CASE STUDY

Enabling Productivity that Equates to an Extra SRE for Formation Bio

spacelift

Formation Bio

140
Company size

AWS, Terraform
Stack

Without Spacelift, attaining the kind of productivity Formation Bio now achieves would require an extra SRE.

Spacelift streamlines operations, so engineering talent can focus on high-value work.

Teams get focused, governed self-service access to the infrastructure they need to move quickly and safely.

Summary

To support its fast-moving engineering culture and robust compliance standards, pharmaceutical company Formation Bio partnered with consulting firm Masterpoint to enhance its infrastructure-as-code (IaC) strategy. Masterpoint recommended Spacelift, a platform that brought streamlined automation to Formation Bio's Terraform workflows. With Spacelift, the team was able to meet compliance needs efficiently while focusing engineering efforts on building high-impact platform solutions that can drive the greatest value for their development platform and ultimately their pipeline of drug assets.

Formation Bio is a technically sophisticated pharmaceutical company that acquires clinical-stage drugs from pharmaceutical and biotech companies and develops them in-house. By leveraging its tech and AI platform, Formation Bio aims to improve development speed, cost, and potential for success. Almost unique in such a highly regulated industry, the company is pioneering a new model within pharma that strives to navigate the balance between compliance and innovation, driving groundbreaking advances in drug development with AI, automation, and modern tech practices.

We spoke to Engineering Manager Chris Niemira and Senior Platform Engineer Harris Jordan, as well as Masterpoint CEO/CTO Matt Gowie, about the ways Spacelift has enhanced productivity for Formation Bio.

Formation Bio's IaC challenge

With a small, focused engineering team and rigorous compliance requirements around audit trails for infrastructure changes, Formation Bio prioritized precision and oversight in their infrastructure-as-code (IaC) workflows. As Engineering Manager Chris Niemira explains, "We have a lean team working across a range of high-impact projects, so it was important for us to ensure every infrastructure change met our compliance standards, which often required two engineers working synchronously. With just three engineers, that meant close collaboration was baked into every infrastructure change."

Formation Bio was well-positioned to accelerate its IaC capabilities with the support of Masterpoint, a consulting firm known for solving complex IaC challenges. Masterpoint CEO/CTO Matt Gowie underscores the value of this partnership: "By choosing a solution that streamlines operations and reduces engineering overhead, Formation Bio was able to focus its engineering talent on high-value work related to their core business of drug development and the technologies and systems they are building to support that — a smart approach for any organization where engineering time is one of the most valuable resources."

Formation Bio's Spacelift experience

The Masterpoint team set up and optimized the Spacelift platform for Formation Bio. Given the company's industry — pharma — a priority was elevating GXP (good clinical practice) processes, compliance, and auditability using Spacelift. By layering automation onto established workflows, Formation Bio gained enhanced consistency and speed.

Accelerating safely

Formation Bio Senior Platform Engineer Harris Jordan explains how it works: "One of the ways we think about compliance is to make sure we are in control of the infrastructure that's executing changes against our AWS environment, so we have a self-hosted requirement. We also need to build a really clear audit trail, so that we have a record of when somebody reviews a pull request. We have a Jira ticket in which someone specifies requirements, and when we apply Terraform, we need to be able to reference the log of the infrastructure changes that need to take place. We need to have a reference of who approved those infrastructures, we need to be able to apply those infrastructure changes, and we need to be able to tie that back to the original Jira source requirements."

Spacelift facilitated this technical functional requirement with an audit trail that is easy to track and reference if somebody from the FDA or another external counterparty requests proof of compliance. This was a great process improvement from the previous approach, which required maintaining this audit trail with tooling on local machines as we were running Terraform.

"It's been a major productivity win," says Harris. "It's like having an extra SRE on the team — we've been able to shift focus from managing infrastructure to delivering impact." Chris adds, "We took a well-established, policy-driven process and evolved it into an automated solution that maintains the same rigor but with greater speed and consistency."

Enhancing productivity

Data engineering is a strategic priority for Formation Bio, and with Spacelift, teams are now empowered to manage much of their own infrastructure needs, while still benefiting from centralized best practices. "The SRE team builds the automation layer, and other teams can confidently use it to operate their own infrastructure," says Chris. "That reduces load on the SRE team and enables faster, more efficient delivery across the board."

This shift toward self-service is particularly impactful in a highly regulated environment like pharma, where control and compliance are non-negotiable. "We're intentional about how we implement self-service," Harris explains. "It's not about opening the gates — it's about giving teams focused, governed access to what they need to move quickly and safely."

As Formation Bio continues to scale, the ability to provide secure, streamlined access to infrastructure will become increasingly important — and Spacelift is helping make that possible.

Spacelift's impact on Formation Bio

With Spacelift in place, the Formation Bio platform engineering team can focus more on delivering scalable, business-critical solutions while routine infrastructure tasks are handled more efficiently.

> With the breadth of infrastructure we manage, Spacelift has helped us scale effectively without growing the team. By reducing manual toil, we've freed up time to focus on delivering platform solutions that add real value for our stakeholders. As the operational burden has gone down, so has the stress, and overall productivity has gone up.
>
> **Chris Niemira**
> Engineering Manager at Formation Bio

Accelerating productivity as infrastructure scales is a significant achievement, especially in a highly regulated industry like pharma, where compliance is non-negotiable. Formation Bio had strong controls in place, and with Spacelift, those controls are now even more robust and streamlined. As Masterpoint's Matt explains, "One of the major things we worked on was ensuring particular infrastructure in a GXP setting followed specific regulatory guidelines. That level of governance involves very specific infrastructure and resources that Formation Bio needs to stay compliant, and Spacelift is enabling that through the ability to collect the full audit trail and ensure that certain checks and multiple approvals are being made."

Ultimately, having Spacelift in place to manage infrastructure automation frees Formation Bio's engineers to focus on what it does best — working to optimize the drug development lifecycle so that treatments can ultimately be developed faster and more efficiently for patients. "At the end of the day, we are a pharmaceutical company. Build automation for infrastructure is critical, but as a foundation for all the other technologies we're building, not as the core area we want our teams to spend their time. So, onboarding Spacelift's solution has freed my team to really focus on some of the more high-leverage returns that we can contribute to the business," concludes Chris.

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