



## CITY OF SAN ANTONIO



The City of San Antonio (COSA) has reduced operating expenses and increased public safety by using video conferencing for a variety of applications.

### CHALLENGE

As the seventh largest city in the United States, the City of San Antonio (COSA) utilizes more than 40 departments to deliver its city services. In an effort to enhance communications and reduce travel among those City departments, as well with outside entities, COSA began an initiative to upgrade its video conferencing infrastructure.

As Jason Tabor, San Antonio's Telecommunications Manager, recalls, "When I came on board in 2008, the City was still doing a lot of point-to-point video conferencing, which enables calls between different IP addresses. The problem with that was it required a separate connection for each endpoint."

Further, while the City already had a large inventory of TANDBERG devices along with equipment from another vendor, they were still using ISDN for many locations. As Tabor puts it, "The City's use of video was still in the infancy stage. We decided then to use our existing network infrastructure and piggyback off of it. But to bring all the City entities into the infrastructure, we had to ensure each had enough bandwidth. As it happened, there were concurrent projects to increase bandwidth at all the various locations, and it all fell into step."

COSA's Information Technology Services Department (ITSD) had already been working on a project to upgrade all of its data center and remote site network equipment and wiring, and was connecting a majority of its sites through a fiber optic wide-area network. By leveraging these network enhancements, it set up an internal secure video network, allowing virtually anyone who works in a City office to connect to any other City office. But then, says Tabor, "The problem arose of what to do about folks outside the City who wanted to call in — they could be telecommuters or non-City people working with us. To accomplish that, we used a VCS Expressway that allows people to register and create a secure transversal into the City infrastructure. At that point, we realized we had an extremely robust setup, so we started to look at ways to do direct applications."





## SOLUTION

Tabor says COSA chose TANDBERG as its video provider “because it’s a much more elegant solution. It’s much less cumbersome, it’s very simple, and it’s a lot more robust. When we have to deal with other entities, we always have to come up with workarounds. With TANDBERG, the equipment is easy to set up and the infrastructure comes together in a nice, elegant, compact fashion. I refer to it as having a ‘tight, logical architecture.’”

Additionally, the TANDBERG solution integrated nicely with the City’s network equipment. The TANDBERG equipment provided the interoperability necessary to enable calls between the TANDBERG network and the Cisco videophones that the City already had installed. By leveraging these collaborative technologies, ITSD can then work with the City departments and leaders and come up with creative technology solutions.

“The use of non-TANDBERG units are more of an exception than the rule,” remarks Tabor. “We needed something that could fit the ‘rule’ category, and that’s the niche that TANDBERG fits nicely.”

With all the endpoints and infrastructure equipment in place, the City embarked on a series of video applications — “most notably,” says Tabor, “in Municipal Courts, the City Clerk’s office and the San Antonio Police Department.”

“If a deaf or hard-of-hearing victim or perpetrator is interviewed by a detective and needs an interpreter,” explains Tabor, “he or she can connect via TANDBERG to DEAFLINK,” a San Antonio-based provider of remote video interpreting. That eliminates the need to wait hours for an interpreter to arrive.

“Another problem we solved with video conferencing is the need for escorting prisoners from cells to plead their cases before a judge,” adds Tabor. “We can now use video conferencing right there in front of the cells, so there’s no deputy required to escort the prisoner, which provides a huge savings for the City.”

The City of San Antonio is an innovative leader in an e-warrant application that it developed, which is a creative combination of technology applied to the traditional judicial process. In collaboration with the Presiding Judge, John Bull, the Court Clerk, Fred Garcia and the Police Chief, Bill McManus, “we have also instituted an e-warrant program that is pretty slick,” he continues. “Let’s say you’re a detective and it’s 8 P.M. on a Saturday and you need a search warrant for a building. You have to see a judge face-to-face, and be sworn in, to get the warrant. Well, the judge might be out somewhere. It could take 12 hours before you get face time with the judge. By then, you might have lost the window of opportunity to execute the warrant.”

“What we decided to do,” he explains, “is use the TANDBERG Movi technology so detectives can communicate from a laptop in their squad car or anywhere they have Internet access. We gave the judges the same capability, so now they can do real-time warrants. That has been huge.”

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Tabor says judges are also trying cases via video rather than in person. “We have a very large caseload — and it’s critical to address the cases in a timely fashion. So, video conferencing is helping with that as well.”

By adding video courtrooms at satellite offices throughout the City, Tabor remarks, “Folks can go there to talk to a judge via video rather than going downtown to the municipal court. The benefits to the citizens are both immediate and significant in terms of travel and convenience.”

This type of robust technology and its ability to integrate with other City infrastructure and systems, gives ITSD leadership the ability to build collaborative solutions with City businesses to enhance our City services and, ultimately, to be more efficient with our time and money.

## RESULTS

“The benefits of video conferencing,” says Tabor, “are self evident. Feedback from police and judges has been super.” In the case of the e-warrant program, the advantages are significant. By enabling judges to grant warrants immediately, video conferencing helps police to catch potential criminals sooner, thereby improving public safety. Video conferencing also delivers manpower savings, eliminating the need for deputies to escort prisoners to and from the courthouse and wait with them to be seen by a judge.

Additionally, notes Tabor, “Video conferencing is a crucial player in emergency situations. We have an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) that has real-time video conferencing capabilities with outside entities as well as anyone in City offices. So, for example, if there is a hurricane threat, we can activate the EOC to become a remote command post for all City public safety activity.”

Tabor says the City also takes advantage of the ability to record video conferences, “which comes in handy when we do video interviews for City workers. One person can conduct the interview and others can watch it on their own schedule. Or, if our Mayor wants to give a State-of-the-City speech, we can record it and multi-cast it so people can watch it when they have time.”

“We’re also working on a business case for the TANDBERG Field View cameras,” he adds. “By providing these cameras to telecommunications technicians when they go onsite to troubleshoot or install equipment, they can do live streaming back to headquarters if they need help. They can also do a recording at the end of the install to show how they left it, and we can archive the recordings for later reference or training.”

In summary, Tabor comments again on “the tight architecture TANDBERG offers. You can pick your TANDBERG component for whatever particular need arises and then fit it seamlessly within the infrastructure without hassle or worry.”

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