

Ron Watkins Interview

Associate Vice President of Strategic Initiatives and Managing Director at SHIELD Illinois, University of Illinois System.

Monday, August 29, 2022 11:04AM • 1:03:27

SPEAKERS

Ronald (Ron) Watkins, Kinsey Brown, Jenna Courtade

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 00:00

I [see here?] some of these I just quickly looked, um.

Kinsey Brown 00:01

That would be perfect. Thank you.

Kinsey Brown 00:01

Right.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 00:01

SHIELD Illinois was the rest of the state, so think of it as this was protecting a population of about 50,000, we're doing 12.3 million. And then SHIELD T-3 which had the other states. SHIELD Illinois was a non-for-profit, so the goal was to make the test as low cost accessible as could for the entire state. SHIELD T-3 is a for-profit, so then its goal is to act like a for-profit and to go out and make the test accessible as, for the other 49 states internationally, but there's a profit motive goal there. So when the President asked for this project, in his mind, he was thinking about what we were doing. And what I realized committed this is everyone was thinking so much about campus, it was actually missing a mark. So I've pushed as much of a trend to difference in the understanding of what the President's looking for and then what I'm looking for. And so the resources that I put behind the project are really to expand the understanding of what we did statewide. So just giving you sort of a scaling difference. We were you know, we had millions in our program. We're here it's you know, it's a very tight close knit confined campus.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 00:03

Right, so, University of Illinois set up three organizations. SHIELD which was just this campus, only here.

Kinsey Brown 01:16

Right. Yeah, those are two completely different things.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 01:18

Two completely different things.

Kinsey Brown 01:19

Thank you.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 01:19

No problem.

Kinsey Brown 01:20

Thank you, because with us, you know, we're, still we're still learning. We've been on this project for a while but they've done some incredible work here. And

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 01:26

Yeah, what I find is because this is where we work, this is where we live, this is where the project is. It's really easy to sort of get our heads around that and forget that there's a much, much larger effort that was done statewide, and that's what we're really looking to capture and archive. They want to capture campus, but we don't want to ignore what the university's made you think about the number of lives it's touched. It's a completely different scale.

Kinsey Brown 01:53

Because we were actually reading this morning, one of our co-workers shared with us an article about the, I believe, the Rockefeller Grant for K-12 and disadvantaged schools throughout the state.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 02:04

Yes, it was about a million dollars. I'm the PI on it. The-- Yeah. Yeah, so there's about a million that came in there. We, the state did around, I'm gonna say in the end, we'll do about 200 million from the state on K-12. So again, like the Rockefeller I Kind of almost forget because it's it's 1/200 of what we're doing.

Kinsey Brown 02:28

Right. That's amazing. We, do you mind if we stick to--

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 02:33

Yes, happy to.

Kinsey Brown 02:34

Yeah, we'll, we'll stick to some of these and then I'll adjust some of the SHIELD and--

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 02:38

I understand and I don't know if you have this under IRB or what, or anything else, so I totally get it.

Kinsey Brown 02:43

Absolutely. We'll fix some of these and also throughout, if if you would like to stray away from kind of the question itself to discuss the larger activities of the SHIELD Illinois project, please feel free to do so because we want to document all of that.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 02:55

Yeah, no problem.

Kinsey Brown 02:56

And even if we want to revisit this and come back for a short, you know, maybe a secondary follow up, we can do that as well. So I'll get into the housekeeping stuff here. My name is Kinsey Brown. I'm a graduate student representing the University of Illinois Archives. I'm joined by Ron Watkins, the associate vice president of strategic--

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 03:14

I read it, you got it.

Kinsey Brown 03:15

Excellence. Of Strategic Initiatives at the University of Illinois System and Managing Director at SHIELD Illinois. Watkins is focused in business working at the GIES College of Business in multiple capacities since 2007, notably as the Associate Dean of Strategy and Innovation and Clinical Professor for Business Administration. With the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Watkins role shifted to focus on the SHIELD Illinois initiative, eventually causing him to be a recipient of the University of Illinois Systems Presidential Medallion in 2021. Today's date is August 9, 2022. We are here at the University Archives conference room 146 A to discuss one Watkins and SHIELD Illinois response to the COVID-19 pandemic. for inclusion in the University of Illinois COVID-19 Documentation project. So on the more personal side, do you remember the first time that you've heard about the emergence of COVID-19, kind of how the status of your office was and how people were reacting?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 04:13

Do I remember? I think it's all just unknown. Just really unknown. Wasn't sure.

Kinsey Brown 04:23

Absolutely.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 04:24

That's the only way I can describe that is just, just yeah just didn't know, there's no information.

Kinsey Brown 04:29

Absolutely, which unfortunately, didn't change much in the next couple of months as we got into things, but um, I understand that you worked from home during 2022. Did it shift your work responsibilities at all?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 04:41

This is pre-SHIELD Illinois?

Kinsey Brown 04:43

Yes.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 04:44

Yeah, no. I was already working from home. I've been working from home for three years prior to this.

Kinsey Brown 04:51

Nice. And I know that the University of Illinois was kind of uniquely suited to transfer into the online teaching model. Since that was something that the campus had kind of worked with prior to COVID-19.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 05:03

And more specifically GEIS, we'd already had several thousand online students, at that point in time. So it's already what we're doing. So We're just fed into programs that we already, already had in place.

Kinsey Brown 05:15

Fantastic. So did you adopt any specific strategies to make working from home more effective, whether individually or with your team?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 05:26

I was already working from home for years so... no, not because of COVID. The way I transitioned years prior was because space is a premium, we started doubling up folks into offices. So by giving up my office, it allowed for other, it allowed for us to create a shared office space to have an additional conference room for meetings and also for personal calls because of how much we're doubling up in every office. So by moving out of my space, it allowed us to create a space for for people to use more efficiently. But that has nothing to do with COVID.

Kinsey Brown 06:12

Right. So, getting back to when did you physically return to campus in any capacity whether at the GIES College or with SHIELD Illinois?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 06:23

I haven't.

Kinsey Brown 06:24

No?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 06:24

I still work from home.

