



# **Office of Digital Innovation**

**Report to Senator Nancy Skinner, Chair of the Joint Legislative Budget Committee**

February 2021

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# ODI improves services for the people of California using design and technology.

*ODI works with agencies, departments and the Governor's Office to rethink, rebuild, and create services that better serve and engage Californians and enable new efficiencies.*

Pursuant to California Government Code Title 2 Division 3 Part 2.5 Chapter 1 §12815(l)(2), this report is submitted to Senator Nancy Skinner, Chair of the Joint Legislative Budget Committee, and includes: 1) a summary of the activities of the Office of Digital Innovation (ODI); and 2) a listing and descriptions of all expenditures made from the Digital Innovation Services Revolving Fund, as well as all revenues received by the fund, for the prior fiscal year.

The Legislature and the Governor created the Office of Digital Innovation (ODI) with the passage of the fiscal year 2019-2020 budget. They also established a Digital Innovation Service Revolving Fund in fiscal year 2019-2020 and funded it in July 2020.

Over the past year, ODI focused on helping Californians get information, data and assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic and building systems to enable scaling.

Among its work, ODI...

- Designed, created and launched acclaimed websites and digital services, including [covid19.ca.gov](https://covid19.ca.gov).
- Worked closely with groups like Labor and Workforce Development Agency to diagnose problems, improve processes and upgrade technology.
- Developed [alpha.ca.gov](https://alpha.ca.gov) digital services and modules for common tasks Californians need to do like find food banks and see lane closures.
- Brought in experienced leaders from within and outside state government to steward and build the organization.

While ODI's accomplishments over the last year have been significant, there is clearly much work to do to help Californians. ODI is honored and ready to do this work.



## ***ODI's Focus***

*In a time of 24-hour, 7-days-a-week mobile access and same-day delivery, many essential government services are only available during certain hours, or in person, or require long, confusing forms. Programs, rules, and operations too often serve the process not the people. Providing better services requires more than just quick fixes. ODI collaborates with state agencies and departments to reimagine the core processes, technology systems, and policies that these problems are rooted in.*

# ODI was created to drive innovation and help transform state government.

ODI applies technology, design, and research to deliver insights, strategy, websites, digital services, and data that respond to and anticipate Californians' biggest needs and challenges. Projects like improving the EDD claimant experience and constantly improving covid19.ca.gov require quick action on pressing problems. At the same time, real transformation requires sustained effort. ODI helps partners solve immediate issues and set up the systems, and processes to implement and make change stick.

ODI hires and develops cross-discipline staff with blended backgrounds in tech, design, data, policy, strategy, and research. They come from within and outside state service. They understand the intricacies of government services and programs and see how to use technology to solve problems. They move quickly to experiment and iterate. They scale impact by building their partners' capabilities.

## *How ODI Drives Lasting Change in Government Services*

### **Create Solutions**

Build intuitive digital solutions like websites, data systems, and APIs, that make it easier to access state services.

### **Increase Accessibility**

Redesign how the state shows information, so all Californians can use it, understand it and get the resources they need.

### **Prototype Services**

Envision solutions that anticipate Californians' needs and help them get assistance quickly and with minimal effort.

### **Raise Empathy**

Gather and share data and insights about Californians' needs and challenges to improve programs and policy.

### **Improve Equity**

Identify and eliminate inequity, exclusion, and bias in state program requirements, policies, and technical systems.

### **Build Capacity**

Equip state workers with the training and tools they need to understand people's needs and create better services.

### **Drive Efficiencies**

Streamline state processes by eliminating redundancy, automating steps and reducing paper-to-digital transfer.

### **Frame Priorities**

Focus leaders' attention on those issues and problems that matter most to Californians and recommend solutions.

### **Safeguard Rights**

Encourage data portability, collaboration, and transparency while protecting Californians' security and privacy.

