

Telework Survey Analysis and Report

Narrative

AFGE Local 17 Union's Response to the Proposed Plan for Return to Office

To Whom It May Concern,

In response to Secretary Denis McDonough's proposal to reintroduce VA employees to in-office work, the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Local 17, acting as a steadfast advocate for VA's bargaining unit employees, undertook a comprehensive survey to gauge sentiments and preferences about telework and in-office attendance. This survey was aimed at understanding the perspectives of employees from various VA departments on the potential shifts in their work environment. The findings, detailed in the ensuing report, provide a deep dive into the collective voice of VA's workforce, shedding light on their concerns, preferences, and insights into the proposed changes. As we navigate through the results, it becomes evident how crucial telework is to the well-being, productivity, and satisfaction of our dedicated VA employees.

1. Where do you work?

The diverse representation of respondents ensures a comprehensive understanding of the needs of VA employees across various departments. Most notably, 44.05% of respondents are from VACO, followed by VBA at 17.47%, and Board/BVA Administrative Professional at 14.68%. This broad spectrum of feedback is crucial for making informed decisions that cater to the diverse VA workforce.

2. Secretary McDonough's 50% Office Attendance Plan

An overwhelming 90.38% (combining strongly disagree and disagree) voiced their disagreement with Secretary McDonough's plan of mandating a 50% in-office attendance. This dominant sentiment underscores a profound disconnect between the proposed plan and the preferences of the VA's workforce. The data suggests that any move to implement such a plan may face significant resistance.

3. Coming to the Office No More Than 2 Days per Week

When asked about the possibility of being in the office for a maximum of 2 days per week, 64.81% (combining strongly disagree and disagree) expressed their opposition. This sentiment further reinforces the workforce's inclination towards maximizing telework options, viewing it not just as a temporary measure but as a long-term preference.

4. Office Attendance 3 Days per Pay Period with One Specified Day for Team Collaboration

Even when offered a seemingly more flexible schedule, 69.37% still rejected the idea of attending the office for 3 days per pay period. This response suggests that the workforce values consistent telework schedules over sporadic in-office days, even if it's for collaboration.

5. Voluntarily Coming to the Office More Often

When presented with the notion of voluntarily coming to the office more than required, 81.27% (combining **very unlikely** and **unlikely**) indicated their reluctance. This overwhelming response serves as a testament to how deeply embedded telework has become in the employees' work routines and how they perceive its benefits.

6. Ideal Telework Days

The preference for telework is evident, with 85.26% (combining **5 days** and **4 days**) expressing their desire to telework for the majority of the workweek. This data signifies that employees don't view telework merely as a perk but as an integral component of their optimal work environment.

7. Communication and Collaboration During Telework

In a powerful endorsement of teleworking's effectiveness, 96.70% (combining **strongly agree** and **agree**) confirmed their ability to communicate and collaborate effectively while working remotely. This counters any potential arguments that telework might hinder effective team interactions.

8. Productivity During Telework

A resounding 95.95% (combining **strongly agree** and **agree**) of the respondents believe they are more productive when working from home. This feedback suggests that telework isn't just a matter of convenience, but it actively contributes to enhanced work output.

9. Retirement Eligibility and Office Attendance

The majority, 80.25%, are not currently eligible for retirement. This stat highlights the need to consider telework policies, keeping in mind the long-term implications on a workforce that predominantly consists of individuals who will be serving the VA for years to come.

10. Impact of Office Attendance on Retirement Decisions

Among those eligible to retire, a significant 67.10% (combining **very likely** and **likely**) would consider early retirement if their telework privileges were reduced. This feedback points to a potential exodus of experienced staff, which could be detrimental to the VA's operational capabilities.

11. Consideration to Leave VA due to Increased Office Attendance

An alarming 65.29% (combining **very likely** and **likely**) of those not eligible to retire indicated they might consider leaving the VA if forced to curtail their telework. Such a move would not only lead to a potential talent drain but might also affect the morale of the remaining staff.