Kinsey Brown 06:26

Smart. So, did the pandemic affects your work? Well, you've been working from home. So it didn't really change your responsibilities too much, but as far as the overarching GIES goals and priorities, did it change the way you guys are approaching pedagogy or teaching or supporting staff?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 06:46

Supporting staff, it sure did. So not in terms of-- Well, you know, supporting staff, it definitely did. Because, so how do you support folks who are used to being in the office and more appropriately, how to support the students in that environment? So it did change in terms of thinking about meeting cadences how often to meet with folks. Yeah, I would say that those are the two biggest things just how to stay connected with people.

Kinsey Brown 07:22

Absolutely. So moving on to stuff concerning SHIELD Illinois. When did you first get involved in the SHIELD Illinois project? How and when did you get brought on?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 07:34

So, July 23. July 23rd of 2020. The President called and asked if; actually the Vice President, Avijit Ghosh, on behalf of the President called and asked if I would take over running SHIELD--, or create SHIELD Illinois. At the time, I was just Dean and Clinical Professor, so, I had to completely leave everything I was doing at the GIES School Business and devote 100% of my time to Shiled Illinois so the job completely changed.

Kinsey Brown 08:16

Wow. And has that it stayed the same? I remember you mentioned you came from class.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 08:21

Yeah, it hasn't changed. The only thing I have done is I continue to teach a, I continue to teach one class I have all the way through. But that was more because of my compensation changes if I don't so. So yes, but I'm still 100% doing SHIELD Illinois.

Kinsey Brown 08:41

I can imagine. Sounds like really incredible program, with a lot of moving parts. This pandemic has been a roller coaster of waves, variants and constantly changing guidelines both within and without the university. So how did the SHIELD Illinois team adapt to these different variants? And do any of them stand out in your memory? As far as how they impacted the community and the state at large?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 09:06

So, the, what the waves created for us was a difference in the number of urgency of schools to sign-up. So, the biggest thing the waves did was it, it pushed especially in the K-12 to sign-up and then every time there's a wave, our community based collection sites would see big spikes that would jump up. So, how we had to adapt was just handling higher volumes of everything when those would, when those would happen?

Kinsey Brown 09:48

Absolutely. And along with that, have, have you changed kind of the way that you have incorporated schools and other entities into the SHIELD Illinois system? Like as the waves have prompted more and more people to kind of come on board with the project.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 10:06

So what it would change is how we would be able to just handle many things at once. So instead of one on one, meetings to help with schools to get onboarded when you've got 700 schools onboarding at once, instead it's through like it's through office hours or it's through, one to many, one to many sort of ways of doing things, because you just can't hand walk every school together. So, instead, you have to essentially create a, an online platform checklists, and then just open meetings for people to come in and help them work through those together as common questions, for common groups. So we just had to do everything instead of one on one. It's one to many, essentially, for getting things done.

Kinsey Brown 10:57

Absolutely. Going off script a little bit here. I wanted to ask you about kind of the size of your operation with SHIELD Illinois, and where those entities are coming from like which organizations in, say the government or public health, are involved?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 11:13

Right. So at different points, different sizes. At our height it was 300 and some, FTEs (Full-Time Employees), about 800 contracted employees. So, we had 1100 employees. And then that doesn't count the CDC Foundation folks who had nurses at schools, that was maybe 60. And then there's all the local public health departments include IDPH and Chicago Public Health, each of those who probably like two contacts per, so maybe call that another 60. And then, and then there was a lot of various local champions like that were formerly a part of our organization. I would say there's probably 20 of those throughout the state, whether they were at labs, or hospitals, or folks we found locally to help us get stuff done. So let's say roughly around the 1200 mark, all-in, today, we're probably a little less than half that just from the scaling down.

Kinsey Brown 12:27

Wow, what an incredible effort just across the board.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 12:29

A lot of people.

Kinsey Brown 12:30

Yeah, no kidding. So, to refer back to an interview that you gave in 2020, you at the point said that you had hopes to return to GIES college, after all of this is done. So at what point, if ever do, you think that your work will be done with SHIELD Illinois.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 12:52

After a year into this, the college could not go any longer with my position being vacant, so they had to replace me. So I was replaced, I was replaced one year after. So, I currently, that's why I'm at the system now and not the college. So they had to, they had to move on. So I just have a different job. So unfortunately won't be going back.

Kinsey Brown 13:17

Sorry to hear that.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 13:17

It's alright. But I still get to teach, so I still have my one class.

Kinsey Brown 13:20

That is nice. Sounds like SHIELD Illinois generates more than enough work for one human being.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 13:25

Yeah, and SHIELD Illinois will be done in July, July of this year [2023]. So, that's when our contracts are currently, our contracts are currently, will end July 31st. So, it'll be from the point of the first sort of phone call. It's almost exactly three years. Three years later.

Kinsey Brown 13:43

Wow, incredible. I don't think anyone was expecting it to be three years long.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 13:47

No. The first, when they first called it was you know, just give us six months at least give us at least three prefer for you to get a six, get this thing up and going off the ground and go back to work. But it just it just wasn't feasible. I mean, it was just, just not possible.

Kinsey Brown 14:04

Yeah, no kidding. I mean, it's like you said everything has been so unpredictable, and there's just no information.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 14:10

Yeah, right. No information.

Kinsey Brown 14:12

And we never know when it's going to change. And speaking of that, so the contracts will be up July of 2022. Do you--

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 14:20

July of 2023.

Kinsey Brown 14:21

2023. Do you think there's any possibility of it getting extended beyond that?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 14:25

Sure. Not with us. So, there's possibly SHIELD Illinois will be ending, at that point. The University has felt as if we, we've done what we were set out to do. So, if there is anything left we'll transition into SHIELD T-3 and they'll just take over this state the same that they do, work in the other states.

