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The government of Canada's digital ambition

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Canada's Digital Ambition 2024-25

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President's Message

Annual Update on the Government of Canada Digital Ambition

Canada's digital government transformation is about modernizing and adapting service delivery to better meet the needs of Canadians in every corner of our country.

Understanding the everyday challenges that Canadians face when interacting with government services is the first step in delivering quality services that are accessible to everyone. From there, we can make use of modern technology and data to help remove barriers, all while ensuring that our services remain convenient, secure, and reliable.

Central to this vision is the Digital Ambition, which sets clear long-term objectives for how the government will put people, policy, and technology first so that we can best deliver for Canadians.

By necessity, the Digital Ambition must remain dynamic and responsive to the ever-changing digital landscape. We must continue to keep pace with the rapid advancements in generative artificial intelligence (AI), ensure that our democratic institutions remain strong, resilient, and trusted, and address the growing threat of cyber-attacks on government institutions.

Over the past year, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat has taken considerable steps to advance these efforts, including developing Canada's first AI Strategy for the federal public service. Once finalized later this Spring, the Strategy will outline how the Government of Canada will leverage AI to enhance productivity, expand our capacity for scientific research, and improve services for Canadians.

There is still work ahead of us, but I am encouraged by the momentum that has been created across federal departments and agencies to move the initiative forward.

Digital government is moving at a fast pace, and the Digital Ambition is critical to ensuring we can deliver services in the modern, digital age.

I invite you to read this report to learn more about how the Digital Ambition is helping to improve the way we serve Canadians.

The Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P.
President of the Treasury Board

Message from the Chief Information Officer of Canada

As the Chief Information Officer of Canada, I am pleased to present the 2024–25 update to the Government of Canada’s Digital Ambition. The Digital Ambition is the Government of Canada’s forward-looking strategic plan to navigate the digital world.

My office, the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) within the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, provides leadership and direction to Government of Canada (GC) organizations in many areas, such as service, data, information technology, privacy, security, access to information, cyber security, artificial intelligence, and digital talent and culture, among others.

Since my arrival in February 2024, I’ve witnessed first-hand the tremendous work being done across departments on digital government. This is happening against a backdrop of several government-wide initiatives that will influence the way we work over the coming months and years, including Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat’s refocusing government spending initiative, a renewal of our values and ethics guidance, and a re-examination of policy risks and operations oversight.

The years of pandemic-fueled digital acceleration and rapid development have left the GC’s digital community in a much different place than it was just a short time ago. This provides an important opportunity to refocus our core priorities and desired outcomes for Canadians. Moving forward, the Government of Canada’s Digital Ambition will transition from four themes to four specific outcomes:

1. Services are user-centric, trusted and accessible.
2. Data and information are foundational to service delivery and informed decision-making.
3. Technology empowers innovation, efficiency and security.

4. The workforce is digitally savvy and adaptable to the digital landscape.

How will we accomplish these outcomes? Through our policies, our people and our technology. This is a shift to a more focused Digital Ambition. It ensures that all organizations in the federal government are aligned to the same outcomes as we continue to confront pressing digital challenges. I am confident that this will better structure the GC for one united goal: to better serve Canadians.

There is much work to be done in the coming years. I am excited for the opportunity to tackle these challenges together, and I am energized about the future of Canada's digital government.

Dominic Rochon

Chief Information Officer of Canada

Introduction

The Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) is housed within the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. The OCIO provides strategic direction and leadership in the pursuit of excellence in many digital priorities across the Government of Canada (GC), including:

- service
- information and data governance
- privacy
- security, including cyber security
- artificial intelligence (AI)
- digital talent

The GC's Digital Ambition guides the OCIO's strategic directive and leadership. It is divided into two parts:

- Part I describes how the GC operates. It also details how the digital landscape is rapidly changing and identifies the trends that are influencing this change.
- Part II highlights the outcomes of the Digital Ambition and how the OCIO will support organizations in achieving those outcomes through policy, people and technology. It details the actions the GC will take toward building a responsive and robust digital government over the next three years. All of this work supports the vision of making Canada a leader in delivering secure, responsible and trustworthy digital programs and services that are also accessible and sustainable.

