Ontario

Start with users. Deliver together.

Ontario's path to simpler, faster, better government

ontario.ca/digitalplan

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To all the people of public service, who are making good change

TL;DR — We are redesigning government for a digital world.

The goal is simpler, faster and better end-to-end services across a people-centred government. A consistent, inclusive and delightful online experience. New opportunities to create savings.

We will need common platforms, open formats, shared data, new approaches and internal processes that unpack complex human challenges into small components to be explored, tested and continuously improved with the users of those services. Together with a mindset that values empathy, experimentation, curiosity, creativity, agility, openness and collaboration.

It will take all of us, across government, to get the job done. The Ontario Digital Service is here to help you think 'digital' and deliver, together. Imagine a force of 60,000+ human-centred designers working side-by-side, solving for good.

This is the 'alpha' of our plan. True to our 'lean startup' form, it is our hypothesis of how we might achieve our key priorities.

Share your input with us online using the hashtag #OntarioDigital

Message from the Chief Digital Officer

Dear fellow public service designers:

You won't see digital in our action plan title, and that's on purpose. Because the term 'digital' doesn't quite capture it all. Yes, we are living in an age re-shaped by the technologies around us—a time when you can hail a ride using your phone and see outer space through a small screen. The internet has changed everything. Except one thing: our collective commitment to people.

As humans, we still want to connect with one another, fulfill dreams and leave our world better than we found it. Some of the strongest examples of human-centred service are seen inside government. The people of public service are impact-driven, working hard to meet the changing expectations of the public, communities and businesses. Technology has not changed our shared mission of service, it has given us new tools.

So, how might we create simpler, faster, better services for Ontarians, together?

By delivering. By being willing to try new approaches. By working out loud, and in the open, to share lessons learned and demonstrate change. By empowering and enabling people to think differently about the way that we deliver programs and make policy.

At the Ontario Digital Service, we believe that we are all designers of the service experience. As public servants, we all want to ensure that the programs and services we design fulfill user needs, whether our users are parents, newcomers, students, seniors, communities, co-workers or organizations.

What's different, now, is that we have new methods at our disposal. Data provides greater insight and connections. Modern technologies are faster, more flexible, cost effective, and can be continuously improved based on user feedback. New design practices and research techniques enable us to engage directly with people and discover their true needs, before we even sketch a solution, make a rule or write a policy.

It's time to use these practices and tools to the best of our abilities. Move out of our collective comfort zone. Challenge assumptions. Ask ourselves: Have we fully understood a human problem, before envisioning a technology solution?

I joined the Ontario government because I saw the passion, tenacity and talent of the people who are here, trying new things and learning through experimentation. I knew we could do great things, together. Since arriving in Ontario, I've seen the same commitment to people and service across the public service. We all want to make it easier for people to interact with their government.

I've called the ODS a 'centre of gravity' for digital skills and expertise inside the Ontario Public Service. But it's people who are at the centre of government. That's why we're working with partner ministries—across an organization that is 60,000+ strong—to introduce new practices, processes and methods of designing, delivering and operating programs and services that meet people's needs from the start.

Our goal is to deliver a consistent, inclusive and delightful online experience across the whole of government. These are the guiding principles that drive our work, and should be the North Star for any team driving digital change in their ministry:

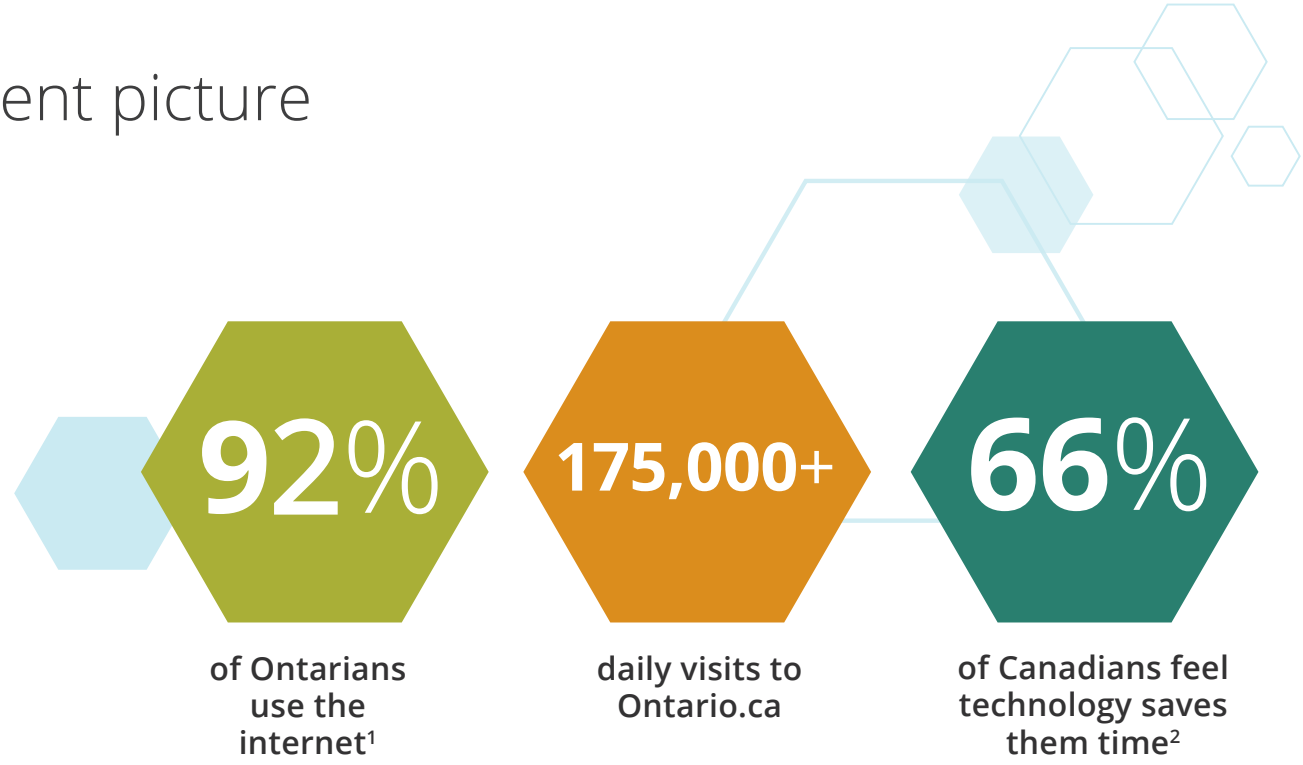
1. ***People*** **are at the centre** of service and policy design, actively participating in government program development by telling us what they need and will use
2. *People* have a common way to identify who they are when they interact with us online through **a single digital identity** across government
3. *People* don't have to inform multiple ministries every time they move or change information—government uses **a 'tell us once' approach to data and information**
4. *People* have an easier time completing a task with government because **common transactional elements** are in place for all online services (e.g., payments, notifications, etc.), and designed to be interchangeable and built with open standards
5. *People* can track the progress we're making because **open performance metrics** are available online for all services (e.g., UK Government Digital Service Performance)