Kinsey Brown 14:48

That makes sense. Could you discuss a little bit kind of the order and the relationship between SHIELD, SHIELD Illinois, and SHIELD T-3 kind of the timeline of how those three developed?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 14:59

Yeah, so, SHIELD here on campus. It would have been, so it would have started roughly around that-- The [impetus was] around that March/April timeframe and then they very quickly developed the assay by, I want to say maybe June? May. And then June/July, they were building a lab and they were starting to, they were doing some initial testing and sort of figuring out logistics wise right? So then think of it as sort of August 1, SHIELD Illinois is asked to launch off. At the time campus was worried about how do they get, how do they get the students back into school? How do we get the staff back in? How do we do this safely here on campus, right? So, then we took that assay, and then started building labs across the state, building up the technology infrastructure, building up the logistics infrastructure, building up all the supply chain, just figuring out how do you do this across the state? Because it's very, very different than how you do it at a campus. The only thing that's the same is that the it's the same test and its in a lab, but even how it's done in a lab isn't even, same process, but even different machines. Just to give you an example, there's a tip that's used and the specific tip that used to transfer in the lab here is not scalable. You can't do it at scale. So you have to get a different tip that then works in different machines that then you can put in to do it at scale. Same process but done in a different way. Which then and then like they're handling, maybe 10,000 a day, right at the at the height. They're doing more 6 to 8. All right, so that means that they're doing anywhere from 30 to 50 thousand [30,000 to 50,000] a week, right? So if we're doing 250,000 a week, it's completely different in terms of how you just physically bring those things in, right? And so we're brick and mortar in places, that we would have to go sell organizations to allow us to go in and partner on putting together a lab. And you have [SHIELD] T-3 which was launched at the exact same time as us, but they were modular trailers. And so the idea there was theirs is more like how do you help a point? A factory, a town, a point. right? So, we have a region and have to think about a region level logistics and network. This university has to think about a point. [SHIELD] T-3 was thinking about a point. So I just go do this factory in this town. And then I can help other other things around that factory in that town. So it's very, very different logistics and very different sort of way of thinking about how you actually go do it. If that makes any sense, right? And that factory will collect its own, that place will collect its own. That's not how it works in a state. When you have community based sites. You can't ask the community to collect it themselves. You can't ask K-12 kids, It just gets, it's different.

Jenna Courtade 18:37

Put it in your lunch bag.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 18:39

It's totally different, right? So where these folks don't have to hire people to go collect, like that's why we'd have you know, probably 1000 people and organization of time, we're just physically out collecting samples. Right this is different.

Kinsey Brown 18:55

It's an incredible infrastructure. That is really, it sounds like you guys have a lot more moving parts. As far as--

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 19:02

In mobile teams. We also have, in addition to all that, we have like anywhere from 7 to 11 mobile teams that would just go around and do breakouts. So maybe you didn't have a site there but there'd be a breakout so you have to get in there and help take care of the breakout whether it's a homeless shelter or at a school that didn't have testing set-up they needed, something happened, right? Oh, prom hits, which we had quite a few of those actually. And then you'd go in and you would test everybody figure out what's going on who to send home, who to get back in, who needs to stay there, and test them three to five times. So those were, sort of just different models. The only thing that's the same is, is the assay at the end of the day.

Jenna Courtade 19:49

Can I ask a question?

Kinsey Brown 19:51

Of course!

Jenna Courtade 19:52

With these like trailers and like--

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 19:55

What [SHIELD] T-3 did?

Jenna Courtade 19:55

Yeah. Would their, like, would their, what is the word? Equipment be the same? [Ron shakes his head] Not even that?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 20:07

So it's again, it's the same process, but like the PCR machine has to be smaller. So--

Jenna Courtade 20:15

But not even within the trailers, like there was no like--?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 20:19

[Shakes head no] Even the way their tips would be different, the machine would be different, the PCR would be different, but the, but what follows is the same.

Jenna Courtade 20:26

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 20:27

So when it goes through the FDA process, you're going to learn more about this than you've ever wanted to. I've had to learn this. I had to learned this, that it's a kit that gets approved and what that is from the point of collection to the point of resulting. So, when they had to apply the FDA, they had to

actually show you had to list every equipment and every step like times three or in all the different sort of variants. So it made it more complicated to get the FDA approval, because it wasn't just one--, even though it's one assay, it wasn't one set way of going through. So the collections are even different because here in campus, they'd be like, "Do you want a straw? Or do you want a funnel?"

Jenna Courtade 21:08

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 21:09

Right? That actually is two different ways of collecting the same thing. So part of, part of what made it so it took us longer to get the FDA approval was because we had all these different variations that we're put in. Campus wasn't thinking about scaling, they're thinking about campus.

Jenna Courtade 21:25

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 21:26

Right? And then, and then when they build a trailer, it's like a trailer is only so big.

Jenna Courtade 21:30

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 21:31

Right? So we had good reasons for it, but it ended up being--, it ended up making it longer and harder for us to get the FDA approval.

Jenna Courtade 21:41

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 21:42

Which, which kept us, SHIELD Illinois, from going out to the rest of the community. So, the FDA approval didn't come until March [2021], and our labs were up and ready to go back by October. So we were on--, lab, the first lab was ready in October, and then we're just like, alright, no FDA approval, no FDA approval. So, we had to go and at that point started, re-opened up all of the campuses and the companies that were comfortable with us not having FDA approval. Which ended up being like ADM, Rivian. Because they're like fine, because, not a problem. And then the other state schools were like well, if Illinois is doing it we, you know, we're comfortable doing it without the FDA approval. And that's kind of where it stopped until we got the approval. That's all we could do. Yeah.

Kinsey Brown 22:40

It's interesting though, because it's, this pandemic was so out of the blue and there was so much innovation being done by your team and throughout the state that waiting on that government red tape could have actually slowed down implementing those things in the community.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 22:55

Oh, I mean, the number of lives that we could have saved if we were up and going in, by October/November because it would have been even before the holidays which the amount of spread is incredible. We've done like six, I mean we've done like over 6.5 million tests. And who knows how many more? We would have done millions more, which would have identified that many more cases, which would have isolated that many more. And money wasn't the issue. It was purely around waiting for the FDA approval to be able to go, to be able to get out. And because the state wouldn't approve it to go into the community based sites with the K through 12 without it, and there was some understandable hesitancy in folks because this idea of it is unknown so we don't, we want to use something that's FDA approved. But interesting enough on the federal side, the federal side did not require an FDA approval for the, for the money it was putting behind. But because we have a federal system, which means in a federal system money flows to the state and major governments to make decisions, the federal government wasn't making decisions it was local decisions. So the local decision wants to only use FDA approved, but the federal money said it did not have to be an EUA approved. It said it only had to run through what's called an LDT, which is what campus was and it's what I had already set up so my argument was we have a LDT, federal money says LDT qualifies so it was actually local public health and the state's decision to wait on an EUA.

