>> So, when I started working with the Dean where I was the only person, they did not want to work with a person who was not in San Diego and I couldn't move to San Diego for personal reasons and so I was anxious that I would be left out of conversations, which happened a fair amount I would add, but at the same time, needless to say the fact that I worked with them for a year and a half, added value to the team and so I think there was a great lesson for me in terms of how to overcome some of the barriers when you get started with the team that is not ready for remote folks.

>> Hi this is Amin. I was a little worried about being able to read body language through either the screen or if we're on a phone call. That was something that worried me a lot, it is still something that I am trying to learn and I have actually been able to do a better job at it that's one thing. The second thing, which is a little bit more funny, was that I had to clean up my house because I was afraid people would judge me based on if it was clean or what was on the walls so it's a little funny but that was one thing.

>> We are still sorting out the mic out over here. That leads into this next question about how working either remote or working with remote people shifted for those workplace interactions, or, that can be interactions with people or interactions with space too. Even though you are on a screen there is still definitely a physical component.

>> Yeah I think I was, I was primarily concerned with feeling isolated. I also had just moved to Pittsburgh like two months before starting at 18F, my first remote gig. I was really concerned about feeling alone, and so, but I will say that that was very quickly assuaged. 18F has this extremely lively culture on slack. There's a lot of conversation going on, and we have video calls all the time. So working remotely has changed the way that I collaborate with people as to first of all to be like really over communicate all the time. I think we are especially expressive on slack because it is the place that we can express ourselves. There's a lot of emoji reactions, there's a lot of being more explicit than needed to be. That I have found both in terms of expectation setting, positive or negative has been really important. The other thing that I found was initially asking for feedback on work was quite challenging in a remote setting. A lot of work was happening asynchronously. So I might raise my hand to do something and work on some deliverable share it with the rest of the team for feedback. I never got no engagement but it was, you know, relatively measured. I found that for certain kinds of work it was just really hard to carve out time to actively live co-work with someone on a video chat so that we would just very quickly make our work better. There is something about working real time that allows you to go back and forth and accelerate the progress that a certain deliverable is really lagging in an asynchronous feedback setting.

>>One way that we've done it and there are teams that I've worked on that making sure we were in person for studios and things like that. And another way when I was the only remote person on an agile team, everyone was in the agile room, they would put my phone number on the wall so that they would remember to call me when they needed my input. Another way

that we've built up kind of facilitated in person community building is that our team meetings instead of spending all our time on work. Each person building a personal presentation, my co-worker is sitting over there. Our last team meeting and so we can get to know each other as if we were sitting in an office.

>>Yeah I would like to add the value of meeting in person from time to time, so it doesn't need to be an all or nothing situation. I would even argue that for folks that have qualitative space and that have meetings that are mostly in the same geographic area there are a lot of opportunities to allow flexibility for folks who work remotely from time to time but in many cases meeting in person at 18F we typically do that at the beginning of a project and probably around every key milestone and also towards the end of the project. So we do make sure that there are sufficient in-person interactions. Piggybacking on what Julia was talking about earlier, it's definitely important to make everything explicit because you're not going to bump into folks in the hallway, and so a lot of those micro interactions, which is where you actually build trust with your teammates, can be little bit harder, so get in the habit of scheduling virtual coffees, or teas, depending on your beverage of choice, but you have the ability to ping anybody in the team, whether or not you are working together, or you know them and you say hey, can we spend 30 minutes talking about stuff. We also have virtual hangouts for folks who work not in the DC office. Being able to create those opportunities where folks can interact outside of project work I think is really important because otherwise you can pretty easily get focused on just talking about project stuff and work stuff which I think is not entirely productive.

>> I wanted to add that I think even if you don't have access to slack, what Michelle was saying about creating the space for the informal conversations, the conversations that you would have at a water cooler. That has been so important. Our slack has tons of channels about runners, about food, about.

>>Cats.

>>Yeah anything like that. I've found that has actually helped me to feel part of the team.

>>Great. Whitney, I'm curious to hear from you on just kind of building on that. From a partner perspective, you know, are there any differences that you've experienced when maybe only some of the team members are remote?

>>Yeah so my remote experience is very project based and it's only a portion of the work that I do throughout the day. I also go into my office physically every day. So I think some of the things that I've learned from working remote I've been able to apply within my other work life where we are teleworking every once in a while and we are able to like you know rather than save all of your personal notes one day that you plan to telework next week I just like no we can have an appointment or webex meeting or update video chat or something while you were gone. A little less rigidity around our regular telework schedules I've learned

from working with remote teams. I don't know if that answers your
question.

[Laughter]
     And --

>>For co.gov it has actually made it a lot easier for us to recruit folks
that we think will fit with the team and have the experience that they do
-- that we need. We have a front-end developer in Dayton and we have a
backend developer in Raleigh and I think the only reason why we are able
to propel the project forward was because we were able to recruit the
best people and they wanted to be remote so we basically expanded our
pool of candidates whenever we had to bring them on a project team
member. I think that's worked in our benefit for the most part because
not everybody has an affinity to live in DC. Some people, you know, their
significant others or their families are based in another city and they
are perfectly qualified and just the distance and the location was the
limiting factor so it has given us a wider pool.

