Public Governance and Territorial Development Directorate

Recommendation of the Council on Digital Government Strategies

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BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

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Adopted by the OECD Council on 15 July 2014

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This document presents the Recommendation on Digital Government Strategies aimed at bringing governments closer to citizens and businesses. It was developed by the Public Governance Committee (PGC).

The steady integration of new technologies (e.g. cloud computing, social media, mobile technology) into the everyday lives of people, businesses and governments is helping to open up governments and giving rise to new forms of public engagement and relationships that transcend public, private and social spheres. This new digital environment offers opportunities for more collaborative and participatory relationships that allow relevant stakeholders (i.e. citizens, business and non-governmental organisations), to actively shape political priorities, collaborate in the design of public services and participate in their delivery to provide more coherent and integrated solutions to complex challenges. Digitally enabled participation and production of services is changing people's expectations about their relationships with governments. As a result, new public governance approaches are needed to support a shift from governments anticipating citizens' and business's needs (citizen-centric approaches) to citizens and businesses determining their own needs and addressing them in partnership with governments (citizen-driven approaches).

The diffusion and adoption of technologies is also changing expectations on governments' ability to deliver public value. Governments can no longer afford to separate efficiency from other societal policy objectives in the governing and managing of digital technologies. The economic and financial crisis is showing that improved service delivery and internal public sector efficiency go hand-in-hand with economic growth, societal equality, and good governance objectives such as greater transparency, integrity and citizen engagement.

This new digital governance context and the multiplication of technological options raise challenges and risks for which governments must prepare. The new possibilities, and the changing societal expectations that arise from them, require governments to re-examine their governance approaches and strategies. Failures to do so could mean an accelerated loss of trust in government and a perception that it is out of touch with societal and technological trends. But are governments really equipped to use digital technology to work more closely with citizens and businesses, particularly in a context of continuous budgetary constraints?

The challenge is not to introduce digital technologies into public administrations; it is to integrate their use into public sector modernisation efforts. Public sector capacities, workflows, business processes, operations, methodologies and frameworks need to be adapted to the rapidly evolving dynamics and relations between the stakeholders that are already enabled – and in many instances empowered – by the digital environment. Setting up more open approaches to policymaking and public service delivery requires governments to re-organise themselves around user expectations, needs and associated requirements, rather than their own internal logic and needs. To this end, digital government strategies need to become firmly embedded in mainstream modernisation policies and service design so that the relevant stakeholders outside of government are included and feel ownership for the final outcomes of major policy reforms.

This shift to use technology to shape public governance outcomes, and not simply to support government processes, requires coherent and strategic planning of policies for digital technologies use in all areas and at all levels of the administration. However, governments remain organised around units, each with clear responsibilities and processes, as well as problems to integrate their ways of working. This is a major challenge to creating broad political commitment and ownership for integration of digital government into overall public sector reform strategies. Governments need to ensure that their own capacities, norms, structures and risk management models are aligned with their strategic digital government vision, and vice-versa. It is imperative that governments also understand the level of organisational maturity of the public sector in relation to project management methods and approaches, and are able to achieve appropriate levels of maturity in relation to their needs and ambitions, to optimise the impact and results of digital government investments.

The purpose of the Recommendation is to help governments adopt more strategic approaches for a use of technology that spurs more open, participatory and innovative governments. Key actors responsible for public sector modernisation at all levels of government (from co-ordinating units, sector ministries, and public agencies) will find the Recommendation relevant to establish more effective co-ordination mechanisms, stronger capacities and framework conditions to improve digital technologies' effectiveness for delivering public value and strengthening citizen trust. While the level of trust obtained in each country largely depends on its history and culture, the Recommendation can help governments to use technology to become more agile and resilient and to foster forward-looking public institutions. This can increase public trust through better performing and responsive services and policies, and can mobilise public support for ambitious and innovative government policies.

