

Mass Vaccine Rollout Showcases Healthcare Agility.



Freed clients who quickly implemented mass COVID-19 vaccination programs shared five success factors in common — factors that could be applied to addressing any expedient need.

“Healthcare agility” was not a commonly used term until recently. Historically, the healthcare industry has had a reputation for deliberateness—and for good reason, since patient safety is paramount. Yet the industry’s response to COVID-19 demonstrates its ability to be both deliberate *and* agile while still producing quality results that benefit patients.

A multitude of providers responded to the new challenges of the pandemic with incredible nimbleness and delivered an array of successful patient outcomes. From treating COVID-19 patients to set up testing sites to rolling out vaccinations, many private and public health entities displayed an unprecedented ability to plan, react, and change over accelerated timelines.

Five quality success factors

The highly scrutinized COVID-19 vaccine rollout provides an excellent example of how healthcare can act nimbly, respond rapidly, and in the process achieve remarkable results. My organization assisted several health systems with their mass vaccine administration. Repeatedly, the following five success factors proved critical in ensuring safe, swift, and effective vaccine delivery. These factors could be applied to other expedient healthcare needs.

1. **Align around a central goal:** It's a core tenet of business operations that successful teams require a clear and common goal. With the vaccine rollout, the goal was obvious: Get vaccines into arms as safely and quickly as possible. Many healthcare organizations quickly rallied around this central goal and took decisive moves to eliminate internal barriers, resource constraints, and lower-priority initiatives. This display of essentialism and focus was critical to teams responding rapidly and with full executive-level support. Because the pandemic impacted so many aspects of life and society, alignment around vaccine goals extended beyond healthcare organizations. In our work to quickly secure mass vaccination sites for providers, we found representatives from universities, hotels, and event centers eager to lend as much support as possible. For example, one university offered to provide ultra-low-temperature freezers from its science lab for vaccine storage. This outpouring of non-healthcare industry support might be mobilized in the future for other initiatives. When healthcare organizations properly communicate needs and societal benefits around a clear and concise goal, external partners may be willing to find creative ways to engage.
2. **Create a sense of urgency:** As COVID-19 deaths continued into 2021, a sense of urgency around vaccination timelines swept over the healthcare industry. "Every shot we give has the potential to save a life" and "We have vaccines; we have to get them into people's arms" were two common quotes we heard from healthcare executives as they sought to rally exhausted teams. Yet how can healthcare executives bring this sense of urgency to other critical issues, such as health disparities? While it may prove difficult to achieve the same sense of immediacy, some common ingredients, like focused attention, data transparency, and clear communication, increase the likelihood of a similarly successful drive for action.
3. **Start small and plan for change:** Providers set up and launched mass vaccination sites quickly, with the expectation that changes would be inevitable. Because such sites were new to most organizations, their leaders adopted a business agility approach and fully expected to deploy several evolutions of site layouts and workflows before reaching optimal efficiency. While patient safety of course remained the top priority, leadership allowed noncritical logistics to be worked out and validated later. As a result, many mass vaccination sites successfully launched within just a few weeks. Providers may find this agile approach similarly beneficial for meeting other fast-turn needs, especially when patient safety can be prioritized alongside a "start small and plan for change" approach.
4. **Forge new organizational partnerships:** The COVID-19 public health crisis and ongoing vaccination efforts are bigger than any one entity. Many healthcare organizations and public health departments recognized that communities would be best served by organizations working together. Companies and counties formed

public-private arrangements within days to share planning efforts, physical space, staff, and vaccine supply. Private healthcare organizations that were typically competitors formed agreements to co-locate at mass vaccination sites. Community organizations lent essential support in getting vaccines to hard-to-reach populations, like those who were homebound, vaccine-hesitant, or undocumented. This unprecedented collaboration was instrumental for rapidly administering the vaccine. As new healthcare needs and opportunities arise, executives should look for win-win partnerships beyond the confines of their organizations.

5. **Accept some risk trade-offs:** Healthcare organizations are generally risk averse. The realities of the pandemic, however, seemed to force a slight shift in risk tolerance. While organizations continued to focus on providing the highest possible levels of patient care, they were also forced to carefully evaluate some risk/reward trade-offs. For example, should a mass vaccination site delay its target opening day if slip-prevention mats to cover the entry threshold have not yet arrived? Does the possibility of preventing a fall outweigh the opportunity to vaccinate 1,000 people per day? Adopting a mindset that emphasizes the greater good over eliminating all possible risks may yield a more nimble response that still preserves an organization's top priorities.

Benefiting patients

The five key tactics outlined above enabled providers to move with amazing speed to open mass vaccination centers. One client we supported took just a single month to build capacity to administer 200,000+ vaccines per week. While some of the key drivers were unique to the emergency pandemic situation, organizations could leverage many aspects of these success factors elsewhere to respond quickly to needs and improve health.