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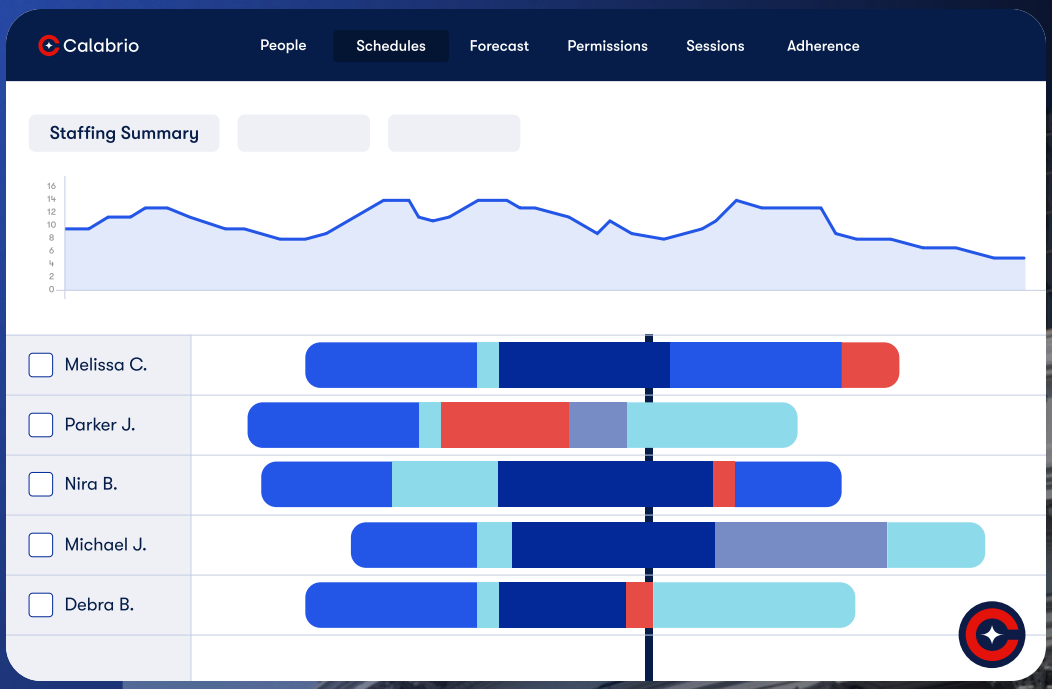
Smart Guide:

Modernizing the U.S. Public Sector Contact Center



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Introduction

U.S. public sector contact centers operate under some of the most demanding conditions in the country. Tight budgets, heightened scrutiny, and increasingly complex citizen needs create a perfect storm in which teams must do more with less while still upholding accuracy, empathy, security, and fairness at every step. At the same time, contact centers face mounting pressure to streamline operations. Cost reductions, consolidation, and large-scale outsourcing continue to reshape how services are delivered. Yet, demand isn't decreasing. More citizens need support, and expectations for digital access and faster response times continue to rise.

This places public sector organizations at a pivotal moment. Digital-first engagement, self-service, online workflows, and AI-enabled solutions are accelerating. These innovations promise efficiency, but in government environments, they must be paired with trust, security, and rigorous compliance.

That's why FedRAMP®, StateRAMP, and TX-RAMP certifications matter. And that's where Calabrio GovSuite – the only independent FedRAMP® Authorized Workforce and Conversation Intelligence platform, gives agencies the secure cloud foundation they need to modernize with confidence.

