Serving the Public
At the Speed of Need

A look back at 2021

When the founding team of U.S. Digital Response sent out an urgent call for expert volunteer technologists to help our governments meet the COVID-19 crisis in March 2020, we weren’t sure how long we’d be around. Six weeks? Six months? Nearly two years later, one thing is abundantly clear to us: we’re here as long as our country needs us.

As we close out 2021, USDR has doubled down on our commitment to helping local governments and nonprofit organizations meet the critical needs of the public at the speed of need today — and to making them better prepared to deliver for their communities during urgent moments in the future.

This was a year not only for transforming digital delivery in our country’s government, but also transforming how USDR approaches our work. From releasing an API for cities to deploy vaccine finder websites, to streamlining Emergency Rental Assistance application workflows for agencies, to building tools for agencies to easily identify grants for which they qualify, we are proud to partner with public servants around the country to show up for our communities when it matters most.

Sincerely,

Jessica Cole
Interim CEO, U.S. Digital Response
Demos, not Memos: Our Work in Action

Since March 2020, USDR's projects have impacted 42M+ people in 37 U.S. states and territories. We've worked with over 230 governments and organizations on more than 300 projects.

**Rapid Response Program**

Los Angeles, CA — In support of an initiative from the deputy mayor, USDR worked with stakeholders across the city to create a hub that tells the story of racial equity efforts and builds trust with the community. In 6 weeks, the team developed high-fidelity mobile and web prototypes based on the outputs of 2 user research phases.

**Health Program**

New Jersey — Closely collaborating with USDR, the state developed a vaccine appointment finder to help residents identify appointments for the COVID-19 vaccine.

**Economic Stability Program**

Pennsylvania — The Department of Labor engaged with USDR to improve the claimant user experience on the state unemployment compensation website.

**Elections Program**

Harris County, TX — USDR created and deployed a tool that automates the poll worker management process, processing 7,000+ applications and placing 700+ student elec tion clerks. The Harris County Elections Administrator team won a 2020 Clearing House Award from the U.S. Assistance Commission for its management of the county’s Student Election Clerk Program.

Memphis, TN — Our work to assist in the distribution of nearly $14 million in rental assistance in Memphis was featured in the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s official guidance for Elevation Diversion.
Programs at a Glance

USDR’s shareable tools, approaches, and vast network of expert technologists can adapt to the specific needs of any state or local government.

**Rapid Response Program**
Recognizing unexpected challenges faced by governments, we can meet the needs of government partners who are responding to the urgent needs of their people. We develop and maintain a portfolio of services and technology that we can deploy to governments, repeatedly and at scale.

**Automating support for evacuees in Afghanistan**
Within 24 hours of receiving a request for assistance, USDR partnered with a former United Nations official in Afghanistan to send phone credits to evacuees. This project gave 822 evacuees the ability to contact their international humanitarian partners.

**Elections Program**
Our election portfolio builds technological solutions for governments at the city, county and state level. We focus on building free and accessible technology products that automate manual tasks, improve voter communication and support our partners in better serving their communities.

**Improving voting access for over 13M people**
Through products such as election website templates and ballot processing tools, USDR has impacted over 13M people through 37 governments and NGOs to ultimately improve voting access.

**Economic Stability Program**
Our economic stability portfolio ensures effective, accurate, and fast delivery of public benefits, and helps states make sound technical decisions in rebuilding their systems to successfully deliver services for decades to come.

**Partnering with Google.org’s Fellowship Program**
For the last six months, USDR’s efforts in the economic stability space has been bolstered by eight fellows from the Google.org Fellowship Program, a pro bono program that embeds Google employees full-time for up to six months with nonprofits and civic entities.

Read more about the Economic Stability Program:
"We're thinking bigger than I ever thought was possible"

Behind the Scenes with USDR’s Response to the American Rescue Plan

We truly value our ongoing partnership with U.S. Digital Response. As we work to modernize our unemployment system, we trust USDR to help us understand how all of our stakeholders — from claimants to community organizations — interact with our system, so it can work better for everyone.

Joe Lee
Deputy Secretary of Administration
Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry
Highlight: Our work on the COVID-19 Pandemic

Responding at the speed of need to our government partners, we scaled our Health Program in 2021 with dedicated staffing and volunteers. We partnered with governments and NGOs across the country to offer resources like website templates, communications strategies, data automation, and more.

When the COVID-19 vaccine entered the scene in December 2020, the rollout was marked with significant technical and communication challenges. USDR’s ability to quickly pivot to changing needs allowed us to rapidly support a number of vaccination rollout efforts across the country.

Primarily, our Health Program focused on:

- Creating a unified vaccine appointment API that could remove barriers to accessing COVID-19 appointment data
- Producing data insights based on this single directory of nation-wide appointment availability
- Improving equitable access to vaccines through continued work with CBOs and government agencies

87M*
Appointment slots tracked through our vaccine appointment finder API

930,000
Individuals notified through Exposure Notifications

16.7M
People impacted through improved website and social media communication projects

20
State partners

31
Projects

* number updated 1/28/22

During a time of overwhelming communication flow for a crisis response, U.S. Digital Response responded quickly, providing a team of highly skilled and professional assistance to focus, simplify and streamline messaging on our website. Our website improved drastically for the community using it.

Sarah Joseph
Public Information Officer
Pueblo Department of Public Health & Environment

Read more about the Health Program:
Building Resilience in Times of Crisis
Highlights from One Year of USDR’s Health Program
Powered by the People

Volunteers with strong technical expertise are deployed to government and NGO partners all over the country to help spin up programs that will serve communities in need.

We also partner with organizations across sectors to help bring together government partners with the right technical expertise.

Highlights: NYC[x] Innovation Fellowship

Since its inception in 2020, the NYC[x] Innovation Fellows has connected 44 expert technologists from outside government with 9 City agencies. The NYC[x]IF program has cumulatively created more than $1 million in direct cost-avoidance and close to $16 million in broader projected, estimated, or indirect cost-avoidance over the course of its three 8-10 week sprints.

The success of USDR’s partnership with the Mayor’s Office of the Chief Technology Officer helped them make the case to expand the City’s digital service investment. Since the conclusion of the NYT[x] IF program, the City has launched the NYC Digital Service and the NYC Digital Reserve.

The work of the NYC[x] Innovation Fellows will have a lasting impact on improving New Yorkers’ lives.

Inspiring technologists to enter public service

After founding USDR and serving as its inaugural CEO, Raylene Yung made the transition this summer to lead the Technology Modernization Fund within the General Services Administration under another USDR alumni, Robin Carnahan.

So far, USDR has helped inspire 22 volunteers to enter civic tech roles.

7,086
Handraisers to date

840
Deployed volunteers to date

40,000
Estimated hours volunteered this year

7
Average days to fill a volunteer request
Working in the Open

With a strong focus on building resilient digital services for local governments and nonprofit organizations, USDR puts a meaningful focus on working in the open and sharing resources.

The services we host include:

- UNIVAC, an API to access vaccine appointment availability information
- Grant identification and reporting tools
- A tool that simplifies searching for small business assistance
- Protect Nursing Homes, an early warning system for outbreaks in nursing homes
- A reference demo for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance

Thank you to our many foundation and individual supporters, who make this work possible.
Together, we're ready to meet 2022. Stay in touch in the new year:

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