In this regard, the principles set out in the Recommendation support a shift in culture within the public sector: from a use of technology to support better public sector operations to integrating strategic decisions on digital technologies in the shaping of overarching strategies and agendas for public sector reform and modernisation. The Recommendation hence offers guidance for a shared understanding and a mind-set on how to prepare for, and get the most out of, technological change and digital opportunities in a long-term perspective to create public value and mitigate risks related to: quality of public service delivery, public sector efficiency, social inclusion and participation, public trust, and multi-level and multi-actor governance.

Since 2000, the PGC has developed an extensive evidence base on digital government in the form of data, analytical work and country reviews showing that governments are looking for ways to align technological opportunities with public demands for better performance and more openness, and to strengthen the ties between digital government and the broader reform agendas. But the PGC work also outlines that many governments are still following a logic of putting existing processes and products online and face challenges related to the maintenance of technology systems established during earlier waves of digitisation of public information and services. Additionally, many governments lack the capacity to monitor the costs and benefits of new technologies and trends (e.g. impact of social media use and open data on increased levels and quality of public participation) and to adapt to the rapidly changing digital context. Additionally, many also miss the real political support for the use of digital opportunities as an integrated element of overarching public sector reform agendas.

Failures of governments to make the transition to the new digital environment can have important consequences including poor service delivery, underperformance of spending, privacy and security breaches, and loss of citizen trust. For this reason, strategies for effective digital government need to reflect public expectations in terms of economic and social value, openness, innovation, personalised service delivery and dialogue with citizens and businesses. In the Communiqué of the Meeting of the PGC at Ministerial Level held in Venice in November 2010, Ministers acknowledged the importance of technology as key ally to foster innovation in governance, public management and public service delivery, and to build openness, integrity and transparency to maintain trust [GOV/PGC/MIN(2010)4/FINAL]. Trust in government is one of the most precious national assets. It was also one of the main themes of the OECD 2013 Ministerial Council Meeting, at which Ministers welcomed the Agenda on "Trust in Government: Evidence, Policies and Decision-making" [C/MIN(2013)4/FINAL, Annex III].

The Recommendation has been developed through the OECD Network on E-Government (the Network) of the PGC. At the meeting of the Network held in Mexico on 26-27 March 2012, delegates underlined the need for a policy instrument on digital government [GOV/PGC/EGOV(2012)2]. A Task Force composed of 13 OECD Member countries collaborated with the Secretariat on a draft set of principles that was discussed by the Network at its meeting in Bern (Switzerland) on 29-30 October 2013 [GOV/PGC/EGOV(2013)1]. The principles embodied in the Recommendation also benefited from public consultation between November 2013 and January 2014, and from consultation conducted internally within the OECD. The Committee on Digital Economy Policy (CDEP) was consulted by written procedure (4-23 April 2014) and provided useful comments.

The Recommendation is the first international legal instrument on digital government. It complements and provides a specific context for the application of other OECD Recommendations containing policy guidance and tools in a number of related policy areas[*]. It offers a whole-of-government approach that addresses the cross-cutting role of technology in the design and implementation of public policies, and in the delivery of outcomes. It emphasises the crucial contribution of technology as a strategic driver to create open, innovative, participatory and trustworthy public sectors, to improve social inclusiveness and government accountability, and to bring together government and non-government actors to contribute to national development and long-term sustainable growth.

The Recommendation is applicable to all levels of government (national, regional and local) and addresses dimensions that are relevant for other stakeholders of digital government strategies. It is intended to apply to all Members and to provide useful guidelines for adhering non-Members seeking to address challenges and identify good practices related to the development and implementation of digital government strategies. It offers valuable guidance for countries whatever their level of digital government maturity, institutional framework and degree of decentralisation might be.

Finally, using technology to bring together stakeholders from all levels of government, and from outside government, to deliver better results and policy outcomes, requires the development of individual and collective capacities to strengthen digital government impact. The PGC encouraged the development of an implementation Toolkit with detailed guidance on the principles embodied in the Recommendation once it is adopted by the Council. This Toolkit, would propose indicators and good practices for each principle, illustrated with examples from all levels of government.