Kinsey Brown 24:35

Politics.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 24:37

That's completely what it was and perception. Right? Perception. So if we're gonna, but I understand because if they're going to, going to take it out to the K-12 schools, it's you know it's important for them to say that it's it's FDA approved. Now my argument was slightly different. Like we're, we're drooling. We're not actually, there's nothing evasive about it, what could go wrong? But if we wait, I can tell you something is going to go wrong. Meaning allowing us to test. It's like, really, is that the decision that you want to make? So it's trade offs ,right, and everyone has their own sort of stance on stuff?

Kinsey Brown 25:24

Absolutely. I can only imagine. I-

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 25:27

It's unknown then, right? Like if we pose that same thing today, it'd be like "oh, yeah, no brainer." Like, why wouldn't you just have them drool?

Jenna Courtade 25:34

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 25:35

right? But at the time, you just didn't know.

Kinsey Brown 25:42

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 25:42

So instead, you choose not to test, right?

Kinsey Brown 25:46

You see how that turned out.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 25:47

So we do nothing.

Jenna Courtade 25:48

Yeah.

Kinsey Brown 25:49

Oh man. That, that tactic was certainly proven to not be the correct one throughout the course of the pandemic. It reminds me of early on when they were saying don't wear masks, they don't do anything, you know, and nobody could. Nobody could find the right thing to say. But um--

Jenna Courtade 26:05

Well if you don't test you're never positive. Right? [said sarcastically]

Kinsey Brown 26:09

Exactly.

Jenna Courtade 26:09

That's-- Some people do have that mindset, you know?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 26:14

That's right. It was highly politicised. Our state was on, you know, was pretty, the Governor and the health officials were pretty vocal about that we were going to be a testing state. It just gets down to the nuances of having a FDA approved assay or not. And the FDA approved assays that they were using, you couldn't scale, meaning they didn't have the ability to go into the K through 12 environment. They couldn't handle the volume. They couldn't handle working with the schools. They couldn't handle the collections. They couldn't handle the sheer volumes of it and the days that would have taken even to get back to do it. They were already having problems keeping up with the communities, community based site volumes that were rolling through, so it took our program to even be able to offer it out to him just because, of the just because of the scale. We did like 1700 schools. So, you know they couldn't even turn that faucet on with the current FDA approved ones at the time that were taking anywhere from two to four days to get to get results. And they didn't have the ability to collect. Right?

Kinsey Brown 27:35

If if they get there, that's where they're gonna go?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 27:38

It just wasn't it wasn't tenable. So they were locked in. They had to use us if they wanted to go into those environments because we're the only ones with the capabilities of being able to actually do it. And then they took a leap of faith with even saying we could do it and then be like, Alright, hope we can do it. Right.

Jenna Courtade 27:57

Can I ask another question?

Kinsey Brown 27:58

Of course! No please. Originally, we had it set up one on one but since we're going off script a bit.

Jenna Courtade 28:05

So are, were there ever any other like entities that were trying to do like what SHIELD Illinois was trying to do? Cause, I know there's smaller ones that can't, but--

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 28:18

Yeah.

Jenna Courtade 28:19

Did you see that? Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 28:19

More and more competition came in and came in really heavy. Yeah, big time, but they are all different models. So we're competing with the federal government's model until we became a subcontractor for them which is through what's called Battelle. Battelle is really, it's going to complicate things more. There's something called the Midwest Coordination Center, which Battelle runs. There was four coordination centers set up across the United States. Each one had roughly a 13 to 16 state region. They were put in place to do K through 12 and community based testing. It was a federal program. The problem with it is, it only paid for the test. Back to my point earlier, the challenge at schools is not the test. The challenge at schools, and even community based sites, is the hard part is collecting and transporting. The hard part is not actually the lab. But all the federal money went to standing up Battelle and some subcontractors to just do testing. So when they're going out and they're phoning, they became a competitor here, but it was like the school would say "Well, if you can't collect it, and I have to transport it, and I have to collect it, why would I do that?" SHIELD Illinois is free, and they collect it, and they transport it.

Jenna Courtade 29:54

No competition.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 29:55

Right. So what I was able to do was I was able to convince Battelle to pay for the test on their money and then use the state to pay us to collect and transport, then what it did was it's stretched the state's dollars, it doubled the state's dollars effectively actually, because I would charge \$15 to Battelle for the test and \$15 to the state for transportation, collection, and support because you have to support those

sites. We do 10,000 phone calls a week just with support. Battelle doesn't offer that. So it ended up being the best of both worlds by being able to use the state dollars for the wraparound services and the Battelle money for the test. But then there was other competition, the main, all the big labs entered. So Thermal Fisher and Quest those are the two big ones. They were in there. Thermal Fisher partnered with [folks?] they had a, they had a product that's, god it's so complicated. They had a product essentially that's called pool. Familiar with pool? So pool works great when there's low positivity rates. It doesn't when there's high positive rates, but all those are swabs. They're essentially like a kit that shows up. It's got a whole bunch of swabs. So each person swabs their nose and they all drop it into the same, the same thing. It's pooled. So now all the, all the samples pooled into one. This greatly reduces the cost of the test. But if one of those are positive, you have to retest all of them again, in a second way through, individually. So we test everyone individually every time we get a test. It's one individual, right? We can pool saliva, but then you're taking a bunch of those saliva samples, and remember the tips? You'd be doing the tip process again to put them into one test that and if one of those are positive, you'd have to go back and test each of each of those. It's the same concept with with the pharyngeal, right. In this case, you know, they're a swab, which class you think it's beautiful. Hey, kids, everyone, hand them out, swab, drop it in, drop it in, drop it in, right? But the downsides were the pooled which means like testing twice, that means the result, they have those in a box they put them in is a FedEx and ship it out. So the result times actually going to be longer because you had to ship it to FedEx, they had to get it. And if there's higher positivity rates, you'd run everything twice. So then you're looking at running the process two separate times, right?

