Private-Public Digital Guidebook Helped Rhode Island Manage Reopening

The collaboration with Salesforce led to Work.com, a digital toolkit to help governments and organizations reopen.

Melissa Harris
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A digital platform intended to guide government and businesses through tailored reopening processes allowed the state of Rhode Island to quickly set up future reopening protocols in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.
As Rhode Island began facing the initial crisis in March, Gov. Gina Raimondo said she recognized that responding quickly and ahead of the virus’ spread was critically important to the public health of the state. Recognizing that technology and innovation were key to scaling up to the mounting public health challenge, she reached out to private industry initially to discuss how to optimize contact tracing.

“You have to embrace technology to go at scale fast, and so a big part of our approach to make it so that we could quickly get in contact with everyone who’d been in contact with the virus was to lean on Salesforce,” Raimondo said during the Salesforce Global Government Virtual Summit.

Deploying Salesforce tools has enabled Rhode Island to test the equivalent of about 30% of its population, with a positive rate of below 2%, Raimondo added. Digital services, automated tools and tracking data has been critical to helping the Rhode Island economy reopen in recent months.

The contact-tracing collaboration led Raimondo and Salesforce to create the digital toolkit Work.com, which is intended to guide other governments and businesses to reopen safely.

“After working with Gov. Raimando and having really some regular contact with her and getting this feedback, we did start Work.com,” Salesforce Global Public Sector President Dave Rey said. “Work.com is a tool really of technology for governors, for government officials, for CEOs and businesses to be able to take these policies and procedures and look at contact tracing. But we also want to look at how do we do work schedule management, how are we doing our facilities management, how are we doing employee wellness check-ins, how are we doing isolation management?”

Using Agile development, a platform integrating legacy systems and a human-centered approach, Salesforce worked with the governor to build the website in 30 days. The company developed four versions leading to the final iteration, discussing each version with Raimondo to ensure that it was delivering the tools and assistance that would help guide governments and organizations through a variety of reopening challenges.
Rey underscored the element of human-centered design and close collaboration with Raimondo and her team in making Work.com a success, highlighting the potential that successful private-public partnerships have in addressing crises like COVID-19 quickly.

“During COVID-19, government was faced with a crisis of scale and complexity they’ve never seen,” Rey said. “We had supply chain disruptions. We had hospital capacity issues. We had exploding unemployment. We have emergency business loans. We had to do scheduling. We had limited tests. We had to do tracing. And this all happened at once.”

This "perfect storm," he said, required technology to be deployed fast that had to scale, be widely available and be secure.

Raimondo not only prioritized technology in acting against COVID-19, but also in ensuring equity and community outreach, understanding the difficulties Rhode Islanders were facing, from the virus itself to mass unemployment and challenges in remote education. She offered that insight to Salesforce to ensure Work.com addressed the diverse concerns of her constituents.

“In the public health side of things, equity means getting into the communities — the poorest, the communities of color, communities with high immigrant populations — going to them to do testing and make health care available,” Raimondo said. “In the economy, it means recognizing that it is very difficult these days to get a good job without enough skills, so commit yourself to training everyone, so everyone has a good shot at a job.”

Moving forward, Raimondo said that the emphasis on deploying technology to address the COVID-19 crisis will ultimately create a lasting impact on the way her state, and likely others, will modernize. Remote learning for school will be easier, not just in times of crisis, but also in normal situations, and different state agencies can deliver to citizens electronically with more ease for the end user.

Digital transformation is becoming a top priority for many governmental bodies, from the local to federal levels.
“Digital transformation was nice to have, and now it’s a must have,” Rey said. “The way I see it is government digital transformation means government services will be provided on the web. It’ll be self-service. You’re going to have all the forms you need right at your access. You’ll be able to do electronic signature. It’ll be personalized. It’ll be secure.”