OneAlabama
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Title:	OneAlabama: How the Alabama Department of Human Resources uses technology to serve families needing assistance
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State:	The State of Alabama
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Start:	April 2020 (full launch)
Project links:	OneAlabama OneAlabama on Google Play Store

OneAlabama
How the Alabama Department of Human Resources uses technology to serve families needing assistance

Executive Summary

The Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) is Alabama's primary social service agency. Many of DHR's programs are designed to help low-income families, but they also have several programs available to anyone in need. The department has a clear vision and core values. Their vision is to help change lives for the better by providing premier social welfare programs with integrity, respect, commitment and accountability.

Being a mission-driven agency comes with a heavy responsibility to the people they serve. With the way their constituents conduct business changing, Alabama DHR was looking to move two of their programs online to be more user-friendly and mobile-friendly.

The Alabama Department of Human Resources teamed up with PayIt, a Software as a Service (SaaS) provider of government services, to create OneAlabama. With OneAlabama, DHR can now digitally provide Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to their constituents.

This innovative approach has fundamentally improved the lives of their constituents, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Launched fully in April 2020, OneAlabama allows citizens to submit Family Assistance (FA) applications, report changes for their employment and training program (JOBS) and upload supporting documentation. This can be done from any device—computer, tablet or cellphone—providing their residents with the convenience and privacy they deserve.

Since launch, OneAlabama has seen steady increases in usage each month, with December 2020 and January 2021 seeing 59% of all TANF applications coming through the online experience.

Project Narrative: Idea

Prior to OneAlabama, constituents either visited the office or utilized time intensive options to submit Family Assistance applications, report changes or provide supporting documentation. The idea to look for a more online- and mobile-friendly approach to TANF services came via a referral from the Alabama Governor's Office.

With people expecting online and mobile options for conducting their business, DHR understood how critical it was to get this off the ground, and quickly. Since OneAlabama follows a SaaS business model, it was launched in under a year, and can be rapidly scaled and expanded. Additional Department of Human Resources workflows can be automated, building an even more encompassing digital solution. Providing their constituents with a user-friendly experience for these sensitive services was also top-of-mind for the state. Making OneAlabama easy to use has given constituents a sense of dignity while conducting business with the state during a clearly trying period in their lives.

The timing of OneAlabama's development and deployment was serendipitous. While the COVID-19 pandemic was bringing in-person operations to a screeching halt, the Alabama DHR had a new, safe and contactless way for their clients to access these essential services. During the onset of COVID-19, Alabama DHR saw a 218% increase in online applications submitted.

This shift to digital also proved critical for caseworkers. Applications being submitted online means they can be processed by staff online, too. With access to a full administrative portal, staff can log in at any time to check for new applications. Applications have a 30-day turnaround, which means processing these in a timely manner is crucial. After the application is submitted, the next step is a full interview which can be completed by phone or in-person. Finally, supporting documentation is required, which can be uploaded directly to OneAlabama. All of this can be done without visiting the office.

OneAlabama is accessible to citizens from their preferred device. This allows the Alabama DHR to meet their constituents wherever they are.

- Desktop and laptop
- Tablet
- Mobile (web and app)
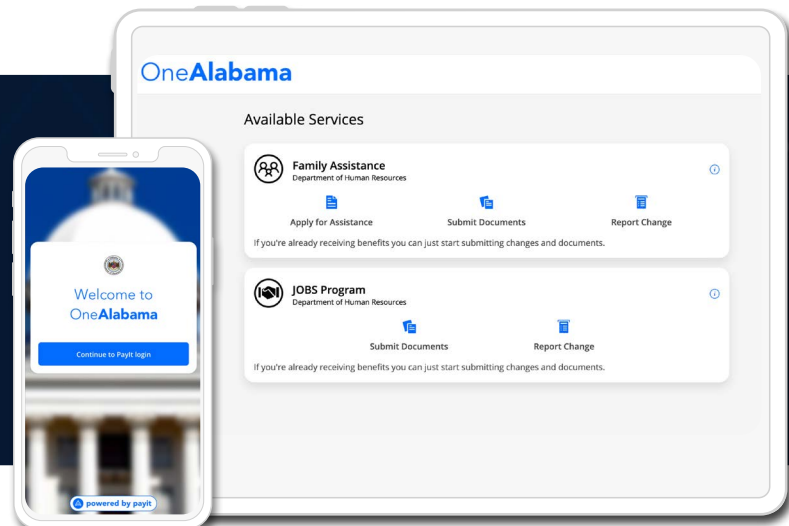
Project Narrative: Implementation

In the public sector, deploying new forms of technology needs to be as non-disruptive as possible. Since thousands of individuals rely on Family Assistance and the JOBS Program, DHR would take a multi-phased approach to rolling out OneAlabama. This was done in order to test this new technology and gather the necessary insights from both end users and their caseworkers.

