The Government of Canada's Digital Ambition 2022–23 Year in Review

The Government of Canada's Digital Ambition: 2022–23 Year in Review

On this page

> "The Digital Ambition sets a path to enable delivery of government in the digital age for all Canadians. This will be done by providing modernized and accessible tools to support service delivery that expresses the best of Canada in the digital space."

Overview

In 2022, the Government of Canada (GC) launched the Digital Ambition (Ambition). This is our first "year in review" report that reflects on the progress that has been made in year one of the plan.

Over the past year, GC organizations have worked to align their digital plans with the Ambition. This alignment has served as a foundation to apply a common framework that enables prioritization of work to help improve delivery of the core services of government. Simply put, two of the main challenges experienced in the last year have been the volume and variety of work underway, as well as prioritizing resources to the highest-impact work.

The GC is a complex organization at multiple levels. In a way, it is several industries operating to deliver a wide range of services under one brand. As a democratic institution that is accountable to every Canadian, the GC is governed by rules and processes as well as must contend with a number of considerations that large for-profit organizations do not. While these unique rules and processes serve to uphold the integrity of our institutions, they can create obstacles in a digital age where there is a need for flexibility and agility. It is this uniqueness that requires innovation and creativity in creating mechanisms that can effectively manage the scope, scale, and decentralized nature of expenditures of $8.9 billion in 2021–22 to unlock the best value for Canadians. In the last year we have developed a path to allow management of this in a different way.

This report provides a summary of work undertaken over the past year to bring the Ambition and its four themes to life:

1. excellence in technology and operations
2. data-enabled digital services and programs

3. action-ready digital strategy and policy
4. structural evolution in funding, talent, and culture

The last year has consisted of a wide range of accomplishments and challenges. It was a year where our digital leaders across government tackled complex problems that are exponentially more difficult given our aging IT environment and did so with determination and Canadians at the core of their actions. The remainder of this report outlines by each theme details of progress. Each result is a piece of a larger picture that each work together to improve the GC's overall digital environment and delivery of modern services that are secure, reliable, user-centric and barrier-free, and that meet privacy and transparency needs.

Theme 1: Excellence in technology and operations

▼ In this section

- Priority 1: Strengthen our government application portfolio
  - Actions
  - Result: Cloud Adoption Strategy
- Priority 2: Steer GC transformation delivery
  - Action
  - Result: Independent reviews and enhanced oversight
- Priority 3: Improve the service experience of all clients
  - Action
  - Result: Access to Information and Privacy Online portal
- Priority 4: Deploy modern and accessible digital workplace tools and devices
  - Action
  - Result: Guidance on hybrid
- Priority 5: Structure sustainable and integrated management of service, data, IT, privacy, and cyber security
  - Actions
  - Result: EnGarde cyber simulation exercise
  - Result: Cyber Security Event Management Plan
  - Result: Cyber monitoring

Aging information technology (IT) impedes GC organizations' ability to operate effectively and efficiently. Therefore, modernizing how we replace, build and manage major IT systems is critical. Delivering the programs and services that people rely on every day depends on:

- fully functional, secure, reliable and privacy-enabled IT
- Accurate and accessible data

Progress in this theme will be measured over time by our ability to reduce technical debt and improve the health of our digital operating environment, including our ability to manage the impacts of an increasing cyber-threat landscape. As outlined in our priorities, this will be done through a combination of successful modernization activities and strategies that improve the

foundations of our technical environment. While the incremental changes we delivered in the first year have not had a significant impact on the GC's overall risk posture, we have also laid the groundwork for increasing the rate at which we can create change and improvements as we enter the second year of the plan.

Priority 1: Strengthen our government application portfolio

Actions

- Assessing the health of departmental application portfolios
- Devising and executing a strategy to modernize the portfolios
- Using a cloud-smart strategy and common solutions
- Emphasizing an agile, iterative and incremental approach

Result: Cloud Adoption Strategy

The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat developed a *Cloud-Adoption Strategy* that aligns the use and implementation of cloud-based services for data storage and usage in the GC. Statistics Canada moved to cloud computing, allowing researchers to access data from the Internet, anywhere at any time.

