

Automating Workforce Management in the Public Sector

Mobile tools help agencies embrace hybrid scheduling

A police officer's mobile app helps her swap shifts so she can attend her son's piano recital. A city department head assigns staff to support a weekend art festival. A special-education manager uses cloud-based software to schedule teachers for different shifts.

Cloud-based, mobile-first workforce management software can help public sector agencies thrive in hundreds of scenarios like these. This technology empowers workers to manage scheduling on their own, giving leadership an edge in nurturing a healthy work-life balance that can increase employee loyalty and ease staffing pressures.

What drives the move to modern workforce management

Managers used to print work schedules on the office bulletin board. Moving scheduling to spreadsheets or on-premises personnel management applications felt like an improvement — until people got a taste of cloud services and mobile apps.

Today, almost everyone carries a smartphone that can access cloud-based workforce management platforms. Cloud tools can use artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI/ML) to give managers valuable intel on scheduling, vacations, sick time and many subtleties of staff supervision.

These tools help managers cope with trends reshaping government workforces.

A recent Center for Digital Government (CDG) webinar¹ explored these trends, which include:

Hybrid scheduling. The pandemic proved a substantial volume of work can be done from home (or anywhere with a fast internet connection). Some workers became more productive and were grateful to ditch their commutes, while others grumbled that their workdays lost their traditional borders. Hybrid scheduling may be the answer, but it poses many challenges for leaders.

"There's a lot of focus on how to maintain the culture if you're remote," says Brianna Zink, senior director of product strategy with Infor Workforce Management. Infor sells a cloud-based, mobile-ready app designed to help leaders adapt to these workforce trends.

Work-from-anywhere staffing. Some teachers spend all day in a classroom but also work a few hours at night during one-on-one lessons with children who cannot attend school. This complicates communications between bosses and staff.

"It's difficult for us to get information to people," says Doug Austin, chief technology officer with the Special School District of St. Louis County in Missouri. Deploying new solutions helped his agency improve communications with teachers.

Stronger focus on skills. It's up to agencies to cement worker loyalty by helping staff improve their skills.

Job-hopping workers. It's common for staffers to change jobs every couple of years. Agencies need technologies and policies that support workers' careers and advancements while encouraging them to remain in public service roles. Developing public servants who view their careers as meaningful to their communities is key.

Layoffs in the private sector. An abundance of talent may be available to agencies thanks to recent workforce reductions at private companies. The public sector has the opportunity to attract this talent pool and develop employees for the betterment of their communities.

The advantages of apps

Public agencies have four primary rationales to modernize workforce management, according to the CDG webinar's guests:

Scheduling. A mobile smartphone app connects to a common scheduling platform that workers can log into as long as they have internet. The platform tells managers which remote workers are on the job. Managers also can post open shifts for qualified personnel. Deskless, in-the-field employees can always check their schedule status and respond quickly.

The platform also allows scheduling of vacation, sick days and other forms of paid leave. Staffers can monitor the schedule and collaborate with coworkers to swap shifts. The platform can also be configured

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to align with the agency’s policies, which streamlines approvals.

“The fact that the platform is available on a mobile app has been overwhelmingly popular among our staff, as opposed to having to log into a laptop, go to a kiosk or use a shared punch clock,” Austin says.

Messaging. Managers can use the platform to communicate with workers, who will see updates when they log in for their shifts. Sending out surveys is an efficient way to get their feedback.

“Having an app where we can ask them a question or send out a piece of information when they log in has been extremely helpful for us,” Austin says.

Analytics. AI/ML algorithms can help leaders spot trends, analyze behaviors and predict future scheduling challenges. Data from attendance and time-tracking features can be used to gauge worker performance.

“We provide analytics to understand what was planned versus what happened,” Zink of Infor says.

Cloud. Amazon Web Services (AWS) helped Infor simplify application management while adding scale, flexibility and security.

“This is a great strategic partnership we have going with Infor,” says Vani Eswarappa, partner solution architect with AWS. Infor has more than 15,000 customers on AWS and generates 25-plus petabytes of data every month. “That’s pretty huge for us,” she says. AWS also provides backup and disaster recovery services that help agencies avoid downtime.

Encouraging a better work-life balance

No matter which innovations arrive in the marketplace, recruiting and retaining talent will be difficult for public sector organizations. The best hope for honing a competitive edge over private sector employers is adapting to people’s shifting workplace preferences.

The question for every public sector manager should be: Are you helping your people use technology to balance work and their everyday lives? Modern, cloud-based workforce management software can help you find the right answers.

This piece was written and produced by the Government Technology Content Studio, with information and input from Infor and AWS.

Implementation Tips

- ✓ Start by envisioning how you want the system to operate. It must align with current needs while enabling new innovations.
- ✓ Prioritize your most pressing challenges. You may want to get things rolling with a small pilot and use what you’ve learned to inform the full install.
- ✓ Evaluate current processes and seek opportunities to automate time-intensive manual processes. Work with your implementation partner to make sure you’re taking full advantage of the platform’s capabilities.
- ✓ Get feedback from key department leaders and staff before, during and after the implementation.
- ✓ Make sure you have the optimum cloud infrastructure for your IT environment.
- ✓ Take time to acquire the proper skills and talents you’ll need to install and operate the platform.
- ✓ Ask vendors and solution providers about security, scalability, backups, remote-work options and AI/ML enhancements.

1. <https://webinars.govtech.com/Providing-Balance-for-the-Government-Workforce%3A-Smart-Tools-That-Support-Work-Life-Integration-141793.html?>

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