# Public Sector Organizational Transformation in Response to COVID-19

Best Practices and Diagnostic Tools to Support U.S. Federal Government Readiness for Future Crises

July 2020

# Table of Contents

The COVID-19 pandemic is severely impacting countries around the world, challenging government response capabilities and resource capacity. In the face of the rapidly evolving public health and economic crises, governments must quickly deploy solutions to address the far-reaching implications. Governments are facing unique structural changes as a result of evolving workload priorities and adapting to working in a remote environment. Censeo Consulting Group undertook this study to help inform and advance the U.S. Federal Government response to COVID-19 and other future crises and to facilitate best practice transfer among agencies at the federal, state, local, and international levels.

# U.S. Federal Government and International Government Responses to COVID-19

U.S. federal agencies can look to both other agencies and international governments for best practices in addressing the unique challenges of responding to COVID-19. We examined lessons learned in three overarching categories of crisis response that, taken together, can help transform an organization to effectively address the challenges posed by COVID-19:

**Capacity Building** | U.S. federal agencies and international governments are working to nimbly and effectively adapt to changing workloads to successfully deliver mission responsibilities and outcomes. Some notable examples of capacity building are:

- **Workload Smoothing** | The IRS alleviated pressures of an increased workload by extending the amount of time Americans had to file their 2019 taxes.

- **Additional Support for Staff** | The Netherlands has provided critical childcare support to essential workers at no additional cost, to enable workers to sustain their contributions.

**Change Management** | Governments are implementing targeted and pragmatic changes to workforce, processes, and technology to meet new challenges and prepare for the future. Some notable examples of change management are:

- **Reevaluation of Standard Operating Procedures** | Agencies within the American defense and intelligence communities have begun assessing how security policies could be modified to meet the needs of unplanned events.

- **Continuous Engagement** | By incorporating feedback loops with citizens into its communication strategy, the German government has continuously improved its ability to manage through uncertainty.

**Remote Operations** | Governments are implementing telework at scale, enabling employees and contractors to effectively work in remote and/or hybrid environments. Some notable examples of remote operations are:

- **Rapid Deployment of Surge IT-funding** | The Department of Veterans Affairs has more than quadrupled its remote work capacity from February to June 2020, demonstrating that ramping up quickly is possible.

- **Process Monitoring and Modernization** | Japan has revised traditional paper-based processes to increase efficiency during telework.

# Where Do We Go from Here?

Informed by lessons from the first wave of COVID-19 as well as Censeo's industry expertise in operational excellence and change management, agencies can take several initial steps to assess their own preparedness and enhance current and future responses to unpredictable events.

**Conduct a Diagnostic** | We recommend that agency leaders evaluate agency preparedness to respond to pandemic events, such as COVID-19, in order to determine opportunities for improvement. The Censeo team has prepared an easy-to-use diagnostic test[1] that scores agency preparedness in four critical areas:

**Workforce**
Recognizing your staff's risks, needs, and opportunities

**Operations**
Adjusting and streamlining processes in the face of disruption

**Supply Chain**
Understanding your vendors and partners' capabilities, risks, and needs

**Strategy**
Planning in the era of expecting the unexpected

**Assess Improvement Areas** | Once improvement areas have been identified, an agency may need to perform additional in-depth analyses to prioritize and implement improvement opportunities. We recommend focusing on the following improvement areas, aligned with the three broad response categories:

1. **Build Organizational Capacity** | Agencies should conduct an in-depth analysis of their ability to respond to an unexpected workload increase or mission expansion. Potential analyses include capacity planning to assess process efficacy and remote work readiness, strategic planning to evaluate potential gaps in an agency's response, and workforce analyses to determine staffing and hiring needs.

2. **Ensure Effective Change Management** | Agencies should consider conducting an Employee Feedback Survey to assess employee remote work conditions and comfort levels with policies and procedures for returning to their assigned work locations (template provided in the Appendix). Agency leaders should model decisive leadership and transparency in charting a path forward.

3. **Prepare for Remote Operations and Telework at Scale** | In order to increase agility and operational readiness, agencies should focus on enhancing process flexibility and investing in IT enablers associated with remote operations, including information security and internet access.

Federal agencies will benefit from retroactively assessing their response during the first wave of COVID-19 and applying best practices towards developing better policies, procedures, processes, and plans for the future. By proactively planning for future crises, agencies will be prepared to meet the needs of stakeholders and can continue to deliver on their missions, even in the face of uncertainty.

---

[1] censeoconsulting.com/survey/

# INTRODUCTION

The 2019-2020 spread of the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, which led to a worldwide pandemic of the viral disease COVID-19, has severely impacted countries worldwide. Governments around the world have had to rapidly respond to evolving public health and economic crises, unprecedented in the last century. The spread of COVID-19 is a "black swan" event – spreading quickly, with little warning, and with major impact on the global economy and on the health of citizens everywhere. Worldwide, governments have scrambled to find effective solutions to deal with this emergency, which has resulted in structural changes to the amount of work to be done to effectively respond to COVID-19 and implement responsive legislation, as well as how the mission is delivered in a remote working environment.

In the United States, federal agencies have had to respond to directives from OMB to make use of telework for their workforce and then reconcile those directives with further guidance on opening up the country, balancing the health and safety of their workers with the need to achieve mission objectives for their agency. In addition, federal agencies have had to work on implementing new legislation and executive orders, including, but not limited to, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) and Executive Order 13924 for "Regulatory Relief to Support Economic Recovery." The CARES Act and EO 13924 have led to structural changes in the mission objectives for certain federal agencies, during an emergency in which agencies have struggled to deliver their mission in a remote work environment.

Censeo Consulting Group performed this analysis to help inform and advance the U.S. Federal Government response to COVID-19 (and other future "black swan" events) and facilitate best practice transfer across government agencies, both domestic and abroad. We focused on three overarching categories of crisis response that, taken together, can help transform an organization to effectively address the challenges posed by COVID-19.

### CAPACITY BUILDING
Nimbly and effectively adapting to changing workloads in order to successfully deliver mission responsibilities and outcomes

### CHANGE MANAGEMENT
Making targeted and pragmatic changes to the workforce, processes, and technology to meet new challenges and prepare for the future

### REMOTE OPERATIONS
Implementing telework at scale, enabling employees and contractors to effectively work in remote / hybrid environments

### ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

We first assess the U.S. Federal Government response in each of these categories across the initial wave of the pandemic, focusing on:

- How U.S. federal agencies have **worked to creatively develop capacity** in order to deliver their organization's sometimes evolving mission responsibilities, while adapting to changing workloads as a result of COVID-19

- How agencies have **managed change throughout their organization**, including modifications as necessary to workforce, processes, and technology and to meet changing talent needs as agency workloads have evolved

- How agencies have **implemented effective telework procedures**, recognizing that telework at scale is an untested challenge for many organizations and may require developing workforce-wide trainings, near-term workarounds, long-term strategic planning, and acceleration of IT-modernization efforts

