

How government
can provide strategic
services for individual
and family recovery



EY

Building a better
working world

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a human crisis – and government is on the front lines, fighting the battle to help people keep afloat. It has the opportunity to play a critical role in providing information, deploying resources, communicating with constituents and empowering resilience.

While everyone has been impacted differently, individuals and families deserve support to recoup what they have lost and rebuild their communities, states and the nation as a whole. There has always been a vulnerable population, but the definition and parameters of vulnerability are dynamically changing in this crisis. Families may suddenly find themselves facing a multitude of issues including unexpected health needs and unemployment.



► Listening to voices that count

In the midst of this pandemic, governments are focusing on what to do now to curb the spread of the disease, support employment and enable people to return to their lives. But what is the longer-term approach to strategic intervention? The first impactful step is to understand that the definition of vulnerability is shifting – along with the role of government.

Since the pandemic, a large part of the population reaching out for help may have little or no experience with government programs. Many have rarely, if ever encountered this side of the government and do not understand the nuances. The inherent complexity of government programs may create another barrier to individuals and families needing the support. Even those who have received social services in the past may be surprised by the added delays and complexities government programs managed across multiple agencies on disparate websites create challenges when searching for assistance. This is compounded by a lack of coordination, concise communication, exponential delays and a cumbersome process than can take more than a dozen clicks to navigate to just one program application. These systems are clearly not designed for the significant increase in demand from COVID-19.

► Connecting people with resources

While government agencies have been migrating toward a better way of administering services, this crisis is creating a catalyst for shoring up systems and doing things in real time. At Ernst & Young LLP (EY US), we see an opportunity to jump in and help state and local governments migrate to a smart safety net and become more attuned to the needs of individuals and families. Through polling, sentiment monitoring and forecasting – blasting out to individuals by geography, demographics or zip code – we can identify what individuals and families need now and directly connect them to available resources. Additionally, by asking them to anticipate needs for the coming weeks we can help state and local government agencies prepare for what may be a tremendous increase in demand of a particular need. Linking that data to pressing issues and intervention strategies will help determine how the dynamics of this new environment is changing lives.

As we move forward into the recovery phase of this pandemic, people's needs will shift – and hopefully, so will the level of available resources. Keeping the dialogue open will be essential. As individuals and families navigate a dozen or more government agency websites seeking answers, many will be so stressed and frustrated that they will throw up their hands and give up. By listening to individuals about their most pressing needs, connecting them to programs and anticipating future needs government has an opportunity to support recovery and resilience.



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We are all connected and need to move forward together. Everyone needs to be lifted for us to really be successful in regaining what we have lost in this pandemic.

► How we can help

We understand that our government clients need to be strategic about how they deploy resources, particularly since many states and local agencies are already facing strict budgetary deficits. Empowering governments to understand the “voice of the people” will help everyone get back on their feet.

The first step for a state would be to quickly inventory their available social service support statewide, including websites and hotlines and directly connect people to requested services. Polling means designing questions around priorities and needs, not just open-ended surveys that cannot be translated into meaningful results. We want to be thoughtful about how we respond and help remove barriers to accessing available support. Including information about access means we will

avoid mistakes like telling people who are under a shelter in place order that there is a great resource, but it is five hours away from home.

In addition to providing this real time support for current needs, our focus is to leverage what we know to allow government to quickly identify an individual or family that may be heading toward a crisis. The **EY Vulnerable Person Platform** allows state and local officials to analyze structured and unstructured data and identify key risk indicators. The data is then used to monitor trends, drive risk scoring and recommend steps for effective interactions, resulting in a cycle of perpetual improvement for both individuals and families, as well as government program administration.

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As a firm, EY US understands that this is painful and impactful for families. We want to do everything we can to support government in their efforts to be productive in helping as many people as possible during these trying times.



► Summary

When individuals and families are strong, they are instrumental in rebuilding the communities and states in which they live. Many were in crisis before COVID-19 and do not have the fortitude or stamina to navigate the complexity of government programs. They need help and support – now and in the months ahead. If state and local governments use technology and data to reshape their thinking, they can make a difference and have a positive impact on the lives of vulnerable citizens.

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