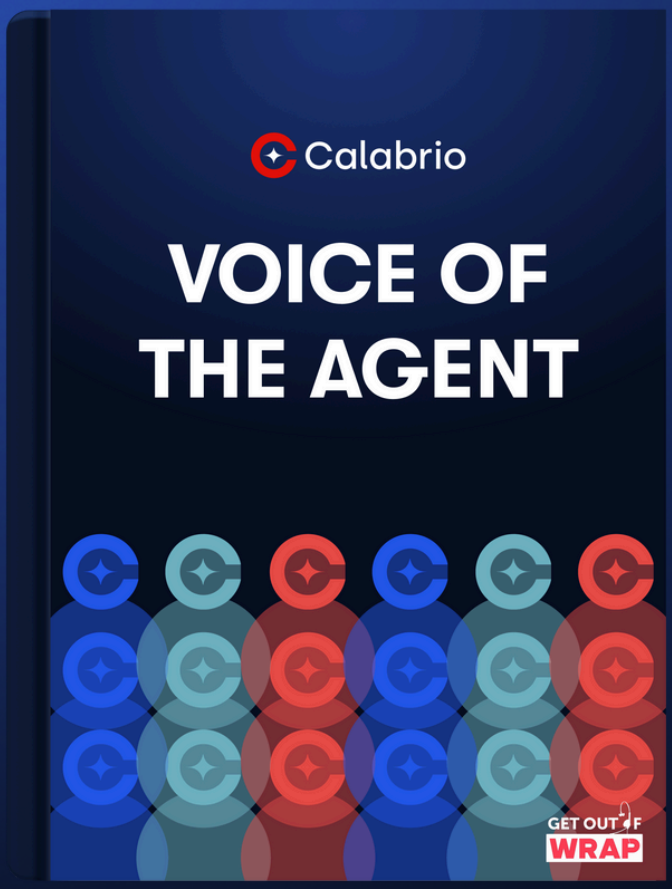
In this Smart Guide, we break down the realities shaping the U.S. public sector today: the pressures, the opportunities, the rise in citizen expectations, and the critical role AI and automation play in helping agencies deliver more with less.

Agent Well-Being: The Foundation of Public Sector Service

Agent well-being is often overlooked in transformation conversations, yet it remains one of the strongest predictors of service quality, retention, and resilience. That's because agents ***are*** the public sector's brand. For many citizens, especially those navigating benefits, healthcare, housing, licensing, or compliance, the agent they speak to is the only human interaction they will ever have with a government service. Every conversation shapes trust, confidence, and the citizen's perception of the entire agency.

Despite tight budgets, ContactBabel data shows that public sector contact centers pay competitively and maintain low attrition rates. Absence levels, which spiked during the pandemic, have now stabilized.

But stability doesn't guarantee safety. The pandemic showed how quickly well-being can decline when demand and emotional strain increase. With calls becoming more complex and more emotionally charged, the risk of overwhelming agents remains high.



Our Voice of the Agent research (industrywide) underscores that well-being is about much more than salary. Supportive leadership now ranks equally with fair pay (59%) as a driver of happiness. Burnout and pay are tied as the top reasons agents consider leaving.

What keeps agents engaged long-term? Clear career paths, recognition, autonomy, and development opportunities, the elements that turn high-pressure roles into sustainable public service careers. *Read our Voice of the Agent report to learn more.*

As operational and emotional demands intensify, agent well-being can't remain a secondary concern. It is a strategic priority, and the foundation for every improvement that follows.

The Public Sector's AI Trust Gap: Why Citizens Are Returning to the Phone

The public sector historically relied heavily on email, but ContactBabel data reveals that volumes have declined sharply. Voice self-service remains inconsistent, and, unlike commercial industries, public sector contact centers have seen a renewed shift back toward live phone support.

Channel	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Telephone (live)	68%	65%	67%	56%	67%	65%	84%	87%
Telephone (self-service)	10%	1%	8%	17%	11%	15%	5%	4%
Email	15%	24%	20%	20%	17%	15%	9%	7%
Web chat	4%	7%	1%	3%	1%	2%	1%	1%
SMS / messaging	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Letter	3%	2%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Fax	1%	1%	2%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%
Social media	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	2%	0%	0%

ContactBabel data shows that live calls remained steady until 2019 before dropping to 56%. Recently, they've climbed again, likely tied to slow digital response times. But the real question is: **do citizens simply trust humans more than AI?**

For years, rushed chatbot rollouts and broken automation conditioned the public to associate "AI" with friction, confusion, and dead ends. Even today, citizens say AI's clearest advantage is speed - not quality.

