

Innovation, Dedication, Excellence and Achievement in Service Award

Colorado Department of State – Office of the Secretary of State

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Project:

Rapid Response Election Security Cyber Unit (RESCU)

Project lead:

Nathan Blumenthal

Prior to joining the Colorado Department of State, Blumenthal served as Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Counter Terrorism and Threat Prevention for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), where he led the development and implementation of strategies to counter a range of threats. Before that, he was Director for DHS' Countering Foreign Influence Task Force, which combatted the threat of foreign influence in the 2018 election and served two tours as a Director for Counterterrorism on the National Security Council.

Description:

Colorado Secretary of State Jena Griswold led the creation of a new Rapid Response Election Security Cyber Unit (RESCU), a highly-trained team of election security experts whose focus is protecting Colorado's elections from cyber-attacks, foreign interference, and disinformation campaigns. RESCU also works hand-in-hand with counties to increase cyber preparedness and provide another important resource for county clerks. RESCU is a continuation of Colorado's dedication and leadership in election security and preparedness.

RESCU is charged with securing Colorado's elections by assisting counties with their cybersecurity in the field and combatting cybersecurity incursions and disinformation. This unprecedented support to counties provides further protection and assistance for those on the front lines of the Colorado's elections.

General Subject Area:

Cybersecurity/Elections



Executive Summary:

History:

During the 2016 election, American intelligence agencies warned that foreign states were likely to attempt to disrupt our elections using misinformation and disinformation to introduce doubts into the American election system. This was done primarily through social media platforms such as Facebook and twitter. This led the Secretary of State to prioritize improving our ability to identify and rapidly respond to any mis or disinformation attacks. The program concentrates on making sure that accurate elections-related information is being shared online and reaching Colorado voters. In July of 2020, Secretary Griswold announced that Nathan Blumenthal would be leading the RESCU team and our office's efforts to help secure the election.

Significance:

The era of social media has dramatically changed the way we interact with each other on a daily basis. Though it has become an extremely useful tool to stay connected with friends and family, not all online content is reliable and accurate. It has been increasingly important for Department's of State and election administrators' offices to proactively share accurate and reliable election information. Having trusted sources provide official information is the most effective way of receiving accurate information.

Having a team with their expertise and knowledge is an extremely valuable asset to have in the face of unprecedented threats to Colorado's elections. It is evident that disinformation will only intensify, putting our elections systems and voters' confidence at risk.

Impacts/Results:

The RESCU team had a critical job during the 2020 election cycle and needed to hit the ground running. Working with other departments the team quickly began to build the program leading up to the 2020 election by building out a network of community partners in order to make sure the team was reaching as many Coloradans as possible.

During the months leading up to the election, the RESCU team met with more than 40 organizations. These included nonprofits, trade-unions, businesses, and professional sports teams. Each organization received a 30 minute presentation from RESCU and were asked to amplify official Colorado Secretary of State content. This greatly expanded the effectiveness of our messaging.

In addition to adding a layer of security to our elections, the RESCU team's program has also allowed us to work with new partners such as the Denver Broncos, Denver Nuggets, Avalanche, and we have now started conversations with the Colorado Rockies.