Responding quickly to a
public health emergency

The need for speed in providing government services

Courtney
Hawkins

Salesforce

Prior to joining Salesforce in 2021, I was the director for Rhode Island's Department of Human Services and was part of the leadership team that managed the COVID-19 response. During the pandemic, the state's leaders knew that if we could leverage technology, we could keep people healthy and hopefully save lives.

We understood we had to move quickly to mitigate the health risks. In doing so, we constantly asked ourselves if technology could help us improve the quality of our service delivery and help us be more efficient and effective. More often than not, the answer was yes.

Pivoting quickly to deliver services in a crisis

To deliver services quickly in a pandemic, agencies should keep these key considerations top of mind. They can begin by assessing and understanding the governance and delivery structure around the type of implementation they're trying to make and understand that rapid deployment cannot happen without having the right technical infrastructure in place.

Agencies could leverage cloud-based, low- or no-code platforms rather than building something new. Cloud-based technology is scalable and can be configured for multiple use cases, making it easier to deliver services quickly while meeting the needs of a rapidly changing environment. It's also important that agencies understand that customers want to be engaged in different ways and leverage technologies that provide omni-channel engagement. Our Customer 360 for Government enables agencies to transform their service delivery and scale to meet customer needs.

Lastly, agencies should value incremental progress. They should not deploy inefficient and bug-filled products that won't meet the needs of customers, but they can find the right balance of deploying a minimum viable product that will be built upon and improved over time.

A foundation for public health responses going forward

The lessons we learned about responding to the pandemic are applicable to many other disease surveillance and public health challenges. Instead of breaking apart the technological structures and tools many states spent two years building, we should ask ourselves: How might we work differently in the future, and how can we build on these new technological advancements? How can we break down silos across public health institutions and leverage data to gain insights, predict and understand future crises, and prepare differently?

We have the opportunity to transform public health moving forward and cannot return to pre-pandemic methods of doing things. With cloud-based technologies in place, public health agencies can deploy services faster and more efficiently to meet the needs of the public. ■

Courtney Hawkins is health and human services industry executive in Salesforce's Global Public Sector. Learn more about Rhode Island's contact tracing system at *sfdc.co/customersuccess-RhodeIsland.*