



Teleworking Opinions in the US Government: Telework Centers Versus Work from Home

Findings from a Survey of Federal Employees

Conducted by LifeSize, Inc.

March, 2011

Findings indicate that even the small number of remaining telework centers may be unnecessary

OVERVIEW

Because of current federal government budget constraints, the General Services Administration (GSA) has announced plans to de-fund and close nearly half of the “telework centers” it has established for employees in the Washington, DC metropolitan area.

Recent survey findings indicate that even the small number of remaining telework centers may be unnecessary, from the perspective of federal employees polled this year for their opinions on the benefits of telework.

While survey respondents noted that they would ideally telework at least two days per week if eligible, over two-thirds of those polled said that they would not use telework centers.

Even more significantly, three-quarters of survey respondents believe that GSA telework centers are unnecessary. The perceived benefits of telework centers – access to agency software and technology, as well as broadband connectivity – were not considered a compelling reason for telework centers.

While some respondents acknowledged that telework centers offer a social and collaborative benefit for employees, more typical were comments that GSA telework centers represent little more than a different commute for federal employees. As one respondent noted, “a major factor in determining if I would use a telework center is the distance from my home to the center. If the distance is about the same or greater, I would rather go to my office than a telework center.”

One possible conclusion to be drawn from this survey would appear to be that the General Services Administration may be better served by outfitting federal employees with the collaborative technology – including cost-effective video conferencing – at their employees’ homes than to continue to offer telework centers. The perceived benefits of such centers are outweighed by the dubious convenience they offer federal employees.

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

This survey of federal employees was conducted by LifeSize, Inc., a leading provider of high definition teleconferencing and telepresence services to the government and commercial markets. LifeSize’s solutions can be applied to such government functions as continuity of operations, telemedicine, distance learning and telework.

The telework survey was sent via e-mail in three separate iterations to federal government IT professionals with job titles ranging from Information Technology Manager to Chief Information Officer to Chief Technology Officer. It was also posted on several social networking sites for federal employees, and included by the Telework Exchange on that company’s home page.

Two hundred eighty six (286) federal employees contributed their opinions to the survey. This represents a federal employee response rate of just under four percent of the entire targeted audience (3.8%).

69.7% said they would not use a GSA telework center at all

FINDINGS

Of those polled in this survey, 61.1% currently do not telework. Approximately 26% of survey participants already telework one day per week.

While 41.6% of those surveyed maintained that they would work at least two days per week from home if they were eligible for telework, the overwhelming majority—69.7%—said they would not use a GSA telework center at all. Just over 13% said they might use a telework center one day per week. A combined 16.9% said they might use a telework center two, three or more days per week.

When asked their opinion of the GSA's telework centers as a solution for teleworking in the federal government, 72.4% responded that telework centers were not necessary. They preferred teleworking from home or other locations.

While approximately one quarter (or 24.8%) of those polled believed that telework centers would have an advantage of access to agency-supplied technology over teleworking from home, 41.8% felt telework centers offered no advantage at all.

Survey participants also were asked whether they would prefer to telework from home or a telework center if technology and quality of service for teleworking were identical at both locations. In response, 59.7% maintained that they would prefer to work from home in all cases. Some 28.3% responded that they would prefer to work from home most of the time.

Perhaps most telling was a response to the question, "if you are eligible for telework, how many days per week would you use a GSA telework center?" Two-thirds of those polled (69.97% of respondents) said that they would not use telework centers. By comparison, 38.6% of respondents said they would work from home two days per week if eligible for telework. In other words, despite eligibility for telework, GSA-provided telework centers would not provide an incentive for even those survey participants who would have taken advantage of the benefit.

RESPONDENT COMMENTS

Survey participants were given the opportunity to provide comments to questions having to do with the benefit of telework centers.

At least one respondent scoffed at the notion of telework in general, saying "Telecommuting is a way of saying 'I am going to do nothing today,' and should not be considered at all."

Several participants were more open to the idea of telework, however, and cited the benefit of a telework centers' "social aspect" as a compelling alternative to working from home. An "office atmosphere" and "the ability to interact with others" were similarly persuasive arguments for telework centers. "The telework center offers the 'realization' of a social network," one respondent noted.