A central digital team can't deliver this change alone. It will take all 65,000 of us—an organization of exceptional people creating an exceptional government experience to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse and digital population. We need a legion of multidisciplinary teams who are unafraid of embracing new approaches, engaging users and working, side by side, together.

We are a digital organization because we are living in a digital world. Let's become one of the most remarkable people-first organizations ever—in Ontario, for Ontario, with Ontarians.

Hillary Hartley
Chief Digital Officer / Deputy Minister Responsible for Digital Government

Current picture



The internet has fundamentally changed our lives. It's easier than ever to use technology to check real-time traffic, book appointments, pay bills, share photos, find information and connect with one another. Along with rapidly-advancing software and hardware, new fields, practices and methodologies have emerged to help us use, understand and get the most from these technologies.

In the internet era, successful organizations are continuously improving how people interact with their products and services, based on data and feedback. Leading organizations are designing ***with*** their users, not ***for*** their customers. They're bridging the gap between what stakeholders and program owners assume to be true, and what end users show us they need.

Governments are also becoming more user-centric in this age of acceleration.

In fact, governments around the world have realized the need for more responsive, people-focused online services. In recent years, digital government teams have been created in the UK, United States, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and many major North American cities, states and provinces, including Ontario. Here in the province, digital teams have been a positive force for good, building a strong foundation for digital transformation.

[1] https://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2017032-eng.htm
[2] http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/171114/dq171114a-eng.htm

What is digital?

Digital is a means to an end, not an end itself. Digital creates better value for investments and enables more efficient services. It's a different way of thinking and working to solve human problems and produce better outcomes in an era where computers are widely used, the internet exists, and people have come to expect speed, convenience, and simplicity.

Becoming digital

When we talk about digital, we're talking about being people-centric and results-driven, exemplifying a new way of delivering products, services and outcomes that are based on meeting end user needs (rather than designing for our own).

Becoming digital is a cultural and operational shift that encompasses:

How we approach problems	Using a "how might we" approach, we develop a hypothesis, research with users, design a prototype based on what we've discovered about our users, build something that addresses their identified need(s); then launch, learn and improve, based on their feedback.
What we value* *(*Adapted from, and with thanks to, agilemanifesto.org)*	Individuals and interactions, over processes and tools. A working product, over a detailed paper proposal. Responding to change, over following a fixed plan. Collaboration with users, over building for them.
How we work	Together, on small, empowered multidisciplinary teams who continuously experiment, design, build, test, learn and iterate in the open and with users.
What drives our decisions	Data and user feedback, not untested assumptions.

> “Digital isn’t a list of things to do. It’s about how you think, how you behave, what you value, and what drives decisions in your organisation.”
>
> **— JANET HUGHES, DOTEVERYONE**

Bending the cost curve

With the rise of the internet, technology has become far cheaper and faster to deploy. In many organizations, using more modern, cost-effective technologies and digital design practices has generated savings that otherwise would not have been realized. In fact, key benefits of digital approaches to program design and service delivery are better value for technology investments and cost avoidance.

The Ontario.ca platform was built and is operated using modern Cloud-based and open source technologies, and costs $4M less to run annually than the previous platform. Moving to common platform, data and design standards can also create opportunities to reduce technology and development costs, while still delivering a top-quality user experience online.

The role of technology

Digital is much more than technology. Technology is the tool that enables transformation to happen; it is not the result. Instead of looking to technology as the solution, we look to people who will use the service or be impacted as a result of a policy. Technologies offer new opportunities for people to improve the world around them. As technology advances, people feel the impact of these changes in their everyday lives.