The Recommendation was adopted by the OECD Council on 15 July 2014 [C(2014)88].

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[*]   Recommendation of the Council concerning Guidelines Governing the Protection of Privacy and Transborder Flows of Personal Data [C(80)58/FINAL, as amended]; Recommendation of the Council on Improving the Quality of Government Regulation [C(95)21/FINAL]; Recommendation of the Council on Improving Ethical Conduct in the Public Service Including Principles for Managing Ethics in the Public Service [C(98)70/FINAL]; Recommendation of the Council Concerning Guidelines for the Security of Information Systems and Networks - Towards a Culture of Security [C(2002)131/FINAL]; Recommendation of the Council on Electronic Authentication [C(2008)36]; Recommendation of the Council for Enhanced Access and More Effective Use of Public Sector Information [C(2007)68]; Recommendation of the Council on Enhancing Integrity in Public Procurement [C(2008)105]; Recommendation of the Council on the Protection of Critical Information Infrastructures [C(2008)35]; Recommendation of the Council on the Protection of Children Online [C(2011)155]; Recommendation of the Council on Principles for Internet Policy Making [C(2011)154]; Recommendation of the Council on Principles for Public Governance of Public-Private Partnerships [C(2012)86]; Recommendation of the Council on International Mobile Roaming Services [C(2012)7]; Recommendation of the Council on Regulatory Policy and Governance [C(2012)37]; Recommendation of the Council on Effective Public Investment across Levels of Government [C(2014)32]; Recommendation of the Council on the Governance of Critical Risks [C/MIN(2014)8/FINAL].

RECOMMENDATION OF THE COUNCIL
ON DIGITAL GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES

THE COUNCIL,

HAVING REGARD to Article 5 b) of the Convention on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development of 14 December 1960;

HAVING REGARD to the Recommendation of the Council concerning Guidelines Governing the Protection of Privacy and Transborder Flows of Personal Data [C(80)58/FINAL, as amended]; the Recommendation of the Council on Improving the Quality of Government Regulation [C(95)21/FINAL]; the Recommendation of the Council on Improving Ethical Conduct in the Public Service Including Principles for Managing Ethics in the Public Service [C(98)70/FINAL]; the Recommendation of the Council Concerning Guidelines for the Security of Information Systems and Networks - Towards a Culture of Security [C(2002)131/FINAL]; the Recommendation of the Council on Electronic Authentication [C(2008)36]; the Recommendation of the Council for Enhanced Access and More Effective Use of Public Sector Information [C(2007)68]; the Recommendation of the Council on Enhancing Integrity in Public Procurement [C(2008)105]; the Recommendation of the Council on the Protection of Critical Information Infrastructures [C(2008)35]; the Recommendation of the Council on the Protection of Children Online [C(2011)155]; the Recommendation of the Council on Principles for Internet Policy Making [C(2011)154]; the Recommendation of the Council on Principles for Public Governance of Public-Private Partnerships [C(2012)86]; the Recommendation of the Council on International Mobile Roaming Services [C(2012)7]; the Recommendation of the Council on Regulatory Policy and Governance [C(2012)37]; the Recommendation of the Council on Effective Public Investment across Levels of Government [C(2014)32]; the Recommendation of the Council on the Governance of Critical Risks [C/MIN(2014)8/FINAL];

HAVING REGARD to the Agenda on "Trust in Government: Evidence, Policies and Decision-making" welcomed by the 2013 Ministerial Council Meeting [C/MIN(2013)4/FINAL, Annex III];

RECOGNISING that public investments on digital government occur at all levels of government thus creating a context of shared responsibility across levels of government;

RECOGNISING a new stage of maturity in the use of digital technologies by governments and a shift from e-government to digital government with a view to opening, innovating and modernising public sectors;