# The ODI approach is grounded in understanding the needs of Californians.

ODI's innovation process puts discovery at its core. It starts by understanding what Californians need and how well current programs are addressing those needs. ODI conducts interviews, on-the-ground observations, surveys and data analyses to gather knowledge and stories of people's experiences. ODI maps departments' processes, analyzes policies and gathers the views of subject matter experts.

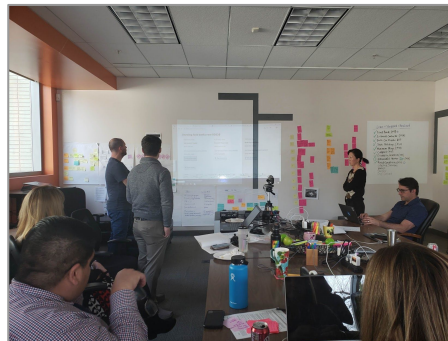
Teams of ODI staff and partners put themselves in the shoes of Californians and try to use state services themselves, building empathy for people's frustrations. As solutions are designed, ODI tests instructions, applications and services with real people who provide feedback on what works and what must be improved. ODI's approach of research, content design, prototyping and testing reduces risk, speeds delivery and solves problems more effectively.



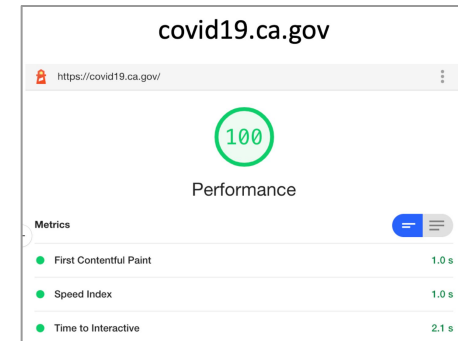
*Traveled to a fire-impacted town to meet with and interview local elected officials and business owners about the issues they face when trying to rebuild.*



*Tested the "Find a birth certificate" prototype and found 3 out of 5 people at the county office had translators because Spanish is their primary language.*



*Collaborated with the Department of Rehabilitation to share best practices for accessibility in digital design.*



*Benchmarked the performance of websites for load times, accessibility and readability using a variety of free and custom tools.*



# ODI's Alpha.ca.gov set a new standard for state digital services.

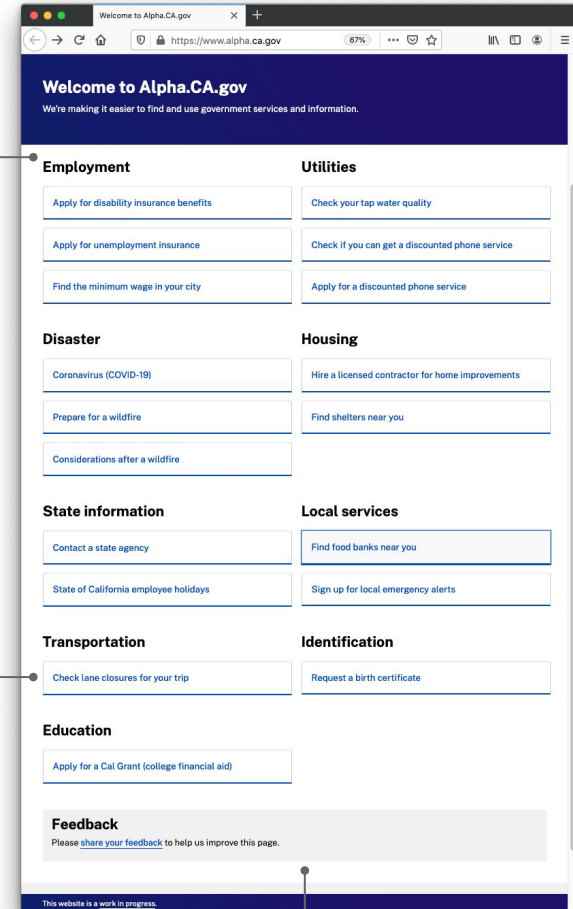
The first project team at ODI created alpha.ca.gov, a collection of digital services to help Californians do common tasks like find a housing shelter nearby and prepare for a wildfire, all in a single portal.

