Cross-Boundary Collaboration and Partnerships
NDResponse.gov Integrated Communications Campaign

North Dakota

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Executive Summary

Reinventing government and tribal partnerships are two of the [five strategic initiatives](#) outlined by Gov. Doug Burgum when he took office on Dec. 15, 2016. Core tenets include being more responsive to taxpayers through delivery of service, digital transformation and enhanced communication.

Reinventing Government

"Anything being done simply because 'that's the way we have always done it' should be and must be rigorously and respectfully questioned. And no matter what, we must have the courage to admit that we can always do better." Doug Burgum, Governor of North Dakota.

Four Elements of Reinvention

Unification/Shared Services | Delivery of Service | Digital Transformation | Cultural Transformation

We have an opportunity to reinvent state government and embrace technology to hold down costs and build an economy and workforce for the 21st century.

These powerful technological forces are fueling an underlying change in our economy and will challenge all of our existing approaches, systems and institutions. Harnessing these forces can lead to lower costs and better outcomes in health care, education and infrastructure. And these areas are some of the biggest cost drivers of our state budget. To do that we need a culture in state government focused on the willingness to grow and change and leaders who will lead us through that change.

Tribal partnerships focus on an intentional effort to engage, listen and learn in order to understand each tribe's individual issues and circumstances and work to collectively strengthen tribal communities across the state.

In 2017, North Dakota was facing an unprecedented situation with thousands of protesters illegally camping on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers land in Morton County, near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, sparking clashes with emergency responders and law enforcement over construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. The protest, fueled in part by a misinformation campaign driven by social media, had been garnering national attention for several months. The newly elected administration faced a steep learning curve with responding to the situation, as well as the thousands of voicemails, emails, media requests and requests for digital assets pouring into state agencies. Facing this historic challenge, the administration set out to implement a new, more positive and impactful way to communicate timely, relevant information to the media, citizens and other stakeholders on issues of statewide importance.

An integrated communication campaign and whole-of government approach was launched, with **a fully functioning, one-stop-shop website (www.ndresponse.gov) serving as the face of a unified response. The effort, which leveraged official YouTube, Facebook and Twitter accounts and a listening campaign led by Gov. Burgum and Lt. Gov. Brent Sanford, helped usher in a new era of mutual respect and the peaceful resolution of the protest.**

Concept, Significance, Impact

North Dakotans are grateful to live in a country where one of our core tenets is freedom of speech.

A world where there is so much information – and misinformation – available for free, and where everyone can be a publisher, creates unique challenges because people have to be more discerning in what they read and what they consider a trusted source.

As Gov. Burgum stated in the press conference announcing NDResponse.gov: "We need to be able to play in that world and ensure that the facts around our efforts and taxpayer dollars being spent are communicated well."

The concept for NDResponse.gov grew out of a need to communicate timely, factual information more effectively to citizens and the media. The immediate benefit of consolidating multiple channels of information from across state, local and federal sources enhanced the state's ability to communicate the enormous response around the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, as well as other incidents with statewide impact.

By leveraging an existing investment in the state's website platform (Drupal), Microsoft SharePoint collaboration tools, free social media channels, and significant cross-agency collaboration through the state's Joint Information Center (NDJIC) involving the state's Highway Patrol, Department of Emergency Services, National Guard, Department of Transportation, Department of Health, Department of Human Services, Department of Commerce, Game and Fish Department, the State Water Commission, NDSU Extension, and the Information Technology Department, the administration set out **to establish an authoritative source of information during major events that have significant impact on the public and involve a multi-agency response.**

Because social media is a key channel the public uses for information gathering the **effort included launching NDResponse Facebook and Twitter accounts, creating additional channels for two-way communication and trusted sources of information.** By implementing a cloud-based, permanent platform, NDResponse.gov eliminated the need to set up individual incident response websites and enabled more seamless communication across numerous agencies for any major event: from spring flooding, tornadoes or other weather events, to the pipeline protests and extreme drought conditions that affected most of the state in 2017. NDResponse.gov is also the home for information during an Amber, Blue, or Silver Alert.

The pipeline protests ultimately cost the state and Morton County nearly $43 million for law enforcement and emergency services support, as well as costs associated with cleaning up the thousands of tons of garbage left behind. Implementing a cost-neutral mechanism to help address the significant conflicting information around the protest helped manage the enormous volume of media inquiries as well as provide clear, official responses on activities occurring at the protest camp.

