

# Distributed Government

- What does it mean?
- Service expectations
- Transparency and citizen empowerment
- Policy framework
- Geographical implications
- Workforce issues



## JOINT COUNCILS' EXECUTIVE MONTHLY REPORT

Developed by the Research Committee

June 2022

# 1. What does it mean?

For government to authentically deliver meaningful public services of the future, it will need to embrace the inevitable relevance and importance of distributed teams.

If government leaders truly value representation, resiliency, sustainability, work/life balance, hiring the best and brightest, economic empowerment, instilling exponential passion for mission-driven work and the many other possibilities for civic innovation, embracing the distributed mindset is the new requisite of how we will define the next phase of public service. As such, government can be physically distributed and decentralized, moving it closer to those who need its services.

The advantages of the distributed government model are many. Lower costs of government, better delivery of services, greater accountability and transparency, and better access of the public to their elected officials and federal services are all benefits this model offers.

The transition to distributed government requires careful planning and focus to align the strategic use of data and emerging technologies to mission outcomes. Governments are leveraging emerging technologies, like AI and advanced analytics, to reliably and accurately detect and predict shifts in risk, opportunity and outcomes.

During the pandemic, most enterprises pivoted rapidly to remote working as a response to government-mandated lockdowns. In late 2021, as businesses in many areas started to reopen, staff have been keen to continue working remotely. Based on research, there are consistent indicators that the majority of hybrid or remote knowledge workers say that their expectations for a remote flexible environment have increased.

## Why Is This Report Important?

- Recent trends are transforming the nature of work, workforce, and workplace. This poses significant risks but also creates opportunities for government entities and organizations to reimagine their service delivery to citizens, service users, and employees.
- As various levels of government prepare for the next normal in work, leaders continue to consider a number of pressing questions. What is their vision for the work, workforce, and workplace, and what is the role of government in this next normal? How to leverage the best tools and technologies to drive collaboration and productivity regardless of location? What are the best practices on setting up the right infrastructure, framework, policies, regulations, and technology platforms?
- The adoption of hybrid workspaces across private industry and the non-profit sector will create new challenges for public sector authorities in terms of employee safety, health, and wellness regulation. The gradual emergence of 'right to unplug' legislation in various jurisdictions is indicative of that trend. Factors associated with hybrid workspaces continue to be identified as areas for future research and sustainable public sector capacity building.

## What is Covered in this Executive Report?

This report includes the following:

- What does “distributed government” mean?
- Service expectations
- Transparency and citizen expectations
- Policy framework
- Geographical implications
- Workforce issues



## 2. Service expectations

In many ways, distributed government enhances its service delivery processes with the extensive use of modern technology.

Readily available digital information ensures easy access to governmental services for all citizens regardless of where they live, as long as they have access to the internet.

This would allow citizens to access and share information conveniently with all levels of government including municipal, provincial, federal, or international entities.

Public authorities can likewise provide and request needed information from other governmental departments, businesses, or individuals with the ease of digital technology.

The ease of transferring data between departments facilitates the collaboration and cooperation of such agencies. This translates into a better experience for the citizens interacting with these various authorities and departments.

Consider the following service benefits of distributed government:

