



## Hear From Your Peers: State of Connecticut Paid Family Leave COO

Eva Skidmore: Thank you so much, Casey, and thank you to everybody who's joining us today. I think that first session was incredible. As Casey mentioned, I'm Eva Skidmore, Vice President of our Global Public Sector here at Salesforce, and I am thrilled and honored to have Kris Floyd here with me today. Welcome Kris.

Kris Floyd: Hi Eva, and thank you for having me as part of today's program.

Eva Skidmore: Awesome. Well, Kris is Acting Chief Operating Officer of the Connecticut Paid Leave Authority and I'd love to hear a little bit more about yourself, your role and the function of your organization.

Kris Floyd: Well, thank you so much. Well, I'll take you back to July of 2019. In the state of Connecticut, we voted for paid family leave to become a law, and that law suggested that we would implement paid family leave in two stages. So I am serving with our CEO, Andrea Barton Reeves, and I'm serving as the acting chief operating officer to help stand up a brand new agency and implement this law, which is being done in two phases. The first phase is for January 1st of this year. By statute, we are required to collect one half of 1% of employee wages, which are being collected into an employer trust fund. And that is being done over the course of this first year. And then beginning in January 1st of 2022, residents will be able to receive paid leave benefits for qualifying life events.

Eva Skidmore: Amazing. And so it sounds like quite a challenge to start an agency from scratch, but also an opportunity. You had a blank slate. How did you think about that challenge?

Kris Floyd: You don't get opportunities like this often, and this was truly a blank slate opportunity. And when I say that, when this agency was formed, we were formed really with an opportunity to start up an organization. As I mentioned, our CEO was the only person. I was the next person brought on to work with her. And we have very slowly grown to an organization of right now about 16 people. And in that, we have had to do everything: people, process, technology. Last spring, we had to select a technology platform to build our employer contribution platform. We selected a technology integrator to help us



develop that capability. And then we had to hire. Just like a startup business, hiring all the resources; our finance resources, our IT resources, our marketing and communications resources. We are a complete startup business.

And what really just made it a little bit more complex, not that no one is experiencing this, the pandemic. And so our CEO started last March and was in our state agency office in Hartford, Connecticut. And within two days, everyone was sent home. And so we have been completely remote. We've never met each other. All of our teams that are partnering with us to develop all of these capabilities, we are completely working remote. And that's just a model that a year or two years ago, no one would've thought, how's it possible to not meet people in person. But we've all had to be very innovative and be very successful at it. And as we are right now, with all of that work that we've done, by end of April of this year, we have successfully registered over 110,000 businesses throughout the state to become part of the paid leave program. And that will enable their employees January 1st of 2022 to reach out to us and apply for paid leave benefits.

Eva Skidmore: That's incredible. That is really incredible. I was about to ask you what the impact was that the pandemic had on your mission and in terms of the number of requests you've had, what a challenge to start an organization with a blank slate.

Kris Floyd: And I will share with you the biggest opportunity there was everyone knew that we were commissioned, we were starting this agency. But when the pandemic hit, everyone very quickly understood, wow, paid leave benefits, we need this. People are having to take time off from their work because of the pandemic where people were sick. And so a lot of the requests that we got last year were, can we start the program January 1st? How fast can we go? And really, it was one of those situations where we understand, but by law the new law goes in January 1st, 2022, but it's a benefit that everyone immediately, because of the pandemic, saw the relevance and the impact that it would have for families. And so that need is still there and we know we have demand coming January 1st.

Eva Skidmore: That's incredible. And it seems to me just from many of the services that government agencies offer that the beneficiaries of government



service and our public servants and just the level of effort that we're all putting in to make a difference in our communities is just that much more clear and that much more impactful.

Kris Floyd: Absolutely.

Eva Skidmore: So speaking of that, how are you measuring the success of your program and how are you thinking about addressing the needs as they increase now that you've turned on the registration for those businesses and the ability for people to apply.

Kris Floyd: We're watching very closely, month over month, the number of businesses that are registering. We're also looking at that data in comparison to the information that we have from the department of labor of businesses that are registered. We're also working very closely with our chambers of commerce to make sure that we can find other small businesses that might not know about this law and the benefit that it can have for their employees. So we're really working to track our registrations and also look for businesses that may not know about the program and get them registered.

And then we're also tracking the contributions that are coming in from these businesses. And we've done a very extensive actuarial studies to make sure that we know that we will have funds from a solvency perspective. And we so far are exceeding those projections that were measured over the last year and a half, and we're right now also working to bring on additional actuarial staff so that we can always keep those numbers honed and just recalibrate them against the actual data of registrations that we've registered from businesses. So we're constantly monitoring, looking at what we've received and measuring it against our actuarial studies.