12. Additional Feedback:

The additional comments section of the survey was replete with sentiments echoing the quantitative findings. Employees frequently cited the benefits of remote work in terms of work-life balance, reduced commute time, and associated cost savings. Calls for allowing employees to choose their preferred mode of work based on individual needs and circumstances were also prevalent. The open-ended responses in the survey highlight some of the key hardships employees anticipate with a return to the office. These range from concerns over longer commutes and associated health risks to challenges in managing childcare and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Many employees also expressed a strong preference for remote work, valuing the flexibility it offers.

Here is some analysis of some of the frequently used keywords from the responses to the open ended questions:

Analysis of Frequently Used Keywords:

1. HOME (262 uses):

- The frequent mention of "HOME" likely underscores the comfort, convenience, and safety employees associate with working from home. It's evident that the home environment has become an essential workspace for many VA employees, enabling them to maintain work-life balance and potentially enhance productivity.

2. TIME (251 uses):

- The repeated use of the word "TIME" may indicate concerns related to time management, including the time saved from commuting, increased flexibility, and better utilization of working hours. This suggests that telework has allowed employees to reclaim valuable time, which might otherwise be spent on daily commutes or other in-office routines.

3. COMMUTE (165 uses):

- The prominence of "COMMUTE" highlights the significance of daily travel to and from the office. Employees might be emphasizing the challenges, costs, and fatigue associated with commuting, especially in metropolitan areas. The desire to reduce or eliminate commuting altogether might be a driving factor in the preference for telework.

4. COVID (92 uses):

- The mention of "COVID" is not surprising given the global pandemic context. Employees are likely referencing health concerns, safety protocols, and the changes brought about by the pandemic. The preference for telework might be reinforced by apprehensions about exposure to COVID-19, especially in shared office spaces or public transportation.

5. COST (80 uses):

- The keyword "COST" suggests that employees are cognizant of the financial implications of daily commuting, office attire, meals, and other related expenses. Telework might be perceived not just as a convenience but also as a cost-saving measure. This keyword emphasizes the economic benefits employees experience when working from home.

In light of these findings, AFGE Local 17 urges the Department of Veterans Affairs to consider the overwhelming sentiments of its employees. As we approach negotiations, we emphasize the importance of crafting a return-to-office plan that respects the preferences, concerns, and well-being of VA employees. Our workforce has demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and unwavering commitment, especially during these challenging times. It is imperative that their voices be heard and their perspectives be at the forefront of any decisions made regarding a return to the office.

We remain committed to constructive dialogue and collaboration and hope that the VA will consider this feedback as a testament to the collective sentiments of its dedicated employees.

Sincerely,

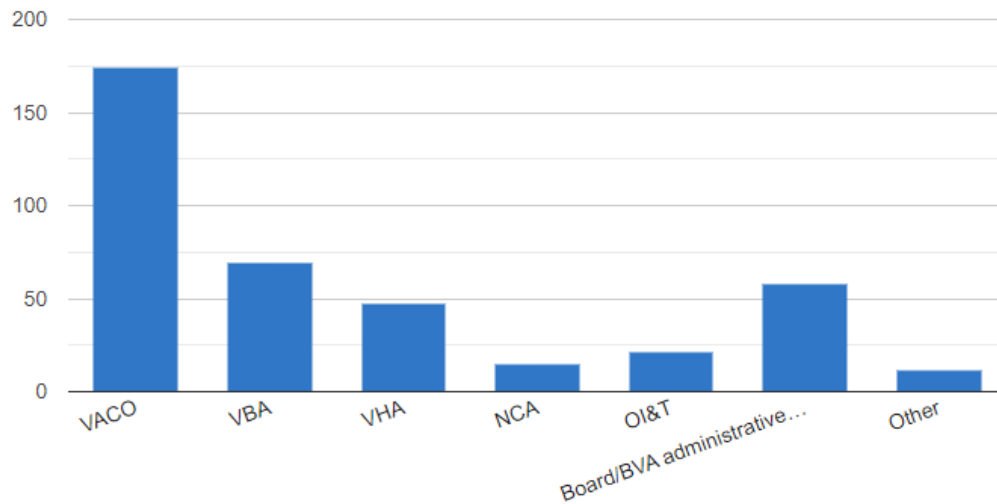
AFGE Local 17 Representative

Detailed Analysis

1. Where do you work?

- **VACO:** 174 (44.05%)
- **VBA:** 69 (17.47%)
- **Board/BVA Administrative Professional:** 58 (14.68%)
- **VHA:** 47 (11.90%)
- **OI&T:** 21 (5.32%)
- **NCA:** 15 (3.80%)
- **Other:** 11 (2.78%)