Part I: Government of Canada's operating context

Current reality

Every day, the Canadian economy and Canadians rely more and more on data, information and technology. Work, communications and interactions with government are moving steadily online, transforming the way the government delivers services.

In fact, 77% of Canadians have now connected with government online, 60% within the past year, and online channels continue to be the preferred method for accessing government services since the pandemic.¹ At the same time, public opinion research shows that satisfaction with government services has dropped.

There is a sizeable gap between the expectations of digital government services and the reality the public experiences. This gap leads to frustration and low adoption of these services. In 2022–23, 50.6% of all government interactions were completed online, but only 22.5% of services were available entirely online from start to finish.² GC services are not always user-friendly or efficient, which deters the public from using them, impacting public trust in government, and potentially increasing the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation.

The GC's information technology (IT) systems are essential for delivering services online to Canadians and improving the government's internal processes. However, only 38% of current applications – the software or digital tools used to manage government operations or provide services – are considered healthy.³

Applications become unhealthy for many reasons, such as limited vendor support for application maintenance, an inability to integrate with other systems, outdated infrastructure, or security vulnerabilities. Progress in modernizing these applications takes time, leading to an increase in systems and applications that are out of date, often referred to as “legacy” systems. Legacy systems can cause additional costs and security risks.

The GC needs to improve its IT systems and services to keep up with the evolving digital landscape and public expectations. These trends present both challenges and opportunities as we work to enhance a digital government.

Digital trends: challenges and opportunities

Data and information: Data is the basis of all challenges and opportunities. As part of the services it provides, the GC collects and stores data and information from the public. It is important for the GC to look closely at the data it collects, its current data needs and how to

increase awareness of the importance of data management. This includes ensuring that work and decisions are based on data to allow the GC to understand how to improve services.

Data and information will heavily impact how the GC addresses the other challenges and opportunities in this Ambition. By making use of data and information, the GC can overcome digital obstacles, inform decision-making, and track the overall health of services.

Artificial intelligence (AI): The evolution and adoption of AI tools and techniques come with great potential to make operations more efficient and help make significant advances in several fields, such as science and research, general policy work, and service delivery.

Generative AI tools are easily available, so more public servants have the power of AI at their fingertips. However, AI adoption also comes with ethical and legal challenges.

For example, AI tools may generate inaccurate content and may not meet federal privacy requirements. There is also a risk of causing harm to or disadvantaging individuals who are affected by inherent biases within AI systems. The GC is adopting AI responsibly to improve services to the people it serves and government operations.

Security: There are many persistent and complex malicious cyber campaigns that threaten the public sector and, ultimately, the security and privacy of Canadians.

High-level threats require constant attention as the GC evolves new digital tools and fortifies existing systems. The increasingly complex threat landscape, coupled with the rapid pace of technological innovation, requires the GC to keep on top of the cyber risk landscape and continuously improve the monitoring of and responses to security incidents across organizations.

Building public trust: The GC will prioritize building trust with Canadians through increased transparency in government decision-making and service delivery. Trust is a critical factor in ensuring that the public embraces government services online.

The GC aims to increase transparency by implementing the GC's Trust and Transparency Strategy and adopting open government principles and guidelines where applicable.

Protecting personal information: Protecting personal information and upholding an individual's right to access and change their information is essential to building and maintaining trust in public institutions.

Personal information and data should be shared between GC organizations to enable faster and more straightforward service. However, organizations should ensure that safeguards are in place to address privacy and transparency measures so that users understand how their data is being used.

Transparency in the sharing of data would increase trust in and use of GC services by creating a "tell us once" environment for better service delivery. The GC will continue to protect personal data and information through partnerships and data and information-sharing agreements. The GC will also limit the collection and sharing of information, build privacy into new digital initiatives from the start, and put in place measures to ensure that users can see how their data is being used to serve them.

Digital talent: There's a global shortage of digital experts, particularly in the fields of data science and cyber security. This shortage means that the GC needs to compete to attract, develop and retain the workforce needed to meet its Digital Ambition.

In addition, the GC must reflect the diversity of Canada's population and address systemic barriers to entering the government workforce, regardless of location or identity. The GC must build a more diverse and inclusive digital workforce that can deliver high-quality, user-friendly services.

