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## FDEM RECEIVES IT INNOVATION AWARD

**There is no doubt that over the past two years COVID-19 has provided its challenges in all aspects of our lives.** There are the obvious challenges that we see in headlines and in our daily lives, and then there are the challenges that are many times unseen but are sometimes the most important to solve. One of these often-overlooked challenges is how to manage and track staffing of hundreds of thousands of volunteers and healthcare professionals in these unprecedented times.



**Americans are stepping up like never before** to provide help, volunteer, and take on extra hours as we all do our part to combat and curb the pandemic. This past year, the Florida Division of Emergency Management (FDEM) was able to take these new staff tracking and administrative challenges and develop an innovative and effective digital tracking practice, something that could be effective in all states.

**This past summer, FDEM was awarded the State IT Innovation of the Year category for leveraging technology to improve the state's COVID-19 response by the StateScoop 50 Awards.** Florida's efforts for digital time tracking among paid and volunteer healthcare workers at COVID-19 testing and vaccination sites highlight one very important aspect of the emergency management profession; public-private sector partnerships.

In January of this year, FDEM was able to forge a partnership with the technology company Merit, leveraging their established IT resources and applying them to disaster response and recovery initiatives in the state. Through this partnership, the Division used Merit's verified identity platform to track nearly 850,000 professional hours across more than 100 COVID-19 testing and vaccination sites from January to June (when the award was presented). Additionally, the Division has also used Merit for other components of the state's COVID-19 response efforts, including the statewide outreach, registration, and verification of more than 3,300 volunteer medical professionals. This partnership gave all 67 county emergency management directors the ability to access lists of verified, licensed medical professionals who wanted to volunteer at state- and county-supported COVID-19 testing and vaccination sites. These shared responsibilities and resources allow for the delivery of the most timely and cost-effective services and responses possible.

While this award highlights the state's innovative and effective response to the on-going pandemic, this partnership could shine a light on how states can utilize the resources of their private sector partnerships in responding to other kinds of disasters and mitigation efforts.

Included in the StateScoop 50 Awards was the nomination of NEMA's own Kevin Guthrie, Director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management, for their Golden Gov award, recognizing visionary and innovative leadership across the country. Regarding the digital time tracking efforts, Guthrie had this to say, "By proactively implementing innovative technology in the state's emergency responses, the Division can save time and focus on delivering critical resources to Floridians. We are honored to be considered a leader in state government technology. We look forward to continuing this progress and improving future disaster responses."

**It is becoming increasingly clear that ambiguity and change will be the only constant for a while**, something that the emergency management community has dealt with for years. With the continuing innovation from leaders in the field, such as FDEM and their IT innovations, will continue to allow for patient/survivor first care and responses.

**We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.**

- Albert Einstein

If you would like more information or have a state practice you'd like to highlight as part of this ongoing series, please contact [Jamie Logan](mailto:jamie@nemaweb.org)

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