

# THE RULE OF DATA: LESSONS ON BUILDING DIGITAL EQUITY AND TRUST IN REIMAGINED PUBLIC SERVICES

RESEARCH INNOVATION COUNCIL USA BRIEF | VOL.3 | HARRISBURG UNIVERSITY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research brief examines the pivotal discussions from the Harrisburg University of Science and Technology-hosted event, featuring public sector leaders, technologists, and policy experts. The conversation centered on leveraging digital transformation to enhance government services, ensure equity, and strengthen trust in democratic institutions. Key topics included the evolution of citizen-centric service delivery, challenges in breaking down data silos, the role of AI assurance frameworks, and innovative approaches to digital identity and consent management.

Facilitated by the presence of international speaker the Hon. Victor Dominello (Australia), New South Wales' transformation journey was drawn on as well as local case studies including Pennsylvania's longitudinal data initiatives. The brief provides actionable recommendations for modernizing public sector operations while preserving inclusivity and equity.

## FUTURE RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

**Data Integration and Real-Time Decision Making:** Addressing siloed systems and delays in data sharing emerged as critical challenges. Future research should focus on developing governance frameworks and technological solutions to enable seamless data integration and real-time dashboards, ensuring faster and more informed decision-making in critical scenarios.

**Standardized Consent and Data Ethics:** Establishing trust and transparency in data use was a recurring theme. Future efforts should prioritize developing layered consent models and ethical frameworks for data sharing, balancing the need for personalized services with individual privacy and control.

**Ethical AI Implementation:** Responsible AI adoption in government services was highlighted as an area requiring careful consideration. Future work should delve into AI assurance frameworks to ensure fairness, mitigate bias, and maintain transparency while leveraging AI to improve operational efficiency and citizen outcomes.

**Inclusion Through Multichannel Approaches:** Ensuring no one is left behind in digital transformations is paramount. Research should examine how multi-channel service delivery—combining digital platforms, physical locations, and alternative solutions—can create an inclusive environment for citizens with varying levels of access and technological proficiency.

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# KEY THEMES AND INSIGHTS

## CITIZEN-CENTRIC DIGITAL SERVICES

Governments are evolving from siloed, transactional models to integrated, customer-focused service delivery.

- **New South Wales Example:** Service NSW implemented a multi-channel approach, combining physical service centers, mobile units, call centers, and a digital app with 92% satisfaction ratings.
- **Key Insight:** Adoption of a "front door" model for government services streamlines user experiences and fosters public trust.
- **Actionable Strategy:** Agencies should embrace omni-channel strategies to ensure inclusivity while maintaining high service quality.

## BREAKING DATA SILOS FOR ACTIONABLE INTELLIGENCE

The integration of siloed data is critical for real-time decision-making and effective governance

- **Case Highlight:** During COVID-19, NSW leveraged a centralized dashboard integrating data from health, transport, and education to track virus transmission and improve decision-making.
- **Key Challenge:** Organizational culture and legal barriers often impede data sharing across departments.
- **Recommended Approach:** Establish clear legislative and non-legislative frameworks to enable secure, privacy-compliant data sharing.

## BUILDING TRUST THROUGH DIGITAL IDENTITY

Digital identity systems are a cornerstone for secure and efficient service delivery but must address equity and inclusivity.

- **NSW's Digital Driver's License:** Achieved 85% adoption, showcasing the importance of opt-in systems and user trust.
- **Massachusetts' Consent Framework:** A multi-level consent model ensures individuals retain control over their data across government programs and public-private partnerships.
- **Actionable Takeaway:** Develop transparent consent mechanisms and educate users about their rights and data usage.

## CULTURAL RESISTANCE AND SILOS

- **Barrier:** Departments view data sharing as punitive, fearing negative performance evaluations.
- **Solution:** Shift the narrative to emphasize data as a neutral tool for storytelling and improvement.

## LEGAL AND PRIVACY CONCERNS

- **Barrier:** Legal frameworks and solicitors often impede timely decision-making.
- **Solution:** Standardize consent policies and establish agile legal review mechanisms to enable responsible data sharing.

## BIAS IN AI SYSTEMS

- **Barrier:** Many citizens lack access to technology or digital literacy.
- **Solution:** Adopt multi-channel approaches and provide non-digital alternatives, such as physical service centers and mobile units.

