



Q&A Executive Viewpoint

A conversation with **KRISTEN BALDWIN**



KRISTEN BALDWIN

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FAA's CIO discusses how the agency is using technology to adapt to the changing needs of customers and employees

How has the pandemic changed the FAA's approach to ensuring that employees can be productive and engaged from any location?

The FAA has a very robust workforce in the field, outside of the FAA headquarters complex, so we had a solid foundation in place for encouraging our workforce to engage from anywhere.

We saw a change in the volume of remote traffic on a daily basis. Fortunately, our team had been working to implement a scalable communication platform before the change to maximum telework, so we were able to adapt pretty quickly. With that platform available, our team was able to dedicate resources to ensure we had the bandwidth needed for the increase in remote traffic.

To this end, we nearly tripled our remote access bandwidth, increasing capacity at the FAA's Trusted Internet Connections. We also increased our remote access capacity by 50% to support 36,000 concurrent connections.

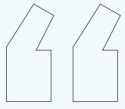
What role does the Office of Information and Technology play in support of the employee experience agency-wide?

In the Office of Information and Technology (AIT), our job is to provide the tools our workforce needs to be productive. It's our responsibility to ensure our toolset is reflective of our daily needs across the agency and that our employees are aware and comfortable using what is available for them.

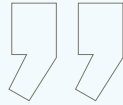
We partner with our Office of Communications to make sure productivity tool technology updates are a regular part of employee communications. From daily newsletter communications to lockscreen messaging to ever-changing content on our intranet site, we use a variety of methods to reach the FAA workforce.

A top priority of the AIT team has been to adapt processes and techniques based on the needs of the workforce. With thousands of FAA employees

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teleworking, AIT observed a delay in the deployment of some patch and feature update installations. It became clear that traditional methods of delivery were no longer effective. Within just a few weeks, AIT re-architected the approach to push content to FAA computers even when they are off-line. This team was able to continue with many time-sensitive efforts thanks to the new approach.

How is the FAA improving the experience for external customers such as the aviation industry, particularly in light of the ongoing economic recovery?

The agency has been able to continue external engagement activities using online collaboration tools and platforms. In some cases, we're able to adapt the same tools we leverage every single day to collaborate internally.

The reliance on virtual communication has also led to the adoption of engagement services that allow better integration among the stakeholder community. In some cases, the online nature of our engagement has allowed us to cast a wider net and reach a more diverse community.

How does the agency plan to extend improvements beyond the current crisis?

At FAA, technology is a foundation for achieving both mission and mission-support goals. We're constantly looking for ways to adapt our current toolset to support future needs of our workforce and meet the agency's mission. Our team also helps support the employee experience by dedicating liaisons to each of the FAA

lines of business and staff offices. The goal is to be able to anticipate emerging needs for technology tools so we can proactively integrate them into our toolset.

We are also focused on technology innovation from an enterprise perspective. Deploying modern approaches to technology solutions, such as robotic process automation (RPA), can help improve efficiency across the agency. RPA has been a game-changer that allows FAA employees to "level up" and focus on strategic work. AIT built an RPA toolkit to help employees become citizen developers by configuring software bots to perform specific tasks in just five steps.

From simple automations that generate and save recurring reports to complex automations that perform mass audit checks in different systems, RPA tools have been enthusiastically adopted across the FAA. For example, in AIT we were able to deploy a bot to replace the manual creation of an hourly report. The time commitment dropped from 30 minutes to just a few minutes with RPA.

What steps is the FAA taking to build a future-ready IT workforce?

Based on the connection between technology and mission activities, our FAA IT workforce is a huge part of our IT strategy and goals. This year, we are rolling out a Strategic Workforce Plan to ensure we have the right people in the right positions, at the right time, with the knowledge, skills and abilities to deliver on strategic business goals.

We see several benefits to taking

this kind of targeted approach to our workforce. First, we support talent identification and succession planning. Second, we are able to promote employee engagement and retention. Third, our staffing plan will inform the budget process to be sure we make good talent investments. Fourth, risk is reduced by identifying talent gaps and needs before they impact operations. And fifth, the plan sets a foundation to inform operational planning for years to come.

Strategic workforce planning provides a clear linkage between AIT's IT strategy and workforce needs, allowing us to plan more effectively for the future and to support our most important asset: people.

What can other agencies learn from the FAA's approach to employee and customer engagement?

I am just approaching my one-year anniversary at the FAA so I am still relatively new. I am still blown away by the collaborative and problem-solving culture of our workforce. We're tremendously lucky in IT to be able to support such flexible and resilient colleagues.

When the FAA shifted to a maximum telework environment, our workforce adapted by getting to know the tools we had available. As just one example, it only took a couple of weeks in the maximum telework environment for the number of online meetings to surpass the number of legacy conference calls.

I think FAA's continued success in this remote environment is a testament to the collaborative culture of the agency. ■