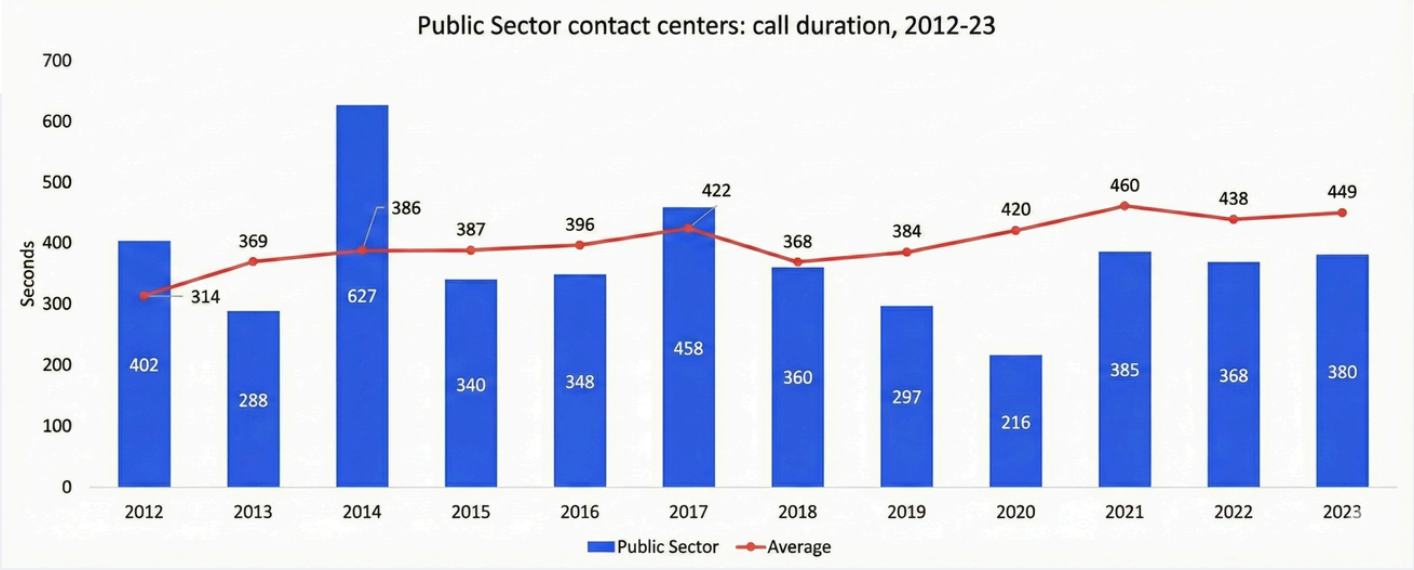
The result? Citizens bypass bots immediately - typing "agent," "human," or "representative" to avoid frustration. Behavior learned over time becomes habit.
To shift that behavior, public sector organizations need more than smarter technology. They need transparency, expectation-setting, and journey design that proves, rather than promises, that AI can help.

Hidden Opportunity: Public Sector Calls Are Often Ideal for Self-Service

ContactBabel highlights a powerful insight: **public sector call lengths have recently fallen below the U.S. average.** Many of these calls *could* be resolved through modern self-service if the channels existed or were trusted.

Talk times are also lower than in many other sectors. While this can look like efficiency, it often signals prolonged after-call work or idle time - prime areas for targeted automation.

Yet, industry-wide, agent downtime has declined dramatically, from **14% to 8%.** Agents now get fewer natural pauses between emotionally charged conversations - conversations involving vulnerable citizens, complex issues, or high-stakes decisions.



With digital channels underused and expectations rising, the emotional load is intensifying on the frontline.

