



Describing customers' interest and experience with federal coworking sites

What is the GSA priority?

The General Services Administration (GSA) launched Workplace 2030 (WP2030) to lead and support the federal government through developing the future of work. GSA develops and deploys customer-driven solutions to enable agencies to align people, processes, and tools. It is important to assess initial interest and use cases for these solutions to support strategic decision-making for GSA's initiative to reduce spending on underutilized office space. Examining employee sentiment surrounding potential offerings also allows us to make progress in addressing GSA's Learning Agenda priority question: *What technologies and solutions does the federal workforce need to additionally improve effectiveness in a more responsive remote work setting?*

What did we evaluate?

Federal coworking, a WP2030 offering, provides federal agencies with a shared, flexible federal work environment in multiple GSA owned locations throughout the country to support GSA's space reduction initiative. Federal coworking has three phases of implementation: pre-agile, agile, and developmental.

During the developmental phase, the program opened six initial coworking sites in Tacoma, San Francisco, Denver, Kansas City, Chicago, and Philadelphia. The goal of the program is to launch more flexible

coworking space solutions, evaluate customer interest, and assess if a long-term benefit of cost-savings can be achieved as agencies reduce their real estate portfolio footprint by sharing space. We partnered with the Public Buildings Service (PBS) program team during the developmental phase to assess employee preferences and engagement, providing data in support of identifying opportunities to improve the offering and drive adoption of federal Coworking facilities.

How did the evaluation work?

The sample for this descriptive study was a non-representative convenience sample of federal employees from 45 agencies. We administered an initial survey to federal employees from February - September 2023 to assess attitudes about federal Coworking. Distribution of the initial survey was decentralized and coordinated through both PBS National Account Managers and regional personnel at the six pilot locations.

A total of 1,905 federal employees completed the survey. The Department of State is more heavily represented (481) than any other agency in the sample, followed by the Department of Health and Human Services (153). Given the sample is not inclusive of all agencies, and some agencies are overrepresented in the sample, this evaluation should be used to provide early signals about the viability of federal coworking, rather than being taken as representative of the views of all federal

employees. More data is needed before making investment decisions.

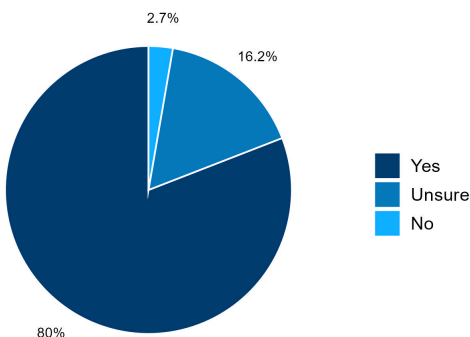
We administered additional surveys (website intake form, check-in survey, and check-out survey) to assess employee interest in pilot locations and reactions to touring or working at the six locations. The website intake form sample included employees from a range of geographic locations, whereas the check-in and check-out surveys were restricted to employees centered near the six pilot locations. The initial survey and check-out survey were the primary vehicles for customer sentiment before and after visiting federal coworking locations.

We used descriptive statistics, measures of frequency, to describe how many customers selected a given survey response. We also used thematic analysis to code open-ended survey responses.

What did we learn?

Figure 1 shows that most customers (80.0%; 145 of 179 who answered the item) who completed an exit survey after coming to a site plan to return, with only six customers saying they were unlikely to return.

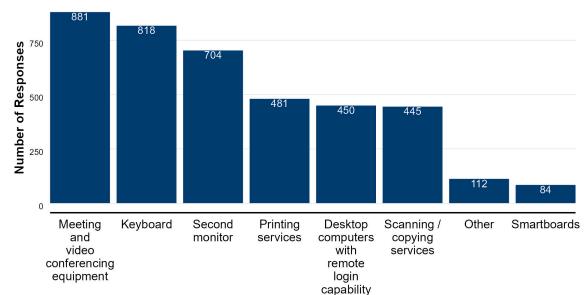
Figure 1. Most customer respondents plan to return to a federal coworking site



Most customers who visited the sites used them for a combination of in-person meetings with colleagues and individual focus work. Of those who visited the space, 65.0% described an improved social experience over their home or agency-assigned office spaces, while 55.6% cited meeting new people as a benefit. While the characteristics of those motivated enough to visit a site may not reflect all federal employees, those who were unlikely to return all shared that they either lived too far away from the site or were visiting from out of town to attend a team meeting.

Figure 2 shows the importance of equipping the space with key technology investments that give customers the flexibility to both collaborate and work independently. Results suggest the minimum viable product (MVP) should include a flexible combination of meeting space and open seating with secure wifi. Private rooms for taking calls and meetings, complemented by open-space with flexible laptop docking stations equipped with monitors and keyboards, may help address noise and privacy concerns. The most commonly cited IT necessities included video conferencing equipment (80.3%), keyboards (75.0%), and second monitors (64.1%).

Figure 2. Most customer respondents require meeting and video conferencing equipment and keyboards

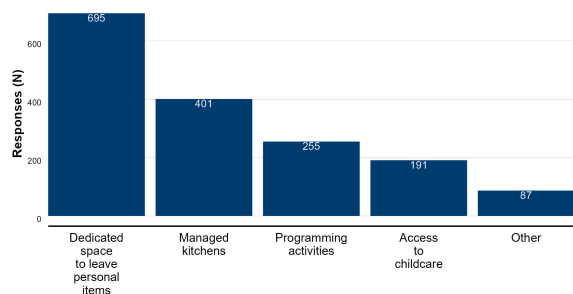


Employees who currently work a majority of their time remotely or hybrid most value

monitors. Employees who currently work a majority of their time in-person place a premium on printing, scanning, and copying services.

In terms of amenities, Figure 3 shows that most customers who completed the initial survey would like 1) dedicated space to store personal items (63.4%) and 2) access to managed kitchens and or food and beverage options (36.9%).

Figure 3. *Most customers need a place to leave their personal belongings*



Lastly, employee attitudes about in-person work are not uniform across groups. Those who prefer working hybrid are the most receptive to coworking. Employees who prefer remote work may only engage coworking locations if mandated by policy or to attend critical in-person meetings. Qualitatively, the most commonly cited barrier to adoption from employees was commute time (20.0% of responses). Employees associated a loss of productivity, increased costs, and a negative impact on work-family considerations with a longer commute.

What do we recommend?

For future evaluations, we recommend the federal coworking program extend the developmental phase. An extension of the developmental phase would allow for more targeted evaluation of site enhancements with the features and amenities identified in

this study and help gather more robust data from decision makers and employees from more agencies and a wider geography.

We recommend that future phases of the program enhance existing sites, expand to new locations, and explore a high-security coworking model. The program should invest in upgrading existing sites with monitors, keyboards, laptop connectors, and dedicated lockers or storage. Expanding the number of coworking pilot sites should include locations in residential areas and near major transit options. Additionally, the program should consider testing a high-security coworking location that includes more soundproofed rooms and small offices compared to open seating.

The program team should specifically learn about the drivers of adoption for specific target populations. For example, among those who prefer remote work, qualitative entries reveal messaging around coworking is more attractive as a flexible option employees can opt-in to use with collaborative and social benefits. The program may benefit from targeted messaging that addresses key distinctions between the needs of customers at agencies with varied levels of security requirements as well as employee preferences for in-person, hybrid, or remote work.

Programmatically, we recommend centralized communications and targeted recruitment of a larger sample of decision makers across all federal agencies to improve the sample quality. We recommend that the next phase of federal coworking move to centralized survey distribution, develop automated reporting and use a customer relationship management tool for increased data visibility.