ODI started by researching the needs of Californians through interviews, observations in field offices and discussions with program staff in departments. The Alpha team followed best practices in designing for accessibility and created new technical tools to improve performance so all Californians can use the services regardless of their abilities and means.

Most importantly, the team created reusable assets - software, templates, guidelines and methods - that other agencies and departments could use in rethinking their websites. The Alpha team used these tools to create Covid19.ca.gov and GovOps used the Alpha approach to create and launch a statewide Telework resources site. These tools will also inform a redesign of CA.gov.

*The site uses few colors, simple English and readable fonts. This makes the site faster to load, easier to see and simpler to use.*

*These services are common tasks that Californians need to do, not lists of every program that each agency offers. Some of these services are right on the site. Others are links that take you right to the page you need.*



*Not everyone has the latest smartphone. The team tested all services on a low end, \$20 prepaid mobile phone on a slow connection to ensure the experience would work for everyone regardless of their means.*

# ODI designs digital services that put people at the center and are easier to use.

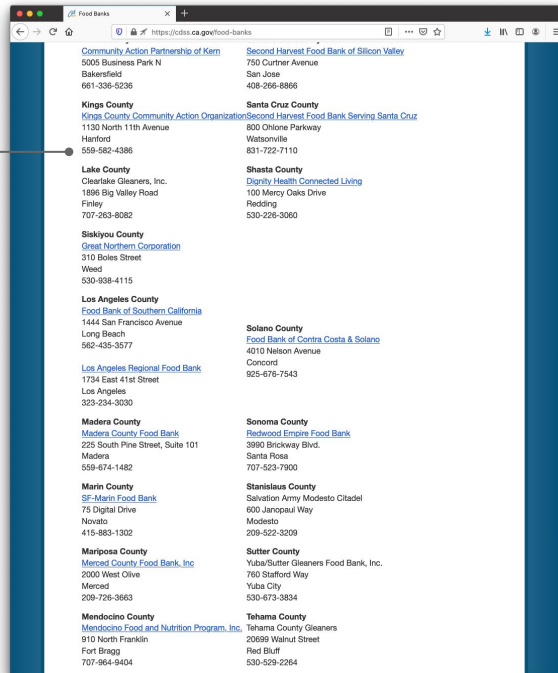
*Let's say you want to find a food bank nearby...*

## Current Informational Web Pages

You have to know to go to the California Department of Social Services website, click on Benefits & Services, click on Food & Nutrition Services, click on Food Banks, then scroll through the alphabetical list of counties.

*A text list of resources on a website broken up by county presents unnecessary hassles for Californians looking for services.*

*People don't always know their county, live near resources in another county, or live in a county that begins with a letter at the end of the alphabet and have to scroll to the end.*



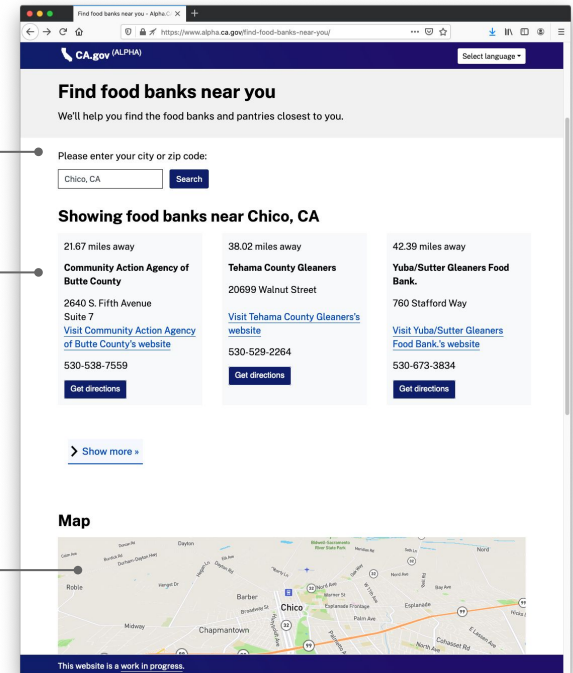
## Californian-Focused Digital Services

On the site Alpha.ca.gov that ODI created, you click on “Find food banks near you,” type in your city or zip code and press search. Food banks including those in other counties but near you pop up along with a map and links to get directions.

