City of El Paso

City of El Paso Confronts Crisis

Homeless visitors find safe haven in pandemic and virtual connections to community services for ongoing support

The customer summary
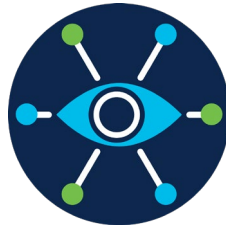
Customer name
City of El Paso

Industry
Government

Population
680,000

Challenge:

· Orders to stay home during the pandemic left the homeless population vulnerable

· Connecting homeless people to dozens of government and community services is complex

Solution:

· Virtual connections were conducted by videoconference using Webex by Cisco

· Real-time translation supports agencies communicating with Spanish speakers

Results:

· In 13 months, 3,000 people received assistance from the Delta Welcome Center

· Homeless visitors were safely connected to services through Webex by Cisco

· No cases of COVID-19 originated in the facility

Providing protection from the pandemic

When COVID-19 struck, people were told to stay at home – but what do you do if you have no home? More than half a million people in the US are homeless, the highest total in the past 20 years. Homelessness by itself is a severe health risk, but combined with the pandemic, the danger is worsened. In the City of El Paso, Texas, the Vulnerable Population Support Task Force was formed to bring together 26 government agencies, nonprofits, and organizations to break down the barriers that homeless people usually face and create the Delta Welcome Center, a safe haven for the homeless during the pandemic. The Webex by Cisco meeting application played a key role in connecting the vulnerable population to the services they desperately needed, including medical services, housing, government-supported food assistance, and other eligible social services.

In normal times, the number of homeless people in the City of El Paso never exceeded 1,000, but the Delta Welcome Center provided care to 3,000 during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Delta created a safe haven for people who needed help and existed to protect people from COVID-19. We turn no one away," says Nicole Ferrini, Chief Resilience Officer of the City of El Paso. "We need to connect people to the services they need and we realized that technology could help us do that, slicing through layers of complex government agencies and responsibilities to create solutions for people."

"Using Webex technology, we were slicing through layers of complex government agencies and responsibilities to create solutions for people."

Nicole Ferrini
Chief Resilience Officer, City of El Paso

Technology helping connect people with services

The City of El Paso had already established a Cisco network infrastructure of routers, switches, and wireless access points. As part of the Cisco Country Digital Acceleration program, integrated, enhanced Webex Meetings services were installed to make virtual videoconferencing available, quick and straightforward at the Delta Welcome Center. With secure, integrated audio and video, Webex created an ideal link to connect government agencies to visitors at the Delta Welcome Center for the assistance they required.

"We knew that by implementing this very user-friendly system, people experiencing a lot of apprehension could easily interface with someone who cares about them on the other end of that screen without feeling intimidated by the technology itself," Ferrini says.

When needed, agencies could utilize real-time translation from English to Spanish to make sure the Spanish-speaking sections of the population were not at a disadvantage compared to the English-speaking ones. The videoconferencing capability with Webex was an important part of the virtual process because initial meetings include an assessment, which helps determine which services are needed. For those with mental and physical health needs, viewing the person during a conversation is an important part of the intake procedure.

"Personal interaction and seeing those visual cues during a meeting are a big part of the assessment process," she explains.

The Delta Welcome Center was established as temporary support during COVID-19. Now, the City of El Paso has transitioned to a permanent solution with Operation Safe Harbor, a virtual welcome center. This center leverages the simplicity of virtual meetings to connect visitors to services and support, and help them in their journey away from homelessness.

"Our goal is not to focus on homelessness," she says. "People are homeless when they're not resilient. The City embraces a resilience perspective with a focus on providing access to empowerment tools—financial, household, and healthcare tools— that help provide stability and ultimately, resilience for people."

"We realized that we needed to give homeless visitors access to the services that they wanted and needed—a virtual welcome center. We achieved that with Webex."

Nicole Ferrini
Chief Resilience Officer, City of El Paso

The bridge to possible

For more information

Please visit: https://www.cisco.com/go/stateandlocal

Product list

Webex by Cisco:

- Webex Assistant
- Webex Boards
- Webex Cloud Calling
- Webex Cloud Contact Center
- Webex DX80
- Webex Flex Contact Center
- Webex Hybrid Services
- Webex Meetings
- Webex Room Kit Pro
- Webex Translation Services
- Integrated Cloud Collaboration

Infrastructure:

- Catalyst Series Switches
- Catalyst 9000 Series Access Points
- Catalyst Wireless Controllers
- Cisco 4000 Series Integrated Services Routers (ISR)
- Cisco ACI
- Nexus 9000 Series Switches
- Unified Computing System (UCS)