Priority 2: Steer GC transformation delivery

Action

- Leading the development of a GC-wide technological transformation program, including prioritization of resources and sourcing of key skills for programs

Result: Independent reviews and enhanced oversight

As programs and services evolve and transform across the GC to allow for digital delivery, assurance processes, including independent reviews, have been established. Such processes mean earlier engagement, more reach and stronger aid to assist senior leaders with just-in-time advice. We began creating and embedding teams to act as liaisons with central agencies to ensure horizontal coordination of complex and multi-year transformation projects.

Priority 3: Improve the service experience of all clients

Action

- Continuing to increase the availability and security of end-to-end online services

Although we have seen some positive results, there is still much we can do to increase the pace in which end-to-end online services are made available. Compared to its counterparts in the international community, Canada's usage frequency of digital services is relatively low. In year two,

Service Canada and the Canadian Digital Service will aim to collaborate more regularly and work with other partners to develop a deployment plan that will address service improvements for Canada.ca.

Result: Access to Information and Privacy Online portal

The GC transformed the Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) process and refreshed the online portal using Sign-In Canada, a digital credentials authentication application. These changes have made the ATIP process more efficient, transparent and accountable when a request is received. The online portal now provides a single digital service delivery portal to submit requests to and receive responses from 252 federal institutions. In April 2023, more than 2,500 requests were submitted through the online portal.

Priority 4: Deploy modern and accessible digital workplace tools and devices

Action

- Providing a suite of accessible, modern and secure cloud-based tools to support productivity, collaboration and web-conferencing

Result: Guidance on hybrid

At the start of the pandemic, the GC demonstrated its ability to respond quickly, for example, by increasing access to web-conferencing tools by over 400% in a matter of weeks. As the world emerges from the global pandemic, the focus is turning to support hybrid work. In fall 2022, the Chief Information Officer of Canada issued guidance to digital leaders calling for specific actions to ensure employees have the digital infrastructure, equipment and tools needed to deliver on government priorities in a hybrid work environment.

Priority 5: Structure sustainable and integrated management of service, data, IT, privacy, and cyber security

Actions

- Focusing on cyber security by ensuring that there are safe, secure and reliable assets that protect data from malicious entities
- Supporting GC organizations in a timely manner to respond to cyber threats

Result: EnGarde cyber simulation exercise

To better respond to cyber threats, the GC conducted a cyber simulation exercise called EnGarde this past year. A series of simulations were conducted to proactively prevent malicious attacks on government networks. These simulations identify gaps and challenges in the decision-making processes, enhanced understanding of the roles, responsibilities and strategies and validated the relevant stakeholders are engaged during a cyber event.

Result: Cyber Security Event Management Plan

The digital environment and the cyber threat and risk landscape are monitored to inform decision-making and protect assets. The _Government of Canada Cyber Security Event Management Plan (GC CSEMP)_:

- helps the government respond quickly, consistently and in a coordinated way
- supports the sustained delivery of government programs and services

Result: Cyber monitoring

The Communications Security Establishment released its 2021–22 annual report detailing the scope of its activities as the government's operational lead for cyber security. In 2021–22, the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security (the Centre) opened 2,023 cyber security incident cases, which is an average of 5.5 per day. Of those cases, 1,154 affected federal institutions and 869 affected critical infrastructure. This work to defend against cyber attacks on government infrastructure prevents disruption to the essential services the public and businesses rely on every day.