As organizations shift toward a different model of operating in the internet era, rules, processes, skills and technology must also change to meet evolving user needs. The switch, however, is not as simple as going from option A (e.g., waterfall development) to option B (e.g., agile development). A new cookie-cutter approach to technology does not fix an old cookie-cutter approach to technology.

We must take a more holistic approach, addressing both how we design, deliver and operate new technological solutions to human problems, as well as adapt existing technological solutions and infrastructure to meet modern needs.

The Apple iPhone

Consider the original Apple iPhone. As a breakthrough touchpad product, it set a whole new standard for mobile smartphones, designed around individual needs. It also completely revolutionized communications, entertainment and business – turning a single handheld device into a phone, camera, music player and internet-connected computer, making it easier and more convenient for people to do many things at once, and on the go. The product itself represented change, but the more significant change was seen in how people used the product as a platform to produce and exchange images and information.

Since the first-generation iPhone in 2007, 13 versions of the product have been launched. Continuous improvements have been made to respond to user feedback. As a 'living' product, it must be cared for and updated on a routine basis to meet the ever-changing needs of users. Development and design did not end at first launch – or iteration two, three or four. Improvements and maintenance continue.

The shift needed

Traditionally, governments, like other large institutions, are built around silos. Information flows from the top-down, but not always across the organization. As a result, the user experience of government is often organized around ministry needs, not people's needs.

When the average person doesn't always know (or care) about what part of the government or even what level of government provides individual services, the service experience can feel disjointed and complicated.

For example, the interaction is not seamless when a person needs to contact multiple ministries, each individually, to update or change personal information; or when an individual is asked to print out, sign and send in a form by mail, at the end of an online transaction.

Silos and hierarchy make information flow and data sharing difficult, especially when creating the necessary feedback loops for service improvement. Internal standard operating procedures can present barriers to change. Policy, program development, information and technology design, and service delivery are often

"Digital: Applying the culture, practices, processes & technologies of the Internet-era to respond to people's raised expectations."

— TOM LOOSEMORE

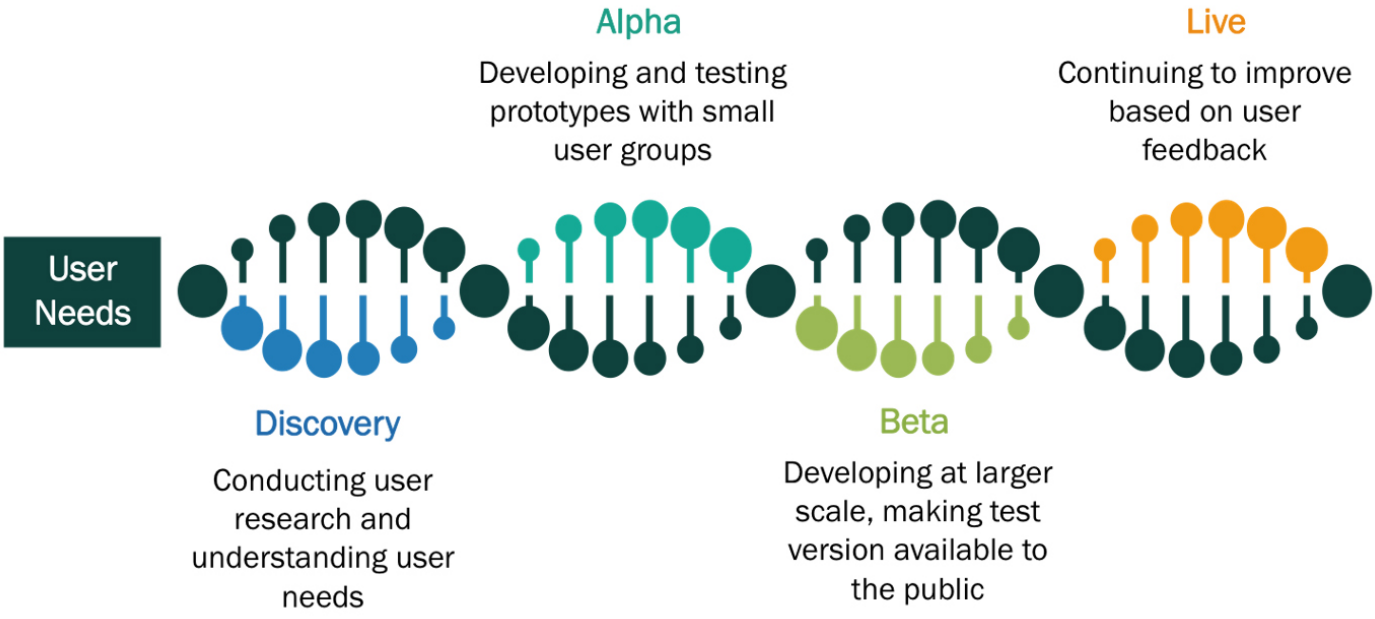
treated as discrete functions. OPS staff shared that they were experiencing these challenges in the OPS of the Future discussions held throughout the province in 2017.

Yet, someone working in operations may know exactly why a service isn't meeting user needs, but can't get that information to a program or policy area, where design decisions are often made. Bringing everyone into a room together, uniting individuals around a common goal (the user need), and speaking about a program or service holistically can solve the problem.

Re-orienting ourselves to take a user-focused perspective will positively impact public sector policy-making, program and service delivery, but also how we shape our organization and teams.

