



CASE STUDY | COVID-19 RESPONSE

OUR EXPERTS SERVE AS FORCE MULTIPLIERS IN SEDGWICK COUNTY'S COVID-19 RESPONSE

CHALLENGE

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified revenue uncertainty for county governments as staff, equipment, and funds have had to be quickly redirected to infection containment. While programs like the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) represent a significant remedy for resource-strapped local governments, many counties lack the capacity to stand up and run new grant programs and shoulder the administrative burden that federal funding programs present.

Sedgwick County in south central Kansas recently faced this dilemma. The county received \$99.6 million in direct allocation from CRF and another \$9.3 million through the State of Kansas CARES allocation. The immediate challenge in allocating these funds was a lack of experience among county finance officers in dealing with federal disaster relief. Even with a dedicated COVID-19 financial assistance team in place, the resource requirements to manage multiple state and federal grant proposals and numerous fund distributions within the community was overwhelming their staff's capacity.

Given the urgency to get COVID-19 response measures in place, the county decided to boost funding application and management capacity by augmenting its internal team with CARES Act funding experts from Witt O'Brien's. Using Witt O'Brien's consultants also gave the county greater breadth and depth in COVID-19 response that helped streamline assessing and prioritizing community needs to accelerate and amplify program delivery.

SOLUTION

Witt O'Brien's helped the county devise a comprehensive community assessment and Notice of Funding Opportunity to prioritize the needs of local governments and public and private sector entities including churches, school systems and social service agencies. The firm leveraged its communications expertise to help the county communicate program eligibility to the community, which reduced the number of rejected programs. Witt O'Brien's expert analysts compiled the assessment data from 131 responses totaling \$165 million in need and organized it



Our experienced experts lead local governments, communities and organizations through the COVID-19 pandemic response.

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into five specific need categories that informed a strategic spending plan. The plan included funding distribution models and recommendations, along with grant agreements to ensure that both the county and the recipient were protected.

Witt O'Brien's also customized its grant application software to meet the county's need to handle multiple recipient forms, and to provide risk assessment forms, tools and dashboards for internal and external county auditors. Increasing COVID-19 testing capacity within its communities and local industries was a top priority for the county.

Witt O'Brien's brought in a pandemic response team and epidemiologist to help develop a strategic proposal that allowed the county to compare various testing methods and select the best solutions. Witt O'Brien's also developed a questionnaire that ensured that the county could fairly evaluate testing partners.

Witt O'Brien's experts helped expedite the procurement of testing equipment and supplies by analyzing county expense eligibility memos to ensure compliance, allowable fund use and cost reasonableness. The county used the analysis to identify equipment and supply needs based on various testing environments such as nursing homes, drive-through sites, and mobile units. The analysis helped justify the addition of 150 temporary staff and securing portable workspace for contact tracing.

To guide strategic planning, Witt O'Brien's worked with Sedgwick County to develop a model to evaluate current cost exposures since the COVID-19 outbreak and future planning and response needs in six categories: county regional response, county preparation and future planning, community organizations and social services, cities and taxing authorities, schools and business and economic revitalization. The model is helping the county design delivery models to meet current needs and provides a framework for adapting those models to future states as the needs of the community change.

RESILIENCE DELIVERED

Working with Witt O'Brien's CARES Act experts, Sedgwick County now has a comprehensive, strategic COVID-19 funding allocation framework, backed by data and analytics. The framework has given the county's finance assistance team greater insight into federal rules and standards, which will help them navigate future funding opportunities as new rules come out. Utilizing the strategies, tools and templates they developed with Witt O'Brien's will allow the county to quickly conceptualize,

customize, and launch new programs as the needs of the community change, while keeping the administrative load manageable.

Looking down the road, Sedgwick County leaders are hoping to see broader range of flexibility in future funding rounds. They would like to create the infrastructure to teach testing methods within the community. Another area would be to improve broadband connectivity in rural areas and schools to support remote work and learning. The county would also like to secure funding to help businesses recoup lost revenue and increase support for school safety.

As they forge ahead, county leaders can be confident that they are taking the best approach to serve their community and reassure county taxpayers that COVID-19 response funds are being spent wisely.

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