From a technological standpoint, opinions differed as to the advantage of a telework center. One participant noted that telework centers allow "more employees to be able to telework if they don't have the correct equipment (at home)."

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Other respondents countered that opinion. "Telework centers previously offered capabilities not available at home," one participant stated, adding "with the availability of these technologies now in the home, the centers are no longer needed."

Ultimately, many respondents were of the opinion that telework centers seemed paradoxical to the very notion of telework. "(A telework center) just means coming into an office in a different location," one participant noted, adding that the concept "kind of defeats the purpose of telecommuting."

Another respondent explained that "one major point of telework is to minimize the need for commuting. (One) might as well go to work, which already has the infrastructure setup, than spend money to set up 'telework centers,'" the participant noted.

"If the distance is about the same or greater, I would rather go to my office than a telework center," another noted.

CONCLUSION

The General Services Administration's move to shut down many telework centers seems to be on the right track – even perhaps overly cautious.

The overwhelming majority of survey respondents hold the view that telework centers are not necessary. Some even maintain that they would not use such centers even though they would prefer the telework option in general. This begs the question of whether telework centers are needed at all.

The technological advantage posed by telework centers also is not compelling to federal employees polled. Almost the same percentage of participants felt that telework centers offer no technological benefit (41.8%) as did those supporting the next two categories of technology-based answers – telepresence/vide Conferencing and agency-supplied technology – combined (42.1%).

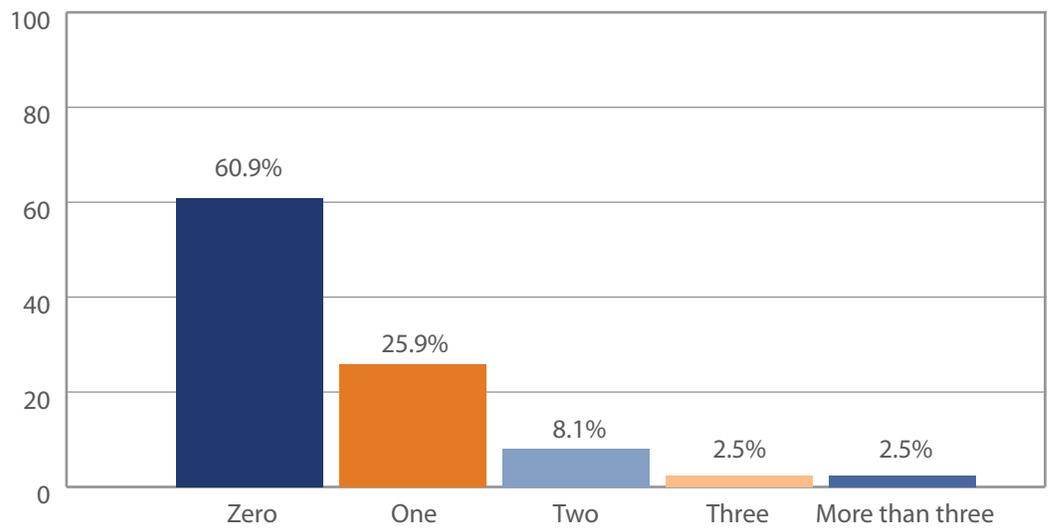
These findings are particularly relevant given that the Telework Enhancement Act signed into law in December 2010 gives agencies until the middle of 2011 to identify employees eligible for telework, and to create a plan for telework adoption and implementation.

Completely outfitting a telework center is not an inexpensive proposition. Taking into account the added cost of maintaining the facilities themselves, it is fair to ask whether the government might not be better served by shutting down all telework centers.

