/A" responses were removed from these results.

25. Which of the following concerns do you have about managing teleworking employees? Select all that apply	Responses	% of All Supervisor Responses
I have no concerns about managing teleworking employees	5,522	42%
The difficulty of managing people I can't see	3,550	27%
Teamwork will suffer when everyone isn't together	3,421	26%
It could be difficult to evaluate teleworkers	3,281	25%
People won't be as productive when working from home	2,867	22%
Having people work from home can be a security risk	2,632	20%
May have to learn a new style of management	2,227	17%
Implementing telework agreements equitably	2,059	16%
Having teleworkers may increase my workload	1,417	11%
Other	1,324	10%
May have to learn new technologies to communicate	1,104	8%
Difficulty of interacting/communicating with teleworkers	1,084	8%

Note: The sum of the percentages will add to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one response option.

APPENDIX C

DA + Staff Offices

The figure below shows the response rates for DA and staff offices.

DA, Staff Offices	Survey Responses	Response Rate
DA + Staff Offices Total	2,917	69.4%
DA + Other Staff Offices Not Listed Below (OCR, OCS, OE, OES, Ombudsperson, OSEC)	435	86.0%
OCIO	1,093	74.6%
OCFO	764	66.3%
OASCR	90	81.8%
ОВРА	30	71.4%
ос	28	66.7%
NAD	45	60.0%
OIG	151	34.3%
OCE	56	98.2%
OGC	196	72.6%
OPPE	29	64.4%

Values represent the percentages indicating the respondents who "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" with the statement in the survey category. Results are also shown by DA and staff offices.

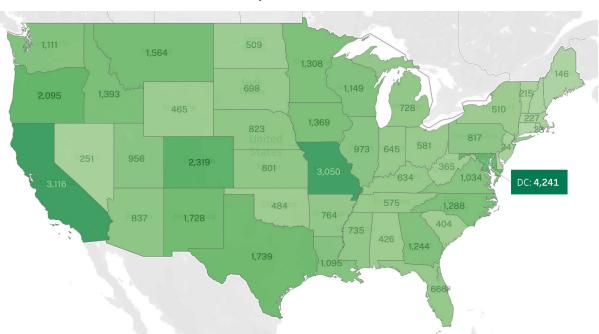
DA, Staff Offices	Successful Shift to Telework	Equipment Needs Met for Telework	Building relationships across teams	Training and career development	Collaborating on projects	IT support	Onboarding new hires	Creating an equitable and inclusive work environment and culture
Total	96	91	77	63	67	77	59	74
DA	93	88	58	58	67	67	54	67
NAD	97	88	59	62	71	80	66	75
OASCR	97	88	63	60	71	76	64	66
ОВРА	96	90	50	52	60	43	44	56
ос	100	96	74	77	89	82	57	81
OCE	98	88	65	54	76	49	69	69
OCFO	95	93	71	70	80	82	64	79
OCIO	96	93	70	61	79	81	58	76
OCR	100	83	75	58	67	100	50	73
ocs	94	88	67	66	73	65	62	62
OE	100	95	77	73	76	82	84	100
OES	100	75	0	0	0	25	0	0
OGC	96	82	62	61	79	61	52	71
OIG	92	88	60	61	74	77	53	73
OPPE	96	83	61	59	82	86	81	64

APPENDIX D

Responses by Mission Area

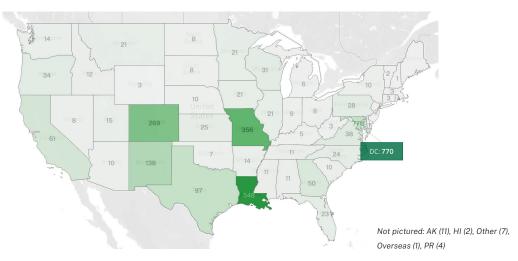
The figure below shows where employees are located for each mission area, with the darkest color being the most populous.

Department-wide

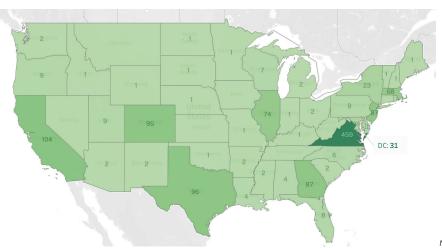


Not pictured: Alaska (494), American Samoa (7), Guam (16), Hawaii, (188), Mariana Islands (4), Other (97), Overseas (173), Virgin Islands (3)

DA+Staff Offices

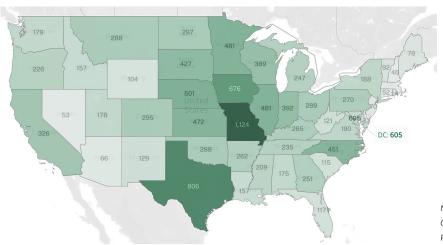


FNS



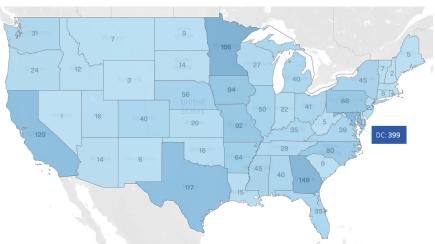
Not pictured: HI (1)