The Human Cost of Serving Citizens Under Pressure

Insights from our Voice of the Agent research reveal that stress and burnout are tied with pay as the top reasons agents consider leaving, and agents consistently rate empathy as their strongest skill. However, our State of the Contact Center data shows a very different perspective: leaders view empathy as the skill most lacking across their teams, and most organizations still don't provide formal empathy training to close that gap. Voice of the Agent also highlights that agents see stress management and resilience as their weakest areas, even as conversations grow more emotionally complex. And while 58% of agents say customer patience hasn't improved, our State of the Contact Center findings show that leaders believe expectations have actually risen, adding yet another layer of pressure to already demanding interactions.

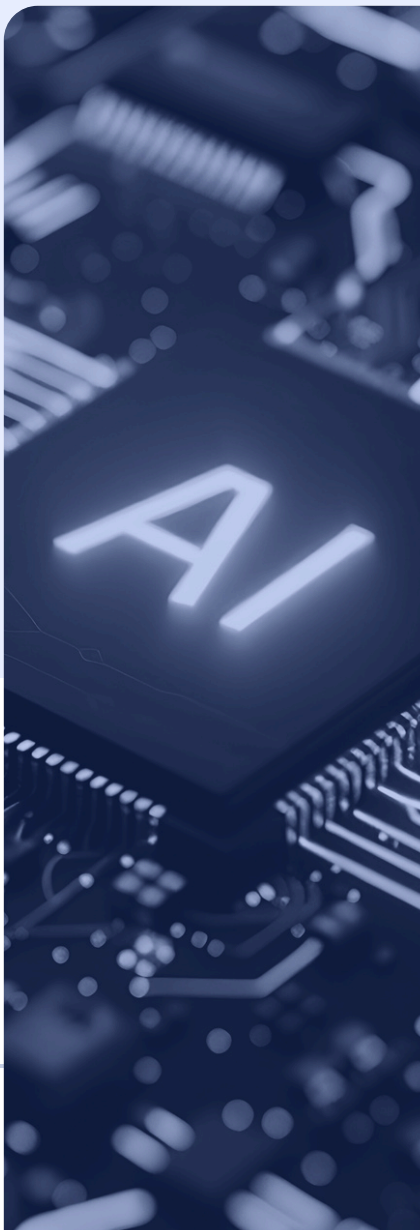
Agents are expected to deliver calm, empathy, and high-quality service, while handling emotionally intense and increasingly complex citizen interactions. AI agent-assist can significantly reduce wasted time during calls, but when it's implemented poorly, it can actually add to agents' cognitive load. Agents are already carrying the emotional weight of every broken journey and every frustrated citizen, so it's critical that the technology we introduce genuinely lightens their burden - not adds to it.

AI in the Public Sector: Awareness Without Understanding

AI is becoming more common across public sector workflows, but agent understanding hasn't kept up.

Voice of the Agent insights reveal:

- Only **35%** know which tools use AI
- **44%** already find AI helpful
- **55%** worry AI could change or replace their job
- **48%** want more AI-powered tools
- **40%** want AI training but haven't received it
- **33%** haven't received training and don't think they need it
- **59%** of leaders don't provide ongoing AI coaching
- **32%** cite agent distrust as a major challenge



This tension isn't resistance; it's uncertainty. Agents want clarity, transparency, and reassurance.

Confidence Comes from Coaching, Not Coding

Across the industry, AI has often been deployed into broken or incomplete journeys. leading to misinformation, inconsistent responses, or increased citizen frustration. Public sector agents feel the consequences most intensely.

Because agents don't always see where AI supports them behind the scenes, such as routing, forecasting, and knowledge retrieval, their perception is shaped by the most visible failures.

To rebuild trust, public sector organizations should:

- Integrate AI literacy into onboarding and coaching
- Clearly explain how and where AI is used in workflows
- Provide safe, hands-on opportunities to experiment
- Celebrate how AI reduces friction and frees agents to focus on citizens

With the right support, AI becomes an enabler, not a threat.