*Type in your city or zip code and press search.*

*See the distance, name, address, website and phone number of nearby food banks and buttons to get directions.*

*See each food bank on a map.*

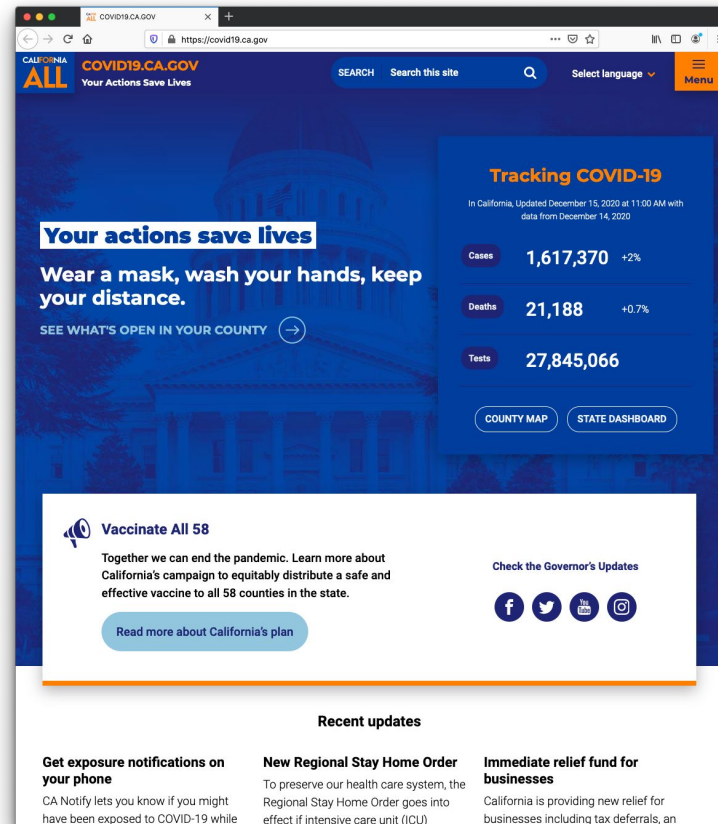




# ODI collaborates across government to help Californians.

Californians face complex issues like economic recovery, systemic inequity and climate change. Lasting change requires ODI to collaborate among multiple entities and diverse perspectives. During the COVID19 pandemic ODI's partners have included Health & Human Services Agency (CHHS) and Labor & Workforce Development Agency.

ODI focuses first on people's needs, pain points and challenges then finds the right technology and policy solutions to address those needs. ODI frames the right problems to address, creates innovative solutions and advises state leaders. This unique approach complements other California agencies and departments. As an office within the Government Operations Agency, ODI works closely with GovOps deputy secretaries, the state Chief Data Officer, California Department of Technology (CDT), Department of General Services (DGS), and others.



*Covid19.ca.gov is a collaboration of ODI, CHHS, Governor's Office, CDT and other departments.*

*The site provides up-to-date information about staying healthy, getting assistance, seeing what businesses are open and tracking data like ICU capacity. It is also an anchor for other state services like HealthCorps and Great Plates Delivered.*

*ODI built the original site in only 4 days. Daily, the ODI team helps coordinate among departments, writes new content, updates the guidance, improves the design, data and code, and builds new functions and features.*

# ODI takes a Californian-first approach to design better government services.

*Putting Californians at the center means designing fast online and offline systems, helping people find the information they need and understand and use that information, and making it easy to access services.*

## Examples from the past year

### Claimant & Employer Experiences

Worked with EDD and other partners to simplify the instructions to apply for unemployment insurance, made it easier for employers to provide Work Share benefits, and quickly stood up a system to help claimants certify retroactively in the first months of the pandemic.