The goal is transformation of end-to-end programs and services, not just digitization. This starts from the time a person starts to achieve a goal (e.g., start a business, choose a school, get out of poverty, improve their health, find child care) to the end point of their journey. This includes all parts of the experience, across all channels (both online and offline), as well as the internal processes that enable government to meet the user need and deliver the intended outcome.

Digital Delivery Approach



Redesigning the experience

Improving the experience of government to delight users and deliver better outcomes for people means reversing the traditional approach—working with people and what's possible, rather than working around technology and "the way we've always done things". All policy, program and service design must start with one question: "What is the user need?"

To be successful, digital can't happen at the edge of government. It must be central to our operating model, if we want to meet shifting public expectations, create savings and achieve better value. We can't just enlist digital talent, either. We must ensure that our entire organization is taking advantage of new technology, practices and people-driven approaches, across the whole of government. We must view ourselves as stewards of service and the end-to-end experience of government.

A better digital service puts the person's experience front and centre. A user-centred program also means that those who are not able to get online can also benefit from better offline services. Not all human problems will have purely technological solutions. Multi-faceted approaches will be needed.

There's also no 'first mover advantage' to digital transformation in government. Ontario has hit the ground running, building, improving and innovating on years of good global work.

Ontario's path to change

Ontario has been putting down strong digital roots, showing the impact that simple, easy-to-use services can have for people, communities and businesses. We have been demonstrating that digital approaches can be more efficient and effective, bend the cost curve and speed up time to market.

2011: a small startup team forms to re-imagine online publishing in government.

2012: the new Ontario.ca launches using open source technologies and hosted in the Cloud, with redesigned plain language content, a modern, consistent look and feel and Ontario's first open data catalogue. the site costs $4M less to run annually than the previous platform.

2013: The province's Open Government initiative launches to create open, transparent and accessible government.

2014: Minister mandate letters are published online, in the open, for the first time.

2015: Ontario's Behavioural Insights Unit and The Centre for Evidence-Based Decision Making launch to enable data-driven decisions and behaviour change through program design.

2016: Ontario announces Canada's first Minister Responsible for Digital Government, and kicks off a world-wide search for its first Chief Digital Officer.

2016: A central Policy Innovation Hub launches to catalyze user-centric, open and collaborative approaches to policy-making in government.

2017: The Ontario Digital Service is born, with a bold government-wide mission to improve the online experience of government and make services simpler, faster and better.

2017: Ontario.ca/osap, featuring a newly redesigned online application and calculator, makes it easier for students to see how much financial support is available to them – the total number of OSAP awards increased by 16% from 2016/17 to 2017/18.

2017: Ontario.ca/health helps people to easily find information about health care and navigate health services.

2017: The Digital Service Standard launches in alpha, outlining 14 criteria for creating a good digital product or service.

2017: The release of a federal, provincial and territorial Declaration of Public Sector Innovation.

2018: A new online environmental registry, built using the Digital Service Standard, better enables people to give input on the environmental issues that matter to them.

“From a little spark may burst a flame.”

— DANTE ALIGHIERI

Sparking a new vision

Government in the internet era empowers people to help design and use responsive online services, participate in an active digital economy, and benefit from digital technologies in their lives. This Ontario is enabled by a digital public service, where work is oriented around people's needs, and teams embrace digital ways of developing and delivering, across government.

Our collective mandate requires that we consider not only the technical requirements of a service that we're designing and developing, but also the entire service and system surrounding the end-user.

People-centred services and programs

At the heart of this vision are simpler, faster, and better online services for the people, communities, and businesses of Ontario. Not just for the sake of simplicity or speed; but because better online services can reduce frustration, save individuals time, improve access, achieve better value for public investments and better outcomes for people.

Consider the example of a single parent who works during regular business hours and can't get away to visit an office to renew their health card. Making services accessible online, around the clock, meets this individual's need for off-hours availability. When this parent visits a government website to complete that renewal, we also want to ensure that their experience is as quick and seamless as possible. Our investment in their experience expresses care and compassion for their time and life situation.

As a provider of programs and services for an increasingly diverse population, government must remain responsive to people in a variety of circumstances—providing the services people need, when they need them, and wherever they happen to be. A one-size-fits-all approach will not work in an era of greater personalization. User needs must guide our approach to more efficient, effective services, policies, and programs.

What tomorrow looks like

A people-centred government means that you:

- have a consistently simple, accessible and delightful experience across services
- can log in once to access services, anytime, anywhere and from any device
- can trust that the information or transaction is secure and official
- control your data government-wide and share data on your terms
- only have to tell us once, if something changes
- don't get postal mail from government anymore, unless you ask for it
- can use any government services, barrier-free

Inclusion, equity and access

In a digitally inclusive Ontario, all people can access and benefit from digital technologies in their lives—regardless of skill, ability, location or socio-economic situation. Closing digital divides and achieving digital inclusion is an obligation of people-centred organizations as we become more digitized and design with our users in mind.

Inclusion and accessibility must be baked in from the beginning of a service, program or policy design. Remember this: When we design for the edges, we design for everyone. If you create an experience that suits a user with highly specific needs, it will almost always work for the majority of users. That applies to both online and offline programs and services.

Only 62% of Ontarians in the lowest income quartile have access to the Internet at home, compared to 93% of those in the highest income quartile.