RECOGNISING that both in times of fiscal pressure and of fiscal expansion, governments require improved efficiency and effectiveness of public spending, including for digital technologies;

RECOGNISING the need of a common vision to ensure coherence in the use of digital technologies across policy areas and levels of governments;

RECOGNISING that digital government can make a crucial contribution to sustainable development and growth at the national and sub-national levels, as well as anticipate current and future steps needed to increase citizen trust and well-being;

NOTING that the OECD plays a leading role in supporting the use of technology to promote good governance at national and sub-national levels of government;

HAVING REGARD to the background document on the principles embodied in the present Recommendation noted by the Network on E-Government of the Public Governance Committee [GOV/PGC/EGOV(2013)1];

On the proposal of the Public Governance Committee:

I.   AGREES that, for the purpose of the present Recommendation, the following definitions are used:

-       **E-Government** refers to the use by the governments of information and communication technologies (ICTs), and particularly the Internet, as a tool to achieve better government

-       **Digital Government** refers to the use of digital technologies, as an integrated part of governments' modernisation strategies, to create public value. It relies on a digital government ecosystem comprised of government actors, non-governmental organisations, businesses, citizens' associations and individuals which supports the production of and access to data, services and content through interactions with the government.

-       **Digital technologies** refer to ICTs, including the Internet, mobile technologies and devices, as well as data analytics used to improve the generation, collection, exchange, aggregation, combination, analysis, access, searchability and presentation of digital content, including for the development of services and apps.

-       **Public value** refers to various benefits for society that may vary according to the perspective or the actors, including the following : 1) goods or services that satisfy the desires of citizens and clients; 2) production choices that meet citizen expectations of justice, fairness, efficiency and effectiveness; 3) properly ordered and productive public institutions that reflect citizens' desires and preferences; 4) fairness and efficiency of distribution; 5) legitimate use of resource to accomplish public purposes; and 6) innovation and adaptability to changing preferences and demands.

II.   RECOMMENDS that governments develop and implement digital government strategies which:

1.   **Ensure greater transparency, openness and inclusiveness of government processes and operations** by:

    i)   adopting open and inclusive processes, accessibility, transparency and accountability among the main goals of national digital government strategies;

    ii) updating accountability and transparency regulations recognising different contexts and expectations brought about by digital technologies and technology-driven approaches;

    iii) taking steps to address existing "digital divides" (i.e. the fact that societies can be divided into people who do and people who do not have access to - and the capability to use - digital technologies) and avoid the emergence of new forms of "digital exclusion" (i.e. not being able to take advantage of digital services and opportunities).

2.   **Encourage engagement and participation of public, private and civil society stakeholders in policy making and public service design and delivery,** through:

    i)   addressing issues of citizens' rights, organisation and resource allocation, adoption of new rules and standards, use of communication tools and development of institutional capacities to help facilitate engagement of all age groups and population segments, in particular through the clarification of the formal responsibilities and procedures (e.g. adoption of

guidelines clarifying roles and procedures for establishing and managing official government accounts on social media, norms of data sharing);

ii) identifying and engaging non-governmental organisations, businesses or citizens to form a digital government ecosystem for the provision and use of digital services. This includes the use of business models to motivate the relevant actors' involvement to adjust supply and demand; and the establishment of a framework of collaboration, both within the public sector and with external actors.

3. **Create a data-driven culture in the public sector,** by:

i) developing frameworks to enable, guide, and foster access to, use and re-use of, the increasing amount of evidence, statistics and data concerning operations, processes and results to (a) increase openness and transparency, and (b) incentivise public engagement in policy making, public value creation, service design and delivery;

ii) balancing the need to provide timely official data with the need to deliver trustworthy data, managing risks of data misuse related to the increased availability of data in open formats (i.e. allowing use and re-use, and the possibility for non-governmental actors to re-use and supplement data with a view to maximise public economic and social value).

