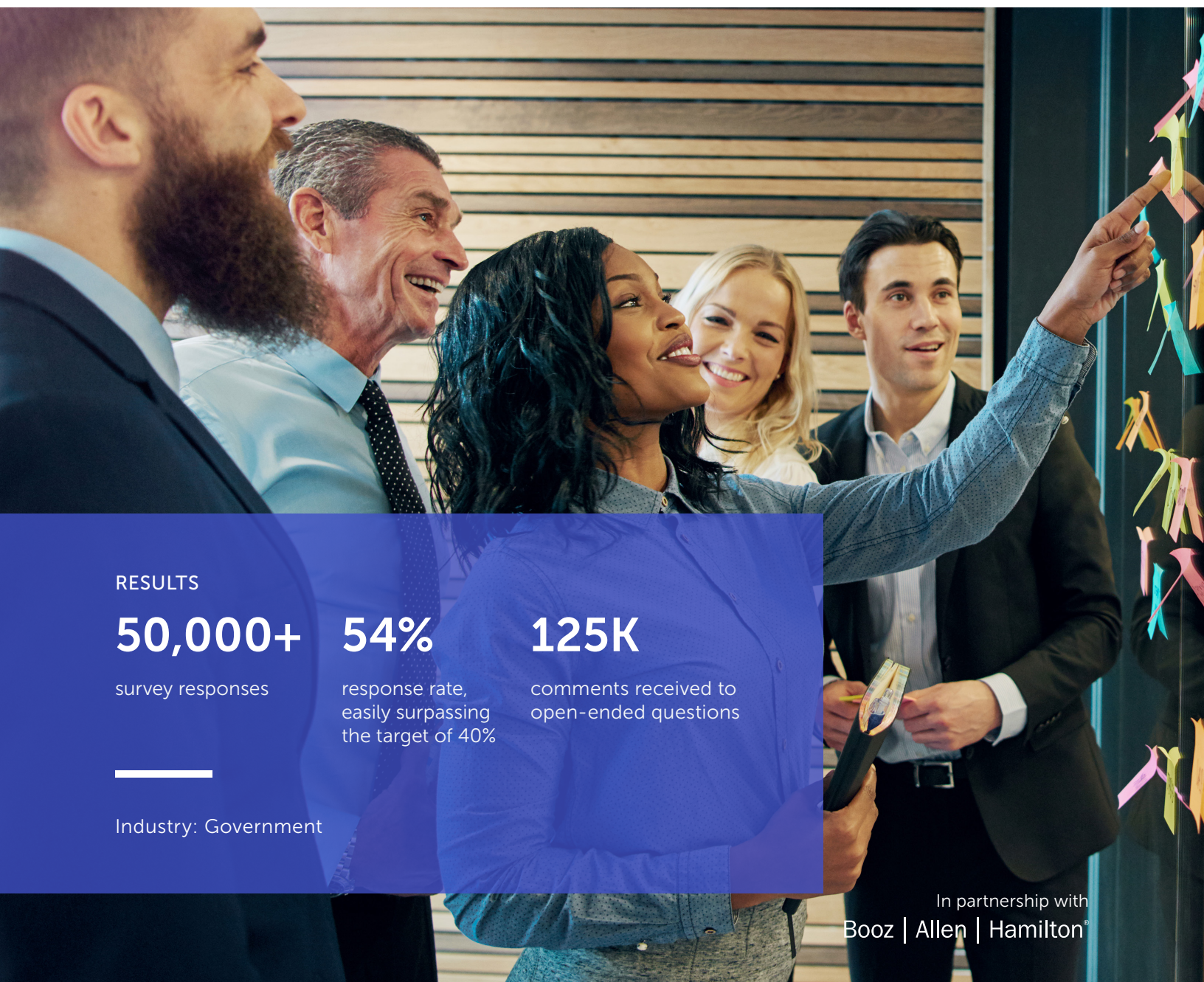




# Listening to employees to shape the workplace of the future



## RESULTS

**50,000+**

survey responses

**54%**

response rate,  
easily surpassing  
the target of 40%

**125K**

comments received to  
open-ended questions

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Industry: Government

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## SUMMARY

- USDA, one of the oldest and largest civilian government departments, wanted to better understand their employees' perspectives on remote work and the potential return to the office.
- USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack pledged to examine workplace flexibility options and the team needed good data to make informed decisions.
- USDA leveraged the expertise of **Booz Allen** to deploy Medallia Experience Cloud and get real-time feedback and insights on employee experiences, needs, and sentiments for remote workplace options.
- After quickly meeting and then exceeding their response target, USDA had the foundational data they needed to understand the benefits and challenges of the telework program and identify important actions to better support the workforce.

### Understanding and Adapting to Changes in Remote Work

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides national and international leadership on food, nutrition, agriculture, rural development, and related issues. This 160-year-old organization is made up of 29 agencies and offices, employing almost 100,000 people at more than 4,500 locations at home and abroad.

Like many other organizations, USDA was challenged by the sudden pandemic-driven shift to a largely remote workforce. As most of the department adapted to work-at-home and faced the uncertainty about returning to offices, they needed to understand how their people were feeling. What did they like about the changes, what areas would they improve, and what supports were missing?

