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The Government of Canada's Digital Talent Strategy: 2023–24 Year in Review

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The Government of Canada's Digital Talent Strategy: 2023–24 Year in Review

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Purpose

The 2023–24 Year in Review of the Government of Canada's Digital Talent Strategy (the strategy) reflects on the steps taken to attract, develop and retain the digital talent needed for modern public services. Digital talent drives modern, user-friendly public services, from tools that help individuals navigate their Old Age Security benefits to platforms that streamline farmers' access to agricultural resources.

This review:

- describes the strategy's first year since its launch in Fall 2023
- highlights the tools, frameworks and pilot programs created
- highlights efforts by organizations
- outlines the progress made and the priorities that lie ahead

Introduction

The Government of Canada (GC) launched the GC Digital Talent Strategy in 2023. This report provides the first year in review.

The strategy was developed by the Chief Information Officer of Canada at Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, the functional leader of the GC digital community, as set out in the Policy on Service and Digital. Through its leadership, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat provides recruitment and development services tailored to the digital community.

This review included collaborators across the public service, including:

- Canada School of Public Service
- Canadian Centre for Cyber Security
- Employment and Social Development Canada
- Environment and Climate Change Canada
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
- National Research Council
- Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages
- Public Service Commission
- Shared Services Canada
- Transport Canada
- other key partners at Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, including colleagues at the Office of the Chief Information Officer and the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer

This is a snapshot of current collaborators; new contributions and working relationships are continuously being established. The network that supports digital talent continues to grow; therefore, new connections may not be listed here.

These collaborations play a crucial role in supporting digital talent in the creation or delivery of digital services for the GC. Digital talent works across diverse roles such as software development, cyber security and user experience design. These professionals often work in multidisciplinary teams, rely on modern tools and technology, and prioritize user-focused problem-solving and service delivery.

In its first year, the strategy focused on building tools and frameworks to empower digital professionals and teams, improve flexibility and remove administrative barriers. This creates the right environment and mindset to deliver excellent digital services. Prioritizing empowerment ensures that digital talent can thrive in a modern, agile workplace, ready to address projects without being hindered by rigid processes.

This review outlines the actions made over the past year on the strategy's four missions, with each action aligned with and supporting the GC Digital Standards. For clarity and conciseness, the mission titles have been updated, while the strategy's core goals and actions remain unchanged.

- **Mission 1 – Attract top digital talent** by focusing on expanding the GC Digital Talent Platform, increasing talent acquisition, and providing recruitment support to improve the applicant experience.
- **Mission 2 – Develop digital talent** by strengthening skills and digital competencies for all public servants, and nurturing a pipeline of future digital leaders through talent management services.
- **Mission 3 – Retain digital talent** with a focus on creating an environment where innovation, collaboration and employee well-being are prioritized.

- **Mission 4 – Lead the digital workforce** by fostering leadership through strategic partnerships, collaborations and community engagement.

Mission 1: Attract top digital talent

Actions in progress

- Action 1.1 Deliver a scalable GC Digital Talent Platform
- Action 1.2 Coordinate recruitment campaigns with departments to hire digital talent in high-demand domains
- Action 1.5 Build efficient, inclusive and seamless onboarding and transition experiences

Action 1.1 Deliver a scalable GC Digital Talent Platform

Progress

- Making recruitment campaigns for high-demand roles easier
- Making it easier to create profiles with a comprehensive skills library.
- Establishing a dedicated space for the Government of Canada's IT Apprenticeship Program for Indigenous People