Jenna Courtade 32:35

At that point, they're done.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 32:36

And guess what, then the cost goes up because what you thought was low cost on one which really is if it's low rates, but in high positive rates, it actually makes it more expensive. See what I mean?

Jenna Courtade 32:47

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 32:48

Great. And then the other thing they didn't understand was at the school, the teacher and the school, they're still in that collection problem, meaning who does that? The janitor? The teacher? And they're all teachers unions, for the most part, the teachers union doesn't want anything to do it. So then what they have to do is they have to go find an outside agency or contractors to hire to come in and do it. And it's really hard for a school and a school district to think about and deal with those things. Yeah. So instead when you show up and say guess what, just give us space.

Jenna Courtade 33:22

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 33:23

Okay.

Jenna Courtade 33:24

Thank you.

Kinsey Brown 33:25

Right.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 33:25

We'll run them through on the way to the lunchroom, we'll run through on the way in the beginning to school, we'll running through on the way to practice like, that's different than we'll run through and we have to figure out who's gonna do it. And we have to transport it into-- You know, that operational lift is actually a lot for them.

Jenna Courtade 33:44

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 33:45

Now private schools were able to pull it off. They were able to get like to get parents hours or find other ways to to get it done. They didn't also have some of the union constraints that were running through on the teacher side as well. So great question, really long answer. I'm just trying to give you the nuances. Of how this all works.

Kinsey Brown 34:07

Absolutely

Jenna Courtade 34:07

That's what we want. You know.

Kinsey Brown 34:09

Really. We-- a little bit earlier, we discuss the politics of all of this and how everything kind of got lost in politics. As far as in the communities and in the sites that you were creating. Did you find any pushback from people who did not want you there or testing or resistance?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 34:31

So, start at the top, the governor's office, incredibly supportive. IDPH [Illinois Department of Public Health] incredibly supportive. IADPH incredibly supportive. So like, those were all, those were all kind of stemming down. So then you get into the community, by community. For the most part, for the most part, the, the superintendents, where there's regional superintendents I didn't know it was a thing, but it is and then the actual school district superintendents were pretty supportive. It was you, they either were they weren't. And if they weren't, they weren't calling. They just, they just didn't sign up for the program.

Jenna Courtade 35:20

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 35:21

They were out. If they're in, they're in. There is communities that just didn't want to have anything to do with it. So then for them, it was a matter of it would go to their school board or come up and then they just it would it would be squashed there. Right? As an example, of those who were testing, or weren't testing 100, and roughly 40 to 150 [140-150] school districts took up a lawsuit against the state for being involved in it. So there's clear examples of where there were communities that were like, I don't want to be under this, this-- There's an executive order in place, don't want to be held to the executive order to to get it done. So what I found was those ones who call this they were basically in, those who didn't were out. It ended up being about roughly say 50% of school districts were testing with us, roughly 50% weren't, but that represented 70% of the students in the state so we ended up being the larger school districts we were, we ended up being captured in, so a lot of the ones we missed on were a lot of the smaller which would happen to be, which would happen to be rural. running through. Then within that there's a fight of whether opt-in or opt-out. And so opt-in means the parent has to sign a form for the for the child to be tested. Opt-out means the parent has to sign a form for the child not the test. So there's a further difference in between. And what we found was a vast majority of schools went with with sort of an split to opt in. We're really what everyone should have been doing was opt-out. And we now have empirical evidence that those who did opt-out, we had much lower COVID rates and those who did opt-in. So what we found was, and it's not much, in our theories, it's not much different with masking, is that unless, unless you're in a constant environment to where 75[%], or 80% of all those of you around are testing, it doesn't matter. Even the testing becomes, because, because you end up matching your population. And our guess is it's the same with masks too. So if you're not constantly in an environment where you're around, around that, like constant.

Jenna Courtade 37:54

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 37:54

Meaning, it's actually [inaudible] and that's where we're like, huh... So we have all the evidence on it now, as far as in schools for testing, so we know it 100% works if 75% or more of the school are in the testing program, compared to their local population, meaning we took the local populations rates and we matched it into the school and there is a significant drop in all those who are in the testing program than those who weren't. But when you went below it, you just looked like your local population. Right?

Jenna Courtade 38:33

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 38:34

Makes sense doesn't it?

Kinsey Brown 38:35

It does.

Jenna Courtade 38:36

It does.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 38:37

So, you either mandate it or you don't, there's nothing in between. It at least that's what least that's what we found. Is it, and if you're not, if you're not going to mandate it, then make it the opt out. Because then if it's the opt out, you're still capturing enough of the percentage of folks that it's making a huge difference. Huge and in the factories that did mandate it at Rivian and ADM when their [town] population was at 13-16%. They weren't breaking 1% in their factories in their work environments. How crazy is that?

Jenna Courtade 39:13

Yeah.

Kinsey Brown 39:13

That's amazing.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 39:14

Because the test is catching before you can get other people sick. Yeah. So when they're testing periodically, you're catching it and you're like, "go home," and then they're not getting both sick in that environment. Yeah.

Kinsey Brown 39:24

Stopping it in its tracks.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 39:25

Stopping it in its tracks.

Kinsey Brown 39:26

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 39:26

Right? So is it offensive or defensive? So what's really cool about this test is it's offensive, but it can only be offensive if you use it in a proper offensive way. If you're gonna use it defensive, then honestly, maybe antigen then becomes-- because it's cheaper, easier, right?

Jenna Courtade 39:43

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 39:45

Because antigen is a defensive test. Right?

Kinsey Brown 39:49

You already got it, like, it's already happened.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 39:51

It's a defensive test. Right? And so if you're gonna test periodic, awesome fire up, but if you're, if it's just gonna be every now and then, okay..., unless you're gonna go see someone like if you're going to see family or something like that you, can do PCR because then you know, you're catching it before you're actually exposing other people.

Jenna Courtade 40:12

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 40:12

That's offensive.

