



# The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Acceleration of Digital Government

JOINT COUNCIL'S EXECUTIVE MONTHLY REPORT

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## 1. Introduction

During the COVID-19 outbreak, federal, provincial and municipal governments announced the closure of several in-person public service centres, including [Service Canada centres](#), [Service New Brunswick locations](#), a [variety of Ontario public services](#), among others. These in-person service centre closures created a large-scale opportunity for governments to experiment with new ways of operating; they also supported in a very radical way, the necessity of digital transformation within the public sector.

This Executive Report highlights the acceleration of digital government that is now taking place. The focus is on exceptional government leadership across the Canadian landscape, with a few key examples from international jurisdictions.



## 2. Key Challenges of Digital Transformation

Dilemmas highlighted in this section demonstrate some of the challenges connected to digital transformation that governments may face now and in the future.

### User Engagement

- Governments are being driven to optimize the number of services offered online and on-demand.
- Not all services are centered around users resulting in inconsistent and unpredictable service delivery.

### Multi-Stakeholder Alignment

- Different and disjointed projects operating in a siloed fashion are commonplace due to uneven alignment on digital approaches across governments, stakeholders and partners.
- Effective partnerships to support governments in restarting and rebuilding are in their infancy, in some cases.

### Procurement Dexterity

- Complex procurement procedures can create slowdowns in upgrading to new technology.
- Some governments are not pivoting to use agile procurement, as quickly as others.

### 3. Innovative Approaches to Digital Government and Services during the COVID-19 Pandemic

*Note: Many governments have demonstrated innovative approaches to service delivery during this time; a few are presented below.*

#### Canada

##### 1. Public Messaging Coordination

Canada has demonstrated exceptional [public messaging](#) coordination between health agencies and all levels of government related to the COVID-19 Pandemic response.

##### 2. Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)

Public servants rapidly mobilized to implement a [massive financial support package](#) to Canadians affected by COVID-19, using an agile, nimble process to put the needs of Canadians first.

##### 3. British Columbia: Service BC Video ID Verification

BC has launched 'Send Video' – a remote identity-verification option. Citizens can use [the service](#) within the BC Services Card app from their phone or tablet to send Service BC a photo and a short video of themselves at any time, day or night.

##### 4. Municipal Partnerships to Provide Free Internet

The City of Toronto (similar to other municipalities) partnered with telecommunications companies to provide [temporary free Internet access](#) for residents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### International

##### 1. South Korea

[South Korea's](#) COVID-19 response strategy is exceptional and sits atop three pillars: [fast and free testing](#), expansive tracing technology, and mandatory isolation of the most severe cases.

##### 2. Singapore

Singapore was among the first countries deemed a “winner” for its response, given its aggressive approach to contact-tracing (which included [scanning people's IDs at supermarkets](#)) and widespread testing.

##### 3. New Zealand

New Zealand's [national pandemic plan was proactive](#), including the introduction of the [NZ COVID Tracer app](#), a Ministry of Health app that allows you to create a digital diary of places you visit by scanning the official QR codes.

##### 4. Estonia

As a response to the pandemic, Estonia was able to continue to use the [resilient digital infrastructure](#) it had spent decades developing.

## 4. Continuing the Digital Transformation Post-Pandemic




The COVID-19 pandemic is obliging governments and societies to turn toward digital solutions to respond to the crisis in the short-term, but also to reinvent existing (and often archaic) organizational operations<sup>1</sup>.

Navigating through such challenging times requires governments to see this as a window of opportunity to accelerate the implementation of innovative digital technologies, including AI-powered technology, the Cloud, blockchain, drones, and many more technologies.

Former GC Privy Council Clerk Michael Wernick recently commented in [How COVID-19 could reshape the federal public service](#), “It’s not that the crisis is forcing us to reshape the public service, but the post-pandemic world could be the window of opportunity, or necessity, to accelerate the renewal and reforms in institutions”.<sup>2</sup>

1. [“UN/DESA Policy Brief #61: COVID-19: Embracing digital government during the pandemic and beyond” 2020, un.org](#)
2. [How COVID-19 could reshape the federal public service](#)

According to a recent [Accenture article](#), the solutions of governments should be flexible and robust across three dimensions:

 Crisis Response	 Pandemic Operations	 Long-term Recovery
Enable the workforce with technical supports and policy adjustments that support critical functions to run on time, serving citizen and business needs with care and urgency.	Establish sustained and robust collaboration across all agencies to engage citizens and share accurate, consistent information; provide vital services through a secure supply chain; create stability while flattening the infection curve.	Softened the lasting impact on revenues, service demand and the larger economy while helping get people back to their daily lives sooner, spurring recovery while planning for the next pandemic.



## Daily Newsletter: Trends This Month July 2020



### Contact Tracing

To address the spread of COVID-19, numerous governments — including those of [Canada](#), [Australia](#), [France](#), [Germany](#) and the [United Kingdom](#) — have deployed or expressed interest in digital contact tracing.



### IT Modernization

Outdated government IT systems and processes hinder many federal and state agencies' ability to deliver services. This is a longstanding fact, only further highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Read more [here](#).



### Government Flexibility

COVID-19 proves that the future of government requires flexibility in people, process, policy, and systems.

Read more [here](#).

## Other noteworthy articles this month:

[Plans for single COVID-19 contact tracing app facing resistance: health minister](#)

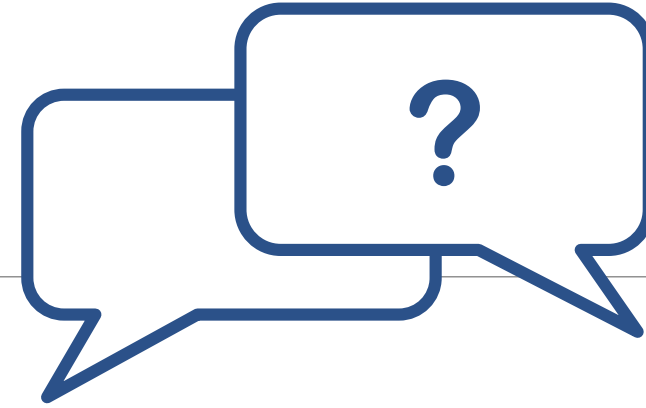
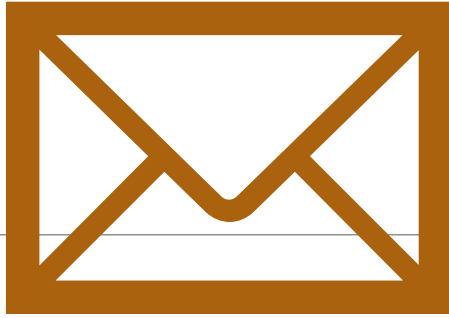
[Canada, France officially launch global initiative to advance responsible use of AI](#)

[Why you're not seeing value from data analytics and what to do about it](#)

[How remote working is changing the talent market](#)

### Research Repository

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



## For further reading

[How digital transformation leaders are standing out](#)

[As Trump Suspends H-1b Visa, Canadian Tech Looks to Attract Foreign Talent \(Again\)](#)

[Digital Government More Critical Than Ever](#)

[The coronavirus pandemic is boosting the big tech transformation to warp speed](#)

[Redefining Customer Service for the Future](#)

[Il faut qu'on parle de votre identité numérique](#)

[Comment les priorités en matière IT évoluent pendant la crise Covid-19](#)

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