Manitoba's Pandemic Response

Prepared for "How to be Digital in the Canadian Public Service"

October 2020

Like many other jurisdictions around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic forced Manitoba to rapidly shift to more digital channels for delivering services and continuing the business of government. Many government departments quickly moved traditionally in-person services and application processes online, and new services that were created in direct response to the pandemic were made to be fully online. Some examples include:

- A web application that connected essential front-line workers with available childcare spaces early in the pandemic response.
- A web application that allowed businesses to identify their ability to supply Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to government.
- Help Next Door, a unique-to-Manitoba web-based application, was implemented to connect volunteers with individuals in need during the pandemic. Similar to a future, larger-scale Digital ID program, each user was required to verify their identity using a credential (Driver's License) upon registering to use the application.
- Web portals were created to streamline application and payment processes for new programs that support workers and employers like the Manitoba Wage Subsidy Program and Manitoba Risk Recognition Program.
- The #RestartMB Pandemic Response System dashboard was created to share information with Manitobans about the province's COVID risk and response, and provide direction for recommended actions. The system was developed alongside Public Health officials, who monitor key indicators and use the information gathered to guide their recommendations in setting each risk level and responses. Manitoba updates the provincial response level in response to the spread of the virus and other public health indicators.
- The Student Jobs MB web application was created to connect students with employers in support of Manitoba's commitment to enhance student hiring through the pandemic. Along with the Student Wage Subsidy program and changes to government's existing STEP program, nearly 9,000 jobs were created for students and youth across Manitoba – over three times the number of student jobs created in 2019.

Enabling remote work was crucial to keeping government running during the initial pandemic response. The following activities were undertaken to expand Manitoba's remote work capabilities:

- Manitoba's Virtual Private Network (VPN) infrastructure was upgraded from allowing a limited number of public servants concurrent access to allowing virtually all Manitoba public servants access to government files and applications at the same time to work remotely.
- Manitoba's network bandwidth was increased to handle the extra demand for staff working from home.
- Microsoft Teams was rapidly implemented to over 12,000 public servants to provide enhanced virtual meeting and collaboration capabilities. Implementing Microsoft Teams was the first part of a bigger project to fully implement Microsoft 365, a key component in the Government of Manitoba's Digital Workplace initiative.
- Digital approval processes were created to replace paper processes.