### Covid19.ca.gov Equity Page

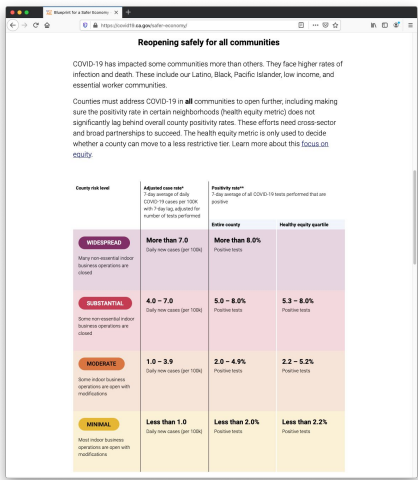
Developed a combination of information and data visualizations to provide Californians with a snapshot of how COVID-19 is having a disparate impact on some of our most vulnerable communities.

### Alpha.ca.gov

Created a proof of concept working with GovOps and CDT to show how user research, content design, and technology tools could successfully make information and services easy to find, easy to understand, and easy to use.

### Performance Analytics

Used several tools to analyze website tech and performance, identify and troubleshoot slow performance, optimize for accessibility, and deliver information that is easier to understand and access.



*Rather than making Californians visit multiple websites with competing information, covid19.ca.gov takes a people-first approach, providing a single source of truth and unified guidance for Californians trying to navigate the pandemic. This can be a model for future cross-departmental coordinated response.*

# ODI uses research, data, and analytics to help design better services.

*ODI gathers and shares the views, voices and experiences of Californians. By collecting and analyzing data, ODI is able to provide actionable insights that enable leaders to use evidence in decision making.*

## Examples from the past year

### Services User Research

Conducted interviews, surveys, usability tests and discussions to understand individuals' and businesses' challenges and gather feedback which informed the design of [alpha.ca.gov](https://alpha.ca.gov), [covid19.ca.gov](https://covid19.ca.gov) and several EDD services.

### Modern Data Analysis Infrastructure

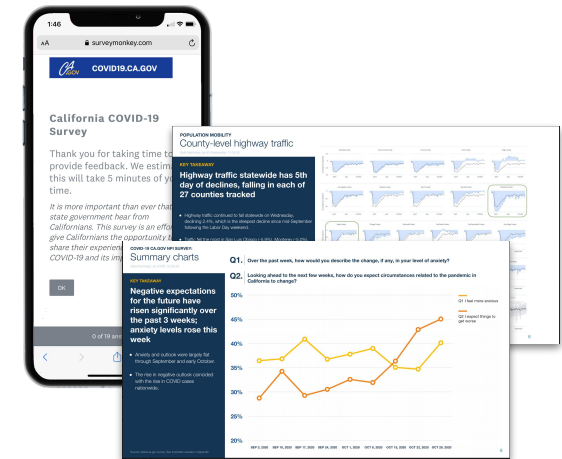
Created the prototype of an innovative, scalable, cloud-based infrastructure that simplifies the intake and analysis of data, makes data easily available, and can enable teams without a lot of resources to begin developing a data practice.

### NPI Analysis Book

Worked with the Governor's Office, CHHS, CDT and state Chief Data Officer to deliver a daily and weekly data snapshot to leaders on the impact of the state's COVID-19 non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI) to inform leaders' actions in the rapidly evolving pandemic.

### Sentiment and Behavior Surveys

Fielded digital surveys asking Californians across the state from different ages and backgrounds what they need and what challenges they face to inform decision making and improve services.



