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Government as a Platform:

Coming soon to a
government near you



High performance. Delivered.



From Apple to Uber, digital darlings are disrupting their industries with platforms. These data-powered business models rely on others outside the company to create value for the business. It's one of the most profound disruptive changes in the global macroeconomic environment since the Industrial Revolution—and it's coming to a government near you.

The digital platform has arrived

Government as a platform is the foundation that allows government and non-governmental organizations to deliver next-generation public services. Government acts as an intermediary—orchestrating participants, facilitating collaboration, connecting people and providers, and ultimately, overseeing public service delivery models that will advance beyond what we can even imagine today.

While 89 percent of public service executives think it's important to adopt platform-based business models, most underestimate the pace of change.¹ Digital technologies are already driving radical shifts in how public services are delivered, blurring the lines between government, business and civil society. Government as a platform is a natural part of this progression.² With 48 percent of public service executives planning to pursue digital initiatives with new partners over the next two years, the trend will only gain traction, and scale fast.³

Getting government as a platform right means thinking beyond the technology. Digital changes all aspects of government, including operating models, processes, skills and culture, and stakeholder relationships. The rise of government as a platform means that government service delivery will face unprecedented interest from organizations looking to invent new approaches to serve the public. Will agencies act fast to foster the platform revolution? Or will they stand by, watch new players from other sectors take the lead and risk their future relevance?

Government services, without government?

Public services do not always have to be produced by government agencies anymore. In the digital era, the private sector, NGOs, citizens and even machines can produce public services—often faster, more organically and with better user experiences than the government itself.

Consider how Europeans are responding to the latest refugee crisis. People took action when traditional government alone could not address the complexity of the issues the refugees faced fast enough. Volunteers created an online university. Citizens used social media to offer shelter. Non-profit organizations like Refugees Welcome were established to provide Airbnb-inspired housing services using a digital platform.⁴



The power of government as a platform

Data currency. Data is the foundation of public-private collaboration around service delivery, economic and social development, and innovation.

Connective tissue "the glue". Common services, technology architecture and governance create efficiencies that streamline user experiences for one-door service.

Network effect. Consumers and producers collaborate in a virtual "marketplace," creating value for each other, which means better outcomes for citizens and society.

Scale multiplier. Agencies scale impact without investment as organizations tap others' skills, ideas and distribution networks—no ownership required.

Control change, or lose control

Only government can set the rules to preserve the quality, integrity and accessibility of truly public services in the government as a platform world. However, this unique gatekeeper role is not a one-size-fits-all blueprint. To harness platforms to reinvent service, lower cost, improve mission effectiveness and spur economic development, public service organizations can play different curation roles. Each role involves progressively less control, but never a complete abdication of government oversight:

- **Lead.** The public sector is the primary driver fostering an environment that supports collaboration among all stakeholders. This active orchestration role runs the gamut—from developing the digital platform concept, addressing regulatory issues, providing the technology foundation, determining how providers integrate with the platform, and managing clear and centralized processes and governance.

Case in point: Altinn, a national platform developed by the Norwegian government in the early 2000s. Evolving beyond an online portal to streamline business reporting, Altinn now provides the tools and technology platform on which government agencies and businesses can create new services. As it does, Altinn supports an increasingly broader ecosystem of exchange and interaction. Third parties can integrate with the platform and develop value-added services, sharing some common data with platform partners to drive innovation. Stakeholders are exploring evolving Altinn further as the trusted data source—think secure citizen data gatekeeper—for the Norwegian digital economy.⁵

- **Partner.** Public sector organizations look outside their walls to provide services and information jointly to citizens and stakeholders with partners from other sectors. This co-creation model fosters natural partnerships and encourages unconventional ones to cultivate new value and innovation.

Pôle Emploi, the French public employment services agency, is pursuing this approach. It launched the “L’Emploi Store,” an open portal where people can download employment-related apps developed by Pôle Emploi and third parties, in 2015. Later that year, the agency collaborated with an online education provider, allowing jobseekers access to more than 1,000 online courses. Furthering its commitment to co-creation, Pôle Emploi created “Le Lab,” an internal innovation center that sponsors opportunities for jobseekers, employers, counselors and start-ups to design new digital services.

- **Let happen.** Public sector organizations make the strategic choice for a traditional public service function to be delivered by a non-government platform partner with government as facilitator and curator. After all, the best ideas for government do not always come from government. The decision is typically motivated by a fundamental win-win—cost savings for the government and improved service delivery. Government can choose to have another entity provide a given public service, but retain responsibility for specific aspects of its provision, such as regulatory oversight, funding or data management among others.

For example, through its E-File program, the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS) provides free online tax assistance and e-file options to taxpayers under a defined income threshold. Rather than taking the time and resources to develop these apps itself, the IRS has certified existing apps developed by several private companies, and makes the tools accessible through IRS.gov. Qualified individuals can use free fillable online forms, download commercial tax preparation software and connect with authorized e-file tax preparers from the IRS managed platform.⁶

Now is the time to act

These government as a platform approaches offer unique opportunities. Government agencies are stewards of a wealth of data that, with the right security and privacy controls, can be unlocked for improved service delivery, mission outcomes and commercial and economic development.

Platforms can help agencies address resource constraints from an aging workforce and allocate workers to higher-value tasks. And government as a platform addresses citizens' digital demands—more than 70 percent have the same or higher expectations for government digital services.⁷ The collaboration advantage of platforms is key to the next wave of digital government. With them, agencies can collaborate in a broad ecosystem, sharing real-time feedback, supporting agile design and forging creative partnerships across sectors.

While exciting, the impact of the government as a platform revolution will mean a radical transformation for people, processes and organizations. In the government as a platform world, central agencies will look very different, workforce dynamics will change, and new players will work together in new ways. This is only the beginning of the new face of government service delivery.

Visit www.accenture.com/GaaP
for more information on four
Government as a Platform models.

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¹ Accenture Technology Vision Survey 2016: Results based on 300 public service executives surveyed across Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Japan, South Africa, United Kingdom and the United States between October and December 2015. For more information, visit <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insight-technology-trends-2016>

² Tim O'Reilly coined the term "government as a platform" in the "Government as a Platform" chapter in Open Government by Daniel Lathrop and Laurel Ruma, February 2010

³ Accenture Technology Vision Survey 2016 among public service executives, see footnote 1

⁴ Lizzie Dearden, Refugees Welcome: 'Airbnb for asylum seekers' started by German couple spreads around the world—and the UK could be next, November 2, 2015, retrieved on May 27, 2015 at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugees-welcome-airbnb-for-asylum-seekers-started-by-german-couple-spreads-around-the-world-and-the-a6718321.html>

⁵ <https://www.accenture.com/no-en/insight-nordic-digital-platform>

⁶ <https://www.irs.gov/filing/e-file-options>

⁷ Accenture, Digital Government: Your Digital Citizens are Ready, Willing ... and Waiting, 2016, <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insight-digital-government-digital-citizens-ready-willing-waiting>

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