# INNOVATIVE IDEAS AND CASE STUDIES

## 1. THE PENNSYLVANIA LONGITUDINAL DATA SYSTEM

The PLDS illustrates a robust approach to integrating siloed data across education, workforce, and human services.

- **Objective:** Enable cross-agency collaboration while preserving privacy and security.
- **Innovation:** PLDS leverages existing legal frameworks and policy-driven initiatives to facilitate secure data-sharing without requiring new legislation.
- **Outcome:** Provides a scalable model for data integration that supports real-time decision-making and long-term policy planning.

## 2. THE DIGITAL RESTART FUND

NSW's \$2.2 billion Digital Restart Fund exemplifies how targeted funding can accelerate cross-agency collaboration and innovation.

- **Success Metrics:** Projects were evaluated on speed-to-market, cultural readiness, and citizen impact.
- **Key Example:** The fund supported initiatives like centralized COVID-19 dashboards and mobile service buses for underserved areas.
- **Scalable Insight:** Governments should create dedicated funds for horizontal projects that prioritize inter-agency collaboration and inclusivity.

# STRATEGIC OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

- **Establish Centralized Dashboards:** Create internal data-sharing platforms to enable real-time decision-making during crises.
- **Launch Pilot Projects:** Test digital identity systems with edge cases, such as visually impaired users, to ensure inclusivity from the outset.

## MEDIUM-TERM GOALS

- **Implement AI Assurance Frameworks:** Develop toolkits for assessing ethical and effective AI use in public services.
- **Standardize Consent Management:** Follow Massachusetts' model to implement multi-level consent systems across agencies.

## LONG-TERM VISION

- **Adopt a Gov 3.0 Model:** Transition to a horizontal government structure prioritizing citizen-centric service delivery.
- **Invest in Digital Literacy:** Launch national campaigns to bridge the digital divide, ensuring equitable access to services.

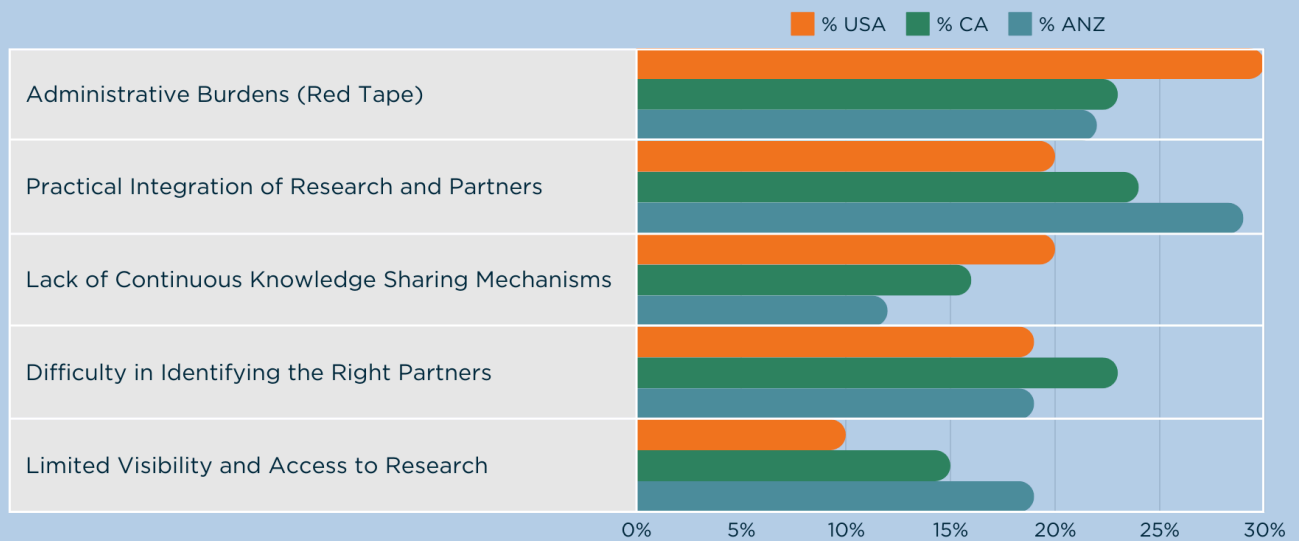
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Source: PSN Research Innovation Council Survey 2024. Total Sample Size: 188 ANZ/ 83 USA/ 80 CA Gov Executives

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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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