



Platforms for Change: Four Lessons from COVID-19

Configurable platform solutions promise greater speed, tighter alignment between business and technology, continual access to updates, and the ability to be more flexible and agile in responding to challenges and opportunities.

But is a platform approach suitable for health and human services agencies?

Going into 2020, there was still a fair amount of skepticism and doubt. Among the most common concerns: *We need custom applications to support our unique regulatory requirements and business processes. We aren't sure that platforms can provide the reliability and scalability our legacy systems sometimes struggle to deliver. Our procurement processes aren't aligned to a phased platform approach.*

Over the past year, state and local governments pushed through those concerns to experience the power of the platform. Quite simply, using platforms was the only way to respond appropriately to COVID-19. As the pandemic raged, there was no time to follow traditional approaches for selecting, building, and deploying technology. Organizations had to roll out new solutions in record time, at incredible scale, and with life-and-death stakes.

Looking back, we can see that the pandemic functioned as a massive stress test for configurable platforms, and these solutions proved they can deliver. Using the Salesforce platform, Accenture helped multiple states, including California, deploy new contact-tracing solutions in as little as three weeks and new vaccine management solutions within six weeks. We also helped states shift entire call centers from on premises to remote. These



experiences affirmed that the platform approach is not just a good idea in theory; it works in the real world.

Now is the time to explore the power of platforms in solving other challenges—including the increasingly urgent need to migrate away from costly and limited legacy systems. With that in mind, we offer these lessons learned.

1. Identify the destination and then sprint toward an MVP.

Existing disease surveillance and immunization information systems were ill equipped for the pandemic. That gave governments two clear destinations: new and better capabilities for contact tracing and vaccine management and distribution. The crisis could not accommodate the traditional pace or complexity associated with gathering requirements or evaluating procurement options. Instead, we recommended Salesforce as a configurable platform and got to work creating minimally viable products (MVPs) as

quickly as possible. No MVP will offer all the features and functionality that you need, but it accelerates the journey to production. From there, iterate until the solution fully addresses your needs.

2. Bring the right people to the table.

With a configurable platform, the pace is so rapid and the process is so iterative that there's no "later stage" for getting business or domain leaders involved. Early engagement helps ensure tight alignment between business needs and technology capabilities. This collaboration is valuable in helping identify not just what a solution needs to do, but also the reason why. In some cases, existing processes require seven steps on a legacy system, but a platform can be configured to produce the same result in just three steps. With the right people at the table, you can efficiently identify and pursue those kinds of business improvement opportunities.

3. Attend to training and change management.

Although platforms can produce systems at record speed, they do not eliminate the need to educate, inform, and engage your user community. Fortunately, since the technical aspects are less intense and time consuming, your organization should have more bandwidth to focus on people-related needs to foster seamless adoption of the new technology.

4. Look ahead with an open mind.

Now that we've seen how platform solutions delivered during the pandemic, we encourage every public-sector organization to consider other opportunities to use this approach. A platform can be used, not only to stand up new capabilities, but also to migrate legacy systems to the cloud.


Time and again, we encounter organizations with many people who are highly knowledgeable in using a legacy system but few, if any, who have

an in-depth understanding of precisely how it works. It is now possible to use the Salesforce platform to automate migration of legacy logic and code—even if it's a “black box”—from mainframe to cloud. This approach delivers functionally equivalent capabilities on the platform without spending months or years defining business requirements.

Once the legacy system has been replicated in the cloud, you can decommission costly mainframe systems and begin leveraging the platform's native capabilities to extend and enhance an application. Although modernizing your legacy system using an enterprise platform will take longer than three to six weeks, platform features do accelerate innovation and help complete the work in a dramatically shorter timeframe than traditional legacy modernization approaches.

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We have been exploring the benefits of platforms for years; now we have

experienced them firsthand. Let's make this the beginning, not the end of the platform story for the public sector. As government focuses less on outputs and more on outcomes—and lines blur further between information technology and the “business”—they turn to these technologies as invaluable platforms for change. 

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