U.S. state and local government

Core principles for public sector crisis management and recovery

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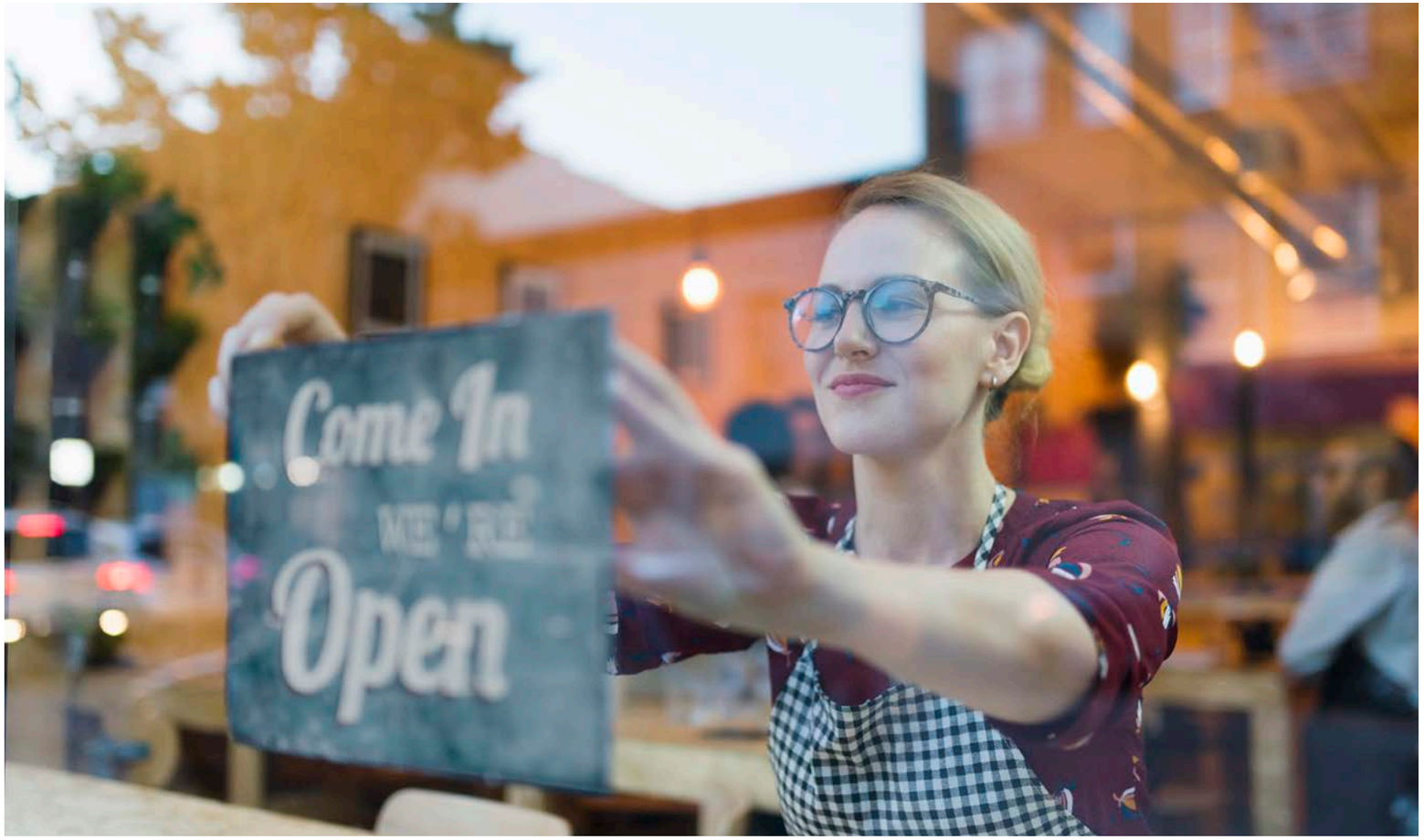
Respond
Rebound
Reinvent

In the midst of responding to a public health crisis that is evolving at a breakneck speed, what should government leaders do now to ensure optimal results in recovery efforts down the road? Taking time to prioritize the investment in and implementation of technology to assist in response and recovery efforts will help ensure greater success overall.



For a number of years, states have been moving toward a model where technology acts as an enabler, not a driver, of business needs. In this current environment, it is important that agencies clearly define their requirements and understand the measures that need to be taken to meet those needs. In certain circumstances, where swift action is paramount, taking the time to develop a technology roadmap is not always realistic.