Jenna Courtade 40:15

Um, I have a, I have another question. So with this, is this like information that you like now know, how, how long have you known this for? Is this very new like information?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 40:31

So I mean, we can now empirically prove the opt-in versus opt-out

Jenna Courtade 40:36

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 40:36

Because we did, we did a study on it.

Jenna Courtade 40:39

Recently? Or?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 40:40

Yeah, the papers right now. It's being, it's, it's under review.

Jenna Courtade 40:43

Okay. Okay.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 40:44

So that's been done. The testing and the percentage of testing we figured that out pretty early on.

Jenna Courtade 40:49

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 40:51

About the testing environment. The opt-in/opt-out, which feeds directly into it, we clearly saw the difference in the participation. So then we were just saying-- We had no empirical evidence, we're saying look, if you're testing 80% environment versus 30%. How could this not be better?

Jenna Courtade 41:12

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 41:13

But we didn't have I couldn't show them like the actual empirical evidence.

Jenna Courtade 41:17

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 41:19

But if for example, Lori Lightfoot and Chicago CPS she came out and said, no way they will do anything other than opt-in. They would not do that to their families and parents, and I'm just sitting there like, wait a second, like-- Right?

Jenna Courtade 41:36

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 41:38

But couldn't empirically show anything. Yeah. So but now we have it. Right?

Jenna Courtade 41:43

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 41:44

So Yeah.

Jenna Courtade 41:47

Do, do you like foresee this, like new, like empirical evidence, like being useful, or--?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 41:54

I think it will be in the future. Interesting enough right now, in our school districts for all the ones who did opt-out. They are now switching all the opt-in under the current environment. The environments change.

Jenna Courtade 42:04

Yeah, it really has.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 42:06

I mean, there's the social behaviors around is what's driving is what's driving so many things. Right?

Jenna Courtade 42:14

Yeah. Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 42:15

It's not really considered it's it's even in Congress. It's not considered a top five, and if it's not top five, you know, they don't even talk about it. So then if you get down locally, this, the population, it's, they're past it.

Jenna Courtade 42:28

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 42:28

Their past it. Now because we saved the state so much money, the state has, the state and it's earmarked to only use for testing, they're like, well, then why don't we just continue testing program? Like, we can only use it for that. So yeah, so we're like fine, we'll do it again this year. And so we've got like 700 schools doing it. But like, what, what we're seeing is that the small private schools that choose to do it, mandate it, roll it through, or they do opt-out. The public side is now almost all now. We went from 1700 to I think what 600-some? And then of those 600-some it's gonna be most, it's almost all opt-in

Jenna Courtade 43:07

Yeah, big change.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 43:09

So, So I think what's going to happen then is, or what I believe will happen is it'll just match whatever the local, wherever the local population is.

Kinsey Brown 43:18

Right. We'll come back to that!

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 43:23

So instead, we're gonna do, we're doing campaigns at the individual schools, trying to help the parents understand why it's important to opt the student in.

Jenna Courtade 43:34

Okay.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 43:34

So we're using the information in a different way.

Jenna Courtade 43:37

Okay.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 43:37

If that makes any sense?

Jenna Courtade 43:39

Yeah. That'll be interesting to see how that plays out to like, if, if there's any change after these campaigns.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 43:47

Yeah, I'm interested to see how it rolls right?

Jenna Courtade 43:49

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 43:49

[I'm trying to get them to] understand.

Kinsey Brown 43:52

I mean, this this kind of, you know, the data you're talking about, about being able to mitigate the spread by this kind of testing. This has got larger reaching implications as far as disease control elsewhere.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 44:05

Yeah. And you know, in SHIELD and SHIELD Illinois both have done a great job but SHIELD's done a better job, or they, it's what their expertise is. That's where the scientists are sitting on. That are really thinking about the test and we're able to show how it identifies early on. So we're more just the proof is in the pudding, they made the pudding to show that yeah, it doesn't work. So we were able to provide data back to SHIELD saying, yes, look what it did in this factory, look what it did in this environments, right? So to help folks right.

Kinsey Brown 44:39

Yeah, it all makes sense. It feels like the programs really complement each other and support each other.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 44:45

Yeah, this was a, you know, the way I view it, you know, this was, it's like the pilot, this was the first, this was all the, the the innovation, essentially, the seed of all of it. This is here how the campus was thinking about it and developing the assay, right? So for us, then it's like, alright, so then how do we take that and do it times 1800? Networked, right? So then it's a different kind of innovation. So our innovation is more around how you do at scale.

Kinsey Brown 45:21

It's gotta be considered, you know, what these pandemics that are affecting the entire US it's, it, they, they feel like a natural connection.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 45:28

Yeah, I mean, we were, we were example all the time for like how you do it at region. They're doing it so.

Jenna Courtade 45:36

Yeah.

Kinsey Brown 45:40

I think we'll move into some of these more general questions. Yeah, cause you probably gotta get out of here.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 45:45

We have time, you're okay.

Kinsey Brown 45:47

Um, so on a more personal note, what have been some of the more challenging parts of working during the pandemic either for you personally? Or with your experience at SHIELD Illinois? Was there anything that stood out as a particularly challenging thing?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 46:00

Oh, yes, time. It's just time. I mean, I took the first year, I literally took five days off and that included, included Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's. I mean, it's just, we're working 24/7. Or at least, not 24/7, but I mean, literally working 16 hours a day, every day for a year. So it's like being on deployment or being gone from your family, but you're in the same house. So that was, that personally was very, very difficult.

Kinsey Brown 46:27

I can only imagine.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 46:29

Until we got enough, more people on here going. The second year got a little bit better. This year, I mean, feeling, it's getting to be more like a regular job.

Kinsey Brown 46:39

Glad to hear that.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 46:40

Yeah.

Kinsey Brown 46:40

I imagine at the beginning it was all hands on deck full blown crisis mode, but--

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 46:45

Yeah, right. So the beginning was just myself and my assistant and so we had to build the entire team from there. Hiring and finding people and just trying to figure out what this thing is and I'm not a scientist so like, you know, just trying to figure out a lot of new things. It's just a different world.