After surveying the U.S. federal government response, we examine how international government agencies have implemented innovative solutions to similar problems in the face of COVID-19, with a view to revealing best practices for consideration by U.S. federal agencies. Finally, we provide recommendations on how individual agencies can improve their response and better prepare for the next wave of COVID-19 or a similar future crisis.
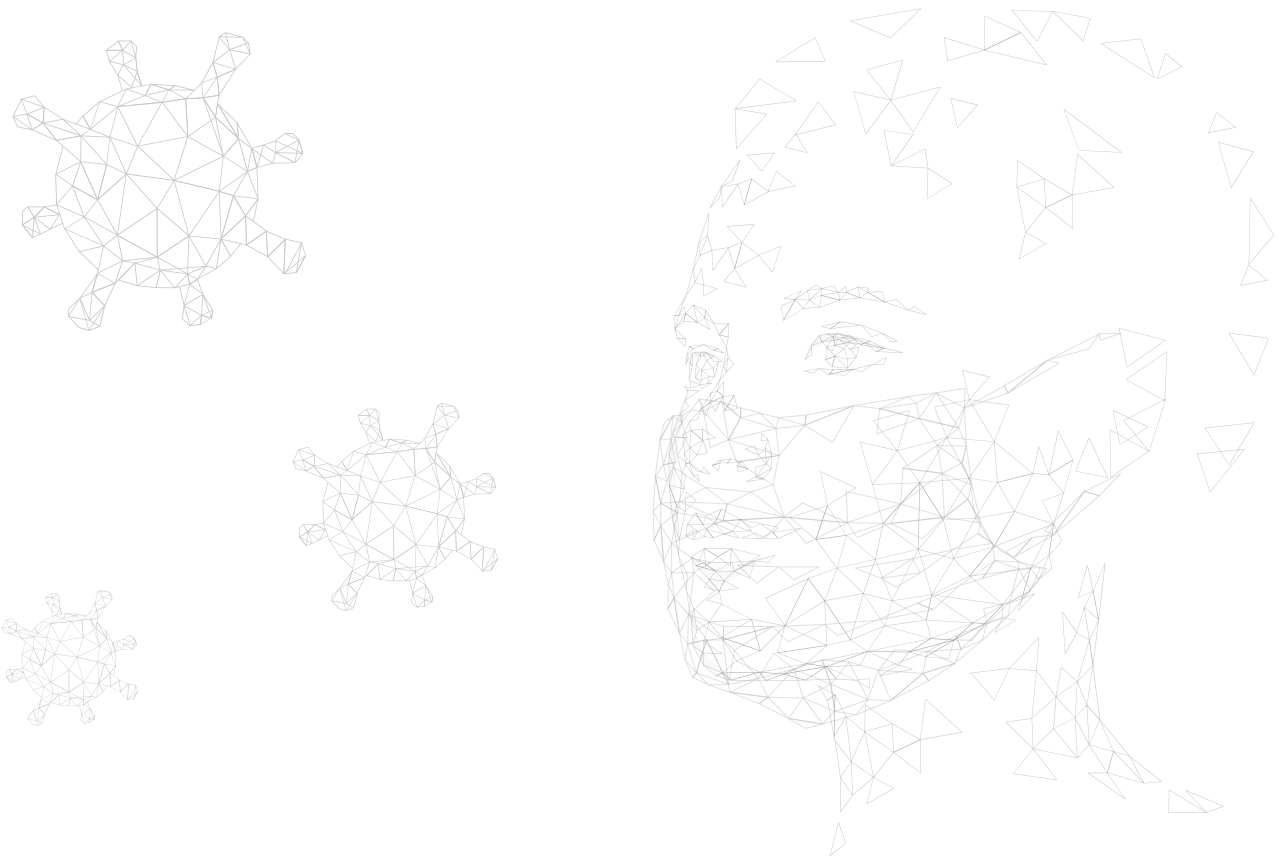
Since the outbreak of COVID-19, federal agencies across the United States have been faced with sudden challenges relating to capacity building, change management, and remote operations. A holistic view across the federal government reveals that while many agencies have devised creative solutions to these newfound problems, there are still many critical challenges that must be addressed.

# Capacity Building

Throughout the federal government, efforts are underway to ensure the continuation of operations at normal capacity despite the challenges posed by COVID-19. For many agencies, these efforts have thus far been successful. Several agency leaders, such as the CIOs of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Transportation, have seen productivity increase across their agencies as most employees have moved to telework. The Social Security Administration has even seen its backlog of pending cases for new benefits and appeals drop by 11%.[2] However, the outbreak of COVID-19 and the Government's subsequent response has created disproportionate spikes in workload for certain agencies, presenting unique challenges. It is in these agencies — in other words, those which must now operate well above normal output — where capacity building efforts have been most striking. Examples include:

- **Workload Smoothing. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) alleviated pressures of an increased workload by extending the amount of time Americans had to file their 2019 taxes.** For the IRS, building capacity involved redistributing workload in a creative manner. Following the outbreak, the IRS found that it did not have the human capital resources available to process millions of stimulus payments for Americans while also ensuring that regular tax returns were processed on time. In order to manage its increased workload, the IRS staffed up to meet demand and creatively expanded its relative capacity by extending filing dates and allowing itself more time to process submissions. As a result, the deadline for filing tax returns shifted by three months, from mid-April to July 15th, with the usual option for taxpayers to request further extensions if needed.

- **Rapid Equipment Augmentation. The Small Business Administration (SBA) turned to contractors to rapidly expand its technological capabilities following a sudden surge in web traffic**. Following the creation of the CARES Act, the Small Business Administration (SBA) was assigned the responsibility of running the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), a loan program designed to temporarily pay small businesses to keep staff employed during the pandemic. Practically overnight, the SBA saw an 8,000% increase in web traffic between March and June 2020, a formidable challenge even though the agency was already operating almost entirely on cloud technology.[3] To manage its increased workload, the agency turned to contractors, who were able to deploy nearly a dozen new scalable, secure, and cloud-enabled servers within 48 hours to meet critical capacity needs.[4] As a result, the SBA was able to quickly stand up more than 2,000 virtual desktops that allowed employees to process PPP applications at lightning speed and keep small businesses afloat across the country.

---

[2] Washington Technology. No turning back from telework's rise
[3] Federal News Network. SBA to bring back Bluestein as new CIO
[4] Business Wire. Small Business Administration Awards Infrastructure Contract to ViON in Support of Payment Protection Program

## ⚙️ Change Management

Beyond the immediate needs of capacity building, agencies across the Government have viewed the effects of the pandemic as a sign that they must kickstart change management efforts to prepare for the future and any unpredictable crisis that might come with it. Despite having contingency plans in place, many agencies still found themselves unprepared for the outbreak. As a result, some agency leaders are making significant operational changes in response to the pandemic that may very well last long after the threat of COVID-19 dissipates. Examples include:

- **Proactive Policy Changes. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has moved to rapidly adopt policy changes that allow for the use of telemedicine.** At the CMS, leaders have made a series of changes that bring telemedicine, a practice which prior to COVID-19 was relatively restricted, to healthcare professionals and patients around the country. HIPAA and other privacy standards have been adjusted to allow for virtual medical visits that take place over applications such as Zoom and FaceTime, among others.[5] Doctors, nurse practitioners, clinical psychologists, and certain other licensed health workers are now able to bill CMS standard service rates for patients that are seen remotely. Additionally, certain documentation requirements for these telehealth visits have been relaxed. Even after the complications of the pandemic subside, it is likely that many of these policy changes will remain, permanently transforming the future of healthcare in America.

- **Reevaluation of Standard Operating Procedures. Agencies within the American defense and intelligence communities have begun assessing how security policies could be modified to meet the needs of unplanned events.** The Department of Defense, which has historically limited employees' ability to work remotely due to security concerns, will continue to implement telework flexibilities even after the worst of the virus is over.[6] In the intelligence community, the pandemic has sparked a discussion around the over-classification of some information and its hindrance on the ability of staff to work remotely. Looking ahead, certain document classification procedures may be adjusted to allow for greater flexibility in the case of future pandemics.

---

[5] Medical Economics. Telehealth is the future-and the future has arrived
[6] Washington Technology. No turning back from telework's rise

## Remote Operations

The ability for organizations to telework changed from a convenient employee benefit to a mandatory asset following the arrival of COVID-19 in the United States. But while many organizations within the private sector were able to rapidly transition to remote work shortly after the virus was declared to be a pandemic by the World Health Organization, some agencies within the U.S. Federal Government struggled to quickly move to telework due to a lack of uniform guidance and varying response capabilities. Key challenges included:

- **Lack of Uniform Guidance. The lack of federal operations guidance at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic led agencies to undertake highly variable shifts to fully remote telework schedules at scale.** Following the World Health Organization's March 11th classification of COVID-19 as a pandemic, OMB encouraged heads of executive departments to make use of telework flexibilities.[7] However, this guidance was voluntary in nature, and, barring clear orders from the Executive Office, department heads were at times left without sufficient guidance to navigate the complexities associated with working during a worldwide pandemic. In the weeks that followed, federal agencies moved to revise their telework policies to varying degrees, but many federal employees nevertheless remained working from their offices into late April.