Strengthening the Frontline: Practical Steps to Support Agents

1 Build Real Break Time Back into the Day

With agent idle time dropping from 14% to just 8%, frontline teams now have far fewer natural pauses between emotionally demanding interactions. Micro-breaks and smarter queue rotation are no longer optional—they're essential for recovery and long-term resilience. Encouragingly, our Voice of the Agent data shows that 78% of agents say they're able to take breaks after difficult calls. That's a positive foundation to build on, and it's vital that public sector organizations protect and strengthen this practice as emotional demand continues to rise.

2 Prioritize Empathy Training That Actually Helps Agents

Agents say empathy is their strongest skill; leaders say it's their weakest. Public sector organizations need practical, scenario-based empathy training that protects emotional boundaries.

3 Deploy AI Thoughtfully to Reduce Cognitive Load, not Increase It

AI should simplify the agent experience, not overwhelm it. Automation of wrap-up, summaries, and admin reduces strain, if introduced clearly and safely.

4 Redesign Customer Journeys to Lower Emotional Intensity

Many emotionally charged calls originate from broken digital experiences. Fixing upstream issues reduces downstream pressure.

5

Strengthen Stress Management and Resilience Support

Agents say stress management and resilience are their weakest skills. Training and mental health support are essential.

6

Improve Communication Between Leadership and Frontline Teams

Agents thrive when they feel heard. Transparency builds engagement and trust.

7

Set Clear Expectations with Citizens

With 58% of agents reporting that customer patience hasn't improved, setting expectations early is essential. When citizens know what to expect, whether it's wait times, required information, or what a digital channel can and can't do, their frustration decreases, and the pressure on agents drops before the interaction even begins. Clear, proactive communication helps prevent escalations and creates smoother, less emotionally charged conversations.

8

Use Data to Identify Empathy Pressure Points

Sentiment and call pattern analytics help shift workloads before emotional overload builds.

9

Create Career Pathways That Reduce Burnout Risk

Recognition and progression turn stressful roles into sustainable careers.