Result: A streamlined experience on GC Digital Talent Platform

- In 2024, the GC Digital Talent Platform (the platform) gained 16,000 applicant profiles and launched 64 recruitment campaigns, generating 12,158 total applications across all job processes
- Managers seeking digital talent used the platform often, with more than 2,542 requests for high-demand talent in diverse domains. By

streamlining the recruitment process, departments can secure high-demand talent

- The platform now features a comprehensive skills library, allowing applicants to showcase their full range of abilities, making it easier to align their skills with job requirements
- The platform continued to attract more applicants, including those for the IT Apprenticeship Program for Indigenous Peoples, and hosted more recruitment campaigns year after year. In addition, a newly developed space was established to allow hiring managers to access and recruit talent from the Apprenticeship Program, on behalf of Employment and Social Development Canada. Hiring managers across the GC have access to more strong pre-assessed candidates, which significantly streamlines the hiring process

Action 1.2 Coordinate recruitment campaigns with departments to hire digital talent in high-demand domains

Progress

- Conducting user research with hiring managers working in digital service delivery
- Completed a pilot post-secondary data science recruitment campaign

Result: Gained insight into the challenges, needs and expectations faced by hiring managers working in digital service delivery

- Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat interviewed hiring managers from 18 departments to understand challenges in attracting, developing and retaining digital talent. Findings revealed barriers to

career progression and a need for mentorship and technical training. In response, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat is developing plans to create clearer career paths and expand training opportunities for IT staff

- As part of the Data Strategy for the Federal Public Service, the GC Data Community and the Public Service Commission launched a pilot recruitment campaign for data science graduates. The campaign resulted in 46 assessed candidates, giving departments access to a pre-qualified pool for further screening, which streamlined the hiring processes for data science talent

Action 1.5 Build efficient, inclusive and seamless onboarding and transition experiences

Progress

- Improving onboarding experiences with pilot programs that explore new approaches to better support and integrate employees in a hybrid workplace

Result: Improving onboarding experiences

- Departments are testing new ways to improve onboarding, tailored to their unique needs:
 - Transport Canada has piloted adjustments to onboarding procedures in a hybrid environment, including email updates to keep employees informed during the hiring process, a new in-person onboarding event on an employee's first day, and touch point surveys during the first year to check on progress and satisfaction at key milestones

- Environment and Climate Change Canada’s Digital Services Branch has explored opportunities through a “buddy system” for new employees and has updated their onboarding process to better align with the latest digital tools and practices

What’s next for Mission 1: Exploring new recruitment strategies

Planned actions

- Action 1.3 Set up a “tour of service” program to deploy multidisciplinary service teams to priorities
- Action 1.4 Test targeted enhancements to make it easier to hire digital talent interested in joining the public service

Upcoming efforts

- Review and assess “tours of service” programs in the federal public service and across sectors to pilot a model best suited for the digital community
- Evaluate flexible staffing strategies to attract digital talent interested in short-term public service opportunities
- Explore specific methods to attract digital talent at various career stages, including but not limited to partnerships with post-secondary institutions to hire new graduates, apprenticeships for early-career talent, fellowships for mid-career professionals and initiatives to increase student hiring
- Continue efforts to streamline the hiring process and reduce time-to-hire

Mission 2: Develop digital talent

Actions in progress

- Action 2.1 Establish a baseline of current digital capabilities, talent and culture across the GC
- Action 2.2 Define foundational digital skills and continue to offer learning on digital topics for all public servants
- Action 2.3 Facilitate and scale specialized learning offerings for digital practitioners
- Action 2.5 Build a common framework for digital development programs across the GC
- Action 2.7 Expand talent management services

Action 2.1 Establish a baseline of current digital capabilities, talent and culture across the GC

Progress

- Implementing the *Directive on Digital Talent*
- Conducting the Annual Digital Talent Survey
- Analyzing workforce data and using survey results to strengthen departmental digital talent strategies

Result: Evidence-based workforce planning for the digital community

- The *Directive on Digital Talent* was developed to help departments apply a consistent approach to workforce planning and provide the GC with a strategic perspective on digital talent recruitment, contracting, leadership and skill gaps