Eva Skidmore: Kris, one of the things that we talked about as we were preparing for this conversation was around how to be smart using the data you already have and whether there's information for other agencies or making sure your data sharing and protection is in place. That was something that we talked about before. Was that something that has been important to you and the team as you've been working over the past year on getting this program launched?



Kris Floyd:

That has been important. Last August, what we envisioned was being able to build a platform, build a website where we knew we would need businesses to register to be part of the paid family leave program. So one of the key decision points that we thought through was if we're going to do this and we want to make it easy for businesses, how can we demonstrate that we actually know them? One way to do that was to leverage information that we had already with businesses who have to submit information on a month or quarter basis to the Department of Labor and to Department of Revenue Services. And so our intention at that time was to get regular data that we can use and see that as our platform.

I will just say it took a while to work through that process, but we are now there where we have access to that. And usually with those organizations, you have to work through a memorandum of understanding because your two agencies are making sure that there's data protections and you have agreements on how the data is going to use. And so our legal teams needed to work through that process. And so as of this year, now we will have access to that information. So what it didn't allow us to do back last September was to automatically seed our registration platform with all the businesses. But now as the businesses are registered, we can compare information, we have access to see are we missing businesses that are registered, are there other businesses that we should find? And so now we are able to be more smart with using data that's already available. And we continue to use that approach.

There's another program that is a new program within the state of Connecticut which is called Business One Stop. That program has been intentional on creating a new strategic identity management for employers that are registered with the state of Connecticut. That platform was developed. And as we were launching in September of 2020, we intentionally partnered with Business One Stop so that as we asked businesses to register, they would register with the same credentials that Business One Stop had developed. So again, we were looking for opportunities for reusability and also to make that experience seamless with businesses that are already registered with the state of Connecticut. So we continue to look for those opportunities to partner, leverage, use and reuse existing data and processes.



Eva Skidmore: That's incredible. Thank you. When we spoke earlier also, you talked about the importance of outreach and engagement and having a set of tools that make it possible to communicate with your stakeholders and the potential participants. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Kris Floyd: Yeah. Our outreach and engagement strategy has been multifaceted. We knew that many businesses, healthcare providers, employees did not know or understand about family medical leave or paid family medical leave. And so our strategy was to really think about what are all the different types of relationships and partnerships that we should really reach out to and help educate about what this program is and what it means to them. So whether it was banking association, manufacturing associations, legal firms that have to explain this to their employers, hosting webinars. We've hosted over 160 webinars about educating various audiences on paid family leave. We've worked with the libraries, we've worked with the chambers of commerce. So we really, from an outreach perspective, looked at who are case stakeholders.

We also then, part of that outreach and engagement looked at what would be our social media strategy and how would we use the various channels to help convey that message. We also looked at who are the different healthcare organizations that we should partner with, thinking about domestic violence. So part of this statute allows people to have paid leave benefits if they are victims of family violence. And so we found the organizations that support women and families around domestic violence, and really just share the information with them. So from an outreach and engagement, we really had to step back and say, how do we need to educate our audiences? Who are the audiences? And what is the best way to get information to them about the program?

We've also had a very active radio campaign. We are now, again, as we're starting to come out of the pandemic, we originally thought that we would have a lot of billboard signs on highways, but with the past year with people being home and not a lot of people driving, we revisited our strategy in 2020 and said, "Well, we're not going to spend our money on that type of advertising." But now that we're in 2021, again, we'll look at where do we put up billboards to help share the information? So our outreach and engagement has been a



full end-to-end marketing strategy and approach to make sure that we can get that message out there.

Eva Skidmore: That's incredible. And that sounds like also building a lot of trust and accountability within your partner organizations and with the communities you serve. Well, let me shift a little bit and talk about the lessons that you've learned before and during the pandemic. And just how in terms of engaging with your stakeholders, using that data that you already had that you mentioned, and then just the importance of engaging with your communities. Like what are some of the lessons that you learned as part of this process?

Kris Floyd: Part of the process is really having a focused outreach and engagement initiative where we would really get to talk with all of our stakeholders and constituents. And when I say that, it's people who will take advantage of the program, claimants, but also spending a lot of time with small businesses. Small businesses are not used to having to administer paid leave benefits and we're not expecting them to do that because we are their partner to support that. But this benefit will directly affect many small businesses. So we've talked and had seminars. We've hosted over 160 webinars around understanding what paid family leave means to you. Also in January of 2022, the Connecticut FMLA laws are also expanding. So helping them understand that employers have the opportunity to apply for a private plan. And so instead of participating in our program, they can go into a private plan.