**24/7  
accessibility**

even during a  
pandemic



**~50% less  
time spent**

interacting with public  
administration



**>50%  
lower costs**

for companies when  
interacting with the  
public administration



**~60% less  
case-handling  
effort**

through automated  
processing



### 3. Transparency and citizen empowerment

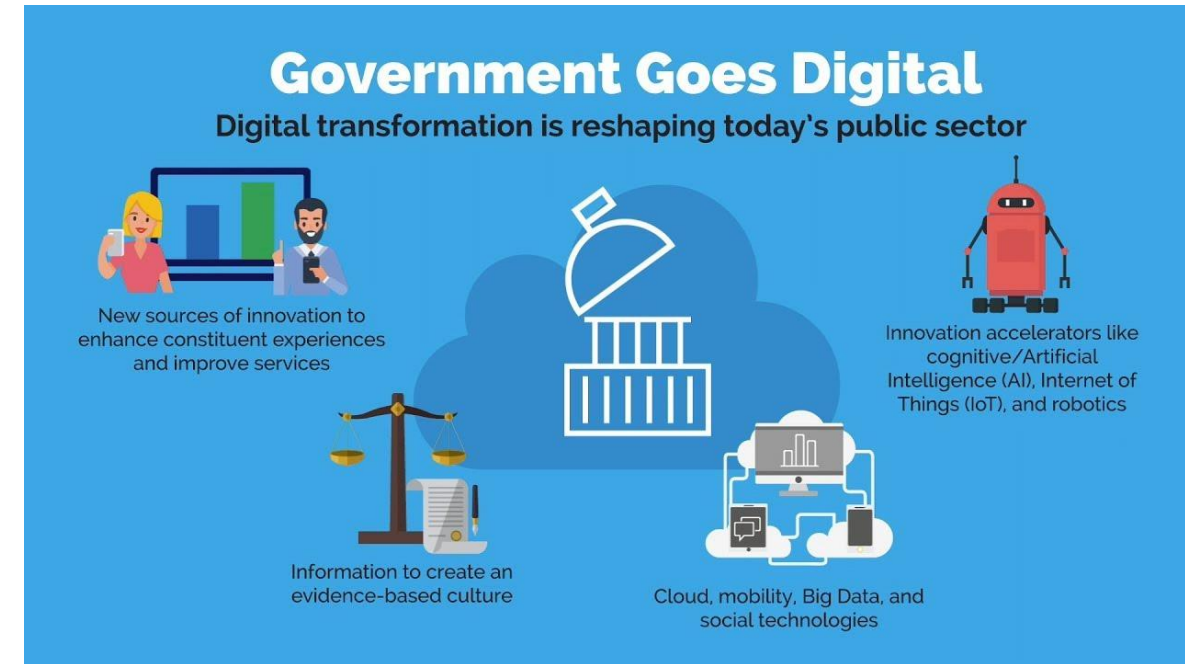
Implementing self-service and automated processes promotes the efficiency of verification processes and data collection.

A distributed government results in more transparency and empowers citizens to hold government accountable. The resilience of service delivery is also increased by the ability to maintain operations regardless of whereabouts, especially if physical locations or regions have been compromised for a prolonged period of time.

The digital transformation of government also drives down administrative costs typically connected with staff processing untold amounts of paperwork, as well as printing documents. Leasing and maintenance of physical buildings become flexible expenses as agencies shift to partly or fully distributed.

There are also work/life balance considerations in this model: government employees spend less time commuting (reducing their carbon footprint) and invest more energy into their families and communities.

Consider the following service benefits of distributed government that is empowered by digitization:



## 4. Policy framework

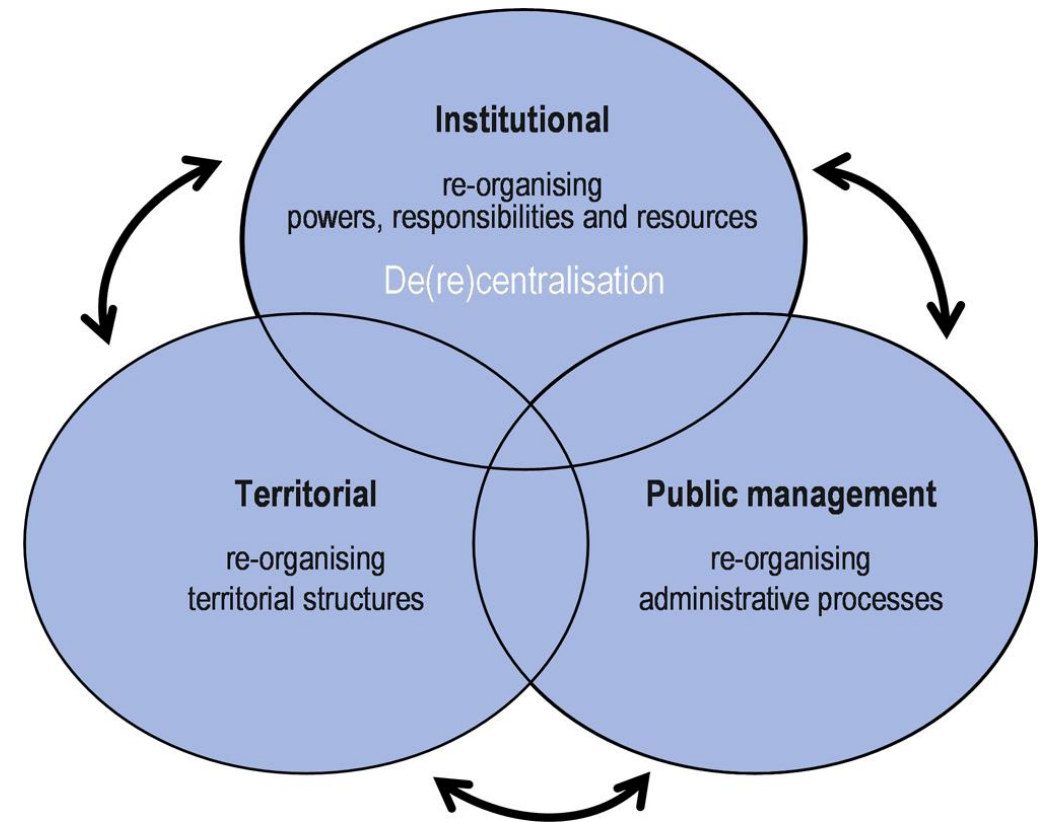
Governments can unlock policy advantages by embracing a distributed model. For instance, a better geographic distribution of federal workforce could improve resilience to economic shocks and reverse the economic declines taking place in rural areas.

Starting in the 1990s, various prime ministers argued that the over-concentration of public sector employment in places like Ottawa was a lost opportunity to support communities navigating the sunset of older industries.

Against the backdrop of the mounting regionalism that was prominent in the mid-1990s, the federal government oversaw the move of several federal offices to such economically vulnerable communities, namely in Quebec and Atlantic Canada.

Better distribution of the federal government's workforce can also help promote Canadian unity and diversity, making the federal government less remote from the citizenry and more representative.

Distributed government reforms aim at re-organising various government administrative and executive processes, including human resources management, financial management, e-government, etc.