Theme 2: Data-enabled digital services and programs

▼ In this section

- Priority 1: Maximize public value of data and information for the public
  - Action
  - Result: Open Government
  - Result: 2023–2026 Data Strategy for the Federal Public Service
- Priority 2: Build and use secure common solutions for digital service delivery
  - Action
  - Result: GC notify
  - Result: GC forms
- Priority 3: Manage and use data and information as strategic assets
  - Action
  - Result: Privacy playbook
  - Result: Artificial intelligence and automated decision-making

Unlocking the potential of data will help us improve services, protect users' privacy, support evidence-based decisions and create internal efficiencies. In the first year of the plan, we established foundational services to support this and appointed the first Chief Data Officer of Canada. We started to change the focus of our policy teams to be one that is action ready.

To improve accessibility and transparency, the GC transformed the access to information and privacy process by updating how to make an access to information or personal information request. It is now easier for those looking for information from the government to track the progress of their request in real time and receive responses digitally, thereby making the entire process easier, more efficient and transparent.

The technology alone does not address the larger systemic challenges that were identified in the Review of Access to Information that was completed in December of 2022, but it provides the base for the movement from an analog world to a digital world and provides a true enterprise platform we can build from.

Priority 1: Maximize public value of data and information for the public

Action

- Improving the service experience for Canadians by enabling secure, seamless, and real-time exchange of data across GC organizations and with trusted external partners and institutions

Result: Open Government

The fifth National Action Plan on Open Government published in September 2022 commits the GC to be more open, transparent and accountable to people. Developed in collaboration with the people of Canada, the National Action Plan consists of five themes, 19 milestones and 106 indicators representing 17 federal departments and agencies. This plan outlines initiatives that give people access to the information and tools they need to:

- better understand the impacts of climate change
- protect against misinformation and disinformation
- advance corporate transparency
- foster access to justice
- encourage participation in fair, democratic processes

The GC also continues to increase the transparency of its institutions through its leadership within the international Open Government Partnership and through its commitment to action. The GC also continues to increase its transparency through the open government portal, which provides centralized publication of 38,815 sources of GC information and datasets and over 2.25 million proactive publications from over 150 institutions, supporting legislated requirements from Part 2 of the *Access to Information Act*. Canada continues to promote transparency in its leadership within the international Open Government Partnership.

Result: 2023–2026 Data Strategy for the Federal Public Service

Government cannot be digital without data. The GC developed a Data Strategy to manage, share and organize data. As the strategy is implemented, better data management will improve client and employee services, as well as federal programs through cross-government initiatives, such as digital credentials and data integration. Better data also underpins the release of high-value open datasets for public and external use.

Priority 2: Build and use secure common solutions for digital service delivery

Action

- Making services simple and easy to use by launching new platforms for common service components

The Canadian Digital Service (CDS) has developed platforms designed to enhance service experience for individuals and businesses.

Result: GC notify

Over 200 government services have used GC notify to send over 90 million messages since its launch in November 2019. CDS continued to scale this platform and power new services, such as Get Updates on COVID-19, which provided trusted and authoritative information on the global pandemic.

Result: GC forms

Approximately 30 government services have used GC forms to accept over 1,200 form submissions since July 2021. CDS continued to test and scale this platform to enable organizations to easily publish simple, accessible, mobile-friendly and secure online forms.

Priority 3: Manage and use data and information as strategic assets

Action

- Establishing a policy framework, guidance and tools that support the sharing of personal information between federal institutions

Result: Privacy playbook

A privacy playbook was developed to guide and outline ways of working or behaviours that align with the Government of Canada Digital Standards: Playbook. The playbook will guide teams in assessing their behaviours and business processes against privacy best practices.

Result: Artificial intelligence and automated decision-making

The GC sometimes uses computer systems to automate decision-making. In other cases, computer systems complete a portion of the analysis leading to a decision. When this involves service decisions that impact people's legal rights, interests or privileges, requirements from the *Directive on Automated Decision-Making* apply. The directive ensures that people are informed about when and how automation is used, while also providing meaningful explanations about the decisions affecting people. The GC regularly conducts reviews of the directive; the most recent review occurred this year, and guidance will continue to be updated in the future. The review focused on strengthening transparency and quality assurance and enabling inclusive approaches.