Canadian Internet Use Survey (2012), Statistics Canada. Table 358-0154.

Ontario is working to achieve digital inclusion by:

- designing programs and services to be inclusive and accessible from the start
- closing connection gaps in rural and remote communities, and making high-quality, affordable internet available in public places
- developing essential digital skills and literacy from childhood to later life
- enabling the growth of the civic technology movement to empower people in using technology to address local problems in their communities

Working together, under a common strategy, we will strengthen the government's collective efforts towards achieving digital inclusion, so that no one is left behind in the digital age.

What tomorrow looks like

A more inclusive Ontario means:

- everyone has access to high-quality, affordable, broadband internet
- people can participate fully in a digital society and economy
- people are empowered to use technology to address local challenges
- services are inclusive and accessible by design, regardless of who provides them
- government information is easy to find, understand, and use in English and French
- people with disabilities face no barriers in accessing services and information online
- our services embody and respect the traditions and values of Indigenous communities, and the principles of Truth and Reconciliation

"The single most obvious reason to push hard for diversity is that promoting diversity means promoting understanding. And that leads to better products that solve problems for those who might've otherwise been sidelined."

— IPSITA AGARWAL

Government as a platform

Government offers a broad range of services, but most of them require the same functions: publishing information, hosting, communicating with people, taking payments or verifying identity. Currently many of these elements are replicated in multiple places, across ministries, in the same way that online publishing was done, before Ontario.ca became the single destination for government information and services.

Government teams should not have to reinvent the wheel each time they build a digital service. Rather than duplicate, bespoke, department-specific systems and services, "government as a platform" imagines a suite of common tools, components, and guidance that every government service can use, across the whole of the organization.

When we create shared components, service designs, platforms, data, and hosting, we're bringing the same elegance and seamless interoperability we provide through a consistent public-facing user experience to operations "under the hood." An example of a common technology service used in government is email (@ontario.ca is a single domain used organization-wide).

Having a suite of common tools and components means teams can spend their time, effort, and resources adding value to the programs and services they run, not creating or procuring individual, customized solutions from scratch. This approach also reduces duplication, creates savings and achieves better value for technology investments.

Government as a platform means services are built on a shared core, including:

- repeatable service design and data sharing patterns
- transactional platforms (e.g., payments, notifications)
- open standards for data and systems
- hosting and internet infrastructure that allows us to scale easily and deploy applications more quickly
- well-documented application programming interfaces (API) to support flexible design and re-use of systems and data

Various services can use these common components, creating:

- a better user experience
- better value for technology investments
- greater focus on technology fit and function
- services that are easier to build and cheaper to run
- more accessible, secure services that protect personal information and privacy
- common analytics and measurements to inform decisions

Sharing common tools and components also creates the behaviour change needed for greater digital uptake, trust and adoption. For example, people just know to call 911 in an emergency; a single number is clear, consistent and users know what to expect. Imagine a future where all online service interactions with government are clear, consistent and people can expect the same experience, regardless of the program or service being accessed.

What tomorrow looks like

A government as a platform means:

- Each service looks and feels the same for people, presenting our individual portfolios and programs as one government
- A common payment platform is used for financial transactions with the public
- A common platform is used to keep people updated with text messages, emails or letters to users
- There's a safe, quick, easy and secure way to prove who you are online
- Systems and data have application programming interfaces (API) to support flexible design and, in many cases, public access and re-use

A new kind of leadership

Digital organizations are open, collaborative, and have an experimental culture that empowers and enables staff to think differently and take risks. For this to happen, we need a new view of leadership.

Executives have long been required to have competence and comfort with business, legal, and financial matters. While organizational leaders don't always need to be technical experts, we must understand how technology impacts the economy, the workforce, institutions, laws, people and society. In the internet age, digital literacy has become an essential leadership skill. Leaders with technical expertise in internet-era practices and approaches need to be cultivated and empowered.

Leaders must also build and sustain a culture that mobilizes and supports creative, effective and responsive multidisciplinary teams. We need to model the behaviours that will enable our teams to be open, people-centred, and adaptable in the face of change.

What tomorrow looks like

Tomorrow's leaders:

- foster an environment of continuous improvement—letting go of the status quo, sharing knowledge whenever possible, and inviting feedback
- flatten out power structures, embrace trust, and work in more fluid, networked ways
- empower teams to try new things, celebrate failing fast and perpetual learning
- focus on discovering opportunities, not designing specific solutions
- value and reward experimentation, openness, and collaboration as part of regular business
- build multidisciplinary, diverse teams that welcome various viewpoints and skills
- lead by example and "show, don't tell"
- share lessons learned, so their teams make only new mistakes
- model 'servant' leadership—where leaders exist to serve and coach team members

Partnering with digital suppliers

Procurement—the practice of acquiring the skills and services of an external organization—must become more flexible in the digital age. This is needed to enable speed and agility; and to ensure that any online product or service that is built can be changed as user needs shift or technologies evolve.

Flexibility includes building around open and industry-standard platforms, software, and services, and moving to more modular contracting.

Modular contracts build in flexibility into partnerships with vendors. In a modular contract, we break up large complex procurements into several shorter-term and lower-dollar contracts that are easier to manage. The risk of total failure is reduced because risk is spread across smaller, more discrete deliverables and stages; rather than a single, 'all-or-nothing' approach. If one part fails, the failure can be isolated. The minor mistakes can be examined, insights drawn, and work adapted to avoid similar results as the project progresses.

