



Tech Executive Leadership Initiative

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National Innovation Ecosystem

Fostering best practices for digital service delivery
through federal grants



PROBLEM

To support workers through the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress passed the \$2.2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act in March 2020. The Act significantly altered the terms for conventional unemployment assistance and provided assistance to previously ineligible workers through a new category of Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA). As a result, states rushed to update their systems for processing unemployment assistance claims to deliver benefits to newly-eligible workers. Regrettably, states have been overwhelmed by massive demand. As a result, millions of Americans have not received the support they qualify for. These burdens exacerbate the strain unemployment agencies already face due to fluctuating funding. **How might the federal government help states deliver unemployment assistance to people faster as the program and nature of the work change?**

To learn more about this
project, please visit
aspentechpolicyhub.com/teli.



Tech Executive Leadership Initiative

ABOUT TELI

This project was completed as part of the pilot Tech Executive Leadership Initiative (TELI), a skills-building initiative to prepare experienced technology leaders to engage effectively with public sector challenges. Each team was given the opportunity to tackle one of two policy challenge prompts. Over the course of eight weeks, the teams conducted research, narrowed their focuses to particular aspects of the prompts, and proposed solutions. Learn more at aspentechpolicyhub.com/teli.

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FOCUS

To implement the PUA program, states rapidly modified their unemployment systems and infrastructure with widely varying levels of success. Dedicated innovation offices such as the Colorado and Vermont Digital Services were helpful but not sufficient at helping states modify their unemployment insurance systems. Delivery systems for state-provided services have still not kept pace with advances in technology and models for service delivery. The global pandemic has provided both a stark illustration of current deficiencies and an unprecedented opportunity to assess existing state digital service models and establish best practices.

SOLUTIONS

It is critical that the United States build out an ecosystem for digital service delivery that better connects federal and state capabilities. Past crises (9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and the 2008 financial crisis) similarly required states to rapidly adapt their information technology (IT) systems to fast-moving Congressional legislation and desperate citizens.

Congress should utilize future economic stimulus programs as opportunities to develop a national innovation ecosystem for state-provided services. Specifically:

1. The General Services Administration (GSA) and the Department of Labor should assemble a cross-functional team to assess the performance of state service teams (such as the Colorado Digital Services) in delivering services, with a particular focus on lessons learned from PUA.
2. Congress should establish a grant program to build a national ecosystem for digital service delivery, following best practices from the United States Digital Service (USDS)'s Digital Services Playbook. Interested states could then apply for modernization funds with oversight and guidance from the USDS. Lessons learned from the study of PUA implementation can help direct efforts and allocate resources under this grant program.