- Driven by the Directive, the Annual Digital Talent Survey collected data from departments on their digital workforce and current and future digital talent needs, providing a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the GC's digital talent ecosystem
- Departments are using survey results from the digital community to strengthen their own digital talent strategies. By identifying gaps in recruitment and development, they are taking targeted steps to attract, retain and grow digital talent. These efforts are helping departments build a more agile and skilled workforce while contributing to a stronger, more connected digital community across the public service

Action 2.2 Define foundational digital skills and continue to offer learning on digital topics for all public servants

Progress

- Conducting research with diverse public servants to identify new and emerging skills required for a modern workforce
- Defining essential digital competencies for all public servants
- Offering comprehensive learning on essential digital skills to all public servants

Result: Advancing the development of the 6 digital competencies for all public servants

- In collaboration with roughly 30 GC departments, work is underway to define the 6 digital competencies for all public servants. These include focus areas such as:
 1. digital literacy
 2. continuous improvement

3. cyber security vigilance
4. information and data stewardship
5. digital responsibility
6. inclusive interactions

- These competencies are intended to serve as the foundation for targeted learning paths and training programs that will give public servants the skills they need to succeed in a modern, digital workplace and encourage a significant shift in culture and mindset
- In collaboration with the Canada School of Public Service, an evergreen list of learning resources was published, allowing public servants to start building their skills immediately
- In the future, the competencies will be used to guide learning resources and programs, recruitment activities and hiring practices, and will allow the GC to measure digital skills capacity and gaps. While these activities are not yet in place, progress on defining these competencies is a crucial step
- Employment and Social Development Canada provided critical support through user interviews, feedback on draft skills, and contributions like skills matrices and competencies. Their development of a Cultural Competency Framework drove the inclusive interactions competency, illustrating the value of collaboration with frontline digital teams
- The Canada School of Public Service Digital Academy continues to offer comprehensive learning opportunities, including new learning paths on digital, cyber security, cloud, data and AI, and service design in the public service
 - For example, the foundational cyber security course, “Discover Cyber Security,” was recently developed by the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security, and the Canada School of Public Service Digital Academy

Action 2.3 Facilitate and scale specialized learning offerings for digital practitioners

Progress

- Providing training opportunities through the IT Community Training and Development Fund
- Piloting a learning path for infrastructure operations and a learning path for digital executives
- Developing a learning library and toolkits for the data community

Result: New enterprise-wide training opportunities

- The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat and the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (PIPSC), the union representing federal IT professionals in the federal public service, has established the IT Community Training and Development Fund (the fund) under the latest collective bargaining agreement to equip IT professionals with the latest digital skills and knowledge
- The fund allocates \$4.725 million annually to support the professional growth of employees represented by PIPSC in the IT Group. Three types of training are available:
 - online self-paced learning for both technical and growth skills
 - instructor-led classes and bootcamps focusing on high-demand areas like cyber security and cloud
 - certifications
- The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat piloted two learning paths: one for junior digital practitioners to develop infrastructure operations skills and one for digital executives to build leadership skills for digital transformation. New learning paths will continue to be tested and scaled to meet learner needs across the enterprise

- As part of the Data Strategy for the Federal Public Service, the GC Data Community identified gaps and opportunities to support the professional development of data practitioners. As a result, two initiatives were launched:
 - The data learning library, currently focused on analytics, ethics and privacy for intermediate and advanced data analysts
 - The data toolkit catalogue, which features proven processes from 19 departments, giving employees practical methods to improve and streamline data workflows

Action 2.5 Build a common framework for digital development programs across the GC

Progress

- Piloted a digital leadership program, which can be used to build future digital leadership programs and offerings
- Piloted a variety of digital development programs, including a digital literacy program for executives, the newest iteration of the Digital Accelerator, and an AI Learning Accelerator

Result: New training programs for diverse audiences

- Created in partnership with the University of Ottawa, the NextGen Digital Leaders Development program is a dynamic, cohort-based initiative designed for current and aspiring digital executives
 - Participants gained skills and knowledge, and expanded networks, to lead digital transformation initiatives with confidence. The program had a significant impact, giving learners the tools needed for effective digital leadership