- **Insufficient Telework Preparedness. With less than half of federal employees eligible to telework prior to COVID-19, agencies faced numerous challenges in implementing remote operations at scale.** Across the government, only 42% of federal employees were eligible to telework in 2018, suggesting a lack of general telework preparedness.[8] In OPM's 2019 Report to Congress titled "Status of Telework in the Federal Government, " OPM stated that low government-wide telework eligibility rates "may represent a missed opportunity for agencies to fully leverage telework … and help ensure that essential federal functions continue during emergency situations."[9] Now that the U.S. Federal Government is facing one of its largest stress tests ever, OPM's report is all the more relevant.

---

[7] Office of Personnel Management. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)
[8] Status of Telework in the Federal Government, Report to Congress, Fiscal Year 2018
[9] Status of Telework in the Federal Government, Report to Congress, Fiscal Year 2018

- **Varying IT Capabilities. Many agencies struggled to move to a fully remote work schedule due to a variety of technological and budgetary constraints.** Finally, some agencies have struggled to implement telework because of the constraints imposed on them by inadequate IT systems. The Government spends roughly $90 billion annually on its IT systems, with about 75% of that budget being used to simply support current systems.[10] In a recent study, federal agencies reported that insufficient funding, cybersecurity concerns, and reliance on legacy technologies remain top constraints to their agency's mission goals, at 47, 43, and 40 percent, respectively.[11]

**Top 3 Inhibitors to Federal IT Modernization**

| | |
|---|---|
| 47% | Insufficient Funding |
| 43% | Cybersecurity Concerns |
| 40% | Reliance on Legacy Technology |

- **Remote Operations Success Stories. Rapid deployment of surge IT-funding.** Despite the above challenges, some agencies have persisted with their efforts to improve remote operation capabilities during the pandemic. The successful transition for certain agencies was aided in part by the CARES Act, which has provided a surge of IT-related funding.[12] There are numerous examples of agencies using the pandemic to spur their remote work readiness. The Department of Veterans Affairs, for example, has more than quadrupled its remote work capacity from 120,000 users in February to 500,000 users at the end of June, suggesting that some agencies may have an easier time promoting remote operations than they once thought.[13]

---

[10] Washington Post. Crisis exposes how America has hollowed out its government
[11] Accenture. The State Offederal IT 2018
[12] Bloomberg Government. Federal Contracting Outlook Amid Covid-19
[13] Federal News Network. Telework capacity quadruples during pandemic, VA says

## ⚙️ Key Takeaways from U.S. Federal Government Response

Though the pandemic took the U.S. Government by surprise, the months following the arrival of the virus in the United States demonstrated that many agencies were able to act quickly in their operational responses. Despite numerous challenges, there are examples of agencies successfully increasing capacity, kickstarting change management efforts, and augmenting remote operations. These success stories should be leveraged to identify best practices and lessons learned for agencies to enhance their emergency response moving forward.
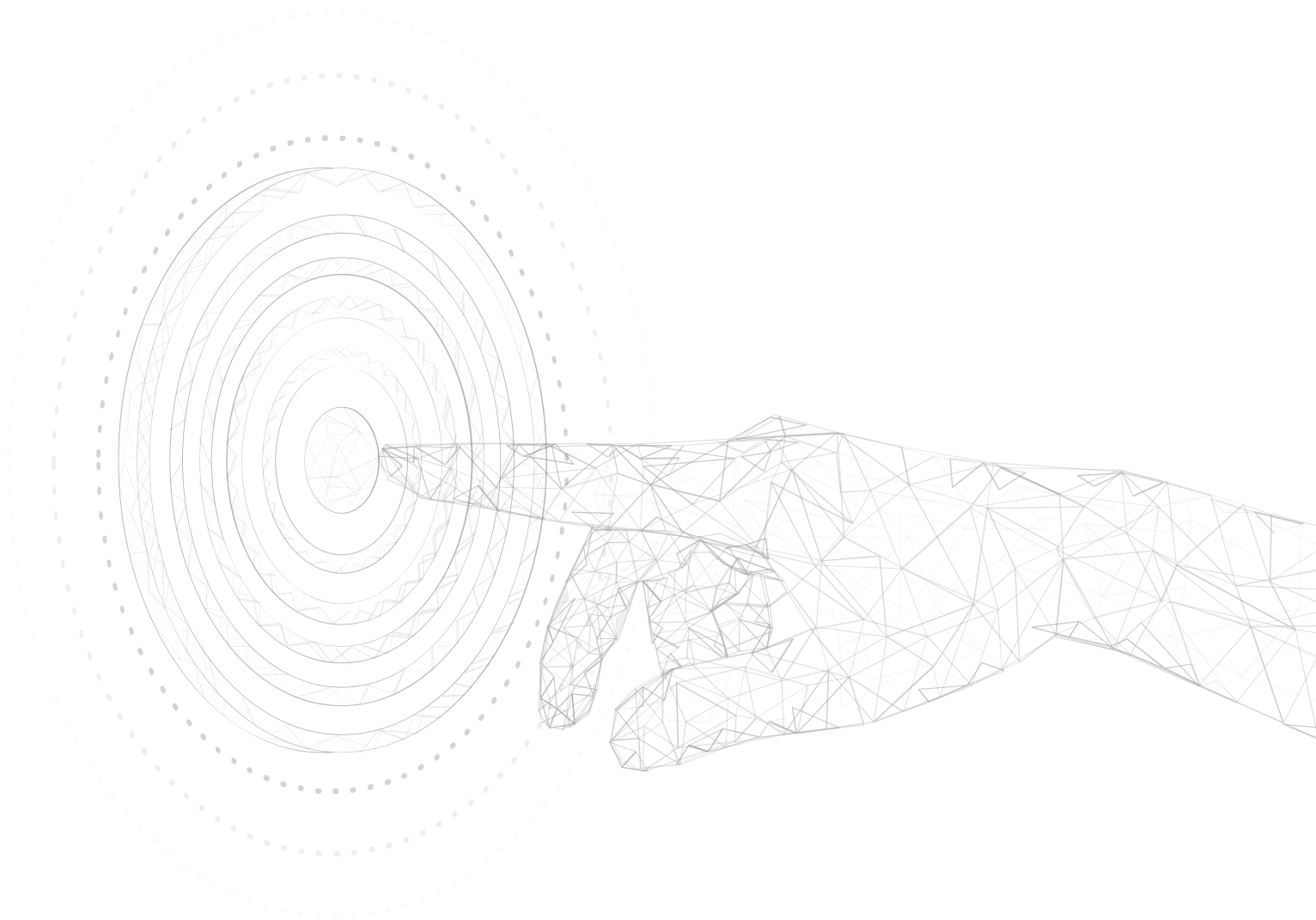
In addition to looking inward, to prepare for future crises, U.S. federal agencies can look to government responses from around the world for best practices in building capacity, managing change, and transitioning to a remote work model. While social, cultural, political, and other factors have impacted the success with which each country has responded to the pandemic, there are several themes and key takeaways from other governments' responses to COVID-19 that should be taken into consideration by U.S. federal agencies when preparing for future crises.

As a federal system, the United States faces unique challenges, particularly when it comes to ensuring effective coordination among federal, state, and local governments. While each country has certainly had its own triumphs and missteps while navigating these unprecedented times, there are many lessons learned and actions within federal agencies' control that have the potential to lead to greater collaboration and coordination across the government and better outcomes across society.