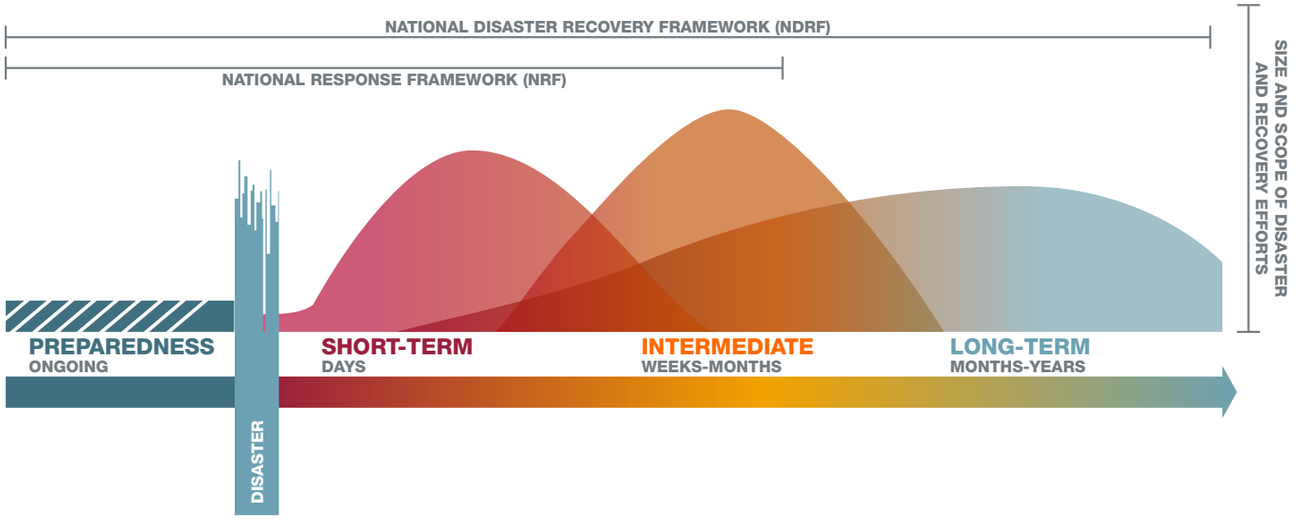
This is the scenario facing states across the country today as they work to address the myriad of challenges rapidly arising as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Government leaders are simultaneously trying to respond to the ever-changing needs of their constituency while attempting to anticipate how to address the long-term needs that lie ahead. This is a balancing act that presents a challenge government leaders must work to overcome.

Success or failure on this front could have a major impact on recovery efforts including the disbursement of federal stimulus funds and more. There are best practices in place that can help government leaders better understand how to construct a framework for a successful response and recovery action plan.

The challenge

The challenges associated with the COVID-19 response efforts are numerous – not least of which is understanding the timing of response activities in relation to the presently unknown duration of the pandemic itself.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has defined the Recovery Continuum in three overlapping phases, with the long-term needs initiating roughly halfway through the initial phase.[1] In applying this continuum COVID-19 presents a challenge in that we have very little insight into when it will be possible to identify the ‘short-term’ phase as over. Certainly not in the “days” FEMA suggests in their natural disaster recovery model.



Additionally, states are attempting to manage insufficient supply inventories, rapidly evolving public health guidance, and how to broadly disseminate accurate and timely information, all while exercising herculean efforts to ‘flatten the curve.’

Given these immediate challenges, it may be easy to overlook immediate steps that should be taken to ensure long-term recovery efforts are successful. Those actions are imperative, but not necessarily daunting.

1 “National Disaster Recovery Framework, Second Edition” June 2016, Federal Emergency Management Agency, p.5

The approach

Determining technology needs does not need to be a time consuming or complex exercise. In looking at those states who have successfully navigated crisis response and recovery there are common themes that emerge. To begin, in order to mitigate risk and streamline implementation, the solution should be designed to be as modular as possible, allowing for easy integration of existing and/or legacy systems. In some cases, this may mean that a new module should be integrated into an existing legacy system.

Meeting the business needs and programmatic requirements for crisis management and disaster recovery should follow these five core principles:

1 Clearly define the outcomes you need your technology to enable

Reflect the underlying premise that technology is an enabler of business and programmatic needs, not a driver. There is no shortage of powerful technology available – that is the least of the challenges we face. Taking the time to collaborate with stakeholders to develop the critical use cases will ensure that business needs are met, rather than determining what a given technology will 'allow' the state to do. This effort will lessen the likelihood that re-work is needed at the end of the effort.

