



The Reliability Gap

Where local government can
improve workforce communications

Local government has kept its communication tools
leaner and better governed than almost any sector.
Its workers are still the least likely to call those tools effective.

Based on The State of Workforce Communication, 2026.
2,000 respondents across 5 markets.



Introduction

Local government delivered on the mandate. Confidence hasn't followed.

IT and communications leaders across the public sector have spent years under similar mandates: consolidate the tool stack, close off shadow IT, and make the case that technology spend is paying off. Local government has largely delivered on that mandate, trimming its tool count and reining in unauthorized channels ahead of most sectors in this study.

This briefing draws on The State of Workforce Communication, a five-market, 2,000-respondent study of workforce communication, to unpack why that discipline hasn't yet produced the confidence it should, and what leaders in IT, employee experience, and citizen experience can each do about it.

The most important finding is that although local government has kept its communication tools leaner and better governed than almost any sector surveyed, its workers are still the least likely to call those tools effective. Here's what's actually going on, and what to do about it.

AT A GLANCE

28%

call their tools "very effective," the lowest of any sector measured.

56%

use an unauthorized communications channel versus 74% market-wide.

51%

use unmanaged AI tools, the same rate as every other sector.

31%

often do not know which tool to use or who to contact, the widest gap in the study.

78%

default to voice when something needs to happen fast.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Success Story on Paper

For years, local government has been doing what IT leaders everywhere are being asked to do: keep the tool stack lean and shadow IT in check. In fact, government employees use fewer communication tools day to day than the broader workforce, and they go around approved channels far less often, 56% versus a 74% market average. By the usual measures of a modernization program, that's a success story.

And yet local government workers are the least satisfied with their tools of any sector in this study. Only 28% call them "very effective," below every other vertical measured, including sectors carrying twice the tool sprawl.

That combination points to a different problem: whether the approved tools actually hold up where the work happens, in a field truck with two bars of signal, on a shared device that logs someone out mid-task, or on a video call that drops during a site inspection. It also shows up somewhere less visible: whether people can find the right tool or the right person in the first place.

This briefing lays out what a 2,000-responder, five-market study of workforce communication found in local and regional government specifically, grounded in direct signals from North American respondents.

Fewer tools and tighter governance have not translated into confidence.



1 Fewer tools, still the least confident sector.

KEY METRICS

6.5

average daily tools versus 6.8 market average.

28%

vs. 31.5% rate tools as very effective.

57.8%

vs. 50.8% say reliability during busy or critical moments needs improvement.

If tool sprawl were the whole story, local government should be one of the more satisfied segments. It runs a smaller kit than the market average, and the classic complaints such as wasted time switching apps and feeling pressured to “make it work” track in line with or slightly below the broader workforce. Satisfaction is the lowest of any sector measured, and the signal points to reliability and fit as the primary driver behind that gap.

Where IT stands out

Reliability under load is the one place local government stands out.

Asked directly which areas of their tools need work, local government workers are more likely than any other segment in this study to flag reliability during busy or critical moments specifically. A total of 57.8% call for at least some improvement there, against a 50.8% market average. Every other improvement area tested, including ease of use, security, AI, and cross-team reach, tracks at or below the market rate.

2 Governance holds for messaging apps. It hasn't caught up with AI.

KEY METRICS

56%

vs. 74% use an unauthorized communications channel.

51%

use unmanaged or mixed AI tools, identical to the market average.

Public-sector IT has real discipline around messaging and collaboration tools. The shadow IT rate is nearly 20 points below the private-sector-heavy average, almost certainly the product of procurement rules and compliance culture.

That same discipline has not extended to AI. Local government workers use unsanctioned or mixed AI tools at exactly the market rate. The governance muscle exists, but it has not yet been pointed at the newest, fastest-moving risk while adoption is already happening underneath it.

3 The friction isn't only outside the tools. It's inside them, too.

KEY METRICS

31%

vs. 22% often do not know which tool to use or who to contact.

31%

vs. 26% say rules or restrictions often slow communication down.

Trim the tool count and tighten the rules, and the payoff should be less confusion, not more. Instead, two of the most common daily disruptions for local government workers are navigational rather than technical: not knowing which system or person to reach, and running into restrictions once they try.

Both outpace the market average, and the "who do I contact" gap is the widest of any issue measured in this study.

That points to a presence and directory problem sitting inside the approved stack, not a coverage problem outside it. It is also the flip side of Finding 2's governance discipline: the same rules that keep shadow IT in check are, for roughly three in ten workers, the thing slowing them down most often.

4 When it's urgent, it's voice, and voice is where the field reports it breaking.

KEY METRIC

78%

turn to voice communication when rapid action is needed.

Field connectivity is where the reliability gap shows up most vividly. Local government leans on voice for urgent, high-stakes moments at essentially the same rate as the rest of the workforce. Voice remains the most trusted channel under pressure across every sector and generation.

The difference shows up in what happens when government workers reach for voice. Direct accounts from North American local government respondents point squarely at field conditions.



"Sometimes it's difficult to reach employees if you don't have a good internet connection or you're in an area that is dense. On the two-way radios it's not clear and there's a lot of static, making it difficult to understand instructions."

Frontline, field-service role,
North American local government

"System we use has numerous issues that require constant logging in over and over. Slows work performance down."

Frontline, field-service role,
North American local government

WHY IT MATTERS

The channel employees trust most in a crisis is exactly the one shown here to falter in the field due to dead zones, static, and repeated reauthentication mid-task. For a sector where urgent often means a resident is waiting on the other end, that gap carries directly into service delivery.

WHAT THIS MEANS

Three Perspectives on the Same Gap

The reliability gap touches every department. It shows up differently depending on where you sit, and the fix looks different too.

Lens 1: Senior IT

Extend governance across the communication stack.

Recommended Actions:

1. Extend the same governance discipline applied to communication channels to AI tools before adoption outpaces policy further.
2. Invest in the presence and directory layer.
3. Audit communication reliability and connectivity using real field conditions.
4. Replace repeated manual re-logins on shared or field

Lens 2: Employee Experience

Fix communication reliability before adding tools.

Recommended Actions:

1. Prioritize device and connectivity reliability for field and frontline roles.
2. Give frontline staff one reliable way to find the right communication tool or person.
3. Treat logged-out sessions and dropped calls as productivity incidents.
4. Involve field crews directly in evaluating communication tools.

Lens 3: Citizen Experience

Internal communication reliability is the resident's experience.

Recommended Actions:

1. Map service-delivery SLAs against communication gaps identified in the field.
2. Address routing and directory failures.
3. Treat internal communication reliability as a resident-facing metric.
4. Use field-reported failure points to target response-time risks.

Make communication reliable where the work happens.

Talk with a Mitel public sector specialist about where your field, voice, and routing gaps are, and what to fix first.

**TALK TO
AN EXPERT**

About this research

Findings are drawn from The State of Workforce Communication, a study of 2,000 IT decision-makers, desk workers, and frontline workers across the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Germany, and France, conducted by Vanson Bourne on behalf of Mitel in 2026.

The local and regional government findings reflect that segment within the full study (n=71 respondents; n=64 for worker-specific questions).

The report includes direct verbatim feedback from North American local government respondents for context and illustration.

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