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5 Ways to Scale Workflow for Vaccine and Service Delivery

When the COVID-19 pandemic stymied resources and sent huge segments of the workforce into remote work, government leaders had to find nontraditional ways to continue providing services.

The lessons they learned around logistics, service delivery, and human variables apply directly to situations governments now face in preparing to roll out mass vaccinations.

In a ServiceNow webinar workshop titled, "Scaling Workflow for Vaccine and Service Delivery," a roundtable discussion of local government leaders brought to light ways to leverage technology and human efforts to ensure service to every person in need. Here are the top takeaways from the conversation.

1 Optimized Self Service Frees Up Resources for More Proactive Assistance

Governments don't have the option to serve only some — or even most — of their citizens.

"In government, you can't leave anyone behind," said Tom Yeatts, global head of state, local and regional government solutions for ServiceNow during the roundtable. "You really have to think long and hard about your strategy for service delivery."

Digital communication channels, which rely on internet and mobility services, can be an effective way to deliver important messages about vaccine distribution as programs roll forward. Even so, digital communication remains only a partial solution.

Tools that help to route work effectively, like ServiceNow's enterprise workflow platform, can help to address the issue of limited connectivity, said Yeatts. If, for example, governments can deploy smart, intuitive, digital, and mobile-friendly services to a large percentage of residents willing and able to use them, that frees up staff to proactively reach out to the remaining segments who need to speak with a human one-on-one. It can also free up staff to implement other communication methods, such as text messaging, automated phone calls, and email.

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2 Bridging the 'Digital Divide' Is an Important Step

As vaccine rollout continues, reaching people digitally will be a crucial part of letting people know when they're eligible to schedule appointments.

However, lack of access to fast, reliable internet creates a digital divide, bringing with it questions of how policy can help to address this challenge as the country moves forward, said Maureen Mahoney, chief of staff at Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas. When students were sent to learn from home, the digital divide between students with access to broadband internet and those without became even more apparent, she said. To try to remedy the issue, the community used a significant portion of its federal COVID-19 response funding to address that issue.

"[Broadband internet is] not a luxury," she said. "It's a utility, and we all have to get our minds to that point so that that can change."

In North Miami, leaders looked to address the digital divide another way. The local government opened up virtual hubs for students and others who needed a clean, safe environment in which to connect to the internet. Even as these hubs proved useful, there's still a need for more assistance, particularly among seniors, many of whom do not have internet-connected devices, as we look ahead at a digitally supported vaccine rollout and, crucially, a more digital future.

"We're in the works of trying to create a program where we can rent out or issue them a digital device so we can update them on things that are happening," said Athalie Edwards, a management analyst with the North Miami Police Department.

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County and Kansas City, KS

3 Breaking Down Language and Generational Barriers is Essential

But digital access isn't the only barrier to effective communications.

In Mahoney's district in Kansas, for example, the largest school district houses 22,000 students that speak seventy languages. The area is a blue-collar community with an ethnically diverse population and many lack home internet access. It also falls in an area not typically covered by the urban newspaper. But by building a diverse coalition, government officials are able to serve the entire community, Mahoney said. To start, officials have prioritized delivering messaging in at least the top three languages to ensure they're reaching as many members of the community as possible.

North Miami faces a similar challenge. Edwards said officials there have to consider the large Creole- and Spanish-speaking populations in addition to English. In an effort to bridge the gap, public information officers are trained to speak all three languages.

And, to reach even more of the population, the area has worked to develop communication approaches tailored toward seniors, which represent a large portion of their community, she added. In many cases, senior adults and those less inclined to use electronics for news, there is a gap that needs to be filled. Bob Bennett, vaccine operations director for the unified government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas, said his team is filling that gap at least partly through volunteer doorknockers from both local political parties.

4 Creative Partnerships Can Help Fill Coverage Gaps

One way to continue bridging these divides is through creative partnerships with community organizations.

While government leaders moved to Zoom meetings very quickly when the pandemic began, they were also strategic about pulling in community resources, said Mahoney. From health foundations and places of worship to social service organizations and senior centers, government leaders were distributing information to a variety of community leaders who could assist with messaging.

Bennett's team leveraged digital scheduling and increased phone outreach for the first phase of vaccine rollout. They also used volunteers, hired staff for a COVID-19 call center, and tapped into artificial intelligence with enhanced robocalling that transitioned to a live person as needed.

Other governments have forged public-private partnerships to become micro-internet service providers for pocket areas not covered by local ISPs. The federal CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan of 2021 include some funding for broadband to help address coverage.

5 Even with New Capabilities, the Need for Old-Fashioned Communication Remains

Art Mead, emergency management and homeland security director for Huron County, Ohio, serves an agricultural area where strong, reliable internet service isn't always available. A significant amount of his work early in the pandemic involved traveling door to door to deliver information to residents who wouldn't otherwise receive it in a timely manner.

"My residents know if they need something, I'm going to help them out as much as I can," he said.

Cmdr. Angelo Brinson, emergency manager for North Miami, said an important part of communicating has been recognizing that not everyone views social media and internet-based services as an effective way to get their news.

"It's easy to say, we're going to send out notifications on all of our platforms and we're going to put it on Facebook, Twitter, TikTok and Instagram, but you have an entire population of people who may use it but they're not as comfortable with using it," he said.

Old-fashioned communication skills come into play even when technology is at the center. For example, multiple contractors have to integrate their services for the unified government to roll out its vaccine appointment interface, Bennett said. Sometimes that requires some education on the importance of working through disagreements to keep the mission forefront.

And even while digital efforts have enabled more than has been possible before, there is value to personal interactions that no technology can replace.

"This works, don't get me wrong," Mead said, "but I'm looking forward to being face-to-face with people again, and I think most of my residents would say they feel the same way."

✅ **Learn more** about how ServiceNow can help your organization achieve a swifter vaccine rollout.

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