As part of our workshop research, we heard from several local government agencies about the issues that they are facing while considering remote/hybrid work options.

-- AGENCY 1 FEEDBACK --

Background:
With the exception of public safety and some public works staff, facilities were closed to the public March 17, 2020 to June 15, 2021. Since June 15, we opened most facilities to the public for in-person (and remote) services and staff have been working in a hybrid environment.

We decided we would pilot a hybrid environment from June 2021 until the spring of 2022 and evaluate at that time. Each Department Director had latitude to allow as much or as little remote/hybrid work as they deemed appropriate. The expectation was that exceptional public service would be provided both in-person and online. During February of 2022, we held an all-managers retreat to discuss and evaluate the hybrid environment we had been piloting. Managers gathered information from their respective staff as part of the preparation for the retreat.

Findings and Feedback from Management Team and Staff:

Pros:
- Flexibility and work/life balance
- Increased focus time/productivity for work that does not require interaction
- More efficient for some types of meetings- avoids travel time, meeting room set-up, etc.
- Forced innovation with respect to use of technology and we transitioned many processes and programs and services to digital/online
- Many of our customers prefer online services. The number of in-person visitors per day averaged about 50 pre-COVID. The current number is 15 even though the total number of transactions and services provided have not decreased

Cons:
- Less connection with teammates and less sense of a team
    - Agency has a strong and positive organizational culture
    - The move to remote and hybrid work has watered-down the culture
    - Less casual interactions and collaboration
- Some employees felt isolated
- Can be challenging to reach staff at times
- Zoom fatigue
- Some service levels decreased as some customers had difficulty reaching staff and/or finding the service on our website
- Direct feedback loops from customers are less frequent
- More challenging for managers and supervisors to coordinate schedules

As a result of evaluating the pilot and other research, the organization is pursuing the following:

Goals/Objectives
- Provide exceptional service to the community, customers, stakeholders, and to each other
- Provide employee flexibility
- Competitive advantage in the labor market
- Contribute to reduction in traffic and parking issues
- Contribute to reduction in greenhouse gas emissions

Policy Framework
- Customers and agency operational needs come first
  o Ample coverage in the office every day in order to provide in-person service (in addition to online/digital services)
- Telework is at the discretion of the Supervisor and Department Director. All Adaptable Work Schedule requests, including telework must be approved by the Department Director
- Not a vested employee right, subject to change and management discretion
- The details provided in this framework represent the maximum amount of telework that can be authorized

Program Details
- Minimum of three days in-person at physical work location
  o Maximum of up to two days remote work
- Two days everyone at physical work location on the same day on Tuesdays and Wednesdays
- Minimize Zoom meetings for the days in which everyone is in-person at physical work location

Considerations
- Be intentional about what is done in person in order to maximize connection
  o What traditions and organizational touchpoints can continue and which would need to stop or be modified?
- Management of remote workers- what do our supervisors and managers need? Training? Clearer objectives, outcomes, measures?
- How to ensure equitable coaching and performance management for in-person and hybrid workers (avoid proximity bias)?
- How to onboard new employees in a hybrid environment?
- Protocols for Zoom meetings- when and for which types of meetings (minimize people being in the office and on Zoom).
- Protocols for when to Zoom vs. phone call or conference call. Protocols for cameras on or off.

-- AGENCY 2 FEEDBACK --

- Remote work challenges:
    - Loss of morale (some employees can work from home, others can't because of the nature of their jobs) Need to identify equitable solutions/incentives for employees who do not have teleworking functions in their current job description.
    - Decreased connection w/coworkers that can't be fixed via Zoom meetings
    - Reduced oversight of employees
    - Technical challenges at home (network/internet connection issues, more difficult for IT to troubleshoot remotely) the district should have a way (without VPN) to access/share documents, phone system should be setup to make/answer calls while WFH.
    - For some, there are more distractions at home (children, roommates, etc.)
    - Zoom fatigue: research is developing as this is a new issue, but emotional & mental fatigue occur more quickly with numerous Zoom meetings
    - Inability to read important non-verbal cues (body language, etc.)

- Remote work successes:
    - Provides flexibility, especially during Covid when schools/some daycares were closed, etc.
    - No apparent decrease in productivity from employees who were working from home
    - For some, there are less distractions at home (example: quiet house vs. people coming in and out of the office throughout the day)
    - Eliminates commute/fuel costs/vehicle wear and tear

    - With fewer in-person needs, facilities can cut down on extraneous costs.
    - Better work life balance: able to complete small chores on breaks, was able to see family more
    - Better access to healthy snacks
    - More comfortable environment for employees

- Hybrid thoughts:
    - Provides flexibility (ability to WFH when you or your child is sick, Covid quarantine, etc.)
    - Hybrid work schedule has been beneficial to staff's professional growth: adjusted schedule accommodates three employees who are enrolled in grad school while working full time.
    - Comparing a hybrid model to a fully remote position, a hybrid model allows employees to have more flexibility than an in-person work schedule, but still has opportunities for in-person team building and protects employees more from digital burnout.
    - A challenge of a hybrid work model is the increased coordination it requires. Determining staff schedules, workloads, and advancing projects could be hard to coordinate through a virtual setting.
    - With an increased focus on hybrid/remote work CHWD has the ability to leverage flexible work schedules as a retention tool to attract/retain employees
    - Still some loss of morale

- some can work from home while others can't
- perception of some choosing to work from home more often than necessary to others

- In-person thoughts:
  - Perception of Increased morale – everyone sees everyone else at work
  - Increased connection with team members (we're all in this together). Great teams require vulnerability, which is better achieved through in-person conversations.
  - Ability to walk to an office next door to ask a quick question rather than calling or setting up a Zoom meeting = increased productivity
  - Increased oxytocin in the brain when together with others = more happiness
  - Ability to help customers who visit the physical office
  - More easily able to supervise employees

-- AGENCY 3 FEEDBACK --

Challenges:
- Employee stress – no work life balance when working at home
- Accommodating employees who have moved and what to do about full-time remote work and the pay structure
- Effective collaboration now requires deliberation versus more informal communication.
- Everything is a bit more of an effort in a virtual setting
- Managing workload and understanding the role of supervision in a remote/hybrid setting. Am I getting a full day's work from everyone?

Successes:
- More effective at delivering services the way that customers want them, rather than the "way we have always done it"
- Telework policy – result from post COVID world. More attractive to younger workers
- More prepared for disaster type events
- Enhanced cybersecurity initiatives that would have otherwise taken more time.
- Enhanced technology for employees and the use of new tools for productivity.

Organizational Learnings
- These tools we have used virtually can be used for better productivity in certain instances
- Teams is way better for day to day than Zoom
- Certain employees can work remotely full time, but not many
- We need to rethink office workspaces to efficiently manage physical space
- We need to build in more wellness programs to support employees
- We need to consider more administrative support as the functions of remote working and new technologies place a heavier burden on processing items that are more administrative in nature, including community complaints.