2 Prioritize projects that deliver insights to aid crisis decision-making

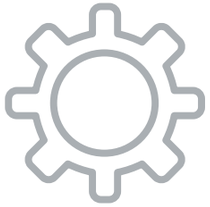
Support information-driven decision making, with a premium on data integrity. At a minimum states need to have a secure technical platform in place that can support basic crisis-related workflow and reporting needs. These include the ability to effectively triage physical and human resources, allow for users to easily provide data inputs remotely, push timely and accurate information to leaders and decision-makers, and provide critical information to those working in the field.

3 Collaborate with community stakeholders to provide vital, timely information to citizens

Enable broad collaboration across stakeholders, including citizens, non-profits, commercial businesses, the healthcare community and legislature. It is well understood that strong community networks can be invaluable during crisis response. In order to fully leverage that support, however, a simple and comprehensive information-sharing mechanism needs to be in place. States that have set up transparency portals to provide current information on everything from case counts to grant expenditures have experienced significant success in not only fully leveraging their community networks, but also providing citizens with a centralized source of authorized information. This helps alleviate concern, frustration and often times panic within the public at-large.

4 Ensure existing solutions are utilized to maximum capability to help minimize risk and cost of recovery

Mitigate risk through utilization of proven solutions and re-use of existing systems wherever possible. This approach not only enables a nimble implementation, but allows the state to fully leverage what is already known to be working as needed. For example, the implementation of a simple solution could support integrating data from a state's existing child welfare and disease tracking systems, allowing caseworkers to identify homes with COVID-19 positive residents. Taking a conservative approach to the implementation of new technologies will free up bandwidth to focus on critical projects.

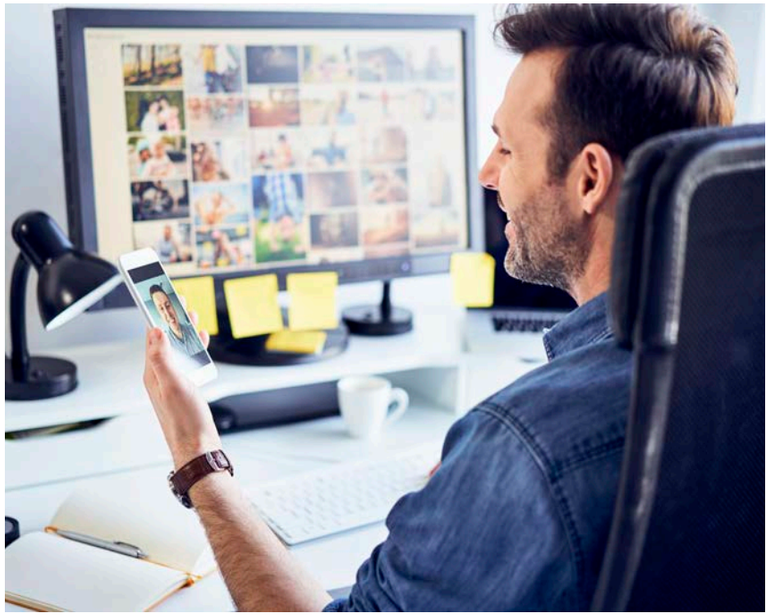


5 Invest in technology that enables quality management and rapid distribution of recovery funds

Support the infrastructure that will be required to develop the action plans and manage the disbursement of federal funds. States will be receiving COVID-19 stimulus funding from a number of different agencies, all with different eligibility, disbursement and reporting rules. Of all the technology requirements states should focus on, the implementation of an enabling information management and financial reporting system is the most imperative. Developing the mandatory policies, procedures and business rules can be costly, and can cause delays getting funds to citizens and businesses in desperate need. Time spent during the response phase planning for these requirements will significantly improve a state's ability to support citizens early in the recovery phase.

The path forward

With 40+ years in the public sector technology industry, CGI has helped clients navigate many challenging times. In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, we will continue to do so, leveraging our strength of resources – drawing on 77,500 business and technology experts; our experience helping federal, state, and local operations continue smoothly and effectively; and drawing on our collaborative model to partner with government agencies to make your technology work for you even when working remotely.



As we navigate the current COVID-19 pandemic, we remain dedicated to helping clients understand the current landscape, plan for the future and move with agility to best meet the needs of those impacted by this crisis.

CGI

About CGI

Founded in 1976, CGI is among the largest IT and business consulting services firms in the world. Operating across the globe, CGI delivers end-to-end capabilities, from strategic IT and business consulting to systems integration, managed IT and business process services and intellectual property solutions, helping clients achieve their goals, including becoming customer-centric digital enterprises.

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