- The second cohort has been launched, with improvements to the program's curriculum. Going forward, it can be used to build other digital development programs for practitioners at various levels
- The Canada School of Public Service's Digital Academy piloted a variety of digital development programs, including:
 - a cohort-based digital literacy program for executives. The first pilot, in partnership with Employment and Social Development Canada, will begin in the final quarter of 2024–25
 - a redesigned Digital Accelerator program, now delivered as a 3-day bootcamp, focused on teaching public servants the design process in the context of digital modernization and service design
 - a cohort-based Executive Learning Accelerator on Artificial Intelligence, which was piloted with 6 departments in January 2025

Action 2.7 Expand talent management services

Progress

- Hosted and expanded bi-annual interdepartmental digital talent management round table discussions to identify and promote talent across departments

Result: Digital leaders are supported and deployed where their skills and experiences are needed most

- The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat offers a variety of services, including:
 - talent management and learning opportunities for digital leaders
 - referral processes for staffing managers looking to fill digital positions

- the Digital Community Mentorship Program, which supports employment equity and equity-seeking groups
- Over the past year, the team's services have evolved and expanded to meet the changing needs of digital practitioners and leaders across the GC, with last year marking the inclusion of the departmental security community to participate and identify their digital talent

What's next for Mission 2: Piloting new training opportunities

Planned actions

- Action 2.4 Build career pathways for individual contributor and leadership roles
- Action 2.6 Explore an internal development program focused on short-term placements for digital practitioners

Upcoming efforts

- Explore opportunities to upgrade and refresh employees' skills, including further expansion of the Digital Academy's AI Learning Accelerator and other cohort-based programs
- Explore creative approaches to skill-building, such as skills exchanges and hackathons
- Evaluate current IT development programs in the GC
- Examine flexible staffing options, such as exchanges between departments and micro-missions, to support internal short-term placements

Mission 3: Retain digital talent

Actions in progress

- Action 3.1 Simplify and implement policies and processes that improve GC-wide coordination and service delivery.
- Action 3.2 Improve and expand the digital community's interdepartmental HR products to easily recruit and hire digital talent in new and emerging jobs
- Action 3.4 Develop action-oriented guidance that will help organizations and teams deliver the GC Digital Standards

Action 3.1 Simplify and implement policies and processes that improve GC-wide coordination and service delivery

Progress

- Streamlining the security screening process to reduce time-to-hire

Result: Progress towards a faster and more efficient clearance process

- Security screening, a core part of the *Policy on Government Security*, ensures that individuals are vetted before they can access sensitive information, assets and facilities. It is a complex process, involving multiple authorities and privacy considerations, that often leads to delays that affect both candidates and hiring managers.
 - On January 6, 2025, the Standard on Security Screening was replaced by a new Directive on Security Screening. This new directive clarifies and enhances the roles and responsibilities of GC

security professionals and standardizes security screening procedures across the government.

- In addition, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat will improve recruitment performance indicators for digital talent to cover the entire hiring process, including the period before a new hire is ready to work, to gather more accurate and comprehensive data

Action 3.2 Enhance and expand the digital community's interdepartmental HR products to easily recruit and hire digital talent in new and emerging jobs

Progress

- Developing interdepartmental standardized job descriptions for various digital roles
- Creating guidance on responsibilities and accountabilities for emerging digital leadership positions
- Creating an executive talent profile to improve talent management for digital leaders

Result: New HR and organizational tools to meet new and emerging organizational needs for digital modernization

- Guidance on the accountabilities for chief data officers has been developed. New job descriptions are being developed for data-focused roles such as information and data management, data stewardship, data science and data analytics. These descriptions highlight the critical contributions data talent make to the GC, from supporting evidence-based decision-making to optimizing services and programs with data. Employment and Social Development Canada contributed to these developments by providing a range of standardized job descriptions,

collaborating on organizational charts, and supporting the development of IT design roles