>> Yeah so we've got, We recently had a position that we posted that our
telework policy is changing at our agency so we weren't able to post the
position as remote. It had to be based in Denver that they could be
remote 4 out of 5 days of the week. And I got so many people responding
to me when I posed it on LinkedIn saying oh it can be remote right? It
said telework eligible. We would have gotten so many good people had it
been able to be remote. I'm not sure what response we would have
gotten. It would have definitely improved our pool of candidates.

>> I don't know if I'm going to add anything valuable that hasn't already
been said but I would like to say that 18F's existence is even predicated
on it being a disputed team. We grew to around 100 folks within the span
of a couple of years and there's no way we could have contracted the
caliber of folks and the volume of folks had it not been a disputed team.
I think it's also important especially for somebody -- a lot of us in
this report from the DC area for the government to be representative of
folks who live in the country and I think this a good opportunity to
have people who are not from DC to be part of this community and I think
that can go a long way changing the perception of the federal government
being a DC thing.

>>I want to build on that a little bit. When you say this is a really
good opportunity for the government to be representative of the people
that we serve, and with that I just want to talk a little bit about how -
- whether at 18F or at other organizations you have created an inclusive
team culture and thinking about diverse teams, what does that look like
in your organization and how does the remote situation play into that?

>>In terms of inclusivity I would say that we definitely have tools that
we use so we can communicate with folks. So instead of meeting in person
if there is an issue or if you have somebody on Google Hangouts, actually
my colleague I can talk to her anytime on Slack, I would just say keeping
the lines of communication open is important and using those tools to
continue to communicate.

>> Yeah I think it is inherently more inclusive in the sense that it allows flexibility for all kind of different factors in somebody's life. Whether it's about how they move around, whether it's family commitments or if you need to be flexible towards their schedule. I think that the tools they use, one thing that I've noticed is that you do have to be careful, you know, that not everybody is comfortable on Slack and wants to be on Slack. Not everybody is comfortable on Google Hangouts. Some people prefer to think first and collect thoughts. It is important to be aware of who is contributing and make space for that by allowing there to be silent time to jot down thoughts. Give people advance notice of what the topics are going to be.

>> Great and then you touched a little bit on different work styles. One question that I have heard people ask around this topic is, you know, what are ways that you might engage team members that maybe seem to be participating less in the remote setting?

>>So when we are on whatever medium we are on I've noticed that, and this is a bit of a, and I'm trying to change my way around this subject, is you immediately see that people have put themselves on mute or maybe their camera is off, if you're using a camera. So we encourage people on our team to not go on mute unless it's like a presentation or if it's like a really really really big meeting. Because when you push the mute button it kind of automatically means that you don't have anything to say or you don't have something to contribute to the team and that's usually not the case so that's one way where we have tried to eliminate or at least encourage people to be a participating member of the team. And I've noticed, I've actually written a couple of articles about this and how when you're like maybe talking in a group setting and you see people on mute you kind of retreat a little bit and you are hesitant to call on somebody, and on the other side you are also hesitant to chime in if you are automatically on mute just to begin with. That is one way that we have tried to encourage people to be participants in a small group setting at least.

>>That's really interesting because I was, when we are on a lot of calls most people are on mute unless they are speaking. We have a moderator. When we have is really bad happened in our office or we are always on mute so we are also usually all in the same room so we end up having these side conversations. When everybody is remote and you have to wait an extra beat for everybody to unmute and make sure they are not speaking over someone else. It takes some getting used to. We have experienced that.

>> We have a really bad habit in our office where we are always on mute. But we are also usually all in chat. So we end up having these, you know, side conversations that are pertinent to the call. You know we are trying to like make sure we are on the same page in real time. Instead of contributing we totally miss something. I try to not be on mute. When we are not having side conversations we are not missing anything.

>> Just leaving a space for folks to contribute asynchronously. So let's say if you are in a meeting, say if you have any ideas after this, or if you think of something later on, you can use this space to contribute.

For folks who are not contributing right then and there, having that space open I think is helpful.

>> What Whitney just mentioned is, reminded me that when my team is also or the team's that I've been on, have also been in a conference room, where there's a bunch of people in the room and there's a microphone in the middle, that what ends up happening is they start talking to the microphone instead of to the people around the room, so there's this weird eye contact with the microphone as opposed to with your team members. But I've also been in conference rooms where that microphone is hidden and that like really encourages people to look at one another. So that's an interesting tidbit.

>>Great. I am going to get this down to you Michelle. I just want to let the room know that we are going to open the floor to questions, if you have any, so after Michelle speaks I will let you all know and we have time for a couple of questions.

>> One of the things that GSA does have an office. One of the things that we have done successfully is that our meetings are now fully distributed. Even if there are a bunch of folks in the DC office, rather than us congregating in the room, we all just attend the meetings on the phone. It creates a more equal environment for everybody on the call.