A modular approach can also speed up the process for vendors, and simplify selection criteria as contracts can be awarded for specific facets of a project (e.g., design a clickable prototype, standardize a data approach).

Above all, modular contracting enables greater responsiveness to user needs and reduces the time it takes to get products and services that work in front of real people. It enables partners to develop a minimum viable product (MVP) that can be launched and learned from, which builds a better product in the long run. Product changes are made faster, based on continuous user feedback.

This approach can help:

- manage risk
- encourage faster delivery of working software and prototypes to people
- ensure that code is compatible and consistent across multiple vendors
- expand access to a broader mix of vendors
- increase the number of small-to-medium sized businesses competing for, and winning, government contracts

What tomorrow looks like

Modern procurement means:

- No huge, monolithic contracts to single vendors
- Large projects are broken up into separate elements and separate RFPs
- Well-documented, standardized software development practices, across vendors
- More commoditization—reproducible and reusable approaches and technologies
- Increased access to a broader mix of vendors
- Vendors working alongside ministries and the public to co-create people-centred programs and services.

Mobilizing innovation

Ontario is an internationally recognized technology hub—an innovation ecosystem designed for next-generation startups and global companies who want to grow, tap into the best talent in North America and emerge more competitive than ever.

Each year, over $14 billion is spent on research and development in Ontario. More than 100,000 business and university-based researchers work on projects ranging from life-saving vaccines to nanomaterials and next generation wireless devices.

Ontario is a top incubator, home to 5,000+ startups, most between the Kitchener-Waterloo and Toronto corridor. The province ranks second in North America in the number of information communication technology (ICT) establishments. Together with innovation communities such as Communitech, MaRS and the Digital Media Zone (DMZ), and telecommunications companies that are connecting Ontarians with internet services, Ontario is building the way the world will live tomorrow.

Ontario also features a growing network of public interest technology and civic tech communities who are designing smart solutions to address local challenges. Supporting community initiatives that drive an inclusive economy and create social good are an essential part of building an innovative Ontario, equipped to confront the changing needs of an increasingly diverse population.

Code for Canada

In 2017, Ontario co-founded Code for Canada, a new not-for-profit organization that connects government innovators with the technology and design community to build better digital services for people. Code for Canada deploys fellowship teams of coders and designers to work with governments on the design of online services that improve lives, using user-centered, iterative and data-driven approaches. The province's inaugural fellowship team is working with the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development to build a digital tool that improves the adult education experience and makes it easier for learners to navigate the adult education system.

We're supporting innovation as we:

- modernize how we buy and use technology inside government
- build open source software that can be used, shared, and changed by others
- support civic technology communities in building software for the public good
- create open data and API to enable others to deliver products
- explore principles for the responsible use of public data and algorithms
- support digital learning strategies and virtual learning

What tomorrow looks like

Supporting innovation in Ontario means:

- a diverse technology landscape thrives across the province
- new companies call Ontario home, business innovation happens here
- Ontario continues to represent a richly diverse society and feature one of the best-educated workforces in the world
- new technologies that create economic and social benefits for the people of Ontario are actively supported by government
- personal privacy and data are protected
- a vibrant open source community exists where all levels of government, civic technology and civil society groups, and leading companies work together to build software for the public good

We are all service designers

Fostering a digital culture can be one of the biggest accelerators of transformation across an organization.

For digital transformation to happen across the public sector, it will take all of us working in public service. We are the architects of our own change. Each time that we stand up and embrace new methods and test new approaches, we step forward, together. Digital empowers people to learn new skills and do more with technology.

If the future is flatter, more fluid teams, we must re-imagine how we work—enabling practices, processes, and tools that spark greater collaboration. We must give teams permission to step out of the confines of convention and work together more creatively.

Human focused, empathy driven, and diverse

The Ontario Public Service has always adopted the values of serving people to the highest possible standard. A digital OPS will be skilled at doing this in a digital age. Empathy and humility are central skills to ensuring that we understand, and constantly strive to meet, the goals and needs of Ontarians from across the province. We must also reflect the diverse populations we serve inside government in order to understand and meet diverse user needs.

Digital skills

To succeed, people across the public sector must be empowered with modern digital skills, capabilities and tools. We must understand and use data. Be comfortable with engaging users throughout the creation of a service. Be willing to test assumptions and learn new techniques to improve outcomes. Be able to organize across verticals, and deliver in agile and adaptable ways.

Agile and adaptable

Agile is a way of working that breaks projects into smaller chunks (known as increments), and releases those chunks regularly (known as iterations). Core to this approach are the rituals of planning and retrospectives for each iteration, which help teams continuously learn and improve as a service is built, feature by feature.

As user needs change, evolve, or are discovered over time, this way of working supports frequent change and flexibility. What we learn from users can be easily fed back into the product or service design. We're not stuck with a single fixed form or function.

An agile mindset embraces experimentation, continuous feedback, learning, and improvement. It recognizes failure as opportunity and data as gold. To be successful in the digital age, we must mobilize agile and lean approaches—including user research, iteration (sprints), and build-measure-learn feedback loops—to design people-centred programs, policies and services.