# Capacity Building

To increase capacity to meet the additional demands of the COVID-19 response, international governments have provided increased support to existing staff, reduced or redistributed workloads to accommodate new priorities, and hired additional staff. Examples include:

- **Additional Support for Staff. The Netherlands has provided critical support to essential workers at no additional cost, to enable workers to sustain their contributions.** In response to increased personal and professional demands due to COVID-19, the Netherlands has provided childcare support for key workers at no additional cost. As a result, essential workers responsible for health care, public transport, essential government processes, and other crucial services can continue to provide critical support while balancing caretaking responsibilities. To address the risk of virus transmission, children attending daycare must be screened for symptoms of the virus. While the United States does not have a nationally funded childcare system, federal agencies can evaluate options to provide additional assistance to essential workers and federal staff through policies that support access to childcare, more flexible work arrangements, and mental health resources as part of a comprehensive emergency response plan.[14]

- **Workload Reduction and Redistribution. The Canadian government is using targeted verification procedures to redistribute workload associated with supplying critical economic support.** Several countries are reducing agency workload by extending deadlines for core government functions. For example, similar to the IRS, the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) deferred its tax filing date for 2019 tax returns so that staff could shift their immediate focus to support critical COVID-19-related benefits and financial support. Beyond extending deadlines, the Canadian government also incorporated creative verification checks to minimize the time to identify fraudulent actions related to disbursing the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). Rather than verifying every transaction, the CRA verification has targeted the most high-risk transactions to concentrate agency workers' verification efforts. While additional time is required to complete the verification process with the applicant, the upfront check reduces the risk of fraudulent or erroneous actions, ultimately

---

[14] Government of Netherlands. COVID-19: childcare for children of people working in crucial sectors

minimizing timely corrections on the back end and allowing staff to prioritize getting payments to those with more critical needs. The CRA plans to complete the full validation later in the year, once the agency's workload has normalized. To better prepare for future crises, U.S. federal agencies can proactively identify opportunities to reduce or redistribute workload by cancelling or delaying aspects of the workload.[15]

- **Proactive Hiring. Proactive workforce planning prepared New Zealand to rapidly address the crisis.** New Zealand's health and safety regulator, WorkSafe, was able to rapidly surge its capacity in response to COVID-19 as a result of proactive emergency response workforce planning. Several months prior to COVID-19, the agency recognized the need for an incident-response lead to address a volcanic eruption. Following the volcanic crisis, the agency elected to retain the position to be able to flexibly respond to future crises. With the position already in place, WorkSafe was able to move quickly to set up a COVID-19 response team upon the first warning signs. The team, comprised of key stakeholders from across the agency, represents a variety of backgrounds including IT, risk, and communications. The task force approach allows the agency to scale its capacity and redirect experienced staff members to meet emerging needs, backfilling existing positions as required. The decisive action and additional capacity provided by the COVID-19 response team have contributed to New Zealand's remarkably successful efforts to contain the spread of the virus.[16]
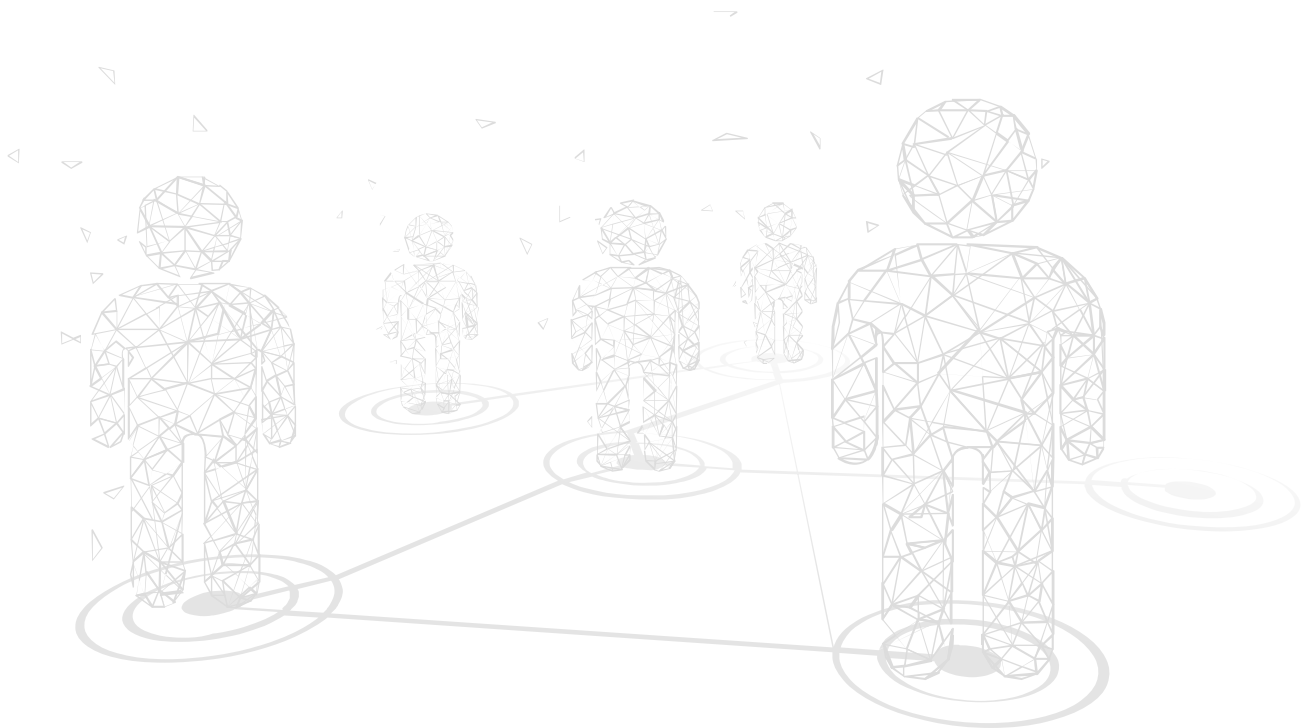
[15] Government of Canada. CUVID-19 : benefits, credits and support payments
[16] Worksafe. Novel coronavirus (COVID-19)

## ⚙ Change Management

Clear, consistent, and transparent planning and communication are critical to addressing the federal agencies' changing requirements and work conditions. A strong federal government response lays the foundation for effective coordination and change management across a country. Examples include:

- **Citizen-Centric Communication. By targeting its most vulnerable citizens, the Argentinian government's communications strategy is improving outcomes for all.** The Argentinian government's response to COVID-19 is marked by a people-centered approach. In confronting the uncertainties of COVID-19, Argentina has employed a coordinated response among the federal, state, and local governments to ensure that government employees and citizens have clear and consistent guidance regarding expectations. At the center of its human-centered response is a focus on designing communications tools that address the needs of Argentina's most vulnerable groups, including individuals living in slums and people with disabilities. By designing solutions with vulnerable groups in mind, the government of Argentina has ensured that no group is left behind in its response. It is essential that federal agencies tailor their response and communications tactics to accommodate the distinct and unpredictable needs experienced by different groups during crises.[17]

- **Continuous Engagement. By incorporating feedback loops with citizens, the German government has continuously improved its ability to manage through uncertainty.** The German response to COVID-19 has been marked by transparency and decisive leadership, with a focus on continuous improvement. While the German government has acted quickly to contain the spread of COVID-19, government leaders have provided regular updates regarding the evolving crisis. Government leaders have been transparent about the existence of knowledge gaps in certain instances and the related need for additional information to make fully informed decisions. In addition to regular communication from leadership, the German government is providing telephone hotlines, digital advice, and support services to answer questions and empower individual decision-making. As the government analyzes additional data and new insights come to light, each of these resources is updated, demonstrating a commitment to continuous improvement. The German response demonstrates the importance of transparent, decisive leadership in order to ensure that agencies can manage change as a result of the crisis and incorporate feedback loops to facilitate continuous improvement.[18]

---

[17] Open Government Partnership. Collecting Open Government Approaches to COVID-19
[18] World Economic Forum. How Germany contained the coronavirus

- **Strategic Planning. South Korea has conducted strategic planning to improve its crisis preparedness.** Following the 2015 MERS outbreak, the Korean government took time to document best practices and pitfalls from the response in order to better prepare for future outbreaks as well as other unforeseen challenges. As a result, the Korean government has prioritized infectious disease readiness as a key government priority. The Korean response to COVID-19 has elevated lessons from the MERS outbreak, including the importance of reliable data and early warning signs, which helped the Korean government contain the initial spread of COVID-19. After navigating the initial stages of the COVID-19 crisis, the Korean government once again updated its strategic plan to reflect new priorities based on additional lessons learned.[19] The government plan includes tactics for risk assessment, risk communication, and risk management, in addition to indictors to evaluate and monitor performance in order to inform continuous improvement.[20] U.S. federal agencies should prioritize taking time to document the strengths and improvement opportunities from the initial COVID-19 response to inform the response to future crises and shift strategic priorities as needed.