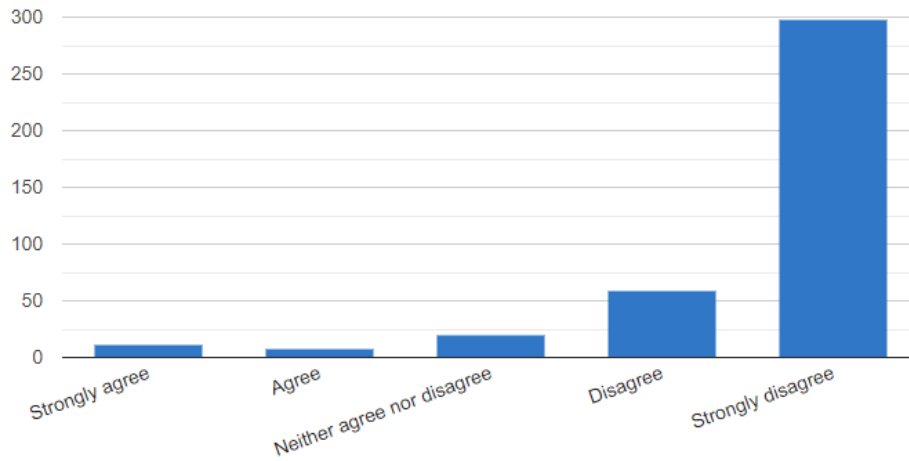
Where do you work?



2. Secretary McDonough's plan of bringing employees back to the office 50% (2 days one week and 3 days the other week during a pay period) is fine with me.

- **Strongly Disagree:** 298 (75.44%)
- **Disagree:** 59 (14.94%)
- **Neither Agree nor Disagree:** 20 (5.06%)
- **Strongly Agree:** 11 (2.78%)
- **Agree:** 7 (1.77%)

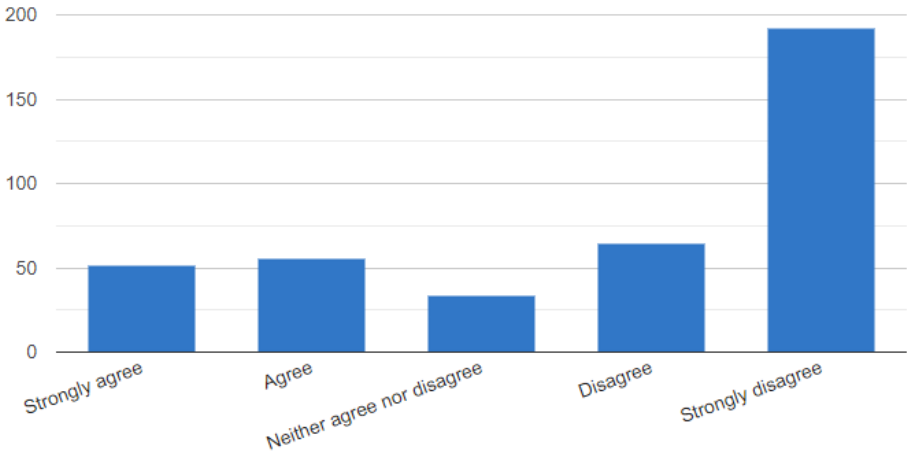
Secretary McDonough's plan of bringing employees back to the office 50% (2 days one week and 3 days the other week during a pay period) is fine with me.