Specialized talent

As a diverse organization, we need to recruit for newer in-demand skills in specialist domains that are under-represented (or not represented) in government at large: service design, user research, interaction design, content design, analytics, agile project management, software engineering, product management, DevOps (unified software development and operations), and cybersecurity. We must also enable people with these capabilities to work in new ways and with the necessary tools, organization-wide.

Through a Digital Talent Framework, we will better understand the areas where we need to cultivate and secure capability in a competitive, global market for digital skills.

Creating new pipelines and partnerships to inject these skills government-wide will help to speed up change, and provide new opportunities to deliver digital products and services. The mix of specialist skills with subject-matter expertise will create a digital-savvy workforce and remove barriers to getting results from digital technology.

Service Design at the ODS Lab at Communitech

In 2017, the provincial government opened the Ontario Digital Service (ODS) Lab at the Communitech Hub, in the heart of the Waterloo Region's innovation and technology community. The lab operates as a dedicated space for experience design and user research, inspiring public service teams to start with users, and think and work in more digital ways. Modeled after similar user labs in the tech sector, the ODS lab features an empathy lounge, where people can feel 'at home' when asked about their experience with government.

The lab team applies industry-standard design methods and research techniques to rapidly bring rough product or service ideas to life. These approaches enable testing with Ontarians, before concepts proceed into development. The ODS lab also provides tools, processes and training to support Ontario Public Service teams in adopting modern digital practices in their work.

Ontario is the first government to set up a dedicated space to service and experience design at the hub, among a growing ecosystem of multinational companies and local startups who are embracing the use of technology to transform their organizations.

What tomorrow looks like

A 21st century public service means:

- people have a consistent, delightful online experience with government because the Digital Service Standard is in place for all ministries, the broader public sector, vendors and anyone building digital products or services for the province
- user research is done to discover user needs before services are designed, during development, and after they are made operational
- human-centered service and systems design are core competencies of public servants
- multidisciplinary, co-located teams have the tools and technology to succeed
- more data is available across common platforms
- workplace practices enable more flexible work and better communication
- evidence, data and user feedback inform all decisions, at all stages of program and product creation and operation

Modern teams:

- reflect the diverse populations we serve
- can easily access the data they need from other ministries in ways that respect the privacy of users
- are empowered to work with one another, no silos
- receive proactive analytics that reveal user trends or insights
- engage with the public directly to learn how to best meet their needs
- engage with people through their communication channel of choice

How can we help?

Measuring success

Some statistical markers of digital transformation are easy to see: transaction completion rates, cost per transaction, user satisfaction, digital take-up, website visits and time spent on page.

The Ontario Digital Service will help ministries and other partners be diligent about using key performance indicators, like these, to measure progress and performance.

We must ask ourselves, "What are the hallmarks of success more broadly?" We will also begin tracking cultural markers of digital transformation, including:

- ministries and teams following the Digital Service Standard
- user research becoming the norm as a practice within government
- understanding the problem before designing a solution

Early work will include developing common performance measures for digital, and a way to tell the story of how we are moving toward realizing our vision.

How can we help?

At the Ontario Digital Service, we want to empower, enable and engage our public sector partners by breaking down barriers, introducing new skills, and championing new technologies and approaches to delivering people-centred programs and services.

We want to build new capabilities across government, so that we all feel confident in our ability to meet our users' rising expectations. Working side-by-side with ministry teams, we can help show what's possible and deliver great things, together.

Digital, data and technology policy

Unpack and solve complicated challenges and tackle gnarly technology and data problems.

Apply user-centered, iterative and data-driven practices to rethink policies and rules.

Digital service standards

Understand and meet the new common standard for digital products and services.

Deliver a consistent, inclusive and delightful online experience for people.

Ontario.ca

Publish to, and design for, Ontario.ca, the government's flagship web platform.

Adopt common, clear and consistent content standards to improve the user's online experience with government.

Service and product design

Provide advice, guidance and support when teams set out to redesign a service or program.

Make a decision on a delivery path: to build or buy digital solutions.

Scope, build and deliver exemplar projects for government's signature priorities.

Application development, Devops and QA

Provide guidance on developing and deploying applications on Ontario.ca.

Work with partners to identify opportunities to build reusable components for Ontario.ca.

Expand the practice of quality assurance through guides and training to ensure that services are continuously tested.

Apply testing methodologies, both functional and automated to Ontario.ca applications.

Provide guidance and best practices on hosting and infrastructure.

Provide sandboxes for development on Ontario.ca, when required.

Digital engagement, talent and training

Link up with civic tech communities and digital teams in other governments.

Foster strategic partnerships with industry, academia, and not-for-profits working in the digital space.

Get to know the technology landscape, including the vast array of digital suppliers and learning programs.

Advise on recruitment and skills development for digital expertise and specialist roles, such as interaction designers, developers and user researchers.

"Transformation" is used to signal profound and radical change. These changes can orient organizations in a new direction, taking them to an entirely different level of effectiveness. This is not easy work, and it will take collective effort, resources, and leadership. But consider us your trusted partner and advisor, whether you're embarking on a new idea or a transformative journey.

Together, we will bring good change.

Digital in practice

View case studies of how digital service principles and practices are being applied to our work inside the Ontario government at medium.com/ontariodigital. Search the tag 'case studies'.

Every time a team starts with users and delivers together – we move closer to our collective vision of simpler, faster, better government for all.

Appendix A: Glossary of terms

Decoding digital

Language helps us understand who we are and how to connect with others in the world around us. It conveys meaning and understanding, so that we demystify the unknown.