The launch was broken up into three stages mixing larger and smaller counties based on the number of TANF applications processed.

> **Pilot:** Launched Sept. 2019 for 5 counties
> **Group one:** Launched Feb. 2020 for 31 counties
> **Group two:** Launched April 2020 for the remaining 31 counties

This project required a successful marriage of DHR's IT staff and resources and PayIt's implementation and integration teams. In order for OneAlabama to be successful—from both a constituent and business standpoint—it must follow all of the state's business rules and interface with FACETS, the Alabama DHR system of record. At the end of each business day, PayIt provides DHR with a secure flat-file exchange that sends identifying information from each application or document submission. This is then cross-referenced with FACETS, which returns a file back to PayIt to confirm a record match, indicate a duplicate record or record any changes in status.

The benefits of SaaS aren't just realized by the Alabama Department of Human Resources, though. The end user gets to interact with an easy-to-use workflow experience. OneAlabama allows constituents to create a single profile where all digital documents and receipts can be stored for easy access. The state is able to meet their constituents wherever they are, with OneAlabama being accesible from any device with internet or data connectivity. A user can start the process on their smartphone, and finish it from their desktop computer. Due to the sensitive nature of these services, identity and access management is critical. OneAlabama allows users to securely log in using Google, Facebook or creating an account with their email.

Driving adoption for OneAlabama was another important part of the implementation process. Since this was originally only offered in-office, DHR caseworkers would hand out business cards to their applicants, urging them to go online. Large banners and posters were also strategically placed in each DHR county office across the state. Between these efforts and the overnight shift online due to COVID-19, the Alabama Department of Human Resources is seeing nearly 60% of all total TANF submissions coming in from OneAlabama.

Project Narrative: Results

The SaaS business model allows the Alabama Department of Human Resources to avoid costly replacements of back-office systems, but still provide a data-driven experience for agency workers and an easy-to-use experience for constituents. The adoption of OneAlabama is very promising for the state. Prior to launch, the only way to conduct this business was to visit the office. With OneAlabama, DHR is now seeing 59% of applications come through this new online channel. This underscores the desire from constituents to have a simple, mobile-friendly method for interacting with their government.

The JOBS Program requires enrollees to submit verification of hours worked or classes taken every week. This can now be uploaded directly to OneAlabama, as opposed to being mailed to or dropped off at a county office. All uploads come in with a pending status and staff members then mark them as received in the portal, triggering an automatic email alerting the user. Clients can also log in to OneAlabama to see the status of their submissions. This allows some of the inquiries constituents have to be answered without direct involvement of a caseworker and, in many cases, has greatly reduced foot traffic in county offices.

OneAlabama was a technological bright spot during a year rife with challenges. Being able to not only serve some of the most vulnerable people during a pandemic, but do it in a way that truly makes their lives easier, was the most tangible and meaningful result of all.

The Alabama Department of Human Resources

DHR is Alabama's primary social service agency. Many of DHR's programs are designed to help low-income families, but also have several programs available to anyone in need.

What citizens can do with OneAlabama

- Submit Family Assistance applications
- Report changes for their employment and training program (JOBS)
- Upload and verify supporting documentation
- Receive status updates via email

123% increase in online TANF applications YoY (04/2020 vs. 04/2021)

59% of all applications are now submitted through OneAlabama

5,353 total online TANF applications since launch (as of May 2021)

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Meeting the needs of our clients is paramount to our agency and the introduction of OneAlabama, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, allowed us to leverage technology in a way that was beneficial to not only the families we serve, but also to our staff in county offices throughout the state.

Faye Nelson
Deputy Commissioner

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