



# HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS



## Video Communications Deliver Cost Savings and Increased Security for Harris County



Harris County uses TANDBERG for applications ranging from distance learning and employee meetings to video arraignment for felony dockets.

### CHALLENGE

With 3.4 million residents covering almost 1,800 square miles, Harris County, Texas is the third most populated county in the nation. The 16,000 employees who work for the county are spread across 225 buildings — making it difficult to share information in a timely manner. In 2004, the county decided to implement video technology, looking for a solution that would enable distance learning and allow the county to easily disseminate information to all its employees on an as-needed basis.

With this criteria in mind, Harris County CIO Steven Jennings and his staff evaluated several solutions before selecting TANDBERG. As Jennings recalls, “Distance learning was the primary application we wanted to implement, along with support for our annual employee conference and the ability to disseminate information either during a live presentation or after the fact from a video library; TANDBERG best supported those applications.”

“There were two things we really liked about TANDBERG,” adds John Meadows, Harris County’s Manager of Telecommunications Technical Services; “First of all, it is simple to use; and secondly, the support they offer is awesome.”

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## SOLUTION

Once the TANDBERG solution was in place, Harris County realized that it offered functionality beyond distance learning and employee meetings — specifically, video arraignment for the thousands of detainees that are processed each year in the county.

“The applicability of the storage capacity on the TANDBERG product literally made it a good solution for video arraignment,” remarks Jennings, “because we have to identify, index, and store the actual arraignment processes.”

“We have 13 dockets daily, with all sorts of hearings covered in those dockets,” he continues; “everything from capital murder to high-profile crimes to extraditions. We process 187,000 inmates annually. With video arraignment, we don’t have to transport detainees from inmate processing centers all over the county. Before, we would have to physically move them from their housing facilities to be in front of a judge; now we bring video to the housing facility and allow the judge to interact without movement of the prisoners.”

“Moving prisoners takes a lot of time and manpower,” says Jennings. “There’s a staging procedure; a security procedure; a movement procedure; a re-staging procedure when you get to the courtroom; and the time that they all have to be there until all the arraignments are done. Then there’s the re-movement back to the housing facility, which is another major effort.”

“With video, it’s all much more secure,” Jennings declares. “We’re not taking a group of individuals with the potential for violence and moving them into a non-secure environment, which is the courtroom. We can keep them in a secure environment and still have the process work.”

Meadows concurs, noting that “The process is much faster and much safer. We even have a pre-recorded video advising the detainees of their rights before the magistrate comes in, which saves time for the magistrate while ensuring that all the detainees’ rights are covered.”

Because the proceedings are public, they must be open to anyone who wants to view them. TANDBERG equipment enables family members and others to view the proceedings without being in the detention facility or the courtroom, negating the need for a bailiff to be present.

Video also streamlines paperwork, enabling Harris County to keep a video record and thus comply with federal mandates to store misdemeanor dockets for 90 days and felony dockets for 120 days.





## RESULTS

One of the keys to the success of video arraignment for Harris County, says Meadows, is that “TANDBERG equipment is easy to use. It has to be, because there are six different magistrates sharing a bench, so they all have to be able to quickly understand how to use it.”

Chris Robin, Communications Operations Manager for Harris County, agrees: “The biggest advantage of TANDBERG is user friendliness, from the judges’ perspective as well as the bailiffs’ perspective. It provides, literally, one-button activation for the judge to begin the proceedings and record the docket.”

“The ability to record proceedings is valuable,” remarks Robin. “Frequently a judge or attorney will request the video record to clarify whether or not the detainee admitted to the crime, whether a public defender was requested or what exactly was said during the arraignment.”

“Video arraignment is a unique application,” says Jennings, “but it’s just one of many applications that are really very important. Distance learning is a key application for us — its saves us a tremendous amount of money every year by making training available to all our employees across 18,000 square miles.”

“The ability to make education available; to make announcements available; to get employees to interact with other areas in the county is absolutely critical to us and video offers a very cost-effective means to do that,” he remarks.

Cost-effective and reliable, according to Meadows, who notes that “We have not had a TANDBERG failure since the inception 3 years ago. If the equipment were to fail, the judge and the district attorney would have to pick up all their paperwork and go to the detention center to hold the arraignment. Because of TANDBERG, that has never had to happen — that says a lot for the equipment.”

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Contact TANDBERG today to learn how our solutions can support your business processes.

Email us at [tandberg@tandberg.com](mailto:tandberg@tandberg.com).