So we've done a lot of outreach for businesses that now need to comply with this and helping them to understand we work with trade associations. We're really being creative in taking a step back and saying, what are all the ways that we can touch the state to help share the message of paid family leave? And then also we are being very, very strategic and wanting to make sure that as we introduce this program, we can come forward to businesses and residents hopefully in a way that lets them know we already know you, you have a relationship with the Department of Labor. You already have a relationship with Department of Revenue Services within the state. How can we use information that we have already within the state so that we can make it easy for you to engage with Connecticut paid leave? So we are actively doing that. We are actively working with our economic development commission and all the various agencies. All



of them have been so collaborative and partnering with us to start up this program.

Eva Skidmore: Amazing. That sounds also really rewarding. Talk to me about your perspective on what it's like to be able to serve those communities and the beneficiaries of your program.

Kris Floyd: It is very rewarding. When we've been building this program, we have done focus group sessions, done a lot of usability sessions so that as we've designed our website and our contribution platform, we have had lots of listening tours just asking people, what does paid leave mean to you? As you engage with our system and our tools, what do you need in order to run your business or to help communicate to your employees? What are the things that your employers are going to be asking? And we've had these focus group studies directly with businesses, employees, and they tell us very, very meaningfully if they had paid these benefits, they would be able to go with their mother, their child, it'd allow them to be there in appointments that need someone as a caregiver to be there and not have to worry about not being compensated while they're away. So, so many people have let us know how important this is and how it'll allow them to take care of family members in such a meaningful way, and then still be able to meet their daily needs.

Eva Skidmore: That's incredible. I love the customer centricity, the focus on the experience of the people who are engaging with your program. And I think that's something, whether you're starting from a blank slate or whether you're starting from a legacy system and trying to modernize, that is possible to think about that customer experience.

Kris Floyd: It's so part of it for us.

Eva Skidmore: Yeah. I've one last question for you and that is, are there any suggestions that you would give to others listening, your peers in government agencies, whether it's federal, state, local, defense organizations, that are thinking about digital service delivery or data or relationship management. What suggestions would you give others in terms of your experience building this program?

Kris Floyd: I would definitely start with people first. Do the listening tours, find out what are their needs. The focus group studies that we did were



invaluable. And then also aside from the focus group studies, I would also partner with as many trade associations that you can. One of the most valuable relationships that we established, and actually they found us, which was the National Association of Payroll Reporting Consortium, NPRC. This is a consortium of payroll providers that are already supporting five or six other states for paid family leave benefits. And so they understand the data that we need, they understand how other states have collected it. They gave us so much information about here's what the state of Washington did when they implemented paid family leave. Here's what Massachusetts did. Here's what works. Here's where you're going to find pitfalls. It's like a gem that we found that we did not expect. And so you will find, whether it's paid family leave or any other initiative, there may be trade or organizations around your specialty, and build that relationship and they can be a great partner for you.

Eva Skidmore: Amazing. Anything else on lessons or best practices for your peers, and I can wrap up?

Kris Floyd: I think staying people centric, staying close. We have a very engaged board of directors that we are accountable to as an agency. We keep them updated month over month on our progress. There's a big concern always around is there transparency of information and how we're spending the state's funds to implement this program. We make sure we're absolutely transparent where the money has been spent, how we're doing on our hiring, where we are on the progress, on our delivery of our systems and our platforms. And each month we have outstanding engagement from our board of directors and they look back and they say, "Wow, you've started this with just 16 people. How did you do that?" And it's really with their support and it's just being tenacious and sharing information on an ongoing basis, and then keep pushing forward even during a pandemic.

Eva Skidmore: Kris, thank you so much for your participation today.

Kris Floyd: Thank you. It's been an honor to share the perspective. We're so excited about Connecticut Paid Leave, and we know it will have a direct impact on many people. We recently did a press conference when we reached our 108,000 registrations and we had businesses come and share their perspective of what it's going to allow for their





employees and for their families. And everyone is excited about the program. So thank you.

Eva Skidmore: That's incredible. And so with that, we are out of time for today's conversation. I am honored to have the time with you today. And for everybody who's still with us, we have plenty of more content coming your way. So stay tuned. On behalf of our event partners, our sponsors, we appreciate you, we appreciate your time. And now I'll send it back over to you, Casey.