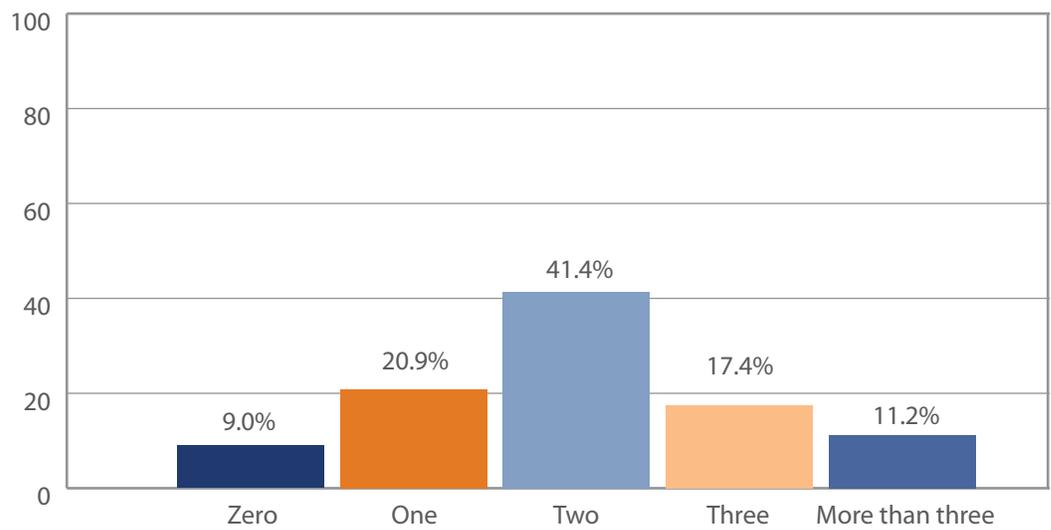
The savings could then be channeled back into providing telework-eligible employees with state-of-the-art videoconferencing and telepresence equipment for their homes.

The intangible benefit to government of outfitting employees with all necessary equipment for teleworking in their own homes cannot be overstated. As one survey participant eloquently noted, "The foremost benefit offered by telework is the demonstration of trust and trustworthiness between the employer and the employee. Without it telework means nothing."

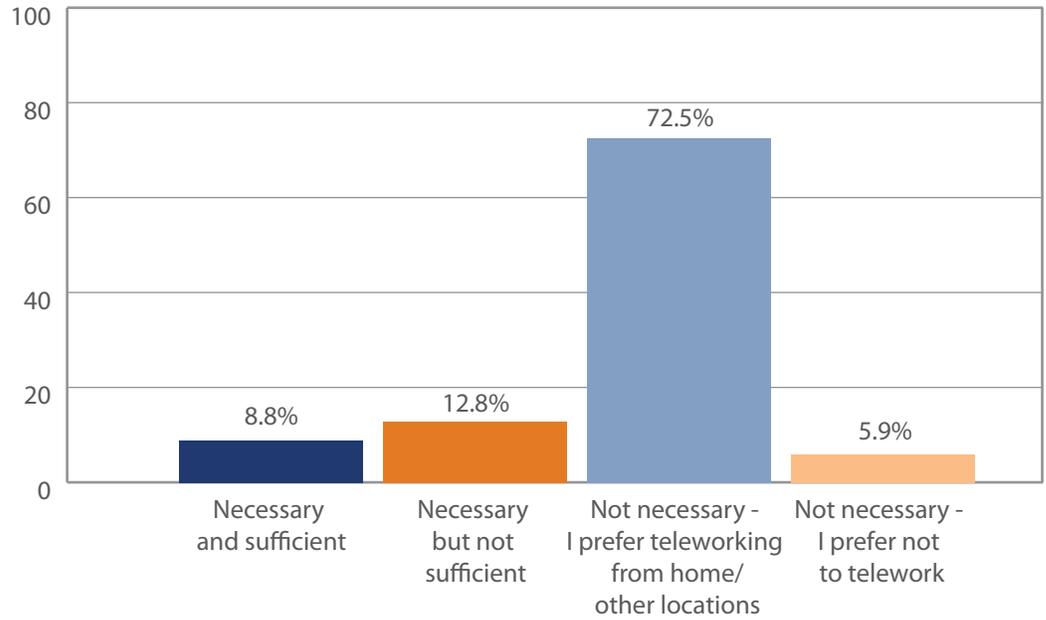
How many days per week do you telework now?