- The chief service and digital officer authorities are being defined, and will ensure a consistent approach to managing digital functions, improve coordination of advice to deputy heads, and support the recruitment and growth of digital executives
- In 2023–24, the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, the Office of the Chief Information Officer, and the Privy Council Office developed a talent profile for digital leaders. This profile outlines the skills, experience and competencies needed for leaders in the digital field. The goal is to increase the leadership talent available and make succession planning easier for senior executive roles, including deputy-level positions
- The profile was improved and expanded to cover all executive levels as part of the 2024–25 executive talent management cycle. This allowed executives to self-identify as digital leaders in the Executive Talent Management System, a central platform for tracking and supporting executive career growth
- As part of this process, the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer teamed up with the Office of the Chief Information Officer to update the talent categories in the Executive Talent Management System. The “IM/IT talent” classification was updated to reflect current and emerging digital skills. This change makes it easier to identify and track digital leaders across government and supports efforts to manage talent effectively

Action 3.4 Develop action-oriented guidance that will help organizations and teams deliver against the GC Digital Standards

Progress

- Conducted a comprehensive review of the Digital Standards Playbook and refined it to close gaps and better meet user needs
- Developed a digital service review process to demonstrate how Digital Standards should be met throughout the development of a service
- Published the pilot GC Catalogue, a curated set of reusable digital and data policy tools

Result: Making it easier for organizations and teams to apply the Digital Standards

- Canada's Digital Standards, a set of 10 principles, guide the government in creating user-centric services. The Digital Standards Playbook (the playbook) offers practical guidance on how to apply the standards and provides a baseline for high-quality service delivery
 - The Digital Standards Playbook was shared on Service Canada Labs to gather feedback and refine the playbook. Respondents suggested adding more practical guidance, particularly on user-centric design and usability. Many respondents highlighted obstacles to designing robust services, including unclear policy requirements, unclear governance and insufficient training
 - The updated playbook was published in September 2024 and will be continually refined based on feedback gathered through consultations, user interviews, surveys and ongoing engagement with internal and external stakeholders

- Employment and Social Development Canada developed a digital service review process to help teams evaluate themselves against the standards. The process also advises teams on how to meet the standards. Employment and Social Development Canada also completed an initial review of design principles to connect all the ways that clients interact with the government—in person, online, or by phone—into one smooth experience
- The GC Catalogue pilot program was released. The catalogue is a curated set of reusable digital and data policy tools to help government teams trying to deliver secure, easy-to-use and trustworthy services. The catalogue currently includes resources on accessibility, privacy, talent and leadership, and user research, with more resources to be added based on feedback and evolving needs

What's next for Mission 3: Clearing the path for effective digital service delivery

Planned actions

- Action 3.3 Create a permanent senior individual contributor role to hire highly experienced digital technologists
- Action 3.5 Review and improve methods for digital talent to access tools and technology
- Action 3.6 Assess official language impacts on recruiting and retaining digital talent

Upcoming efforts

- Create new interdepartmental standardized job descriptions for data and other emerging roles

- Develop formal guidance on adopting agile approaches in funding, procurement, risk management and governance, as well as integrating diversity, equity and inclusion considerations in service design and delivery
- Undertake a broader review of the *Policy on Service and Digital* to orient it more explicitly toward agile practices, streamlined processes and minimized administrative burdens
- Advance a new approach to enterprise performance to increase transparency and reduce administrative burden. The approach will include regular dialogue with departments through the enterprise performance dashboard to track key metrics and identify risks early, as well as organizational self-assessments to evaluate capacity and risks related to talent, processes, technology and data

Mission 4: Lead the digital workforce

Actions in progress

- Action 4.1 Create mentorship, sponsorship and other development opportunities for those who are underrepresented in the digital community.
- Action 4.3: Convene, celebrate and scale community-driven engagement across the GC