3. I would be okay coming to the office no more than 2 days per week, which represents a slight decrease from 50% to 40% in-office days.

- **Strongly Disagree:** 192 (48.61%)
- **Disagree:** 64 (16.20%)
- **Agree:** 55 (13.92%)
- **Strongly Agree:** 51 (12.91%)
- **Neither Agree nor Disagree:** 33 (8.35%)

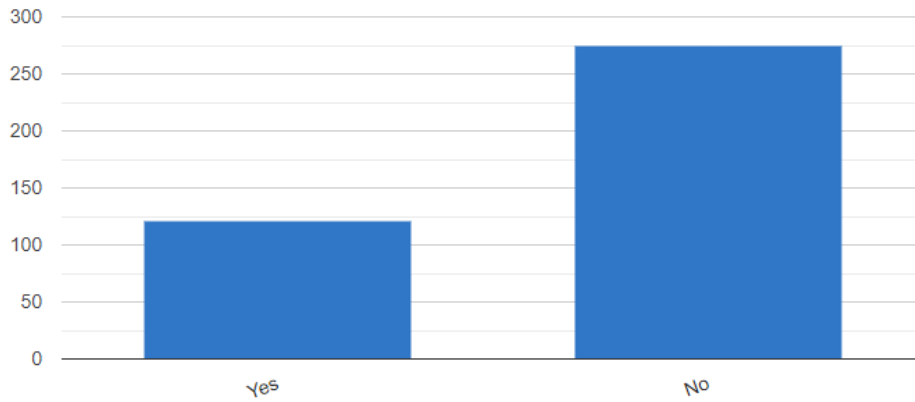
I would be okay coming to the office no more than 2 days per week, which represents a slight decrease from 50% to 40% in-office days.



4. I would be okay coming to the office 3 days per pay period – 2 days one week, 1 day the other week – but with one required in-office day (e.g. Wednesday) for my entire group/team to collaborate.

- **No:** 274 (69.37%)
- **Yes:** 121 (30.63%)

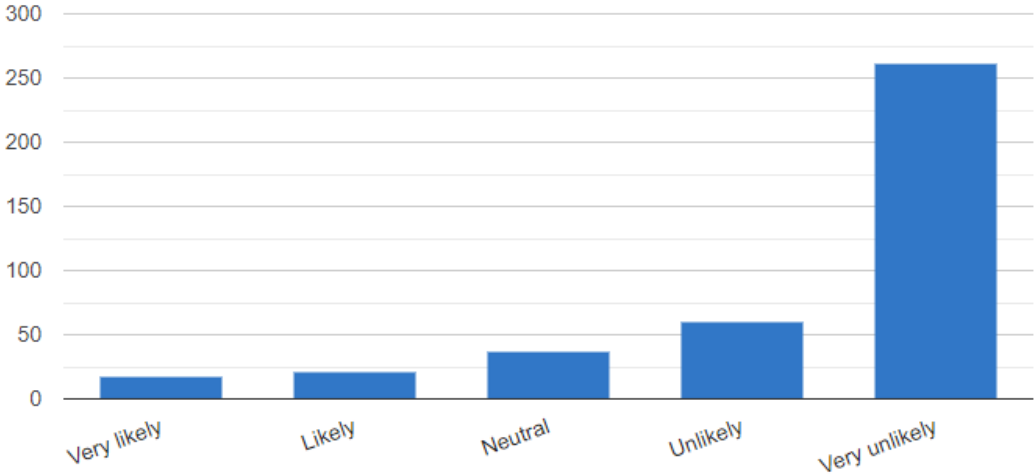
I would be okay coming to the office 3 days per pay period – 2 days one week, 1 day the other week – but with one required in-office day (e.g. Wednesday) for my entire group/team to collaborate.