Theme 3: Action-ready digital strategy and policy

▼ In this section

- Priority 1: Embed GC priorities into governing frameworks and policy

Today's digital landscape is marked by change of extraordinary pace and scope. To encourage digital transformation throughout the GC and address emerging threats and challenges, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat developed and implemented the following:

- Government of Canada Digital Standards: Playbook
- *Policy on Service and Digital*
- *Policy on Government Security*
- *Directive on Service and Digital*

This provided a foundation for the work we conducted in the past year and the shift from passive policy to action-ready policy.

Priority 1: Embed GC priorities into governing frameworks and policy

Action

- Examining the potential for amendments to policy and to legislative and governance frameworks to enable digital transformation

Result: *Policy on Service and Digital*

In 2022, the GC adapted Treasury Board policies to support digital service delivery. The *Directive on Service and Digital* was amended to align government services with the Government of Canada Digital Standards: Playbook, which are a set of principles intended to guide the design of digital services to better serve Canadians. These amendments strengthen requirements for user research and promote the use of open-source software, among other innovations.

Result: Access to information policy renewal

In 2022, in response to <u>reviewing access to information</u>, the <u>*Access to Information Review Report to Parliament*</u>, which identified three key focus areas, was tabled:

1. improving service to Canadians as it relates to access to information
2. increasing trust and transparency in institutions
3. advancing reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples

As part of this review, the GC engaged the public, Canada's <u>Information Commissioner</u> and <u>Privacy Commissioner</u>, Indigenous Peoples and organizations, and more than 265 government institutions subject to the *<u>Access to Information Act</u>* on the critical role of access to information in advancing government transparency and accountability.

Priority 2: Provide horizontal prioritization and portfolio management

Action

- Identifying, leveraging and, where needed, creating the policy authorities needed to enable GC-wide approaches to digital

Result: Portfolio management model

This year, a new portfolio management model was established in the <u>Office of the Chief Information Officer of Canada</u> (OCIO) to strengthen oversight and better support major transformation initiatives. The idea was that early engagement, advice and support can help shape digital initiatives from the outset. The four portfolio teams also provide advice in areas such as:

- governance and engagement
- alignment with the Ambition
- reduction of the environmental footprint of digital investments
- alignment with the <u>Government of Canada Digital Standards: Playbook</u>

Priority 3: Streamline partner portfolios

Action

- Identifying opportunities for cost optimization and contract consolidation to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing GC IT investment

Result: A refresh of the Enterprise Architecture Review Board

The GC Enterprise Architecture Review Board is a review board that was created as it was mandated by the *Policy on the Management of Information Technology*. The Board defines current and target architecture standards for the GC, and provides guidance when reviewing departmental plans to ensure alignment.

A refresh of the GC Enterprise Architecture Review Board was also undertaken to:

- improve alignment with the Ambition
- influence strategies and designs early

- integrate data and information
- streamline the process
- ensure better tracking and follow up
- enforce standardization
- enhance reporting on evidence-based decision-making

Priority 4: Establish an agile operating model

Action

- Assessing and redesigning key groups of processes to deliver whole-of-government priorities

The Product Management Community of Practice, which launched in 2022, is the first enterprise product management community of practice. Monthly drop-in coaching sessions and demonstrations provide just-in-time support and learning to practitioners and executives across the government. Membership grew to over 200 participants from more than 26 departments in 2022–23, and the group serves as a useful way to share successes and failures from a product mindset. Offerings in 2022–23 included drop-in coaching sessions, workshops, and a panel co-hosted with the Canadian Digital Service and the Ontario Digital Service. A 2023 member survey showed that 83% of members would recommend the group to a colleague, and 84% found the monthly sessions useful. Member polling in 2022 found that 69% of attendees learned something from the Community of Practice they could apply to their work today.

