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Office of Information Technology Services

Governor Cuomo Announces New Tool to Help New Yorkers Access Critical Benefits Amid COVID-19 Pandemic

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NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. | Office of Information Technology Services

Public-Private Partnership with Google.org Streamlines Process for Identifying Potential Benefits for New Yorkers Unfamiliar with Social Programs

Monday, November 16, 2020

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced a new web application that will help struggling New Yorkers locate benefits to assist them during their time of need. Developed through a public-private partnership with Google.org, the user-friendly social services discovery application will help individuals who are either new to or unfamiliar with the state's social programs network.

"COVID-19 has caused unprecedented demand for social services in New York, including families and individuals who have never relied on social programs before," **Governor Cuomo said.** "This new web application, the result of a public-private partnership, will provide New Yorkers with a user-friendly, stigma-free resource to get the assistance and relief they need."

The "Find Services" web application provides an easy-to-use starting point for first-time users of social programs. The web application prompts each user with a series of simple questions aimed at narrowing the field of possible services to those that are best designed to serve their needs. After answering the questions, the user is provided with a ranked list of potential services along with a description to help residents judge if the service is right for them and provide them with more information about how to apply.

The web application was developed at no cost to taxpayers during a six-month collaboration between the state Office of Information Technology Services and the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, which oversees many of New York's social services programs, and a team of 10 full-time pro bono Google.org fellows supporting the Governor's COVID-19 Tech SWAT Team initiative. This unique public-private partnership has enlisted the assistance of leading technology companies and has assisted roughly four million New Yorkers since its inception. The web application's code has been open sourced to allow other government entities the opportunity to build on this project to meet the needs of their residents.

During a three-week pilot of the application, more than 100,000 New Yorkers accessed the web application. The State will use analytics data to understand where residents need help getting connected with vital government services and refine the application over time to best serve the needs of New Yorkers.

ITS Interim Chief Information Officer and Director Jeremy Goldberg said, "Under Governor Cuomo's leadership, New York State has moved with urgency and resilience to tackle the coronavirus head-on. We have received unprecedented support from civic-minded technologists across the state to support our response efforts. We welcomed that support and worked hand-in-glove with this team to assist those who needed it most."

New York's social services programs have seen increased caseloads since the start of the global pandemic. More low-income New Yorkers are availing themselves of critical benefits, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and temporary cash assistance.

OTDA Commissioner Mike Hein said, "Now more than ever, it is critical for eligible New Yorkers to have easy access to programs designed to help them and their families in their time of need. This new web application expands our ongoing efforts to provide a stigma-free platform for individuals and families to explore and familiarize themselves with social programs that can make an enormous difference in their lives."

President of Google.org Jacquelline Fuller said, "Seeking social services can be difficult, especially if you don't know where to start. The Google.org Fellows wanted to make it easy for New York residents to find and access essential programs, especially in times of crisis. In under six months and 10,000 pro bono work hours donated, the team was able to build a web application from the ground up by combining the technical expertise of Googlers with the unwavering leadership of New York State. Google has called New York home for the last 20 years and we're proud to stand alongside Governor Cuomo and the members of the Tech SWAT Team to help ensure the health and safety of our community."

In March, Governor Cuomo directed ITS to solicit volunteers from the technology community to help develop competent technological solutions to meet the unprecedented challenges posed by the unprecedented coronavirus outbreak, to help facilitate New York State's coordinated, decisive, and rapidly evolving response. ITS worked with the Governor's Office and the state Department of Financial Services to establish a team of highly trained civic-minded professionals in the technology field to assist the state's response over 90-day periods.

The New York State COVID-19 Tech 'SWAT' Team has since assisted state agencies with operations, analytics, communications, and other critical needs during the ongoing response. The team completed 21 large projects managed and led entirely by internal government teams at ITS, the New York State Digital Service Team, and state Office of General Services. An additional 19 projects were completed pro bono, involving a combined 25,000 hours of volunteer hours and saving taxpayers roughly $14 million.

About ITS

The New York State Office of Information Technology Services (ITS) was created in 2012 to transform IT services in an effort to make New York State government work smarter for its citizens and enable the state to be accessible for businesses through the use of technology. ITS provides statewide IT strategic direction, directs IT policy and delivers centralized IT products and services that support the mission of the State. ITS operates data centers 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to support statewide mission-critical

applications for over 50 Agencies, over 17 million citizen accounts, 120,000 employee accounts, 60,000 phones, 99,000 desktops and laptops, and 3,433 Virtual Desktop remote connections. ITS operates a secure network of over 1,600 miles of fiber to deliver telecommunications, Internet and Intranet services, enterprise email systems and support, IT training, networking, data storage and processing to State government entities in addition to developing new services in support of citizens, businesses and State Agencies.

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