5. If required to come to the office 2 days per week, I would voluntarily come in more frequently.

- **Very Unlikely:** 261 (66.08%)
- **Unlikely:** 60 (15.19%)
- **Neutral:** 36 (9.11%)
- **Likely:** 21 (5.32%)
- **Very Likely:** 17 (4.30%)

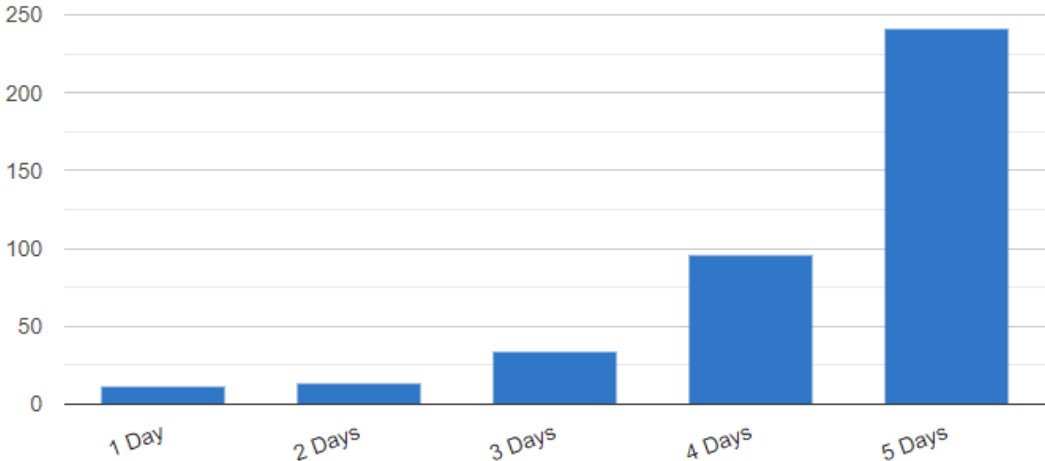
If required to come to the office 2 days per week, I would voluntarily come in more frequently.



6. How many days per week would you ideally like to work from home?

- **5 Days:** 241 (60.96%)
- **4 Days:** 96 (24.30%)
- **3 Days:** 34 (8.61%)
- **2 Days:** 13 (3.29%)
- **1 Day:** 11 (2.78%)

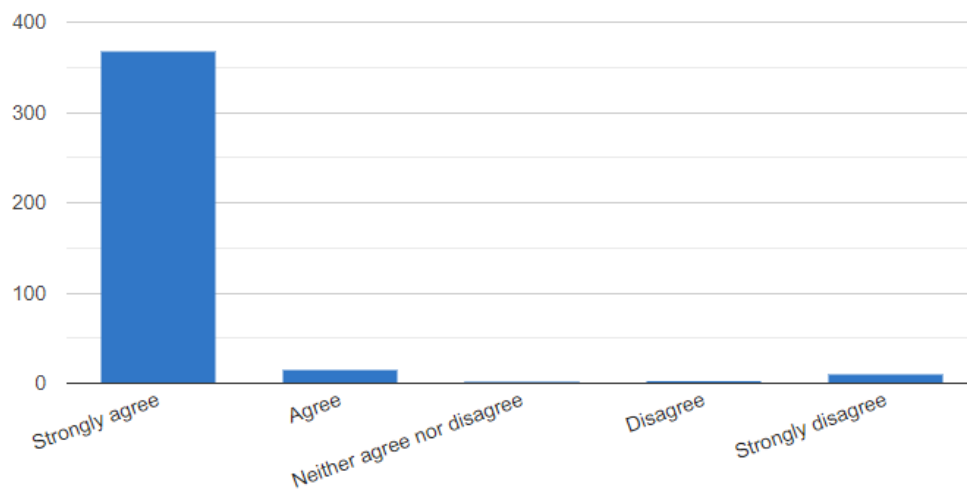
How many days per week would you ideally like to work from home?