Services: The continuing shift to digital methods of communication and interaction has emphasized the need for secure and reliable services. The GC interacts with millions of people each day. Digital channels are becoming the main method of interfacing with users and the foundation for public trust.

This significant speed of digital growth presents challenges to the GC. Many factors influence the delivery of digital services, such as supporting policies, tools, data and resources, including a digitally savvy workforce. The GC is focused on delivering services and programs that are easy to use and meet user needs, all while being timely, secure and efficient.

Government sustainability: The GC must ensure that it builds secure, reliable and resilient operations, while maximizing the value and longevity of its investments in technology.

Accessibility: The GC must continue to ensure that products and services are accessible to ensure better services for all, whether delivered online or offline.

How the digital landscape is shaping government priorities

To address emerging digital trends and define clear priorities, the GC is strengthening how it operates. To keep up with the rapid evolution of the digital landscape, the GC workforce needs a common set of priorities and approaches. This will help the GC to navigate the complexities, ambiguities and rapid changes of the digital landscape to reduce vulnerabilities and ensure that the GC has the flexibility, skills and agility to seize opportunities for improvement.

Collaborative approaches to key priorities

The GC is a large and complex ecosystem of 161 federal organizations,⁴ each with their own independent systems and processes. These organizations need to collaborate and align to deliver data-driven, secure and adaptive digital modernization with a common user experience.

In the coming years, the OCIO will prioritize government-wide initiatives, such as:

- updating the Policy on Service and Digital to align it more closely with GC objectives
- assessing needed improvements to the Policy on Government Security to ensure that the GC is proactive and responsive to threats and risks
- building on the principles in the Guide on the use of generative AI and the Directive on Automated Decision-Making to develop a comprehensive AI strategy for the federal public service
- implementing the GC's Enterprise Cyber Security Strategy, which provides a whole-of-government approach to the cyber security of government operations
- enforcing the 2024 Application Hosting Strategy, which promotes cohesive and consolidated application hosting services
- completing and renewing the 2023–2026 Data Strategy for the Federal Public Service, which, given the GC's growing volume of data holdings, must address increasingly complex issues and improve services to ensure that organizations access data appropriately and are accountable for managing data as an asset
- ensuring that the Government of Canada Digital Talent Strategy, in effect since April 1, 2023, remains the framework for addressing talent needs
- supporting the implementation of the Accessible Canada Act and accompanying regulations, which continue to focus on identification, removal and prevention of barriers by adopting international best practice standards and developing supporting guidance and tools

These priorities benefit organizations in the GC. They will also help the GC better align and collaborate with international partners and allies, leading research institutions, and the private sector. To remain competitive in the global digital environment and to better deliver programs and services, the GC must be adaptive and align its strategies and approaches with the changing digital landscape.

Part II: Outcomes and the support the Government of Canada will receive to achieve them

The previous iteration of the Digital Ambition had 17 priorities. In implementing these priorities, it became clear that a sharper focus was needed, with simpler, measurable objectives that are accessible and easy to reference. As a result, the Digital Ambition has shifted to focus on four outcomes that are anchored in the four policy suites that are fundamental to government:

- *Policy on Service and Digital*
- *Policy on Government Security*
- *Policy on Access to Information*
- *Policy on Privacy Protection*

Going forward, GC outcomes are aligned with the tangible measures that will be collected to assess performance (Appendix A):

Outcomes

1. Services are user-centric, trusted and accessible
2. Data and information are foundational to service delivery and informed decision-making
3. Technology empowers innovation, efficiency and security
4. The workforce is digitally savvy and adaptable to the digital landscape

Each organization has its own digital challenges and opportunities, so each organization will approach the outcomes in a different way. The OCIO will support organizations in working towards these outcomes and will assess progress through measurements that will be reported on annually (Appendix A). Going forward, the OCIO will support the outcomes of this new Digital Ambition through a policy, people and technology lens.

Supporting the outcomes through policy, people and technology

Policy

Policy is the foundation that directs government actions to be fair and effective. Based on the aforementioned four policy suites, the OCIO guides organizations through instruments, such as directives and standards, and monitors organizations for compliance. The OCIO ensures that policies meet the needs of Canadians and adapt to the evolving digital landscape.