>> Great. Thank you. So I would love to open the floor if people in the room have questions. The way this will work is you can say your question then I will repeat it for our remote friends on the Internet so yes?

>> Yeah ok. So the question is when you are the direct supervisor of someone how do you handle the things that you need to do to maintain that relationship especially one on ones or difficult conversations?

>> I think a lot of the principles that apply to management when you are in the same location also apply to more teams and in a way I think one-on-one conversations are a lot easier to bridge than the group conversations. So the one thing that I do on a bunch of different projects. I make sure that I talk with them on a regular basis and we also have other clear feedback mechanisms and we have a culture of like open communication which again I think ensures that it's not just the management but also the team is connected at a peer level. One of the things that is unrelated but. So yeah.

>> Great. And I am supposed to be a neutral moderator but the one thing that I will add is that there's definitely an equalizer moment when you're both you're not going to your bosses fancy office to have that conversation with them. If you are both in your home office or in your kitchens it makes it so that the power dynamic is a little bit more equal which is something I hadn't thought about before I started having these conversations with my colleagues at 18F. I think we have time for one more audience question if there is another audience question. Yeah?

>> So the question is what kind of tools are useful for remote collaboration? This one comes with the caveat because we are government

employees so we are not explicitly endorsing any specific products at this moment but we definitely use tools to collaborate as remote teams.

>> Whiteboarding, Google Hangouts for Video Conferencing. Slack for project communication.

>> Trello as well.

>> Google docs, Google sheets, Google Slides.

>> Yeah so we work in a place where we are not allowed to use Google. And so it's been really hard to collaborate on some projects with 18F without using my personal device. We have to use things like SharePoint and WebEx and things that I'm not as big of a fan of. I'm sure it is hard working with partners who don't have all the tools.

>> I think, and again neutral moderator adding things again, but when it comes to partners another thing that I have seen some of my teams do is really trying to use the tools that are available to our partners. So even though we have access to all of this fancy stuff, we are working with you and we want to collaborate with you in your space and that is the most sustainable for the work that we are going to do together in the long run anyway. Um, so while we have the opportunity to show you our cool tools, we definitely try to meet our partner agencies where they are.

>> 16 years ago when I started working remotely we were using call in numbers and then like we were all opening the same document at the same time and saying what page number we were on and like using headings and things so it can be done without a lot of fancy tools.

>> I would like to add that tooling matters though. The fact that we have all of these tools does make a meaningful difference. In terms of being able to do this effectively. And I believe that at least in the tools that exist in the private sector, you probably hit a critical mass to be able to do this at scale. Needless to say like most government agencies aren't there yet. But we are pretty fortunate that GSA is usually on the cutting edge in the government. Enables us to use Slack and Google Docs. I can't think of ways in which we would be as effective if we did not have these tools.

>> We have a couple of minutes for one more related question.

>> Yes. Because of time I'm going to say we will do a couple of quick answers to this and then please find us afterwards. We are going to be around. The question is deeper than this but again for time's sake I'm going to do it high-level. What are some of the norms that are inherent and important in working across teams regardless of the tools that you are using to make sure that you are working in the best ways together across the team?

>> I can talk to this a little bit. At our agency we are starting things with a virtual mindset because we have offices throughout the country. It's not just the people who are remote who need to use these tools. So

we have kind of been putting together a toolbox with all of the tools we have available in our agency that people can use. And a mindset that things about collaborating like using video chats and using, like setting up expectations with your teammates, like there is a checklist with it, so it is kind of putting a little bit of structure to it. It's for people who are working even if they are in office putting them into the mindset and making sure meeting rooms are set up right and things like that.

>> I'm not sure if this will answer the question but since we are on a development team we use scrum as like a method so we have like daily standups that we do and a particular tool we have like retro things we do with a particular tool, so by utilizing these already existing structures, or not technically structures, but like meeting methods, or collaboration methods, through our tools, we set the norm that way.

>> Having to use tools forces you to have certain norms that are, or conversations about the norms, that you might not have if you didn't have to use that tool. So it is valuable for any team to talk at the beginning of the project about how are we going to communicate? What is our expectation about how quickly we'll get back to one another? You know, are we going to comment on each other's documents or are we going to have a conversation about it? Like all of those conversations making very explicit what expectations are on both sides, whether the partner and ourselves or within a team. It is to some extent facilitative having these tools. You have the conversation on the side, are we going to use Github to track this or Trello to track this? Ok we are going to use Trello. If we are using Trello, how are we going to define when something is . In coming up with, you know, ways that we formulate an issue that we put in Github. Like we are always going to have a problem statement, we are always going to have checkboxes. So I think in some ways those tools are going to make it easier to have those conversations about norms.

>> Yeah so, find us, even if you didn't, if you have a question you didn't ask, we want to thank everyone for coming and joining both online and in the room today and I think all of my panelists for coming out and joining in this conversation. And yeah, thank you.