Highlighting the incredibly dedicated men and women who are part of these efforts across agencies helps taxpayers understand where their tax dollars are going, and creates a citizen-centric, multi-channel, trusted source for factual information. (Press conference launching NDResponse.gov https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohdcyPHtWnk).

Key attributes of the NDResponse.gov effort included:

- **A mobile-friendly website and ability to engage through associated social media channels**.
- The state's **first cloud-hosted website**, which leverages cloud services to instantaneously scale to meet unpredictable traffic during emerging events.
- **A media resources section** included an inquiry form, press releases, digital assets and daily activity provided by Morton County, which helped provide historic timeline information.
- **Myth vs. fact section** to address misinformation and help set the record straight, and a "Contact Us" button to ensure we are serving citizens, regardless of incident.
- **Leveraging the state's website platform, a full-functioning site was ready for content entry by the JIC within hours of decided to pursue this strategy.** The official site launched Jan. 25, 2017.
- The state also **implemented a digital communications strategy branded with NDResponse**, including social media channels, collateral material and press releases. This provided transparency as well as more easily consumable content.
- Separate but related: North Dakota **is leveraging Everbridge** to manage notifications to citizens, law enforcement officials and communities statewide. The state's alerts (Amber Alerts, Silver Alerts for missing elderly persons, and Blue Alerts for assault on an officer), previously maintained on a separate website, have also been pushed to NDResponse.
- The platform and continued interagency collaboration **supported numerous efforts associated with severe drought** affecting most of the state in 2017. For instance, a resources section including federal and state programs that provide support for famers/ranchers with regards to crops, water supplies, livestock and other supplies during flood or drought conditions is also available.
- **Resources available to citizens affected by flood or drought**, including federal and state
- **NDResponse has grown to be the state's coordinated public face for any emerging event or incident.**

The outcome of this historic effort and extensive partnership spanning numerous state, local, federal and tribal partners was ultimately the peaceful resolution of an unprecedented event in North Dakota's history.

The whole-of-government approach and integrated communications plan around NDResponse.gov reflects a new way of thinking and new way of doing business on behalf of citizens.

The website itself has increased efficiency by eliminating the need to maintain a separate Public Alerts website and amplifies the marketability of NDResponse as a more comprehensive source of information. This approach has also been mirrored by South Dakota, which announced SDResponse.gov in November 2017.

Gov. Burgum's efforts to peacefully resolve the protests included initiating outreach to tribal partners, with a nearly five-hour listening session with Standing Rock Tribal Council members in January 2017. In addition to his personal involvement in the direction and launch of the website, his ongoing outreach efforts have helped create opportunities for government-to-government collaboration and usher in a new era of respect between tribal and state government leaders.

As the governor stated during a tribal visit in August 2017: "We have the opportunity to genuinely engage on a government-to-government basis, collectively strengthening our tribal communities across

North Dakota. Our goal is to listen, learn and understand each tribe's individual challenges and opportunities so that we may move forward towards greater mutual respect, harmony and prosperity."

Gov. Burgum continues to challenge state team members to reinvent government to improve service delivery to all North Dakotans and to embrace humility, courage and curiosity to help overcome adversity and seek solutions that benefit all residents.

The NDResponse.gov communication campaign and partnership is aligned to the following NASCIO State CIO Top Ten Priorities:

#1 Security and Risk Management – the website and associated social media channels had to meet high thresholds to prevent a significant increase in cyber attacks during the protests, while serving as a trusted, 24/7 source of information.

#2 Cloud services – the website was the first cloud-based website launched by the state. At the time the state's website strategy was to host websites on-premises (which has subsequently evolved to a cloud-first strategy).

#3 Consolidation/Optimization – optimizing the existing investment in Drupal as the state's website platform, and Microsoft SharePoint as a collaboration tool that supported JIC activities in any incident or emerging situation.

#4 Digital Government – NDResponse.gov improves the citizen experience by providing transparent information through a mobile-friendly, unified site with associated social media channels, enhancing accessibility and engaging citizens and media.

#5 Budget, Cost Control, Fiscal Management – leveraging existing resources provided a cost-neutral initiative, truly reflecting a best practice in governance.

#8 Data Management and Analytics – by consolidating relevant information, we can better understand how many people are interested in the content, and which content is most t in-demand. This is much more challenging when trying to collate data from across many more disparate websites, and allows us to highlight more relevant information for users