Policies are the building blocks that create better services. By improving policies, organizations can provide services that focus on user needs. The better the services and policies, the more accessible, trustworthy and transparent the government becomes.

People

People drive digital operations and transformation initiatives in the GC, including staff and leaders both in the IT community and beyond. The Government of Canada Digital Talent Strategy aims to attract, retain and develop the workforce of the future with the digital skills and savvy required to advance in the digital landscape. Better recruitment and retention fosters a culture that values talent, inclusivity and professional development across the GC.

Ensuring employees have the skills and tools to do their jobs is also crucial. This is not just about attracting talent, but empowering the existing workforce, including developing the digital community and embedding digital in the culture of the public service. It is imperative that the workforce is upskilled and given the necessary tools to keep up with the changing digital landscape.

Technology

Technology includes the tools, systems, data, information and infrastructure that support our digital operations, projects and service delivery. To benefit from the data collected across the GC, the OCIO will help organizations use and re-use data.

This will create feedback loops to keep data and information secure, improve the oversight of technology investment and implementation, and foster innovation. As a result, digital services will be better delivered and more cost-effective and follow common technology practices.

Interconnection

Policy, people, and technology do not operate in isolation from one another; the three overlap and influence each other. Policies shape how technology will be used.

Policies are also designed to meet the needs of people, which can shape how programs interact with each other. Technological advances can lead to new policies or change existing ones. The needs and behaviours of the people who will use the technology should help determine how it is developed and implemented.

By understanding these interactions, the GC can better tackle challenges and obstacles and deliver better services. Understanding these interactions sets up the GC to ensure that:

- decisions and policies are based on evidence and data, and are transparent for ongoing improvement and responsive service and program delivery

- decisions on digital investments are based on readiness to execute and measure benefits
- oversight provides information and evidence needed for timely intervention, process improvement, and direction setting

Conclusion

Annual reports on the progress made against each of the outcomes will be published to ensure transparency and accountability to showcase to Canadians not only what has been achieved, but also the challenges that remain.

The digital landscape is constantly evolving and often requires fast, responsive action while maintaining guardrails. It requires GC organizations to work together to make tangible progress on the four outcomes of the Digital Ambition.

Through data-driven decisions, innovative and secure technologies, and a digitally savvy workforce, the GC will produce real results in service delivery. In doing so, the GC will build a digital future that is user-centered, data-driven, secure and accessible.

Appendix A – The four outcomes with their associated measurements

To measure the outcomes, the OCIO will use existing datasets that it collected for reporting purposes. As such, organizations will not be required to perform any additional reporting.

Outcome 1: Services are user-centric, trusted and accessible

- Percentage of services that are meeting the service standards established
- Percentage of clients who are satisfied with the services being provided
- Percentage of services with publicly available real-time reporting
- Number of privacy breaches per year

Outcome 2: Data and information are foundational to service delivery and informed decision-making

- Percentage of services that have used (client feedback) data to improve service delivery
- Percentage of plans for digital investments, assets and operations that are maintained, accurate and complete
- Percentage of organizations that have data quality controls in place to maintain the accuracy, consistency and reliability of information and data, in accordance with the Guidance on Data Quality

Outcome 3: Technology empowers innovation, efficiency and security

- Percentage of low-risk decisions made through automated decision-making systems
- Percentage of GC websites delivering digital services to citizens securely
- Percentage of GC websites that are accessible to citizens
- Percentage of unhealthy applications planned for remediation in the next 12 months, and percentage of unhealthy applications without plans for remediation in the next 12 months

Outcome 4: The workforce is digitally savvy and adaptable to the digital landscape

- Number of public servants and number of employees in the digital community participating in digital skills training and development (various sources such as the Canada School of Public Service Digital Academy and IT Training Fund)
- Number of employees and departments using the OCIO Digital Community Management services and guidance in line with the Digital Talent Strategy
- Percentage of digital job openings filled by TBS digital talent pipelines and mobility pools

Footnotes

1 [Citizens First Survey, 2023](#)

2 [GC InfoBase - Services](#)

3 [Auditor General of Canada Report 7 – Modernizing Information Technology Systems](#)

4 [GC InfoBase - About government](#)