---
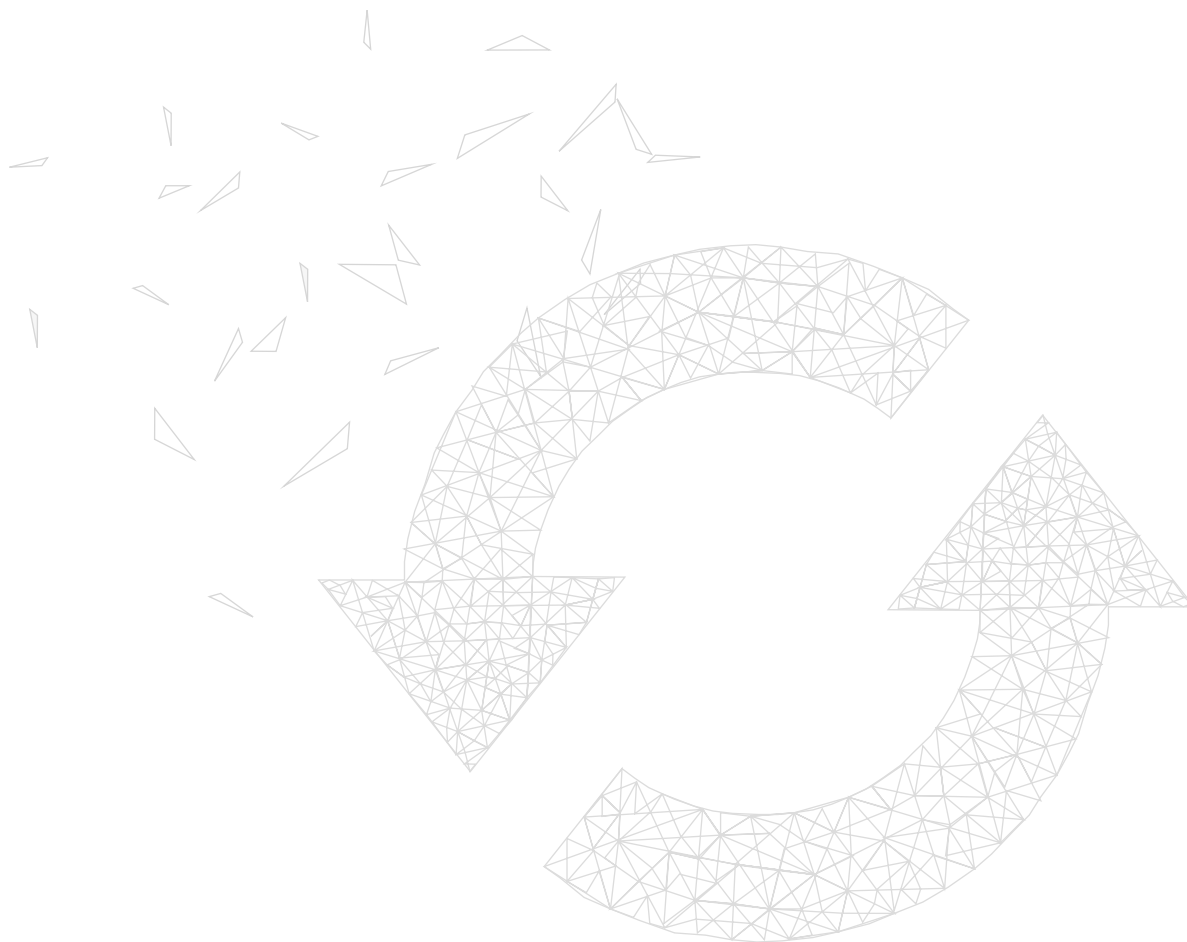
[19] Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. South Korea learned its successful Covid-19 strategy from a previous coronavirus outbreak: MERS
[20] PMC. Public Health Crisis Preparedness and Response in Korea

# ⊡  Remote Operations

While the rate of remote work has been steadily increasing over the past several years worldwide, countries are experiencing varying levels of preparation to work remotely. Foreign governments have demonstrated creative solutions and best practices for adapting to the remote work situation posed by the pandemic, which can inform U.S. agencies' preparation for future crises. Examples include:

- **Telework Readiness. Transparent communication and collaborative planning have prepared New Zealand agencies for the transition to telework.** New Zealand government agencies swiftly moved to a telework environment, with some agencies completing the transition within 48-hours of the countrywide lockdown being announced. While the government has encountered challenges with training and technology in the remote environment, the secrets to New Zealand's telework success have been effective communication and collaboration. Agency leaders have used newsletters and virtual meetings to communicate with staff and answer questions, and agencies have worked together to share best practices through frequent touchpoints. Government leaders are transparent in acknowledging the limitations of telework, and they support staff to execute their roles to their fullest potential through measures such as home office furniture allowances and mental health support. Equally important to managing the transition to telework is navigating the transition back into the office. After soliciting ideas from staff from across the organization, one New Zealand agency aligned on a gradual return to the office as the optimal approach. Informed by the agency's successful strategy, the New Zealand government recommended the tactic to all government offices.[21] While transitioning to telework poses challenges to federal staff who are not accustomed to operating in the remote environment, transparent communication and collaborative planning are two keys to successfully navigating the transition.

- **Process Monitoring and Modernization. Japan is revising traditional processes to increase efficiency during telework.** Confronted by a lack of organizational readiness to telework, governments have been forced to adapt their business processes to the new environment. In the past, Japan has demonstrated resistance to transition to a telework environment due to an office culture anchored in paper files and face-to-face conversations. One Japanese practice, the hanko, refers to the traditional practice of requiring official documents to be stamped by a carved official seal. While the practice is deeply rooted in Japanese work culture, government staff working remotely as a result of COVID-19 have been eager to abandon the practice in favor of increased efficiency. At the onset of the pandemic, government processes such as small business subsidies required individuals to bring hand-stamped papers to government offices. In support of public safety during the pandemic, many businesses and agencies have temporarily abandoned the stamping requirement, opting instead for an electronic signature.[22] In order to accommodate the unique demands of the remote work environment and minimize public health risk, processes must be flexible and resilient and must be accompanied by clear communication regarding any process changes. While in the case of Japan it has taken a public health crisis to force changes to traditional practices, agencies can proactively identify opportunities to increase the flexibility of business processes in preparation for future crises.

---

[21]  SHRM. Viewpoint: How New Zealand's Health and Safety Agency Responded to COVID-19
[22]  TIME. Coronavirus Is Forcing Japan to Rethink Its Custom of Stamping Documents by Hand

