

# CAPABILITIES FOR A CITIZEN-CENTRIC DIGITAL GOVERNMENT: CAN DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING BOOST PUBLIC TRUST?

RESEARCH INNOVATION COUNCIL CA BRIEF | VOL.1 | UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Derived from dialogue during the 10th October Research Innovation Council roundtable in Alberta.*

This research brief examines pathways for enhancing government services through data-driven decision-making, cross-sector collaboration, and trust-centred digital transformation. The roundtable convened key leaders from the Government of Alberta, academia, and technology, bringing together experts across digital strategy, public service delivery, and policy. Participants included directors and advisors from government bodies, consultants in innovation, and specialists in areas such as digital health and AI. This cross-disciplinary group provided diverse insights into the challenges and opportunities within digital public services.

Discussions highlighted the importance of shifting from reactive service models to integrated, anticipatory frameworks that can enhance service delivery, promote data interoperability, and safeguard citizen privacy. Key case studies underscored the benefits of digital ID, federated data hubs, and collaborative AI initiatives as models for streamlined, citizen-focused services.

Top priorities included creating data-sharing protocols, developing a federated digital identity system, and aligning digital projects with broader societal resilience goals to attract sustainable funding. Participants identified data access, transparent communications, and addressing public privacy concerns as essential to maintaining trust in digital services.

Next steps include pilot data-sharing initiatives and developing digital identity frameworks that protect privacy while facilitating ease of access. Future sessions will delve deeper into topics like predictive governance and the role of AI in public sector transformation to advance these strategic digital objectives.

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## KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

### FROM E-GOVERNMENT TO CITIZEN GOVERNMENT

Alberta's public sector must transition from isolated, reactive models to a collaborative and anticipatory framework. Participants agreed on the importance of data sharing across agencies, suggesting that Alberta's transformation hinges on enhanced coordination and reduced bureaucratic lag.

Stakeholders expressed a shared vision for making digital transformation accessible, with a focus on transparency to build public trust. Without this, data-driven policies risk being sidelined by privacy concerns and lack of citizen engagement.

### COLLABORATIVE AI AND DATA HUBS

The University of Alberta presented a model for partnerships where public agencies and academia jointly leverage AI resources, such as shared datasets and collaborative hubs, to solve practical public sector challenges. Such hubs would operate under stringent privacy standards to ensure compliance with citizens' trust and legislative requirements.

### DIGITAL ID AND TRUST FRAMEWORKS

A federated digital ID system was suggested as a solution to streamline citizen access to services while maintaining privacy controls. Participants emphasized that this system should allow for optional participation to respect citizen autonomy.

### INTEGRATED ANALYTICS FOR REAL-TIME DECISIONS

The Council discussed using predictive analytics to identify and preemptively respond to high-risk issues, such as health and safety, but noted that real-time data integration must be pursued responsibly and transparently to uphold public trust.

## CHALLENGES AND INHIBITORS

### FUNDING APPROVALS AND ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS

Lengthy approval processes and funding constraints were flagged as critical obstacles. Representatives highlighted the importance of framing digital projects in terms of measurable public value to secure necessary resources.

### CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND PRIVACY CONCERNS

Participants raised concerns about how to effectively communicate the benefits of data-driven services to a public wary of data privacy issues. Alberta's unique demographics mean that transparency in both communication and implementation is crucial for widespread acceptance.

### OUTDATED SYSTEMS

Legacy IT infrastructure remains a hindrance, limiting the capacity to adopt innovative technologies. Alberta's transition requires modernized systems capable of supporting agile, scalable solutions that are resilient against future disruptions.



## STRATEGIES AND SOLUTIONS

### DATA SHARING INITIATIVES

Participants left keen to explore pilot projects for data-sharing protocols, creating an “inter-agency language” for data compatibility that supports privacy while enabling collaboration.

### ESTABLISHING A PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATION FUND

To address budgetary bottlenecks, a dedicated fund was proposed to fast-track digital initiatives, allowing rapid deployment of innovative projects with periodic evaluations to ensure alignment with Alberta’s strategic goals.

### IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

A collaborative working group to draft Alberta’s digital ID framework was recommended, ensuring that privacy-by-design principles guide the initiative from the outset. Additionally, Alberta’s government has the opportunity to create a blueprint for a centralized data-sharing framework to enhance interdepartmental communication.

### LONG-TERM PLANS

Alberta’s roadmap includes establishing dedicated centers for AI and digital research that integrate public sector needs with academic insights. As government transitions to a digital-first model, these centers will support continuous innovation, adaptable to emerging needs and legislative developments.

## CONCLUSION

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

Public sector transformation depends on a cross-sector approach that prioritizes transparency, secure data handling, and citizen trust. Building a system that respects needs and preferences unique to regional citizens will be key to achieving sustained success in digital innovation.

### NEXT STEPS

Launch of pilot projects in digital identity and real-time data-sharing initiatives. Further, Albertan government agencies will seek to frame these projects as investments in societal resilience to streamline funding and expedite implementation.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSIONS

Future roundtables should focus on topics such as data privacy in health systems, strategies for increasing public trust in AI tools, and optimizing cross-agency communication to better respond to emergencies and changing citizen needs.



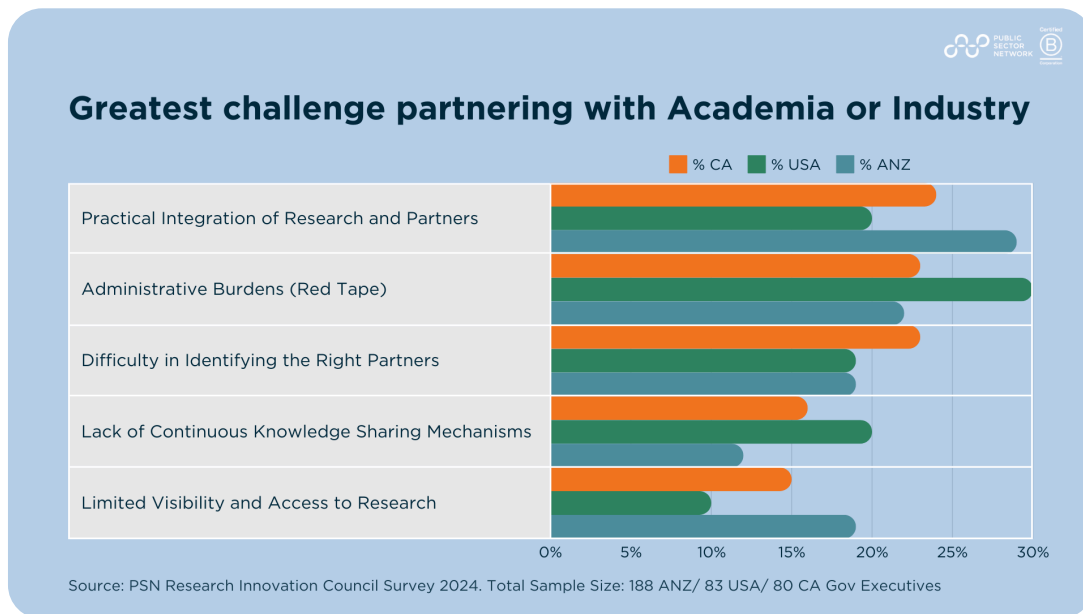
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Leveraging our extensive connections, we are uniting the sharpest minds from government, academia, and industry via monthly research-driven roundtables, hosted at esteemed international centres of research.

Our program offers senior executives a unique opportunity to gather monthly for PSN-facilitated roundtable sessions with colleagues, academics, and technologists. Together, we will discuss trends, challenges, and opportunities in technology, innovation, and the modernisation of government services.

We run the program at no cost to government executives or academics, and provide attendees a private online group on our global insights exchange platform, access to research briefs, and expert engagement with PSN analysts and facilitators.



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Public Sector Network is a research company that represents public sector professionals across Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the USA. It develops roundtables, seminars, and conferences to suit current areas of interest to government agencies and their suppliers.

PSN's growing community spans across federal, state, and local government departments, healthcare, and education, allowing members to share information, access the latest in government innovation, and engage with other like-minded individuals on a secure and closed-door network.

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