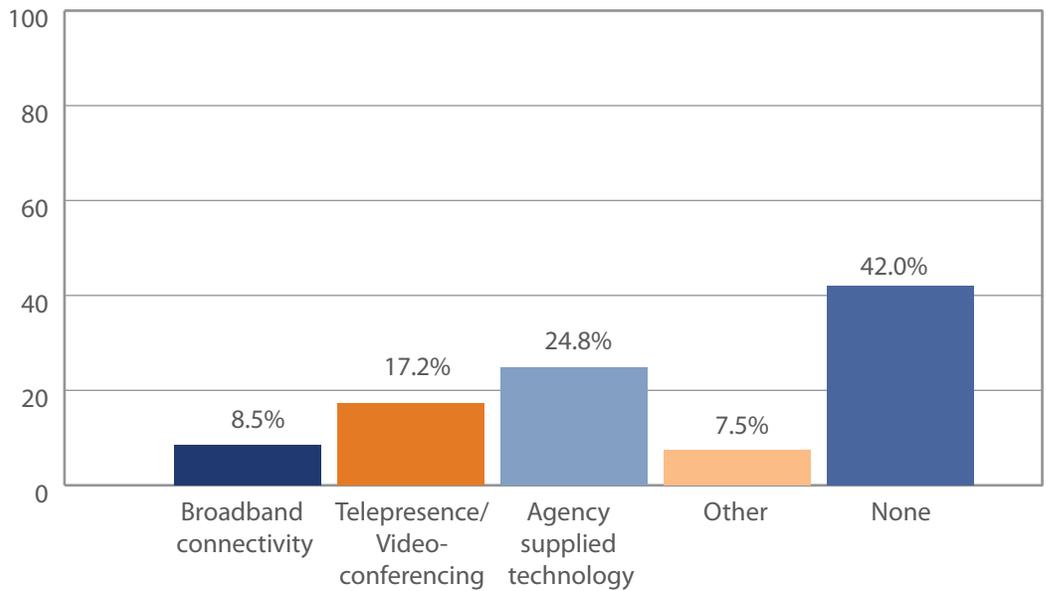
How many days per week would you like to telework?



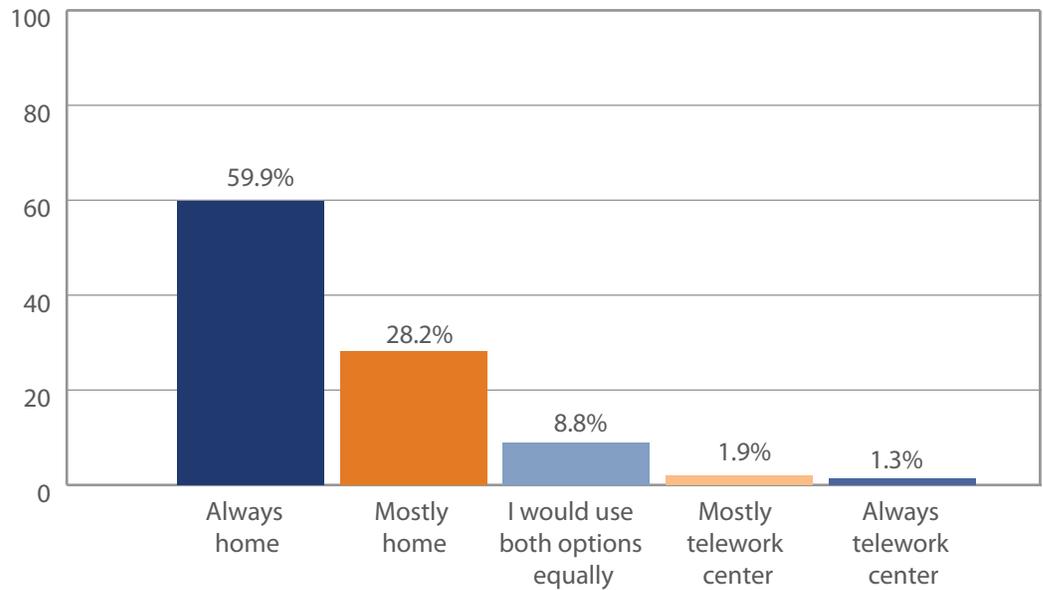
What is your opinion of the General Services Administration's "telework centers" as a solution for teleworking in the federal government?