- **IT Capabilities. A resilient internet infrastructure supports Singaporean government crisis response.** The pervasiveness of telework accelerates the need to modernize existing IT systems and expand internet infrastructure. Singapore, with its robust digital platforms and resilient internet infrastructure, is already considered one of the countries with the highest preparation to do work in a remote environment.[23] Despite a 30% increase in internet activity as a result of quarantine measures, Singapore's internet was able to absorb the shock due to previous efforts to equip every home with ultra-fast broadband internet. In response to the pandemic and the accompanying telework requirements, the government is prioritizing additional increases to internet access and speed. The Singaporean government supported immediate network upgrades and has introduced additional requirements for telecommunications providers to expand 5G network coverage.[24] Widespread internet access, a critical enabler of telework, ensures that a country can effectively absorb the shock of additional demand as a result of a telework environment. As part of its crisis preparedness planning, the U.S. government should proactively expand internet access, especially in underserved markets, in addition to prioritizing other IT modernization efforts.
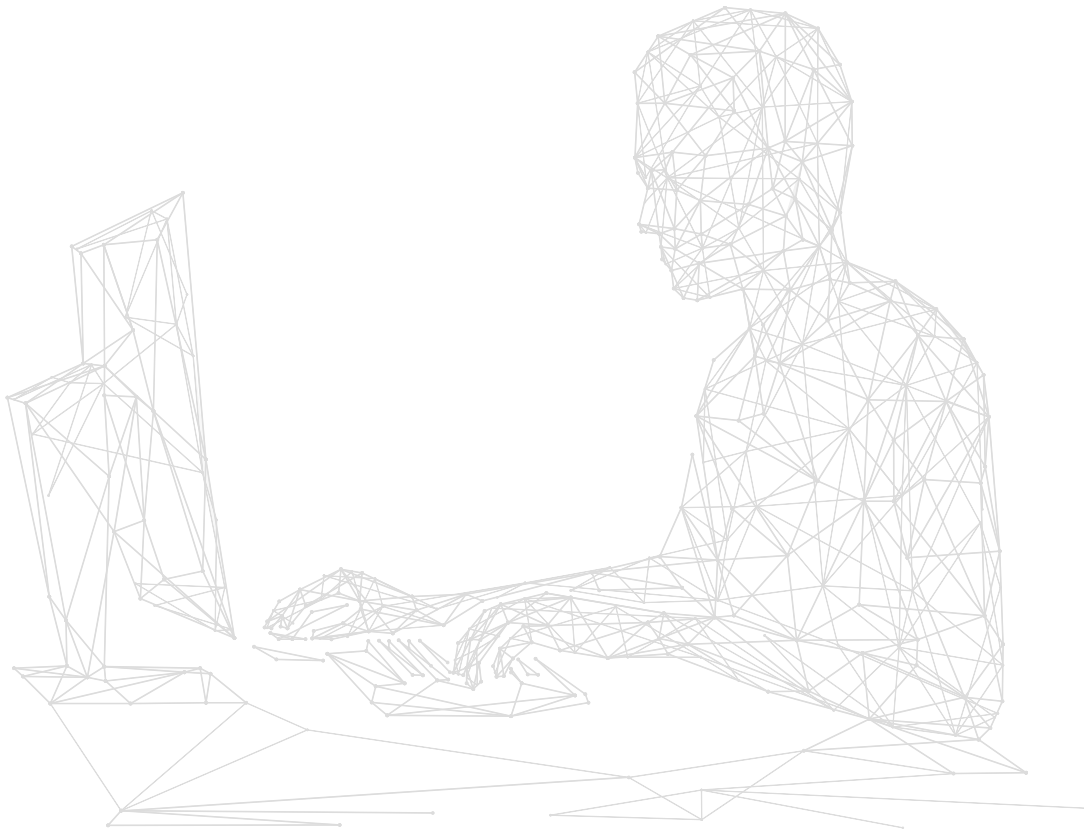
[23] Harvard Business Review. Which Countries Were (And Weren't) Ready for Remote Work?

[24] ZD Net. Singapore unveils initiatives to help population stay connected as stricter COVID-19 measures kick in

## 💡 Key Takeaways from International Government Responses

Best practice sharing among agencies — both within the U.S. and abroad — has the potential to inform responses to future crises. While certain social, political, and economic factors shape each country's individual response, lessons learned can be creatively applied in each agency's unique setting. Critical evaluation and careful planning can support agencies in building capacity, managing change, and transitioning to remote work environments in response to potential pandemics.
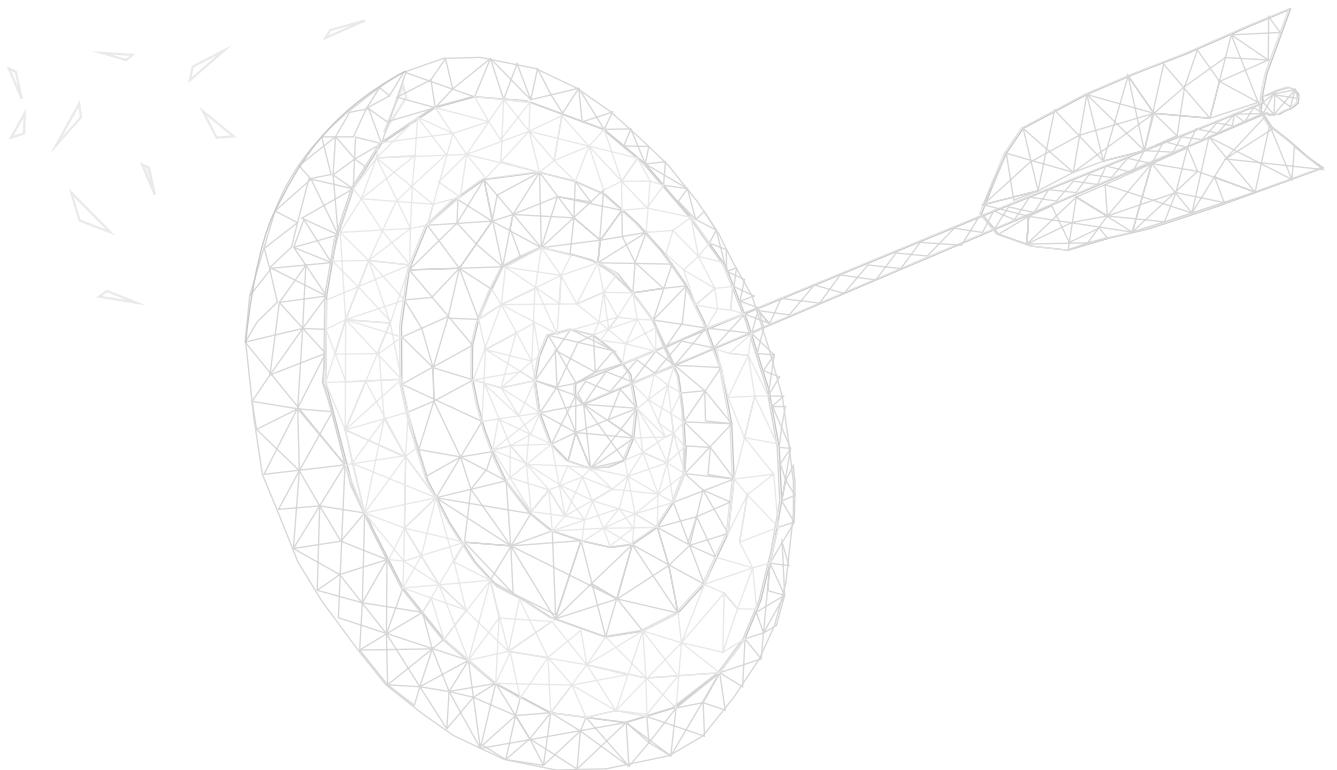
Unfortunately, the first wave of COVID-19 is likely not the end of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The world should be prepared for successive waves of the virus in coming years, and the rapid transmission of COVID-19 drives home the point that it is essential for the U.S. government to be prepared for future crises, especially viral pandemics. Though executive-level policy decisions regarding pandemics may largely be outside the control of most federal agency heads, the guidance that we have assembled below can help leaders streamline operations and improve internal coordination abilities to be better prepared for the next crisis. In the face of ambiguity, staff look for precise leadership and a clear path forward. The guidance below is rooted in Censeo's industry expertise in operational excellence and change management, and leverages lessons learned from the first wave of COVID-19, in preparation for the next crisis. There are several initial steps that each agency can take to assess their own preparedness, and to improve their agency's current and future responses to such events.

## Conduct a Diagnostic

We recommend first conducting a diagnostic to holistically evaluate agency preparedness to respond to pandemics, such as COVID-19. The Censeo team has prepared an easy-to-use diagnostic test that scores agency preparedness in four critical areas:

**Workforce**
Recognizing your staff's risks, needs, and opportunities

**Operations**
Adjusting and streamlining processes in the face of disruption

**Supply Chain**
Understanding your vendors and partners' capabilities, risks, and needs

**Strategy**
Planning in the era of expecting the unexpected

Based on the results of this, or a similar diagnostic test, an agency can determine areas of improvement to better respond to current and future events. These improvement areas may fit into one or more of the following response categories discussed earlier: capacity building, change management, and remote operations.