10

Make Agent Experience a Strategic Priority

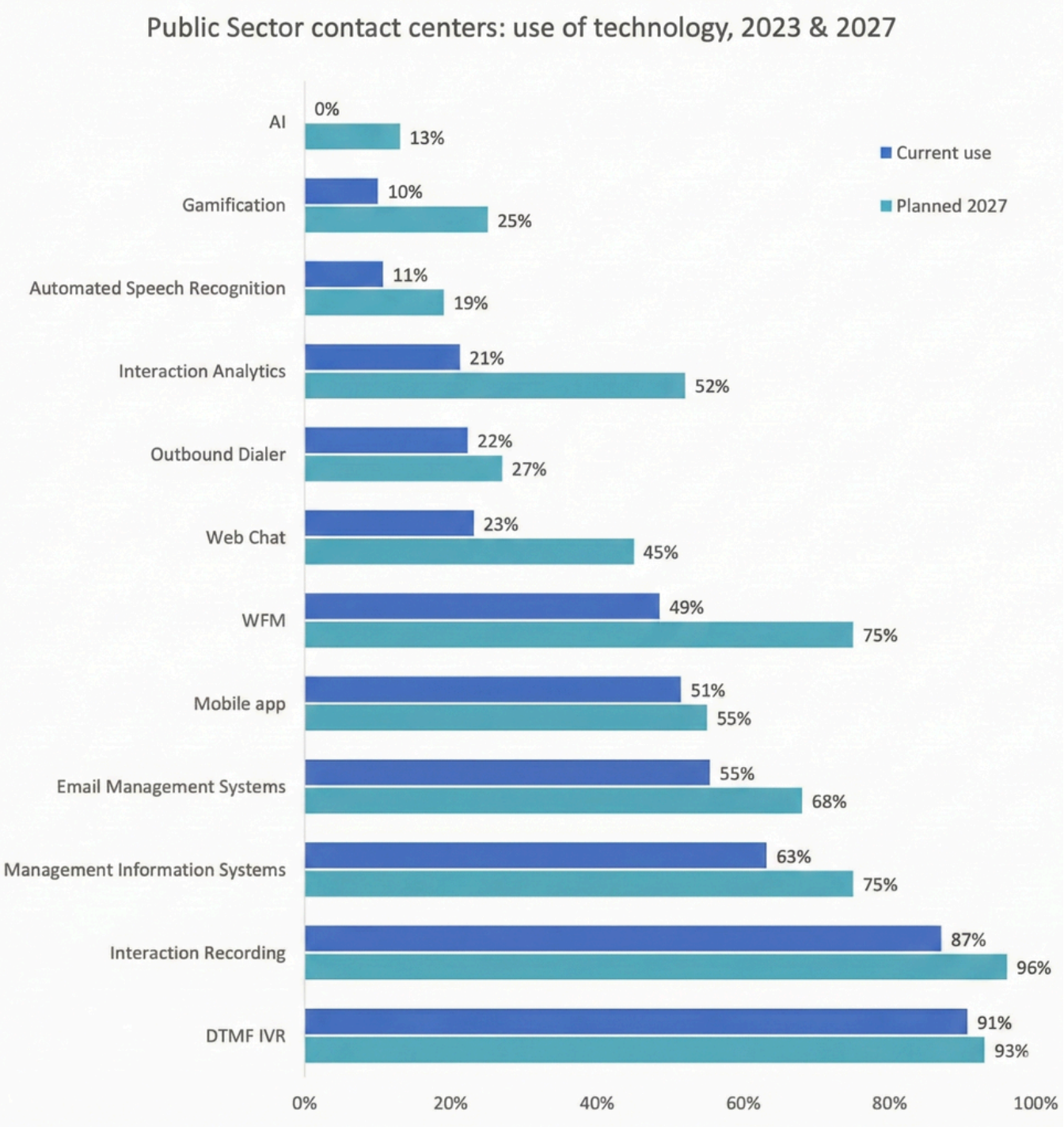
Agent well-being deserves equal weight to citizen experience. Both must rise together.

Investing for the Future: Where Public Sector CX Is Headed

Historically, the public sector has been slow to adopt new technology due to legacy systems, risk aversion, and long procurement cycles. But expectations are shifting.
Over the next four years, public sector organizations anticipate significant investment in:

- Digital channels
- Workforce Management
- Interaction Analytics
- Web chat and messaging
- Advanced forecasting tools
- Gamification
- AI-driven intelligence

These investments reflect a deeper understanding: modern citizen service depends on smarter systems, better insights, and technology that empowers agents, not replaces them.



Where Calabrio Comes In: Turning Secure Intelligence into Better Citizen Experience

Calabrio is the only independent workforce and conversation intelligence vendor offering a FedRAMP® Authorized cloud platform, with additional StateRAMP and TX-RAMP certifications. For U.S. public sector agencies, this isn't just a badge, it's a necessity.

Government contact centers handle some of the most sensitive information citizens will ever share: health records, financial data, identity documents, benefits information, and personal stories tied to emotionally charged life events. Ensuring that this data is stored, processed, and analyzed securely is non-negotiable.

That's why certification matters. FedRAMP®, StateRAMP, and TX-RAMP were designed specifically to protect the public sector from cyber risk, inconsistent vendor security, and the challenges of managing data across multiple systems.

Choosing a FedRAMP® Authorized WEM and conversation intelligence platform means agencies can modernize confidently, knowing every insight, transcript, and interaction is protected to the highest federal standards.
But compliance is only the beginning. The real value comes from what agencies can *do* with that secure data.