7. I've been able to sufficiently communicate and collaborate with my team members while working from home.

- **Strongly Agree:** 368 (93.16%)
- **Agree:** 14 (3.54%)
- **Strongly Disagree:** 10 (2.53%)
- **Disagree:** 2 (0.51%)
- **Neither Agree nor Disagree:** 1 (0.25%)

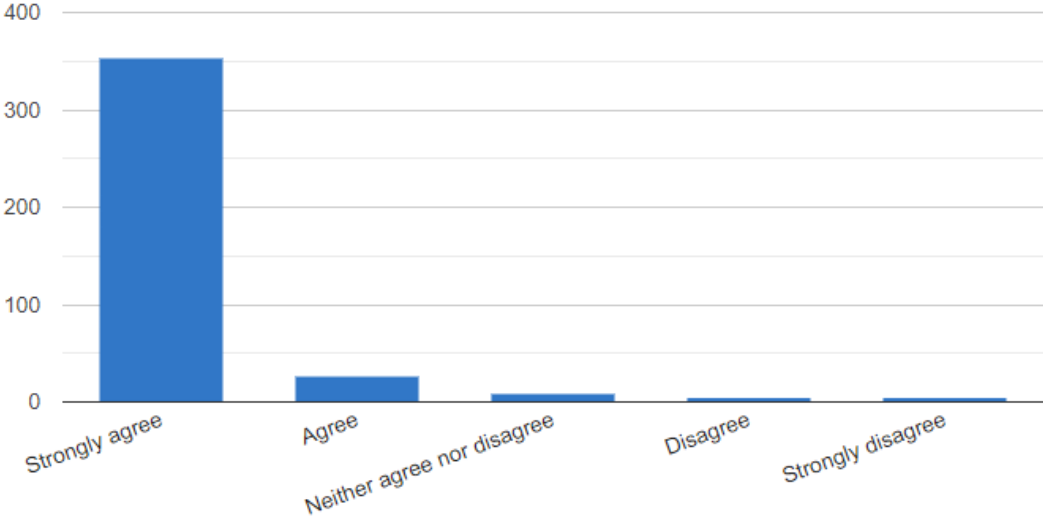
I've been able to sufficiently communicate and collaborate with my team members while working from home.



8. I'm generally more productive working from home.

- **Strongly Agree:** 353 (89.37%)
- **Agree:** 26 (6.58%)
- **Neither Agree nor Disagree:** 8 (2.03%)
- **Disagree:** 4 (1.01%)
- **Strongly Disagree:** 4 (1.01%)

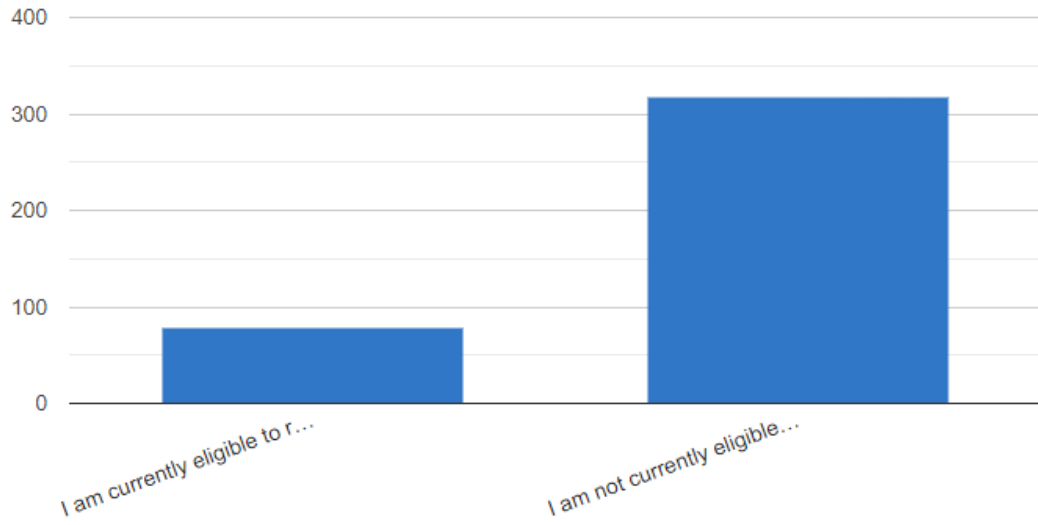
I'm generally more productive working from home.