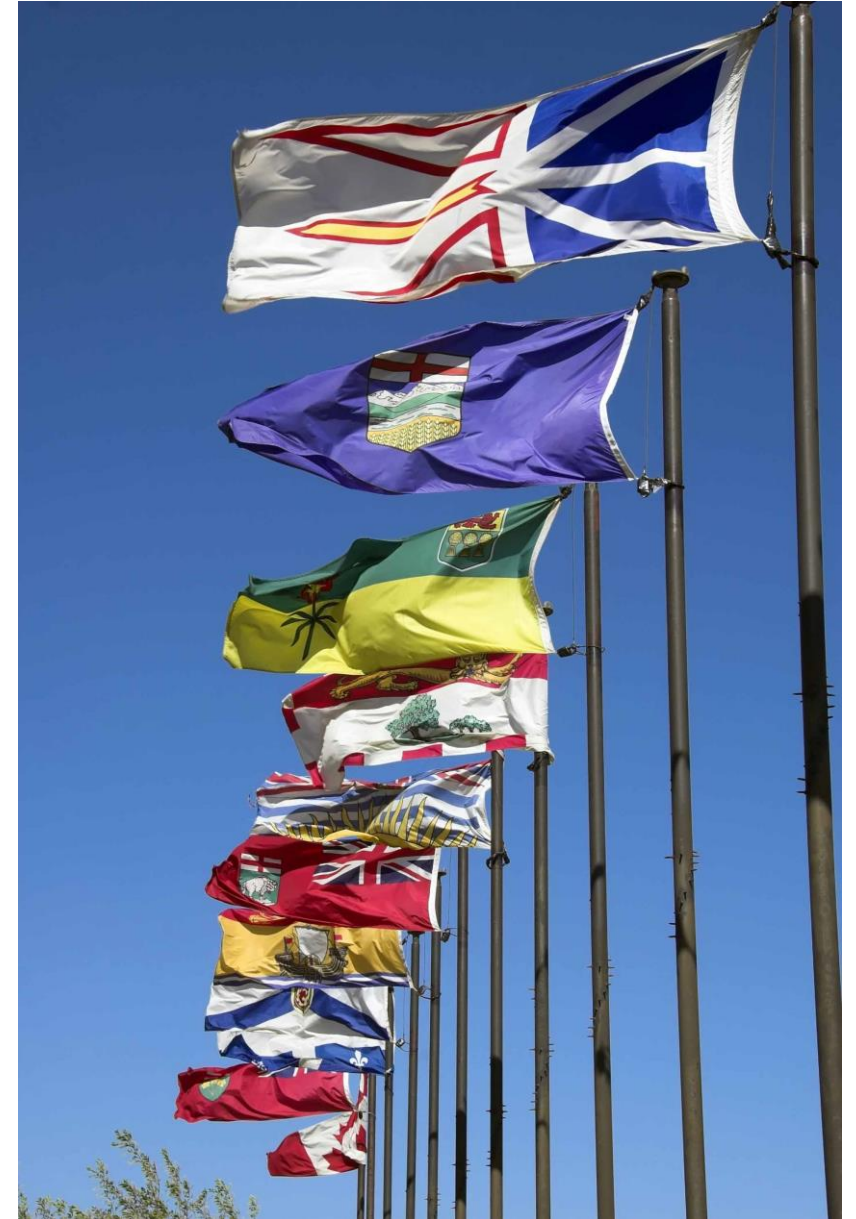


## 5. Geographical implications

A distributed workforce could also result in better integration of policy functions in regional offices. There is a longstanding divide between regional offices, which tend to host more service delivery functions, and federal offices in the National Capital Region, which tend to host more policy functions.

Using a move to distributed government as an occasion to better address this gap has a great deal of potential to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of government programs by better integrating these functions with one another. Others still will note that an over-concentration of public administration within one city-region can leave the federal government vulnerable to local emergencies.

Having government functions more widely distributed across the country instead of concentrated in downtown Ottawa will help to limit the impact of such events on the business of governance. On the international stage, such a bold rethinking of public administration would help Canada to be seen as a leader and innovator in public administration among its peers in the digital nations.



## 6. Workforce issues

The essence of hybrid workforce goes beyond binary choices between working in a physical office or working remotely. Ideally, a hybrid model enables the seamless alignment of both in-person and virtual settings within innovative and flexible workspaces designed to strengthen both individual and collective performance capacities. In stark contrast to extending hierarchical control and surveillance from the office setting into the virtual realm, a hybrid model should seek to empower employees with the tools and freedom to devise their own working arrangements that better reflect their own personal attributes, talents, and circumstances. Additionally, this model has its advantages in recruiting top tier talent by opening up government to those outside of the capital. For government, while some negotiation is essential in balancing individualization with the collective aspects of any organization, a hybrid approach views negotiation as a natural and positive feature of a more agile and empowered workforce rather than an exceptional arrangement to be tolerated.