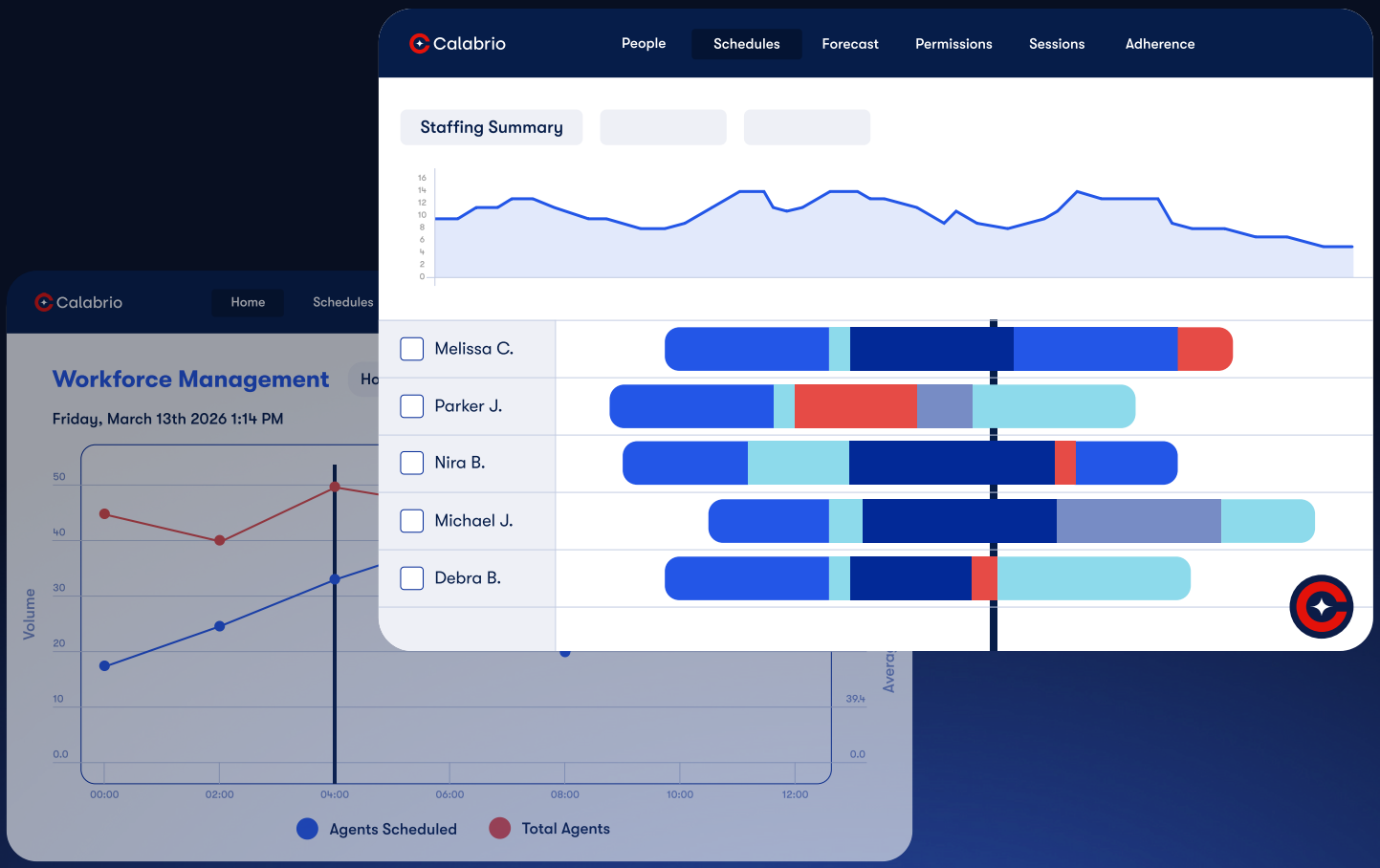
Every day, public sector contact centers generate enormous volumes of information, sentiment signals, emerging issues, recurring call drivers, policy pain points, and breakdowns across digital journeys. Calabrio GovSuite turns these citizen interactions into actionable intelligence, helping agencies discover:

- Why citizens are calling
- Where digital services are failing or causing frustration
- How policy changes affect citizen demand
- Where agents need more support, training, or clarity
- Which moments drive trust — or distrust — in the service

Built specifically for government environments, Calabrio GovSuite helps agencies:

- Improve performance with real-time, data-driven decisions
- Enhance service delivery by identifying and removing citizen friction points
- Optimize operations using accurate forecasts and intelligent workload management
- Increase efficiency through automation and streamlined workflows
- Strengthen compliance and auditability with centralized, secure data
- Build long-term public trust through consistent, high-quality experiences

With advanced WFM, powerful analytics and flexible automation, GovSuite transforms the contact center into a secure intelligence hub - one that not only supports frontline teams, but also informs service design, policy improvements, and agency-wide decision-making. Calabrio doesn't just help agencies operate more efficiently. We help them understand their citizens - securely, intelligently, and at scale - so they can serve them better.



Business Outcomes

Educational Service Provider Boosts QA Evaluations by 67%

Challenges

- Legacy QA processes were manual and unreliable, with agents relying on spreadsheets and outdated reporting tools that frequently crashed and offered limited visibility
- Disconnected processes led to uneven evaluations and little coaching
- A costly upgrade pushed leadership to find a modern, data -driven platform to streamline QA and improve impact

Calabrio Analytics Solution

• The organization replaced manual, outdated tools with Calabrio ONE's unified cloud platform for a more flexible and scalable QA process

• Evaluators could quickly find and review calls, and agents gained real -time performance insights that turned evaluations into growth opportunities

• A new library of high -quality call examples strengthened training and helped build a more collaborative, trust -based QA culture

67%

Boost in QA evaluations

250%

Increase in CSAT

225%

Increase in automation

*To read the full case study, visit: https://www.calabrio.com/case -study/educational -service -provider/

Calculate Your Potential Savings

Modernizing a public sector contact center isn't just about improving citizen experience, it's about strengthening operational resilience, reducing waste, and running services more efficiently.

With Calabrio Gov Suite agencies can dramatically reduce the time and cost tied to manual processes, avoidable call volume, agent burnout, and outdated systems.

That's why we built Calabrio's **Value Calculator**, to give public sector leaders a clear, data-driven view of what they could save by optimizing staffing, streamlining workflows, and improving digital containment. From reduced overtime spend to lower attrition costs and shorter handle times, the calculator helps you quantify exactly where efficiency gains and cost savings will come from.

Whether your target is budget relief, better performance, or long-term modernization, understanding your potential return is the first step.

See what your contact center could save with secure, intelligent workforce engagement.

About Calabrio GovSuite

Calabrio GovSuite empowers public-sector contact centers with secure, actionable intelligence built for modern government service. As a FedRAMP® Moderate Authorized and StateRAMP/GovRAMP certified cloud solution, GovSuite unifies workforce and citizen interaction data to help agencies work smarter, respond faster, and deliver consistent, high-quality service.

Calabrio GovSuite equips government organizations to meet today's operational demands, from supporting hybrid teams to optimizing resources and elevating citizen experiences. With rapid deployment and continuous updates, agencies can confidently future-proof their contact center while maintaining strict security and compliance standards.

Trusted across the public sector, Calabrio GovSuite helps agencies improve performance, enhance service delivery, and build long-term public trust by turning every interaction into a strategic advantage.

Learn more

Calabrio powers people and businesses with actionable intelligence. Our AI-powered, cloud-native Calabrio ONE suite maximizes agent performance, turning every interaction into a strategic advantage. Trusted worldwide, our workforce and conversation intelligence solutions help teams work smarter, respond faster, and connect better to drive measurable business outcomes. Calabrio, Calabrio ONE, and the Calabrio logo are registered trademarks or trademarks of Calabrio, Inc. All other trademarks mentioned in this document are the property of their respective owners. Calabrio operates in Canada under Calabrio Canada, Ltd., based in British Columbia.

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