USDA Secretary, Tom Vilsack, pledged to look at workplace flexibility options. As part of the process, they engaged with a diverse group of stakeholders, including employees, managers, senior leadership, labor unions, and advisory groups. However, their existing employee-feedback systems were not up to the task of quickly and efficiently surveying a large remote

workforce. They promptly began the search for an employee experience platform and a government-approved vendor who could provide the necessary implementation and support services.

"USDA has a great workforce made up of hardworking, dedicated and passionate individuals who appreciate the importance of the work we do here. With a little work and dedication, we can have a great workplace to match the workforce and the work," said Vilsack.

### Listening to Employees to Shape The Workplace

USDA's Office of Customer Experience (OCX) has a mission to empower, enable, and collaborate with customers and employees towards providing exceptional services and experiences. OCX was tasked with designing and running a program to listen to employees about their telework experiences, understand their sentiments, and identify how well they were being supported in remote work environments.

To do this, OCX needed a solution that would enable a small team to engage with a significant percentage of employees. The team looked

to Booz Allen, a knowledgeable, government-approved consulting firm with deep expertise helping agencies tackle complex challenges, enhance their missions, and foster better experiences. Together, they deployed Medallia Experience Cloud as part of OCX's "Listen Better, Serve Better" framework and Voice of the Employee program. The immediate goal was a voluntary employee telework survey that would garner a minimum response rate of 40 percent, or almost 40,000 employees.

OCX sent out the Employee Telework Survey to the entire workforce. A comprehensive communications strategy was implemented to encourage responses, including reminder emails, newsletters, and personal messages from senior leadership. Within a week after launching the survey they surpassed their target, ultimately receiving responses from 54 percent of employees before the survey closed two weeks after it started.

### Building Workplace Flexibility and Continued Improvement

Analyzing the data enabled USDA to make informed decisions about their telework program and identify important actions to support the workforce. Overall, 86 percent of employees viewed their shift to telework as successful, while 78 percent felt that the USDA-issued equipment met their needs.

More important was granular analysis of the survey, with breakdowns by job type, mission area, and agency size. These results provided important insights about which groups needed more training and career development, had concerns about remote productivity, or required help building effective collaboration. The survey also clarified that most staff were supportive of a hybrid workplace model, with 76 percent preferring a mix of virtual and in-person work environments.

A series of open-ended questions, such as "What do you need for optimal success in working from home?" and "How does teleworking impact your well-being?" revealed additional details. Highlights from more than 125,000 responses to these questions included increased productivity, improved physical and mental health, and noticeable time and cost savings. The respondents were also very positive about the future potential, with 92 percent feeling that the additional flexibility would help their work-life balance.

As a result of the survey, senior leadership increased their support of teleworking and USDA formed a 'Future of Work' taskforce. The agency also expanded its telework policy and established new remote work guidelines. Some key policies include:

- Enabling mission areas, agencies, and offices to develop their own remote work agreements
- Permitting telework up to 8 days per bi-weekly pay period
- Requiring business-case based evaluations for denial of telework
- Providing guidance on a variety of different scenarios
- Reinforcing collaborative discussions and clear communications between employees and supervisors

"Leadership across USDA are establishing best practices we can start implementing today, including increasing vertical and horizontal communication across teams, fostering learning within our organizations using human-centered design, and celebrating diversity of our workforce," said Vilsack.

USDA leaders remain optimistic about the future, while acknowledging areas for continued improvement. Hybrid work models require additional engagement: 63 percent of supervisors believe the office is important for team building and work culture, while fewer than 20 percent of employees want to return to the pre-pandemic status quo. Clear communication of expectations and the



establishment of healthy workplace boundaries will increase flexibility, trust, and employee well-being. To support this, USDA created a FAQ website to provide answers to the most frequently asked questions related to telework and remote work. Medallia and Booz Allen are helping USDA celebrate the successes of their remote work program and delivering actionable insights on areas that require further effort. Continued employee experience assessments will provide additional insights and guide decision-making. Senior leadership continues to listen to employees to build confidence in the program and ensure that USDA attracts a talented and diverse workforce.

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It's more important than ever to leverage a human-centered design (HCD) approach in everything we do in Government. The Department's Office of Customer Experience (OCX) focuses on just that – identifying core customer needs to develop metrics that will most accurately measure experience and identify insights that will help USDA move towards the future. Providing direct lines of feedback and mechanisms for engaging those we serve; in this case, our own employees is a critical step in big changes to come.”

**Simchah Suveyke-Bogin**

Chief Customer Experience Officer  
at USDA

Learn more at [medallia.com](https://medallia.com)

A story written in partnership with **Booz | Allen | Hamilton**®

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Medallia is the pioneer and market leader in Experience Management. Medallia's award-winning SaaS platform, the Medallia Experience Cloud, leads the market in the understanding and management of experience for customers, employees and citizens. Medallia captures experience signals created on daily journeys in person, digital and IoT interactions and applies proprietary AI technology to reveal personalized and predictive insights that can drive action with tremendous business results. Using Medallia Experience Cloud, customers can reduce churn, turn detractors into promoters and buyers and create in-the-moment cross-sell and up-sell opportunities, providing clear and potent returns on investment. [www.medallia.com](https://www.medallia.com)