Priority 5: Implement GC-wide architecture strategy and standards

Actions

- Evolving target state enterprise architecture
- Ensuring architectural alignment in the implementation and delivery of IT transformations and procurements

Result: Cloud cost management

The GC published the FinOps: Cloud Cost Management and the GC Cloud Cost Management Playbook (FinOps) (accessible only on the Government of Canada network) to drive alignment in cloud operations, funding and investments.

Priority 6: Provide modern, reliable, and secure networks and infrastructure

Action

- Transitioning to a single modern, end-to-end enterprise class network infrastructure that users can access anytime, anywhere

Result: Seek funding for application modernization

Critical applications support the health, safety, security and economic well-being of the public, and the effective functioning of government. Through the Workload Migration Initiative, seed funding was provided for GC organizations to stabilize critical infrastructure, such as applications that support border crossings or health and safety recalls.

Theme 4: Evolution of structural funding, talent, and culture

▼ In this section

- Priority 1: Drive a systemic culture shift across government to a digital-first mindset
  - Action
  - Result: Improved points of influence
  - Result: Canadian Digital Service
- Priority 2: Attract, retain and develop diverse digital talent
  - Action
  - Result: Specialized recruitment campaigns
  - Result: Digital talent platform
  - Result: IT Apprenticeship Program for Indigenous Peoples
  - Result: Improving talent outcomes

Technological change is hard, human change is harder, and both are happening at the same time. Outdated approaches and complex processes and governance structures can make it difficult for federal organizations to deliver on their mandates and serve the public. Through talent strategies, the GC is:

- attracting, retaining and deploying digital talent to where it is most needed
- intensifying the development of skills required for digital program and service delivery, data literacy and cyber security

Priority 1: Drive a systemic culture shift across government to a digital-first mindset

Action

- Engaging partner organizations to support the GC's cultural transformation

Result: Improved points of influence

Government is implementing the GC Digital Talent Strategy, which helps to better attract and develop in-house digital talent. This strategy includes a description of the GC's Digital Community Culture, which will guide leaders in creating an ideal culture that will ultimately attract and retain top digital talent in Canada wherever it may reside.

To ensure that the GC digital community remains an adaptive learning organization, digital leaders are driving the utilization of new tools and methodologies to maximize hybrid work. This has presented an opportunity to identify (IT) specific areas where exceptions made sense for recruitment and retention purposes. It also allowed the digital community to embrace working differently to help address the digital talent challenge overall, reflecting those served by the GC, and enabling the best possible services to Canada and Canadians.

Result: Canadian Digital Service

The Canadian Digital Service (CDS) was brought into the Office of Chief Information Officer earlier this year as a distinct service delivery-focused sector to drive digital. Since its transition, CDS has evolved to include:

- supporting federal public servants in delivering better government services
- offering tailored guidance on service delivery challenges
- publishing digital government guides and resources

Priority 2: Attract, retain and develop diverse digital talent

Action

- Building a diverse workforce for digital delivery

Result: Specialized recruitment campaigns

Going digital is a team effort. GC organizations all need to recruit digital practitioners. The Office of the Chief Information Officer continues to implement customized national recruitment campaigns to provide organizations with access to pools of qualified candidates. For example, a cyber security recruitment campaign held in November 2022 attracted more than 1,600 candidates from inside and outside government.

Result: Digital talent platform

People are at the core of everything the government does, and digital experts are in high demand. The GC Digital Talent platform was recently launched to help connect the community. The platform is meant to support its many different users, including:

- those thinking about joining government
- existing employees
- those hoping to recruit and hire
- those considering an executive role in digital leadership

Result: IT Apprenticeship Program for Indigenous Peoples

Co-designed with Indigenous Peoples, Employment and Social Development Canada developed an innovative approach to increase Indigenous representation in IT disciplines across the GC. A Place for Us Too addresses some of the very real barriers that many Indigenous Peoples face when it

comes to entry into the public service. The IT Apprenticeship Program for Indigenous Peoples offers a 24-month apprenticeship that combines on-the-job work experience with formal training and mentorship. The training curriculum was co-developed by:

- the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat
- the Canada School of Public Service
- Employment and Social Development Canada
- Shared Services Canada
- public servants working in IT
- the private and not-for-profit sectors

Upon completion of the program, apprentices are issued a digital credential that indicates that they meet the IT educational requirement for employment in the GC.