### Different Approaches to the Hybrid Model





## For Further Reading

- Downes, Stephen. "12. Toward a New Democracy." *Viable Utopian Ideas: Shaping a Better World* (2015).
- Kassen, Maxat. "Blockchain and e-government innovation: Automation of public information processes." *Information Systems* 103 (2022): 101862.
- Janowski, Tomasz. "Digital government evolution: From transformation to contextualization." *Government information quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2015): 221-236.
- Erkut, Burak. "From digital government to digital governance: are we there yet?." *Sustainability* 12, no. 3 (2020): 860.
- Castro, Conceição, and Cristina Lopes. "Digital government and sustainable development." *Journal of the Knowledge Economy* (2021): 1-24.

## Other noteworthy articles:

- Barcevičius, Egidijus, Guoda Cibaitė, Cristiano Codagnone, Vaida Gineikytė, Luka Klimavičiūtė, Giovanni Liva, Loreta Matulevič, Gianluca Misuraca, and Irene Vanini. "Exploring Digital Government transformation in the EU." Luxembourg: Joint Research Centre. <https://doi.org/10.2760/17207> (2019).
- Wilson, Christopher, and Ines Mergel. "Overcoming barriers to digital government: mapping the strategies of digital champions." *Government Information Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (2022): 101681.

## Research Repository

Access the Citizen First [Research Repository](#).

Recent entries on the research repository:

[The Importance of User-Centered Design – Joint Councils' Executive Report May 2022](#)

This report includes the following: Importance of User-Centered Design in Government, Systematic User-Centered Design Process, How to Enable User-Centered Design Thinking, Strategic Enablers to Improve User-Centered Design.





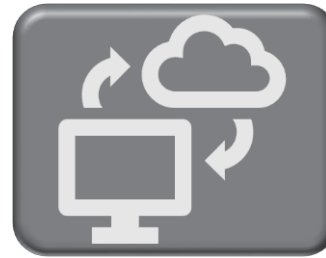
## Trends in the Daily Newsletter



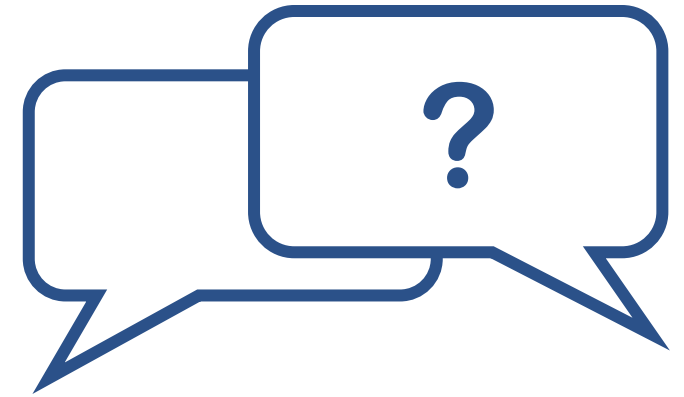
Today, public sector data is commonly spread across silos and trapped in legacy systems – a problem many private sector organizations also face. Governments need to capitalize on data that is [increasingly distributed](#), without centralizing all of that data. Modern edge-to-cloud platforms can enable any organization to shift from simply capturing data to quickly extracting value from it, better serving customers or citizens in the process. The capability to derive value from data can and should lie with data generators themselves.



The public sector is essentially a service industry, and as such it faces the [challenges](#) that face all service industries. This is to achieve similar increases in productivity and improvements in quality that global manufacturing has managed to deliver. You can automate a car assembly plant but you cannot automate a hospital. But the combination of big data and artificial intelligence should enable all service industries, including healthcare, to deliver better outcomes. We just have to learn how to do so.



A comprehensive government led system of online services developed before the war is now providing Ukrainians a lifeline in times of crisis. The service, known locally as [Diia](#) (meaning “Action” in English), is fully automated. The platform was launched in 2020 to enable Ukrainian citizens to use digital documents in their smartphones and access more than 80 governmental services. It was also developed to enable the Government to reach its citizens in the most remote areas of the country, and those with disabilities, helping to ensure that no one is left behind.



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