Kinsey Brown 47:08

No kidding. I mean, seems like it worked out very well. It seems like having the business side inform the way that the scientific side was deployed. It was incredibly successful.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 47:18

Yeah, I think that's probably a good way of thinking about it in terms of the scientific innovation here and then the business side of it and how you how you deploy it.

Kinsey Brown 47:29

Yeah, exactly. If you could have done anything differently-- Again, personally or even regarding SHIELD Illinois-- what would it be?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 47:38

Do you mind for a spend a second on the question before?

Kinsey Brown 47:41

Oh, absolutely.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 47:42

Because you said personal, one of the most challenging parts of working during the pandemic. I work [inaudible] me personally, forgive me. If we have time later, I think there's some challenges just in general of dealing with organization-wide that we can capture. If we could anything different... what would it have been? Yeah, so I'm thinking organizationally, is that okay?

Kinsey Brown 48:07

Of course, absolutely.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 48:08

Yeah. So differently for me would have been, I would have approached it as super labs instead of so many small labs.

Kinsey Brown 48:21

So like, condensing all of the lab work in one place?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 48:25

So, uh, within the region, like, instead of having-- I had 11 Labs, instead I would have had, I don't know. A better balance between geography and number of labs.

Kinsey Brown 48:44

Makes sense.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 48:46

It just would have been a lot easier to manage. The other thing I would have done differently. [Pause for thinking] I would have just pushed in hiring more people faster. If that was possible. And maybe thirdly,

better job of integrating on the federal side. Did a nice job of Chicago and the state. It took a while before getting the federal side in.

Kinsey Brown 49:50

If you'd like to return to challenging operational aspects.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 49:58

Most challenging during the pandemic?

Kinsey Brown 49:59

[Makes sound of agreement.]

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 50:00

The most challenging things, we overcame them, but the most challenging. I'll put it in a couple different buckets. Operationally, most challenging was the technology and reporting platform. Secondly, the modeling, the use of disposable items. I mean like, like there's so many different little parts, pieces, how much you need ahead of time and where. And then there, you know, you have to think about supply chain you know, someone has to make it, and ship it to you, and how many of you need, and-- Like it's the most challenging things, which we overcame both, but the most challenging things was was a predictable, secure supply chain and the technology system for being able to, being able to have a secure private reporting that you know, just any person off the street anywhere can walk in and you're getting those results back to them and their health system. Right? It's I mean it's just from a technology [point] it's just difficult. Those two are hard.

Kinsey Brown 51:24

Yeah, I mean--

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 51:25

The lab part is easy. Honestly, shows up then you can do it fine. How does it show up? Nuts! And you know, how do you not over buy or under? It's just, you know, we're trying to keep it fairly low cost. So it can't, you know, couldn't just say alright, we're going to do 6-- If I knew we were going to do 6 million tests, I would have bought 6 million of stuff. But then even that, who can do it?

Kinsey Brown 51:55

Because on top of everything else, there were enormous challenges with supply chains.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 51:59

Yeah I mean you have to find a factory, and create your own dye, and start pumping it out yourself. And then do you, are you going to need enough to do that? It's just for how many different plastics? Those two were fairly hard.

Kinsey Brown 52:12

Yeah, I can imagine.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 52:14

But interesting enough, I wouldn't have done it different than how we ended up doing it. So differently other pieces. And then challenging that's operational, challenging in the external environment has been the misinformation, and misinformation especially around how people see it as an invasion of their privacy, or somehow it's an invasion of themselves. That is the number one challenge, and then the number two challenges is that somehow somehow this is a profit, money making venture by the state, or the university, or like that there isn't this altruistic component to it. That was that was challenging, defeated much easier. The one that's not, I still deal with today, is this idea of privacy. Like what are you doing with my DNA?

Jenna Courtade 53:13

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 53:13

Are you using this stuff for research? Which we don't. I mean that's that a big time challenge. And the third is just, it's just you miss, it's just, just ambiguity and unknown in a political environment, and getting folks to make decisions and move with so many different sorts of hands in the, involved. But see, these are things that campus doesn't have to deal with.

Kinsey Brown 53:44

Exactly.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 53:45

Don't have to deal with a mayor, and a governor, and and then the different public healths, and the [Illinois] school board of education, and then the representatives, and then the federal representatives, and the federal senators, and the state senators, and the school boards. And, like--

Kinsey Brown 54:05

It's almost unbelievable.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 54:07

They're such very different sort of like--

Jenna Courtade 54:10

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 54:10

--things, right? It's like yeah, no, you have to worry about whether you're being told that you're making money for Pritzker or that what's happening with the data and the privacy, those were the challenges.

Jenna Courtade 54:22

Yeah. And you overcome them for someone to say no, thank you. [Laughs] Thank you, but my kid's good. Thanks

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 54:34

It's okay. Those are all the pieces right?

Jenna Courtade 54:36

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 54:37

It's a very, very different deal. Even [SHIELD] T-3 doesn't have to deal with that stuff. Because they get hired by a point to go in and do it, right?

Jenna Courtade 54:45

Yeah, yeah.

Kinsey Brown 54:47

Wow

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 54:48

See what I mean?

Jenna Courtade 54:48

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 54:50

It's, so there's just there's different entities.

Kinsey Brown 54:53

It's completely different.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 54:54

Completely different.

Jenna Courtade 54:55

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 54:55

With different challenges.

Jenna Courtade 54:56

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 54:56

And different things going on, right?

Jenna Courtade 54:58

Yeah.

Kinsey Brown 54:59

It's amazing. I mean, the fact, how many, I want to have it one more time on the record. So how many tests has SHIELD Illinois manufactured or given if you have a number for those?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 55:10

As it today's north of 6.5 million. I don't know where we're at and that doesn't count the antigen test. But my guess is we'll be, who knows? I mean, again, we do just guess at these things. Probably around 8 [million tests] by next year. Maybe 8.5, who knows.

Kinsey Brown 55:30

It's incredible.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 55:30

Yeah, I mean that part's not going to be hard, what's is crazy is we only at-- in March of 2021, we're at like 350,000. So in a year we did over like 6 million.

Jenna Courtade 55:43

That's crazy.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 55:44

That's the crazy part.