Result: Improving talent outcomes

The *Directive on Digital Talent*, in effect as of April 1, 2023, was developed with extensive engagement and input from stakeholders. This directive includes mandatory procedures, reporting templates for departments, support and implementation guidance, and presentation materials, as well as a "what we heard" report and a stakeholder engagement report. Efforts are already underway to automate the reporting templates and develop departmental data dashboards that will connect to recruitment processes and employee profiles on the GC Digital Talent Platform.

The government has dramatically reduced time to hire in all centrally led digital hiring processes. For example, a C-suite campaign was completed in 10 weeks instead of the average 28 weeks. After evaluating a mix of external and internal candidates from various employment equity groups, a bank of qualified talent was established that departments and agencies can draw on. Additionally, 34 digital C-suite and non-C-suite placements were completed within the fiscal year, delivering on hundreds of mobility and professional development opportunities for aspiring executives and executives, ensuring the active management of talent in the community.

Other processes that have garnered significant interest in the GC include a cyber security recruitment poster which received more than 1,600 applications. This was the first centrally led recruitment campaign with strong diversity messaging, encouraging all candidates to apply, including racialized and Indigenous Peoples, women, persons with disabilities, and persons of the 2SLGBTQIA+ [1] community.

The government has been working hard to attract and develop highly specialized talent in high-demand areas. For example, an IT-05 individual contributor pilot was created collaboratively with various government departments and agencies who communicated that they needed help to attract and retain senior technical talent, to reduce reliance on external contractors.

Looking ahead

Globally, countries are unleashing the potential of digital to better serve their people.

This past year, Ukraine became the first country in the world to release a digital ID that is valid anywhere in the country. It also launched a mobile application that gives citizens and businesses access to digital documents and provides a single portal for public services, with a main goal to make 100% of public services available online.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development recently recognized Brazil's effort to provide universal Internet access as a foundation for democracy and public trust. South Korea is using AI to check in on vulnerable seniors in an effort to prevent lonely deaths.

There is a human imperative to getting digital right. The Digital Ambition defines a path for Canada, and this year we have some solid examples of progress.

The Canada Energy Regulator worked with Elders on how best to return historical records to Indigenous nations. The Canada Revenue Agency used a mix of technologies to shorten the time between eligibility and payment for benefits such as the Canada Dental Benefit. Statistics Canada moved to cloud computing, allowing researchers to access data from the Internet, anywhere, anytime and powering an advanced data analytics platform that supports partnerships and collaboration across Canada. Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions is investing in digital literacy by developing a new skills framework that includes self-assessments, custom training and ongoing support.

With these great examples of progress as we emerge from year one, having confidence that we have developed strong foundations for progress, we know that the GC needs to do better. While Canada is one of the most connected countries in the world, it has the lowest usage rate for digital government services among a recent survey of 36 countries.

While digital continues to change the way people live, work and interact with one another, a rapidly evolving context in areas such as cyber or quantum call for the GC to respond and adapt. Emergency benefits, service backlogs and the reality of aging technology, disinformation and misinformation, along with hybrid work, have shone a light on the vulnerabilities and possibilities of digital to make a difference. The Ambition is about delivering government in the digital age and unlocking this potential, which will have impact in experience and effective and efficient delivery of government services.

In conclusion, in year one, the results were incremental in terms of what those who access services have experienced. The work that has greater potential for impact as we enter year two has been the foundational elements outlined above. We will have an indicator on true progress when Canadians and those who access GC services feel something different in that interaction. It is with this outlook on the horizon that we enter our second year encouraged and humbled with the work ahead.

Footnotes

1   Two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other.