Action 4.1 Create mentorship, sponsorship and other development opportunities for those who are underrepresented in the digital community

Progress

- Highlighting Employment and Social Development Canada's IT Apprenticeship Program for Indigenous Peoples as a vehicle to increase the representation of Indigenous Peoples in the digital workforce
- Growing the Digital Community Mentorship Program to enhance professional growth and support for people in employment equity and equity-seeking groups

Result: Enhancing representation of diverse voices in the digital community

- Employment and Social Development Canada's IT Apprenticeship Program for Indigenous Peoples continues to grow and succeed. This 24-month program provides First Nations, Inuit and Métis participants with on-the-job training, mentorship and professional development opportunities. By focusing on an individual's potential rather than formal educational requirements, the program helps address employment barriers and contributes to reducing educational, employment and economic gaps experienced by Indigenous Peoples in Canada.
 - In 2024, the Program received 420 applications from more than 171 Indigenous communities, leading to 64 new hires. Over time, the program has gained widespread support and recognition of its value in fostering diverse talent, as demonstrated by the over 30 departments and agencies that have hired apprentices. The program has achieved an exceptional retention rate of 95% or higher, thanks to its thoughtful design and comprehensive support systems
 - To develop and retain diverse digital talent, the Digital Community Mentorship Program pairs mentors and mentees from employment equity and equity-seeking groups to network to

discuss professional goals and provide career guidance. Last year, the program's impact grew significantly, with the number of matches doubling. The team further enhanced the program by adapting to the evolving needs of practitioners and leaders, offering career advice to over 500 digital employees and launching a successful campaign to bring on board senior mentors committed to nurturing emerging digital talent. Mentorship programs like these empower underrepresented groups to advance their careers while contributing diverse viewpoints to their roles and organizations, resulting in more equitable and effective public service delivery

Action 4.3: Convene, celebrate and scale community-driven engagement across the GC

Progress

- Hosted multiple community events, bringing the community together and recognizing excellence in high-impact digital services and programs
- Hosted Chief Information Officer Council Talent Subcommittee meetings regularly with digital leaders

Result

- Notable events in 2024 that brought the digital community together and reinforced its momentum include:
 - the Annual Digital Leaders' Summit in January, which united the community to share best practices and shape the future of digital government

- the Digital Government Community Awards in May, celebrating excellence in high-impact initiatives and outstanding contributions to advancing the GC's Digital Ambition
- the 2024 GC Data Conference, co-hosted by the Canada School of Public Service GC Data Community and Transport Canada, which broke records with nearly 10,000 registered participants
- The Chief Information Officer Council (CIOC) is a group of senior federal government leaders collaborating to enhance the management of information and technology, guiding initiatives that strengthen program and service delivery
 - CIOC Talent, a sub-group of CIOC, convenes digital leaders to discuss and collaborate on best practices and challenges related to digital talent recruitment, development and retention. Topics often include new learning opportunities, recruitment campaigns to be prioritized and strategies for addressing common retention challenges. These meetings are highly productive and widely valued by participants, making them an essential forum for advancing digital talent initiatives among leaders

What's next for Mission 4: Connecting the digital community

Planned actions

- Action 4.4 Encourage a commitment to ongoing learning

Upcoming efforts

- Promote the GC Digital Talent Platform and diverse digital careers in the public service through a communications campaign, emphasizing the civic mission and digital community

- Engage communities of practice and other community-driven groups to foster cross-departmental networking, mentorship and events
- Hold internal showcases, tech talks, workshops and other events to support and strengthen the digital community

Conclusion

In the first year of the GC Digital Talent Strategy, the GC created a solid foundation for attracting, developing and retaining digital talent across the government. This review highlights the collective efforts of various GC organizations, each of which adapted the strategy to their specific needs while aligning with our overarching goals.

Looking ahead, the GC will listen to the needs of the digital community and adapt accordingly, ensuring that it remains connected and capable of driving robust public services.

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