The diagnostic is available here[25], upon completing the diagnostic you will receive your score with additional tailored insights.

[25] censeoconsulting.com/survey/

# Assess Improvement Areas

Once improvement areas have been identified through a diagnostic evaluation, an agency may need to perform additional in-depth analyses to determine the optimal opportunities for improvement with regards to their pandemic response. From there, an agency can develop strategies to implement changes to ensure the ability to meet mission-critical needs in a crisis. We recommend focusing on the following improvement opportunities, aligned with the three broad response categories:

1. **Build Organizational Capacity** | Agencies facing increased workload with reduced resources during a crisis need to think creatively about implementing various methods of increasing their organizational capacity to cope with workload. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of various aspects of an agency's ability to respond to and handle an expanded mission or increased workload would help prepare the agency for the next crisis. Such an analysis might include:

   - **Capacity Planning Exercise** | Agencies may benefit from an assessment of what their capacity would look like if all workers were required to work remotely. This may change the ability to complete certain processes, especially manual processes, or uncover necessary changes to agency priorities during a crisis.

   - **Strategic Planning Exercise** | Agencies may want to conduct a "red team" analysis or similar strategic planning exercise to critically and creatively examine potential gaps in their agency response. A "red team" can help reveal gaps in an agency's response by designing a worst-case scenario against which to evaluate agency procedures and processes. This could also take the form of a retrospective on the organizational response to the first wave of COVID-19. Outputs from these analyses can help in developing an in-depth strategic plan spanning financial, resource, capacity, and workforce preparedness.

   - **In-Depth Workforce Analyses** | Conducting a retrospective on the organizational response to the first wave of COVID-19 can also reveal where an agency might be understaffed during a crisis and reveal other hiring needs. From there, an agency can develop a long-term workforce strategic plan.

   Organizations can also add capacity through efficiency in operations, seeking to work smarter — and not harder. Conducting these planning exercises and analyses can help reveal where an agency needs to focus on developing innovative, creative solutions.

2. **Ensure Effective Change Management** | Successful change management within an organization requires adherence to processes, and often is most effective when executives, leaders, and managers set an example for the rest of the organization. It may be helpful to perform an Employee Feedback Survey to assess employee remote work conditions, and comfort levels with policies and steps agencies take to ensure employee safety as they begin to return to their assigned work locations. Censeo has conducted such surveys in the past, using the results to inform strategic planning efforts. A template for an employee survey can be found in the Appendix; agencies can use this template as a starting point for developing their own questionnaire. The results of this survey could be used to ensure effective change management during future crises.

3. **Prepare for Remote Operations and Telework at Scale** | Telework is relatively new to most U.S. Federal Government agencies. While some employees may have done some limited telework prior to the COVID-19 response, telework for an entire agency, at scale, is unprecedented. This can come with a whole host of IT considerations, such as endpoint security and ensuring secure access to VPNs and systems. Telework at scale also relies on employees having access to secure and reliable internet connections. Proactive preparation for remote operations and telework at scale enables agencies to turn immediate attention during a crisis away from operational enablers and towards mission-critical priorities.

Federal agencies will benefit from taking steps towards assessing their response during the first wave of COVID-19, with regards to their capacity, change management, and telework, and then applying best practices towards developing better policies, procedures, processes, and plans for the future. By proactively planning for future crises, agencies will be prepared to meet the changing needs of stakeholders and can continue to deliver on their missions, even in the face of uncertainty.
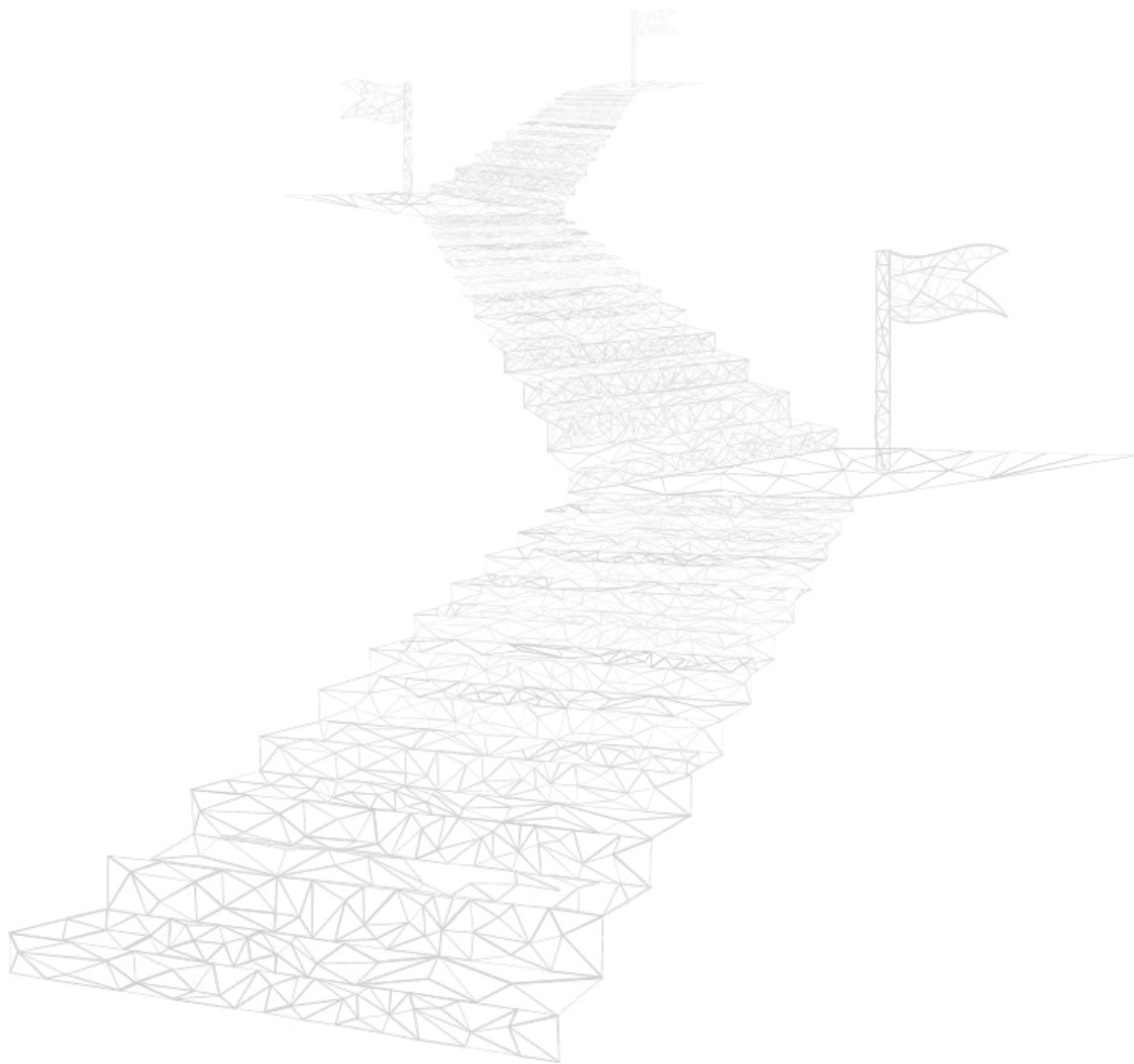
# Template for an Employee Feedback Survey

This document is intended to provide agencies with a sample survey that can be used to assess employee remote work arrangements and staff preferences on returning to the office. There are two options for developing for the survey, depending on how the agency would like to use the data:

1. Collect Survey Participants' Names: to identify targeted solutions based on the individual's situation/role (e.g., offer a hotspot to a staff member with unreliable internet)

2. Keep Anonymous: to identify overall trends to inform overarching policies and decisions (e.g., offer hotspots for all members of specified teams who conduct certain activities)

The survey is divided into two sections: Section One focuses on remote workstations, and Section Two focuses on considerations for when staff return to their assigned work location (i.e., office).