4. **Reflect a risk management approach to addressing digital security and privacy issues, and include the adoption of effective and appropriate security measures**, so as to increase confidence on government services.

III. **RECOMMENDS** that, in developing their digital government strategies, governments should:

5. **Secure leadership and political commitment to the strategy,** through a combination of efforts aimed to promote inter-ministerial co-ordination and collaboration, set priorities and facilitate engagement and co-ordination of relevant agencies across levels of government in pursuing the digital government agenda.

6. **Ensure coherent use of digital technologies across policy areas and levels of government,** by:

i) engaging relevant stakeholders and other levels of government to provide input to the development of the digital government strategy;

ii) integrating the digital government strategy in overall public administration reforms;

iii) identifying the complementarity, alignment and mutual reinforcement between the digital government strategy and other relevant sector strategies;

iv) providing the institution formally responsible for digital government co-ordination with the mechanisms to align overall strategic choices on investments in digital technologies with technological deployment in various policy areas.

7. **Establish effective organisational and governance frameworks to co-ordinate the implementation of the digital strategy within and across levels of government,** through:

i) identifying clear responsibilities to ensure overall co-ordination of the implementation of the digital government strategy;

ii) establishing a system for "check and balances" of governments' decisions on spending on technology to increase the level of accountability and public trust, and to improve decision-making and management to minimise risks of project failures and delays.

8. **Strengthen international co-operation with other governments** to better serve citizens and businesses across borders, and maximise the benefits that can emerge from early knowledge sharing and co-ordination of digital strategies internationally.

IV. **RECOMMENDS** that, in implementing the digital government strategies, governments should:

9. **Develop clear business cases to sustain the funding and focused implementation of digital technologies projects,** by:

i) articulating the value proposition for all projects above a certain budget threshold to identify expected economic, social and political benefits to justify public investments and to improve project management;

ii) involving key stakeholders in the definition of the business case (including owners and users of final services, different levels of governments involved in or affected by the project, and private sector or non-for profit service providers) to ensure buy in and distribution of realised benefits.

10. **Reinforce institutional capacities to manage and monitor projects' implementation,** by:

i) adopting structured approaches systematically, also for the management of risks, that include increase in the amount of evidence and data captured in the course of project implementation and provision of incentives to augment data use to monitor projects performance;

ii) ensuring the availability at any time of a comprehensive picture of on-going digital initiatives to avoid duplication of systems and datasets;

iii) establishing evaluation and measurement frameworks for projects' performance at all levels of government, and adopting and uniformly applying standards, guidelines, codes for procurement and compliance with interoperability frameworks, for regular reporting and conditional release of funding;

iv) reinforcing their public sector's digital and project management skills, mobilising collaborations and/or partnerships with private and non-governmental sector actors as necessary;

v) conducting early sharing, testing and evaluation of prototypes with involvement of expected end-users to allow adjustment and successful scaling of projects.

11. **Procure digital technologies based on assessment of existing assets** including digital skills, job profiles, technologies, contracts, inter-agency agreements to increase efficiency, support innovation, and best sustain objectives stated in the overall public sector modernisation agenda. Procurement and contracting rules should be updated, as appropriate, to make them compatible with modern ways of developing and deploying digital technology.

12. **Ensure that general and sector-specific legal and regulatory frameworks allow digital opportunities to be seized,** by**:**

i) reviewing them as appropriate;

ii) including assessment of the implications of new legislations on governments' digital needs as part of the regulatory impact assessment process.

V.   **INVITES** the Secretary-General to disseminate the Recommendation.

VI.   **INVITES** Members to disseminate this Recommendation at all levels of government.

VII.   **INVITES** non-Members to take account of and adhere to this Recommendation.

VIII.   **INSTRUCTS** the Public Governance Committee to monitor the implementation of this Recommendation and to report thereon to the Council no later than three years following its adoption and regularly thereafter, notably in consultation with the Committee on Digital Economy Policy.

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