9. Are you currently eligible to retire?

- I am not currently eligible to retire: 317 (80.25%)
- I am currently eligible to retire: 78 (19.75%)

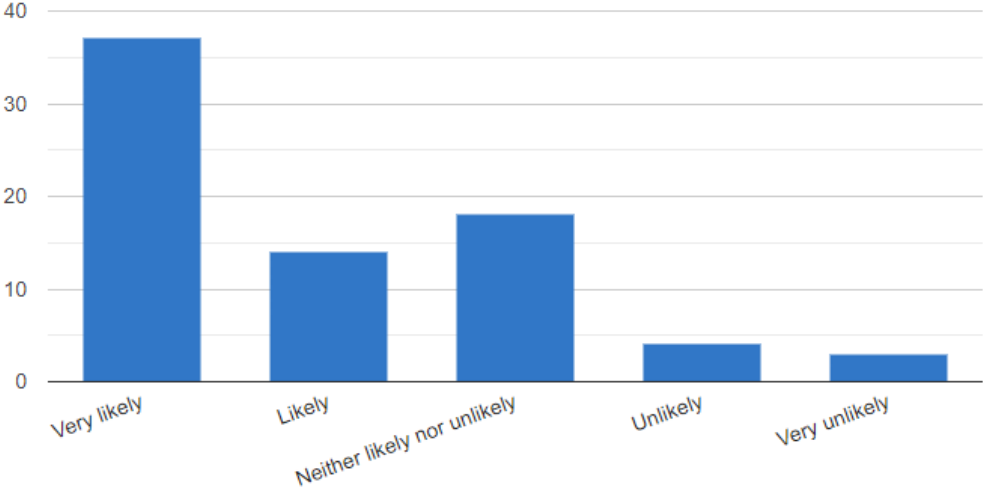
Are you currently eligible to retire?



10. I am eligible to retire and would seriously consider retiring if required to come to the office more frequently.

- **Very Likely:** 37 (48.68%)
- **Neither Likely nor Unlikely:** 18 (23.68%)
- **Likely:** 14 (18.42%)
- **Unlikely:** 4 (5.26%)
- **Very Unlikely:** 3 (3.95%)

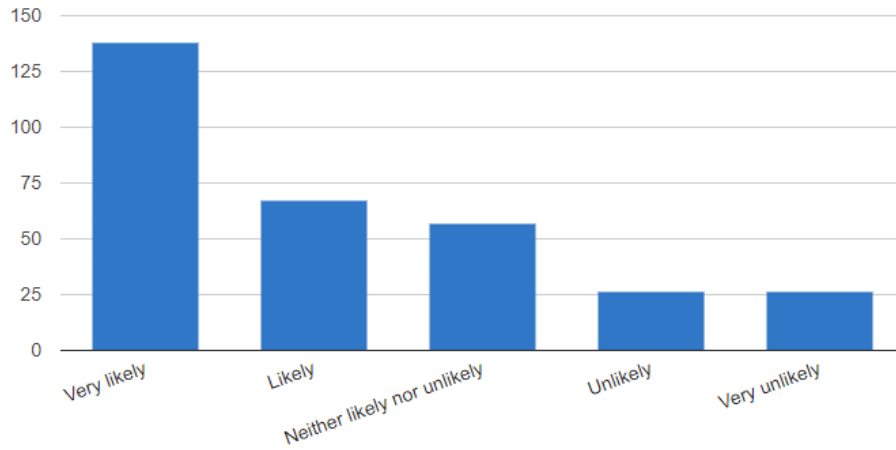
I am eligible to retire and would seriously consider retiring if required to come to the office more frequently.



11. I am not eligible to retire but would seriously consider leaving the VA if required to come to the office more frequently.

- **Very Likely:** 138 (43.95%)
- **Likely:** 67 (21.34%)
- **Neither Likely nor Unlikely:** 57 (18.15%)
- **Very Unlikely:** 26 (8.28%)
- **Unlikely:** 26 (8.28%)

I am not eligible to retire but would seriously consider leaving the VA if required to come to the office more frequently.



Open Ended Response Keywords