*A daily survey gathers quantitative and qualitative data about Californians' perceptions on a range of topics. To date, over 100,000 people have responded, giving a dynamic snapshot of activity and social sentiment. Summaries of the data and some of their stories are shared in the NPI Analysis Book.*

# ODI helps agencies and departments build their innovation capabilities.

*Broader transformation requires all departments to be able to create services that solve people's needs. ODI co-creates solutions as part of its core work, making toolsets and providing advice to increase partners' capabilities and share results across government.*

## Examples from the past year

### Usability Test Environment

Helped design, create and use a digital test space where staff can get feedback from real California claimants on how to improve new forms and instructions before going live.

### Homelessness Data Integration System

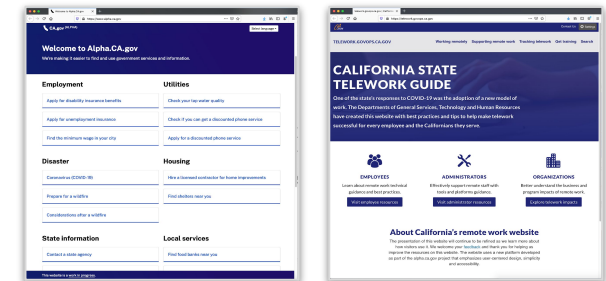
Collaborated with the state Chief Data Officer, CDT and Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency on a challenge based procurement where vendors prototyped solutions as part of the process to create a flexible data integration platform.

### Identity Verification System

Helped scope, procure and implement higher integrity identity verification and identify and mitigate access challenges for underserved claimants.

### Web Analytics Platform & Training

Created a standardized data reporting process and began helping several departments use these tools to understand who comes to their websites, what services they access, and how to improve content, design, and performance.



*Alpha.ca.gov was an ODI-led project to build a new digital gateway for state services. The team used an approach grounded in understanding and designing for Californians' needs and created reusable code and digital assets. ODI used the Alpha approach and tools to create the covid19.ca.gov site and GovOps used them to build the COVID Telework website.*

## ODI is building a flexible, responsive organization that can have greater impact.

*In addition to project work, ODI has been focused on setting up the organization to thrive. By bringing creativity to how it recruits, its team structure and its operational systems, ODI is creating an organization that can quickly pivot and respond to urgent needs. These efforts will enable ODI to work with more agencies and departments, diversify its portfolio and scale its impact.*

### Leadership and Team

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The Director of ODI joined in June 2020. ODI also hired and appointed a Chief Deputy Director, Deputy Directors, an Administrative Chief and a Head of Talent.

ODI uses a variety of hiring vehicles including CEAs and other civil service staff, select staff from partner departments brought in by inter-agency agreements, exempt appointments made by the Governor, special consultants, and contractors. The team is intentionally virtual, spread across the state and enabled by cloud-based technology tools.

To respond to specific needs, ODI brings on and assigns team members to projects as needed. ODI has invited staff from other teams to work with ODI and learn new methods, tools and approaches.

### Digital Innovation Services Revolving Fund

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Title 2 Division 3 Part 2.5 Chapter 1 §12815(l)(1) created the Digital Innovation Services Revolving Fund within the State Treasury on July 1, 2020. Therefore, the Digital Innovation Services Revolving Fund had no revenue or expenditures for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2020.

*Innovating in 2020 meant understanding and responding to the needs of Californians who were trying to get through the pandemic. Deep-rooted challenges in serving Californians, especially the most vulnerable, remain. Over the next year, ODI will focus on building capacity to continue closing those gaps. It will provide training and tools to help programs use research, data and technology to understand Californians' challenges and expectations. It will work with state partners to simplify processes and make it faster for people to get the assistance they need. It will help build resilient digital services that can flex to serve Californians in the face of adversity. As the digital innovation office for the state, ODI is committed to working in partnership with the Legislature, departments and external stakeholders to help build a more equitable and prosperous California for all.*



