

Vermont Legislative Research Service

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The Use of Slack and Other Communication Platforms in Government

The recent rise in online work has led to a large increase in use of apps and websites that have been created for the workplace. There have been many challenges and questions emerging with this transition and these apps are attempting to ease this burden. This report examines one of these apps called Slack, as well as a few similar apps. We begin by looking into the features of Slack and the security practices of the app. We then look into the use of Slack by other US government agencies as well as international governments. We then examine two similar apps, Microsoft Teams and Google Chat. We conclude with our responses from other state legislatures on the technology they have utilized during the pandemic.

Slack Description

Slack is a messaging platform that utilizes different channels for communication among groups. Slack was created to send and receive and messages as well as upload files and creates a searchable log of all the messages and files that can viewed on public channels at any time.¹

Within the Slack platform there is the ability for users to fore MI86J]Tj efn (r)l.1 (b)2 ()4 (t adMI86J]Tr)rbvve

The New York Times conducted tests of the 19 most popular messaging apps for the workplace and concluded after two months of testing that Slack was the most effective app of this nature.

device used and IP address.¹⁸ Data is automatically backed up nightly to data centers around the globe, with tests every 90 days. Primary Owners can initiate deletion of all of their organization's data, and paid users can customize the length of their data retention.¹⁹

Government Uses

Several government agencies currently use Slack for their internal communications. According to a 2019 *Vice* article, Slack reported that “many local, state and government agencies and legislatures’ use the service.”²⁰ Slack also has a webpage devoted to the potential uses of Slack for government.²¹ Although Slack does not release the names of which agencies use their service without consent, many government agencies have provided publicly accessible information on how and why they use Slack.

The United Kingdom has created a Slack channel open for access by anybody working for the United Kingdom central government, with several subchannels for different topics and departments. The platform allows government employees to “share what they’re working on, ask questions and deepen community knowrydg11 ()J0.ov kr02

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) website
ability to “solve the problem of lost time through
conversation.”²⁶ VA users “direct message each
others, conduct conference calls, and use video.”²⁷

Communications Platforms

Microsoft Office 365 hub. MS Teams works as a
chat, message, schedule meetings, and collaborate
with others comprised of others within their organization.
Users can share files. Through the meeting feature, users are
able to connect with other Teams users.²⁸

An organization's Environment and Climate Change
Department uses Microsoft Office 365, including MS Teams, for all
internal communications groups, with additional channels created as

needed. Teams is a platform that allows for group messaging, file sharing, and
video conferencing for users and is built into the Google interface and
Google also offers a Google Meet feature that offers
video conferencing for up to 250 participants.³² Google Chat or as it was

known as Hangouts, “Slack Technologies – Slack,” United States General
Accounting Office Report, March 14, 2021,
[https://www.gao.gov/products/B-20-104#x:id=647747&product=product&productNameSearch=slack](#).
Last modified March 22, 2021, accessed March 22, 2021,
[https://www.gao.gov/products/B-20-104#x:id=647747&product=product&productNameSearch=slack](#).

Microsoft Support, accessed March 22, 2021,
[https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/topic/migrate-from-office-365-to-microsoft-teams-b98d533f-31e1-4681-b412-474a427a429d](#).

formerly called Hangouts Chat has been approved for use by the US General Service

the United States and abroad, but many American state legislatures still currently rely mainly on email and phone communications. None of the legislatures that we contacted reported that they use Slack, but these bodies have adopted several other platforms for internal communications, including Microsoft Teams and Google Chat. For legislatures looking to transition away from email and towards a more streamlined messaging system, platforms such as Slack, Microsoft Teams, and Google Chat provide options for secure collaboration and communication.

This report was completed on April 7, 2021, by Nola Farrell, Holly Kuhn, and Emily Sheftman under the supervision of VLRS Director, Professor Anthony "Jack" Gierzynski in response to a request from Representative Barbara Rachelson.

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