### Section One: Remote Workstation

1. How private and accessible is your remote workstation location?

    **Privacy**
    - ⚪ My workstation is in a shared room
    - ⚪ My workstation is in a private room
    - ⚪ Other (please specify) _____

    **Accessibility**
    - ⚪ Others may need to access my workstation area while I am working
    - ⚪ Others will not need to access my workstation area while I am working
    - ⚪ Other (please specify) _____

    **Other Considerations**
    - ⚪ I believe others may be able to overhear my conversations (e.g., neighbors, family, roommates)
    - ⚪ I do not believe that others will be able to overhear my conversations
    - ⚪ Other (please specify) _____

2. Could anyone who has access to your remote workstation area and/or potentially overhear work-related conversations present a conflict of interest with your agency or work?

    ⚪ Yes　　⚪ I'm not sure　　⚪ No

3. My internet bandwidth (internet speed) in my remote workstation is adequate for remote work (e.g., able to maintain a consistent connection during video calls, or when uploading or downloading large documents from a VPN)

○ Strongly Agree      ○ Neutral      ○ Strongly Disagree

○ Agree               ○ Disagree

4. Which of the following devices or peripherals do you have access to in your remote workstation that you could use for work purposes (please complete for all that apply):

| Device/<br>Peripheral | Qty | Vendor and Operation System<br>or Provider (ex: Dell, Windows 10) | Additional<br>Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Desktop Computer | | | |
| Laptop Computer (Issued by Agency) | | | |
| Laptop Computer (Personal) | | | |
| Tablet or iPad | | | |
| Additional Monitor | | | |
| Cell Phone (Issued by Agency) | | | |
| Cell Phone (Personal) | | | |
| Hotspot (either through Cell Phone or other portable device) | | | |
| Landline Phone | | | |
| Headset or Bluetooth | | | |
| Printer | | | |
| Fax Machine | | | |
| Other (please specify): | | | |

5. Since beginning mandatory telework, have you experienced any challenges related to your devices or peripherals identified above?

○ Yes (please specify) _____

_____

○ No

**6.** Since beginning mandatory telework, have you experienced any challenges related to balancing work with your personal obligations, or do you have concerns about interruptions or distractions?

○ Yes (please specify) _____

_____

○ No

**7.** Are there any other concerns not covered above that you would like to raise, related to your ability to perform your work from your remote workstation?

○ Yes (please specify) _____

_____

○ No

**Section Two: Returning to Work**

**8.** Which of the following safety measures would you want to see in the workplace before returning to the office? (Select all that apply):

**PPE**

○ Face masks
○ Hand sanitizing stations (throughout the office)
○ Individual hand sanitizer
○ Disposable gloves
○ Other (please specify) _____

**Policies**

○ Required use of face masks
○ Regular disinfection of work areas / common areas
○ Physical distancing protocols
○ Staggered work schedules or teams in the office
○ Standardized temperature checks before entering the building
○ Other (please specify) _____

**9.** Assuming that the above safety measures are in place, how comfortable would you be with returning to the office, while telework policies are still broadly in effect?

○ Very Comfortable     ○ Neutral     ○ Very Uncomfortable

○ Comfortable     ○ Uncomfortable

**10.** Do you have any specific concerns about returning to the office to conduct work?

○ Yes (please specify) _____

_____

○ No

**11.** If you return to the office, what would be your primary method(s) of transportation? Please select all that apply:

○ Drive myself in a personal vehicle     ○ Public transportation

○ Carpool     ○ Walk, personal bike, or personal scooter

○ Borrow or rent a car     ○ Shared service bike or scooter

○ Taxi or rideshare service (e.g., Lyft or Uber)

○ Other (please specify) _____

_____

**12.** Do you have any specific concerns about transportation to/ from the office if you were to return to the office to conduct work?

○ Yes (please specify) _____

_____

○ No

**13.** Are there any other concerns not covered above that you would like to raise, related to your ability to perform your work when it comes to returning to the office?

○ Yes (please specify) _____

_____

○ No

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Vinai Trichur**
Managing Partner

Dr. Trichur has over 20 years of management consulting and advisory experience, working with public and private sector clients at Censeo, BCG, CEB / Gartner and i2 Technologies. Vinai is a recognized organizational transformation, IT, and big data thought leader in the Federal Government, and is adept across the entire enterprise transformation and performance improvement life cycle. He recently led a Government-wide effort sponsored by ACT-IAC to help agencies implement the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policy-Making Act (HR 4174) and is currently leading Censeo's work in helping the Federal Government craft a data-driven approach to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of COVID-19 response efforts.

- Ph.D. and M.S., Operations Research / Management Science, Smith School of Business, University of Maryland, College Park
- B.Tech., Aerospace Engineering, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras, India

Vtrichur@censeoconsulting.com

**Rachel Shulruf**
Associate

Rachel Shulruf has over eight years of experience spanning from management consulting to international development and financial innovation. She has engaged in cutting-edge consulting projects with nonprofits, community organizations, and Fortune 500 companies. Rachel has also worked with agencies across the Federal Government, including the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and National Institutes of Health (NIH). She possesses extensive experience in working with clients to identify sustainable, data-driven solutions to their toughest challenges. In 2018 Rachel graduated with high honors from Boston University with an MBA specializing in Social Impact and Strategy & Innovation.

- M.B.A., Questrom School of Business, Boston University
- B.A., International Relations, Drake University
- Certificate in AI Management, School of Continuing Studies, Georgetown University

rshulruf@censeoconsulting.com

**Clara Cecil**
Consultant

As a Consultant at Censeo Consulting Group, Clara Cecil works to help mission-driven organizations rapidly improve their management and operational practices in support of the social and public good. With previous work experience spanning the business, government, and nonprofit sectors, Clara is adept at identifying organizational inefficiencies, implementing operational improvement strategies, and communicating with stakeholders across several organizational layers. In her two-year tenure at Censeo Consulting Group, Clara has worked with a variety of federal clients, including the Department of Commerce (DoC), General Services Administration (GSA), and the United States Marine Corps (USMC).

- B.S.B.A, McDonough School of Business, Georgetown University

Ccecil@censeoconsulting.com

**Thompson Hangen**
Consultant

Thompson Hangen is a graduate from the College of William and Mary with a B.A. in Russian and Post-Soviet Studies and a minor in Business Analytics, focusing on Data Analytics and Process Improvement. Prior to joining Censeo, Thompson worked in a wide variety of fields including consulting work in medical manufacturing, working for a data research laboratory, and management of communications infrastructure for the Fairfax County Police Department. In his tenure at Censeo Consulting Group, Thompson has worked with a variety of federal clients, including the General Services Administration (GSA), Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and United States Marine Corps (USMC). Thompson also has over two years of experience in managing technical and operational IT services, including vendor relationship management, end-user support, and project management for scaling up IT resources for organizations.

- B.A., Russian and Post-Soviet Studies, College of William and Mary
- Certificate in Business Administration, School of Continuing Studies, Georgetown University

Thangen@censeconsulting.com

**Wyatt Hayden**
Business Analysist

Wyatt Hayden has nearly three years of experience spanning from strategy consulting to small business management. He is a graduate of Harvard College, holding an A.B. in History & Literature with honors. He also holds a credential of readiness from Harvard Business School and is working toward a certificate in Business Administration from Georgetown University. In his tenure at Censeo Consulting Group, Wyatt has worked with a number of federal clients including the Department of Commerce (DoC) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). His skill areas lie in business process management and innovation management. Prior to joining Censeo, Wyatt worked in a wide variety of fields including finance, construction, and music.

- A.B., History & Literature, Harvard University
- Certificate in Business Administration, School of Continuing Studies, Georgetown University
- HBX CORe, Credential of Readiness, Harvard Business School

whayden@censeoconsulting.com

# censeo
## CONSULTING GROUP

You can learn more at
**censeoconsulting.com/insight/covid-19**