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Rhode Island's Office of Innovation **Accelerates Digital Transformation**
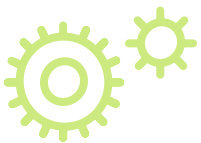
Challenge

A significant portion of Rhode Islanders lack high-speed internet access at home. In addition to addressing this challenge by promoting digital equity, the state government is seeking ways to accelerate innovation in the state and be more responsive to citizen needs.

The Rhode Island Office of Innovation functions as the catalyst for accelerating innovations in the state and redesigning government to be more efficient for citizens. Kevin Parker, Director of Government Innovation, discussed how Rhode Island is digitally transforming government through improving digital accessibility and cross-agency collaboration.

"We want to make sure we have everyone connected and that everyone's on the network," Parker said. "Twenty-six percent of Rhode Islanders don't have high-speed internet at home."

For Parker, the Office of Innovation is charged with ensuring digital equity to reduce barriers to reliable internet. "An important component of the digital economy is a digital front door to government. People may not have access to those public services online and we want to address that."

The Office of Innovation as well as other state entities are working to make sure their online services are easier-to-use and more accessible. "We have to make sure that we not only have websites for people who are on a desktop, but also mobile-friendly applications," Parker said. For example, citizens should be able to easily obtain the information needed to get a fishing license through the Department of General Management's websites or pay their taxes through their mobile devices.

Solution

To promote digital equity, the Innovation Office sought the help of industry partners to help reduce barriers to accessing networks. "We put out a Request for Information for industry to respond in reducing barriers to connectivity, such as a 5G network," Parker said. "We also provide digital literacy training to citizens via public housing authorities with our municipalities. So we can not only be sensitive about the utility providers to all parts of Rhode Island but also give people direct access to the hardware and the knowledge to jump on the networks."

He added," We want to build a platform that people know how to use and that's intuitive and helpful."

Solution (cont.)

In an effort to put government employees at the forefront of navigating digital transformation, the Rhode Island Office of Innovation developed a year-long training program for government employees in using non-traditional approaches to solve tough problems. The program, better known as the **Government Innovation League**, is comprised of 1-2 rising leaders from each state agency who works with the Office of Innovation for 8-10 hours per week on their agencies' biggest challenges.

Specifically, Innovation League participants conduct research on end users and how they access government information or track how end users do their research concerning a government agency or service.

"We carve out the time and space for them to think about how they can deliver and design a government with the end user in mind," Parker said. "And what is not surprising is that many of their projects, even though they are not technologists themselves, have digital components to them."

When government employees work together to solve their agency's problems, they often gain more awareness of the needs of their citizen users and how they can improve their digital accessibility.

Tips for Success

1. Develop a digital voice and brand

Provide a central user guide or governance document to ensure consistency between the communications team and the executive teams. Make sure citizens are familiar with the platform, voice and brand of the content.

2. Encourage peer mentoring

To cultivate the technology skillsets needed for digital transformation, foster peer mentoring and open communications. This allows employees to rely on each other to ask questions, share ideas and best practices. .

3. Enhance collaboration

Digital transformation does not come out of just one office. Collaboration with the IT department is mission critical. To facilitate change, make sure there are ongoing communications between the executive, customer service and IT teams.

"We want to design government for the user and we want to design it in a way that people are accessing their government in a digital marketplace."

Kevin Parker, Director of Government Innovation, Rhode Island