FPAC



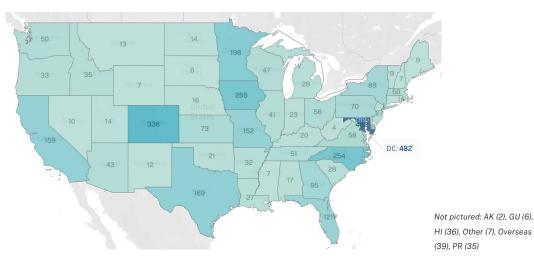
Not pictured: AK (37). AS (4), GU (1), HI (59), MP (3), Other (8), PR (33), VI (2)

FSIS

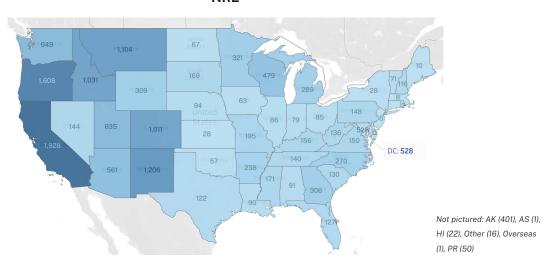


Not pictured: AK (3). GU (2), HI (10), MP (1), Overseas (3), PR (7). VI (1)

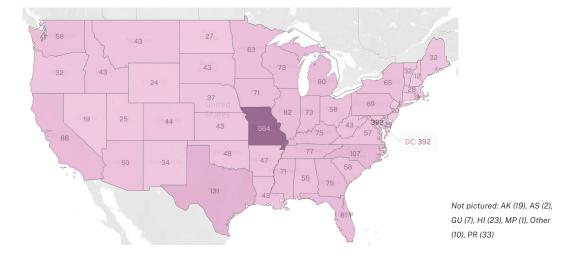
MRP



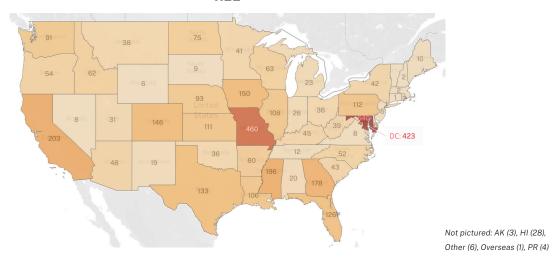
NRE



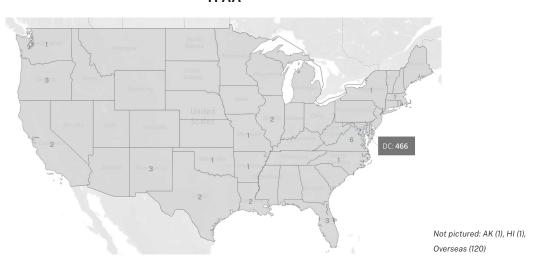
RD



REE



TFAA



APPENDIX E

Job Series by Mission Area

The figure below shows the number of responses for each job series by mission area.

Job Series Code	FNS	FPAC	FSIS	MRP	NRE	RD	REE	DA + Staff Offices	TFAA
0000	28	543	38	59	244	162	87	64	45
0100	31	83	8	39	560	18	170	25	43
0200	26	208	162	138	541	77	103	143	14
0300	679	2756	252	849	2856	531	496	470	191
0400	6	3400	81	1031	6676	3	1331	22	7
0500	61	305	76	220	506	227	146	500	19
0600	56	3	96	5	11	0	14	1	1
0700	0	1	357	423	1	0	40	1	2
0800	2	618	4	15	971	107	126	28	2
0900	6	10	5	13	35	3	3	204	2
1000	24	77	13	47	384	26	53	29	4
1100	43	1879	13	392	983	1615	120	100	106
1200	0	0	1	1	2	0	7	0	0
1300	3	131	43	50	543	0	263	11	3
1400	1	0	1	11	17	0	49	0	0
1500	3	12	24	21	25	4	468	0	0
1600	2	16	7	10	45	12	30	11	0
1700	2	11	8	57	57	0	25	9	0
1800	25	103	854	172	135	2	1	54	13
1900	8	13	42	164	1	2	4	2	1
2000	1	0	2	6	16	1	4	3	0
2100	1	13	1	15	203	11	2	3	3
2200	47	404	58	166	294	82	180	1094	21

The figure below shows the number of responses for additional job series by mission area. Job series with fewer than 10 responses in total are not shown.

Job Series Code	FNS	FPAC	FSIS	MRP	NRE	RD	REE	DA + Staff Offices	TFAA
3500	8	41	2	2	14	25	14	1	1
4600	0	0	0	0	36	0	1	0	0
4700	0	5	0	0	24	0	18	1	1
5000	1	36	7	37	4	0	101	3	3
5200	1	14	1	1	4	2	4	3	0
5700	0	0	0	0	16	0	0	1	0
5800	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	0
6900	0	0	1	9	6	0	0	1	0
Prefer not to say	129	1,970	134	200	382	431	302	94	123