



With a new home for DOGE in the White House, here's what you need to know

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Stephen Fowler



President Trump speaks to journalists as he signs an executive order regarding Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), in the Oval Office of the White House on Jan. 20.

Jim Watson/AFP via Getty Images

A proposed commission with a sweeping mandate to shrink federal bureaucracy and slash government spending now has a new home — and a more efficient mandate, as President Trump continues to turn campaign promises into [actual policy](#).

On his first day in office, Trump [signed an executive order](#) that renames the little-known but highly respected United States Digital Service office as the United States DOGE Service, referring to the Department of Government Efficiency, an effort helmed by tech billionaire and Trump ally Elon Musk.



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In contrast to the initial announcement of DOGE, focused on federal spending, the workforce and technology infrastructure from "outside the government," Trump's Jan. 20 order outlines a temporary organization within the larger USDS office that will be led by a to-be-named administrator.

The [order](#) also moves the USDS from the Office of Management and Budget to the Executive Office of the President and directs each federal agency to create a "DOGE Team" that may include a team leader, engineer, human resources specialist and attorney to help facilitate Trump's "DOGE agenda."

Additionally, the new USDS office is tasked with a "Software Modernization Initiative" to update software, network and IT infrastructure across the federal government. There's still a lot that's unknown about DOGE but there is now more insight into what it may look like moving forward.

What office is the DOGE initiative joining?

Jennifer Pahlka, a senior fellow at the Niskanen Center and one of the architects of the USDS, said one thing that seems apparent is the previously behind-the-scenes office is likely to be more in the spotlight.

Pahlka said the office was founded "to meet the public's expectations, or help the agencies meet these raised expectations of the public," when it comes to digital presence.

The USDS launched in 2014 by the Obama administration in the aftermath of the botched rollout of HeathCare.gov as an office to boost the digital capabilities of the federal government.



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It has operated like a digital strike team of sorts, recruiting private sector experts in design and technology to work collaboratively with federal agencies on projects that make public-facing parts of the government more efficient, modern and user-friendly.

Mina Hsiang, the most recent administrator of the USDS before the Trump rebranding, said that over the last four years the office has worked with more than 30 agencies on projects that ranged from urgent action items to longer-term overhauls of digital systems.

Haven't heard of it? Maybe its projects will ring a bell

"USDS has no special authorities or anything else that other parts of government don't have," Hsiang explained. "What we do have is a difference in strategic perspective on how to take on these challenges."

The latest [USDS annual report](#) touts, for example, an increase in customer satisfaction with the Social Security Administration website after working to simplify complicated language that led to longer wait times.

It also highlighted the rollout of an Internal Revenue Service pilot to file taxes online for free and ongoing efforts to modernize the Department of Veterans Affairs and make it easier for veterans to access their health care benefits.

"There are digital transformation people in agencies now, and there always have been," Pahlka noted. "They tend to struggle, they tend to be swimming upstream, given how risk-averse government is and how hard it is to change the culture to sort of shed the legacy thinking and the legacy ways of working."

What do we know about the vision for the new USDS?

Not much, beyond the text of the executive order.

Trump hasn't yet named an administrator for the retooled office, it's not clear how Musk will operate in relation to the USDS and the new DOGE teams have not been put into place across federal agencies.



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"DOGE is positioning itself — and we'll see if this really plays out — as having far more

power than USDS has traditionally did in the past, say, three administrations," she said.

Pahlka adds that there are many parts of the federal government where computers and technology could be doing tasks that are currently done by civil servants, freeing up time and resources to focus on other things.

"My choice would be to redeploy those people in higher value work, their choice may be to lay those people off," she said. "The end result of both, though, is a kind of change that government has needed for a long time."

So, it's all about cutting?

Hsiang and Pahlka both said the continued success of the USDS under its new mandate can only happen if the conversation with federal agencies continues to be viewed as a two-way street, and if the new leadership takes the time to understand why the inefficiencies exist in the first place.



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"They will find inevitably that the questions that they think are simple to answer are not, and the systems are the way they are, for reasons that are very hard to see from the outside," Pahlka said.

"One thing that I'm looking for is, how quickly do they learn and sort of challenge their own prior assumptions?" she added. "Because everybody who goes into government thinks that it's going to be easy to fix and everyone finds out that it is a lot harder than they thought because we have made government very, very complex."

Hsiang adds that focusing on spending cuts without addressing things like congressional oversight and regulation of how agencies operate won't lead to success.

"I cannot think of any companies that build a vision that is just around cost cutting... that has limited utility," she said.

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