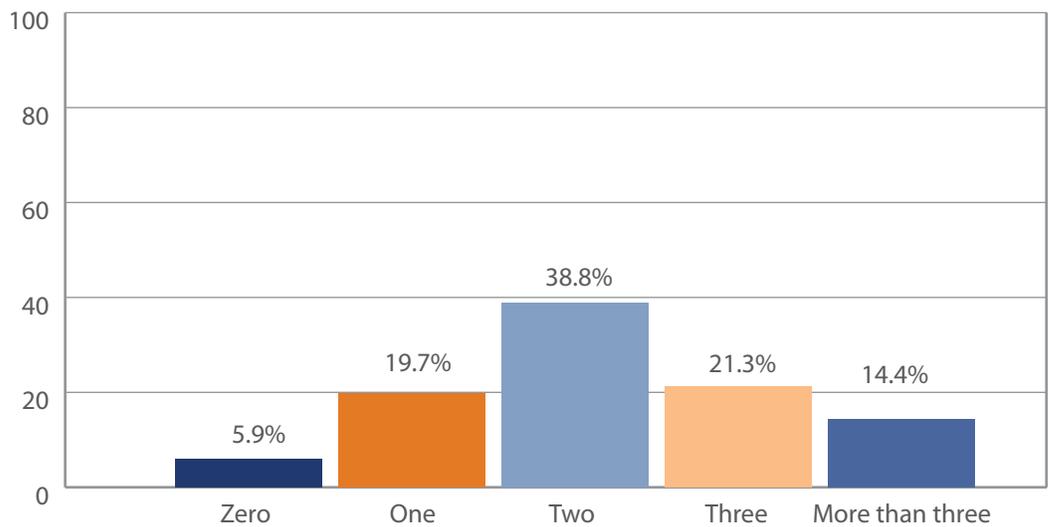
What is the main benefit you believe a telework center offers over teleworking from your home?



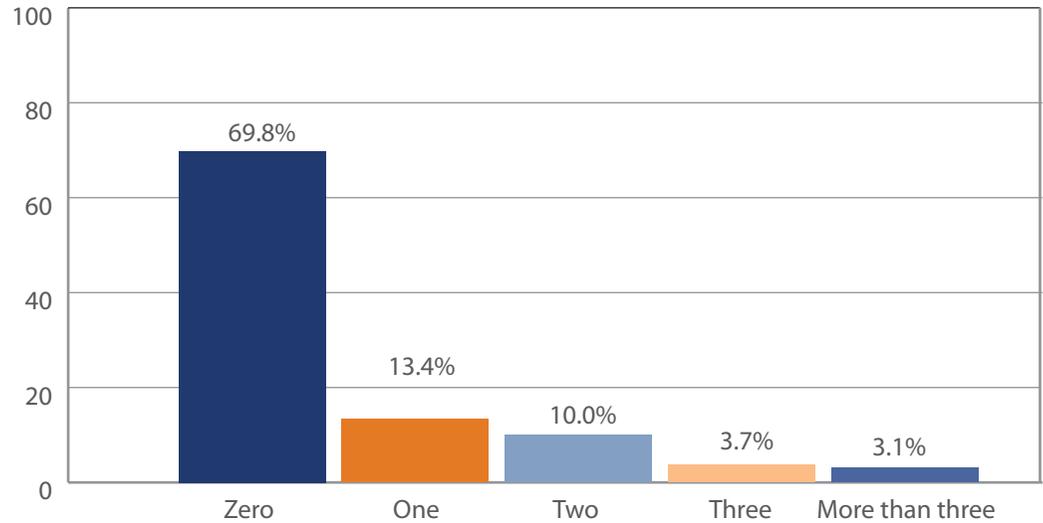
If technology/quality of service for teleworking were identical at home and at a GSA telework center, would you prefer to telework from home or a telework center?



If you were eligible for telework, how many days per week would you telework from home?



If you were eligible for telework, how many days per week would you use a GSA telework center?



ABOUT LIFESIZE

LifeSize Communications is a world leader in high-definition video communications and telepresence. Founded by industry veterans in 2003, LifeSize pioneered high-definition video communications to make communicating at a distance as natural and effective as being in the same room, for anyone, anywhere. LifeSize became a division of Logitech in December 2009, sharing a vision of everywhere there is voice there should be video. More information about LifeSize can be found at www.lifesize.com.