Kinsey Brown 55:46

So it was an exponential thing but once it started hitting the communities--

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 55:50

Through, so like, and we didn't do that much until, so through March and then through July, and another I think, I think we hit, I forget exactly. We have all this information, and we can easily get this to you. I think we hit like a million took like nine months to hit a million and then and then they were just like a million a month. I mean, it's like it's like crazy, right? I I don't know roughly, but we have all that information. Actually, there's a really cool video I can send you that has all this on it if you'd like.

Kinsey Brown 56:26

That would be fantastic, and we'll include all of it too.

Kinsey Brown 56:29

Yeah the video is good. So--

Kinsey Brown 56:31

Have that represented. So just to wrap things up. Last year you were one of 30 leaders to receive the Presidential Medallion for your aggressive and unparalleled response to the COVID-19 pandemic,

which as we've heard today, absolutely is true. Can you describe how it felt to receive that recognition especially after being handpicked by the president for this project?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 56:55

Yeah, I really appreciated the, the symbol but I viewed it as recognition for the organization because as I just mentioned, what I was doing was just one of, at that time, I think maybe 180 sitting there. So it really as I told them, and as I told the group, it's its representative of what the team was able to accomplish in that period of time. I felt like a lot of the other folks it was very much they did some tremendous individual efforts, because that really was recognizing the various scientists always folks who really did get things personally to get, to get this done. So you know, 28 of those 30 were representing SHIELD, one was representing SHIELD Illinois of those medallions, right?

Jenna Courtade 57:52

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 57:53

So I very much viewed that as well, that's the one for the organization.

Jenna Courtade 57:57

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 58:00

I'm not upset about that at all, by the way.

Jenna Courtade 58:03

No. [All chuckling.]

Kinsey Brown 58:07

So just, just to wrap up. Did you learn anything from this pandemic? About yourself, about your work, or about the university, or even the state since you worked on that scale?

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 58:16

Sure. Well, university for one I'm incredibly proud of the university thinking about-- You know it's a land grant university, and it really proved that it does what a land grant supposed to do like creating intellectual property to make a difference in the world. And about the university system as a whole in thinking about the state, just the way University thought about itself, the system was thinking about the state. So it really opened my eyes to the importance of having a system to be able to think about that kind of that kind of impact. And then I, I've learned the importance of, we really need to figure out as a, as a society, as a country, however we're going to look at it about how we handled viral response. We're not there, we're not even close to there. If we think about an environmental response, we've become really pretty good. There's an oil spill. We're pretty good about like, getting on it. We understand that now. We don't, I truly believe that we're not even going through this we're not even close and infrastructure we need for viral attack or a viral, the next SARS which will absolutely happen. We've learned but we haven't put the infrastructure in place to actually get it down. Yeah, and then

about myself, I just learned, again, how nice it is to work with folks that have a common sort of mission set of values in place and how much can really be accomplished. It's pretty incredible with what folks are getting behind something can go do, as represented I believe by the effort. The team of SHIELD Illinois, its incredible.

Kinsey Brown 1:00:11

Truly

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 1:00:12

Move mountains, really fast.

Jenna Courtade 1:00:13

Yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 1:00:15

Right?

Kinsey Brown 1:00:16

It's amazing. I mean, the amount of work that you and your team were able to get done in a super short period of time, I--

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 1:00:22

Nuts.

Kinsey Brown 1:00:23

It, I mean, it saved people's lives. Like it's, it's pretty--

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 1:00:26

Yeah, there's no doubt, they did a great job.

Kinsey Brown 1:00:29

But thank you so much for joining us. Is there anything you want to add on here at the end? I know there's probably a lot.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 1:00:36

I think what's helpful is, and we've been building a folder, I don't know if you have access to it that we have been dropping documents into for Joanne [Kaczmarek].

Jenna Courtade 1:00:44

Yeah

Kinsey Brown 1:00:44

I think so, yes.

Jenna Courtade 1:00:45

I do.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 1:00:46

I would say the things to point out in that, is there's a goals document which I think is really important. Meaning it was like tracking sort of periods of time, what the goals were. So I think it does a nice job of sort of seeing an evolution. Second thing, is I would quarterly do a write up that I sent out to the world. Every three months. That would list with the current challenges were and what the current, it would basically say, here's what we've accomplished. Here's where we're going. Here's the things that could be headwinds from us to get to point A to point B. So I think pulling, using those it actually just that to me tells a little bit of a story, a real time story. And then the last thing is I did a business plan like three weeks in that sort of laid out the initial model where we were heading. To me those like when I think about from an archive standpoint, are probably the three and then I would throw on then this video that then sort of is almost like tells a story that, that it's a two year point in time. And it's really kind of after we've gotten past the big stuff. So I would say from my standpoint, those are probably the four key sort of sources. And there's not much in each one. So it's easy. It's tangible. Yeah, if that makes any sense. It's not like here's a million emails.

Jenna Courtade 1:02:19

Yeah.

Kinsey Brown 1:02:19

Oh, it's perfect. And it's great that it bookends it a little bit too, you know.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 1:02:22

Yeah.

Kinsey Brown 1:02:22

The beginning of the efforts and the end.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 1:02:24

Yeah. So the only thing that is not in there think it's a video and I'll make sure that that gets sent or actually it should probably get uploaded, in there. I've made sure the goals are in there. I don't know if all the letters in there quarterly, but I think they are, that were sent out

Kinsey Brown 1:02:41

And we can follow up on that today. And let you know.

Jenna Courtade 1:02:43

Yeah, I definitely looked at that. When it first was being deposited in there, so it's been a minute, but I do, I do remember the goals for sure. I remember a lot of structure trees too.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 1:03:00

Yeah, I would hit the, the only thing I think the story the easier thing is sort of that one or two pager of every three months.

Jenna Courtade 1:03:07

Yeah, yeah.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 1:03:08

To me that kind of lays a lot out. Cause I was pretty forthright in those on what was happening.

Jenna Courtade 1:03:17

That's good. I'll double check. Yeah, no problem. Thank you.

Ronald (Ron) Watkins 1:03:22

Do you need this? [Holding a sheet of the interview questions.]

Kinsey Brown 1:03:24

If you'd like to keep it, we could get rid of it for you though.