Here is a quick-list of terms that can help each one of us dive into the digital world, with knowledge and know-how.

Agile coach
An Agile coach helps a team or individual adopt and improve Agile methods and practice, for instance, ensuring the rituals of agile (stand-ups, retrospectives, show and tells, sprint planning, user research) occur seamlessly every sprint, and there are no organizational blockers to Agile ways of working.

Agile development
Refers to creating products with Agile processes and techniques.

Agile method
Agile methods are project management processes that are rooted in adaptive planning, early delivery and continuous improvement, and a heavy focus on user research, all with an eye toward being able to respond to change quickly and easily.

Alpha
Alpha phase is about testing hypotheses and experimentation. It is to determine how to meet the user needs that were identified in discovery. It's an opportunity to quickly test many different approaches with users before building a service.

Application programming interface (API)
An application programming interface (commonly referred to as simply, "API") is a software intermediary that allows two applications to talk to each other. APIs allow other people to reuse government information and services and integrate them into their own products, cheaply, simply and securely.

Artificial intelligence
The creation of intelligent machines that work and react like humans. It's also the simulation of human intelligence processes (learning, reasoning, and self-correction) by machines, especially computer systems.

Beta
The goal of beta phase is to build a real service that works well for a larger group of people. The prototypes that were developed and tested during alpha are used to build a minimum viable product in a live, user-facing environment.

Big data
Voluminous amount of data that has the potential to be mined for patterns, trends, and information.

Cloud computing
The delivery of on-demand computing resources—everything from applications to data centers—over the internet (the cloud) on a pay-for-use basis.

Commodity technology
Technology that's widely available and sometimes refer to inexpensive, low-cost technology.

Content design
Content design is a practice of understanding user needs and presenting content to them in the best possible way (i.e. video, infographics, text, etc.).

Data-driven
Process or activity that is compelled by data, as opposed to personal experiences or instincts. Any decisions made are with empirical evidence.

Data literacy
The ability to derive and communicate meaningful information from data.

DevOps
A software engineering culture and practice that aims at unifying software development (Dev) and software operation (Ops). The combination helps increase the ability to deliver applications and services at a faster pace than traditional software development and infrastructure management processes.

Digital inclusion
Refers to ensuring that individuals, groups and communities—especially those that might be traditionally marginalized or excluded—can benefit from digital technologies in their lives. Besides being able to have access to all things digital, it's also about meaningful engagement with digital content, adoption of digital tools and technologies, and application of knowledge.

Discovery
Discovery phase is about understanding users and their needs. During this phase, preliminary research is done to help define a product or service's potential user and how their needs can be met.

Experience design
The design of products and services that is driven by consideration of the moments of engagement or touch points, between people and brands, and the emotions and memories that these moments create.

Human-centered design
A design approach that is about building empathy for the people that you're designing for and developing solutions that suit their needs. It considers human perspectives such as behavioural, emotional, and environmental, throughout the design process.

Internet of things
Interconnection of networks and devices over the world, collecting and sharing data and information without requiring human-to-human or human-to-computer interaction.

Kanban board
A workflow visualization tool that helps optimize the flow of work. A Kanban board has columns that represent the stages of the overall process. Cards on the board are moved from one column to another to show the progress of the work. Commonly used in agile teams.

Modular contracting
An acquisition strategy that breaks up large, complex procurements into multiple, tightly-scoped projects to implement technology systems in successive, interoperable increments. It is an approach that can help reduce vendor lock in, mitigate risk, and encourage the delivery of working software to users more rapidly.

Open source software
Open source software is software with source code that anyone can inspect, modify, enhance, and redistribute.

Open standards
Standards made available to the general public and are developed and maintained collaboratively in the open and in a consensus approach.

Product management
A function within an organization that is responsible for the steps of a product's lifecycle by focusing on the product and its users first and foremost, from development to launch, as well as ongoing maintenance to the product, so long as it is available.

Servant leadership
A philosophy and set of practices that enriches the lives of individuals, builds better organizations and ultimately creates a more just and caring world. A servant leader is "servant first", with the desire to serve others through identifying and meeting the need of those around them (customers, colleagues, and communities).

Service design
Service design is the design and implementation of interactions that a user touches throughout the entire journey. This includes any online or offline interactions, human interactions, business models, etc.

Sprints/sprint planning
As part of an agile approach, each sprint has a defined time frame (one week, two weeks, a month) in which the team collaboratively agrees to complete a set of product backlog items or tasks based on the team's capacity and velocity. This agreement happens during a sprint planning session.

Technology stack
A combination of software products and programming languages that make up an application. Both the front-end (the client-facing side) and back-end (the server) have their own technology stack, with each layer of the application building on the features of the one below it.

User experience
User experience (UX) is the overall experience that users go through when interacting with a product. It's often associated with feelings, emotions, and thoughts.

User interface
User interface (UI) is the series of screens or pages, and visual elements (buttons, links, icons, etc.) that users interact with a device.

User needs
The needs that a user has of a service, and which that service must satisfy for the user to get the right outcome for them.

User research
Focuses on understanding user behaviours, needs, and motivations, and informs design decisions. User research also involves evaluation of the impact of designs on the users.

DIGITAL SERVICE STANDARD

14 points to help government build and deliver excellent online services

ontario.ca/digitalstandard