The Challenge
In 2010, a large southern state’s Department of Labor was struggling with a skyrocketing unemployment rate, much like the rest of the country. More and more people were applying for unemployment benefits, but resources weren’t available to keep pace with the rising demand. As the number of applications increased, incoming call volume also increased. Space, equipment, and staff were all at a premium. As volumes rose, the Department’s call center operation was overwhelmed. An estimated one-third of calls were answered successfully, but another third went to voice mail, and the final third were simply abandoned by callers, frustrated with the long wait times.

One of the most pressing issues was that the same phone system served the call center and the Department’s administrative offices. The huge volume of incoming calls meant that employees throughout the Department, regardless of their level or function, had trouble receiving incoming calls reliably, in addition to suffering voice mail and outgoing call issues. Stress on the performance of the internal phone system was impacting the Department’s ability to do other work and provide much-needed services to their constituents.

Knowing something had to change -- and fast -- the Department established their desired scope of work and conducted an open procurement. Xerox won the contract, and began customer care operations in August 2011.

The Solution
While the Department sought help with their call challenges, they weren’t interested in handing over all calls to an untested partner who might use offshore resources or otherwise compromise the standard of service the Department wanted to provide. Xerox was not only a trusted partner who had provided similar services to a number of fellow government clients, but we also brought an innovative solution to the partnership. Our solution: instead of incurring the costs and challenges of standing up a brand-new call center in a single location, we proposed and delivered a virtual work-at-home call center operation. This solution kept jobs in-state which was in line with the Department’s mission, and offered a number of other benefits. Employing at-home agents offers enhanced retention, complies with green initiatives, and offers access to a much larger and higher quality employee base than hiring in one specific location. Xerox had the knowledge and ability to make an at-home operation work, with more than 1000 at-home agents employed throughout the company fielding calls for government and commercial clients of all sizes and types.

Initially, Xerox handled routine Level 1 calls, with the State retaining more complex Level 2 calls. Regardless of call type, callers benefitted from the new operation -- Xerox implemented an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) unit that took the burden off the state’s overwhelmed phone system and routed calls where they needed to go. Because our Customer Service Representatives have direct access to the state system, the process is seamless to callers, regardless of whether the representative is a Department or Xerox employee and whether he or she is working from an office or in his or her home.

The Results
Wait times are down, caller satisfaction is up, and phone system issues are a thing of the past. In fact, Xerox delivered such strong results in the first six months that all calls, both Level 1 and Level 2, are now routed to our at-home representatives. We also hired former state employees to ensure that institutional knowledge wasn’t lost. In addition, during periods of especially high demand, when desired by the Department, Xerox can route calls to large call centers to meet surge volumes without missing a beat.