

**2021 Rooney Award: Innovative State Human Resources Management Program
The State of Arizona COVID-19 Testing and Vaccination Program**

NOMINATOR:

Emily Rajakovich
Director of Human Resources

CONTACT:

Paul Shannon
Assistant Director, Benefits
paul.shannon@azdoa.gov
Mobile: (602) 525-6140
Main Line: (602) 542-5008



State of Arizona
Department of Administration
Human Resources Division
100 North 15th Avenue, Phoenix,
AZ 85007
Main Line: (602) 542-5482
FAX: (602) 542-2796

Program Description

As the administrative and business operations hub of Arizona state government, the Department of Administration (ADOA) provides medical and other health benefits to state employees in more than 100 State government agencies. This effort has included providing employees, their dependents and retirees with a robust set of health insurance benefits, including a wellness program that provides on-site health screening and flu vaccinations.

By late June 2020, the initial surge of COVID-19 cases in Arizona threatened the continuity of State agency operations. The virus had overwhelmed private sector testing facilities and many public-facing State services temporarily closed. The Benefits Section of ADOA's Human Resources Division (BSD/HRD) established a saliva-based, on-site drive-through COVID-19 testing program for all State employees that was expanded to include targeted workplace testing for State Departments of Transportation, Veterans' Services, Economic Security, Corrections and Juvenile Corrections staff. By early 2021, the program expanded to provide drive-through vaccinations for State employees, including vaccination events in rural communities and at State prisons for Corrections staff.

**2021 Rooney Award: Innovative State Human Resources Management Program
The State of Arizona COVID-19 Testing and Vaccination Program**

How long has the program been in operation (month and year)?

The program launched July 7, 2020.

Why was this program created? (What problem[s] or issues does it address?)

The onslaught and devastation of COVID-19 took everyone by surprise, with Arizona experiencing its first surge of COVID cases in early June 2020. With rapidly rising COVID cases, many public-facing State agencies struggled with outbreaks jeopardizing public and vulnerable population services. Lack of private sector testing capabilities and extremely long wait times for results aggravated the situation. Without widespread testing as a tool for controlling the spread of the disease, the State faced continuity of operations issues and the self-insured employee health insurance program was vulnerable to an unprecedented surge in infectious disease claims.

Why is this program a new and creative method?

This project was new and creative because life and death circumstances required rapid innovation and crisis leadership from the State's BSD/HRD team. Maintaining the continuity of Arizona government and the health and safety of State employees was our top priority. Of course, we also relied on scientists at Arizona State University (ASU) who developed an innovative, saliva-based PCR test that offered a very simple sample collection methodology that made a huge difference in the ability to mass test without a large number of medical personnel.

What were the program's start-up costs?

Start-up costs were minimal and limited to Personal Protective Equipment. ASU provided other supplies and equipment via our COVID-19 testing contract. ADOA and eventually other State agencies met most of our staffing needs without extra hiring and unbudgeted expenses.

**2021 Rooney Award: Innovative State Human Resources Management Program
The State of Arizona COVID-19 Testing and Vaccination Program**

What are the program's operational costs?

Project expenditures for both saliva tests and vaccinations, July 2020-May 2021, totalled nearly \$14.7 million. Saliva tests through ASU initially cost \$100 per test. The cost of sample collections were initially incurred through a separate agreement with ASU to collect samples, though eventually ADOA acquired the ability to do this in-house. See [Budget table, July 2020-May 2021](#).

How is this program funded?

Costs for testing (and later vaccinations) that were not paid with in-kind contributions were covered by the State Employee Health Insurance Trust Fund, a non-appropriated funding source used to pay self-insured medical and dental claims. Other in-kind contributions were funded by State agency and Federal funding sources. COVID-19 vaccines were supplied by the Federal government through the Arizona Department of Health Services.

Did this program originate in your state?

Arizona's program was made possible through ASU's ground-breaking saliva-based COVID-19 test and proactively secured by the State's benefit program to provide a fast and easy testing solution for state employees. While many other states may have had programs for testing and vaccinating State employees, we are not aware of anywhere else that Human Resources provided the pivotal leadership role.

Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If yes, how does this program differ?

We are not aware of any other State programs of this design.

How do you measure the success of this program?

2021 Rooney Award: Innovative State Human Resources Management Program The State of Arizona COVID-19 Testing and Vaccination Program

The measurement that matters most, the number of illnesses and deaths avoided, is unknowable, but it is impossible to overstate the success of bringing non-invasive, saliva-based COVID-19 testing to thousands of employees through an efficient and easy drive-through process that delivered results within 24-48 hours. This design prevented having to quarantine employees unnecessarily and allowed the State to continue safely offering mission-critical public services. See [agency testimonials](#).

For the vaccination program, the most relevant indicator of success is the number of eligible employees who received a vaccination. Between January 4 and April 26, 2021, more than one-third of eligible State employees (11,125) received at least one dose of vaccine and one-quarter of State employees (10,231) were fully vaccinated. This response rate is comparable to the vaccination rate in the country as a whole at the date. Additionally, intense effort was made to avoid wasting any doses of vaccine by maintaining employee standby lists so that every vial of vaccine was completely administered. See [table of Vaccine Program highlights](#).

How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

Initially the program's objective was to test State employees and provide results within 48 hours. As the testing program and demand evolved, we expanded it first to include dependents, then retirees and finally the general public. At the peak of the COVID-19 surge during the first week of 2021 the program conducted more than 4,300 tests from 33 testing events at 17 different locations conducted by staff from six different agencies and the National Guard.

From January through April 2021, we used the same drive-through design to offer COVID vaccinations to eligible employees, including in rural communities and at 12 State prison sites.