

New Role as Data Stewards

Statistics Canada and Statistics Austria

In an environment of an increasing digitalisation of public and private lives, governments are adopting digitalisation and data strategies to promote e-government activities, make information available to a broader public and reduce reporting burden of citizens. In this context, NSOs can assist public administrations as data stewards and contribute with their expertise in data management, data governance and the generation of information retrieved from data. This is an opportunity to strengthen the role of NSOs and official statistics in the public domain.

Better data management, assisted or operated by NSOs, can lead to efficiency gains, additional insights and better decisions. The collection of data can be organised more efficiently if the public sector follows the “once only” principle, i.e. collect the same data only once from companies, households or individuals. This implies, however, that a system of micro data exchange between public institutions must be established that allows for efficiency gains of administrative procedures by re-using data once they are collected. At the same time, data protection principles and strict privacy rules must be respected when setting up such a system.

When NSOs take the role as data stewards they can benefit from the fact of a better overview and access to administrative data. The production function of official statistics would benefit. The role of data stewards could also include the operation of administrative registers on behalf of the government or public institutions, whereas data ownership must remain with the responsible public entity.

It is important, however, to respect the boundaries between statistical and administrative purposes, i.e. data collected for statistical purposes must not be used for administrative purposes at the micro level. Any breach of this principle could put public trust in NSOs at risk and seriously endanger the collection process of statistical data.

A Data Strategy Roadmap for the Government of Canada (Adapted Executive Summary)

Governments are starting to look to NSOs to perform the role of data stewards. In 2018, the Government of Canada established a Government of Canada Data Strategy. This data strategy was precipitated by the realization that the volume of data that governments, businesses and Canadians produce is growing exponentially, animated by digital technologies. Organizations are changing their business models, building new expertise and devising new ways of managing and unlocking the value of their data. Governments need to evolve rapidly to keep up.

The volume of data that governments, businesses and Canadians produce is growing exponentially, animated by digital technologies. Organizations are changing their business models, building new expertise and devising new ways of managing and unlocking the value of their data. Governments need to evolve rapidly to keep up.

How the Government of Canada collects, manages and governs data—and how it accesses and shares data with other governments, sectors and Canadians—must change. The government has a responsibility to ensure its workforce has the skills and tools it needs to ethically leverage data to support the public good, while protecting the sensitive and personal data of Canadians.

Data have the power to enable the government to make better decisions, design better programs and deliver more effective services. But for this to occur—and for the government of Canada to share data in a way that allows other governments, businesses, researchers and the not-for-profit sector to also extract value from data.

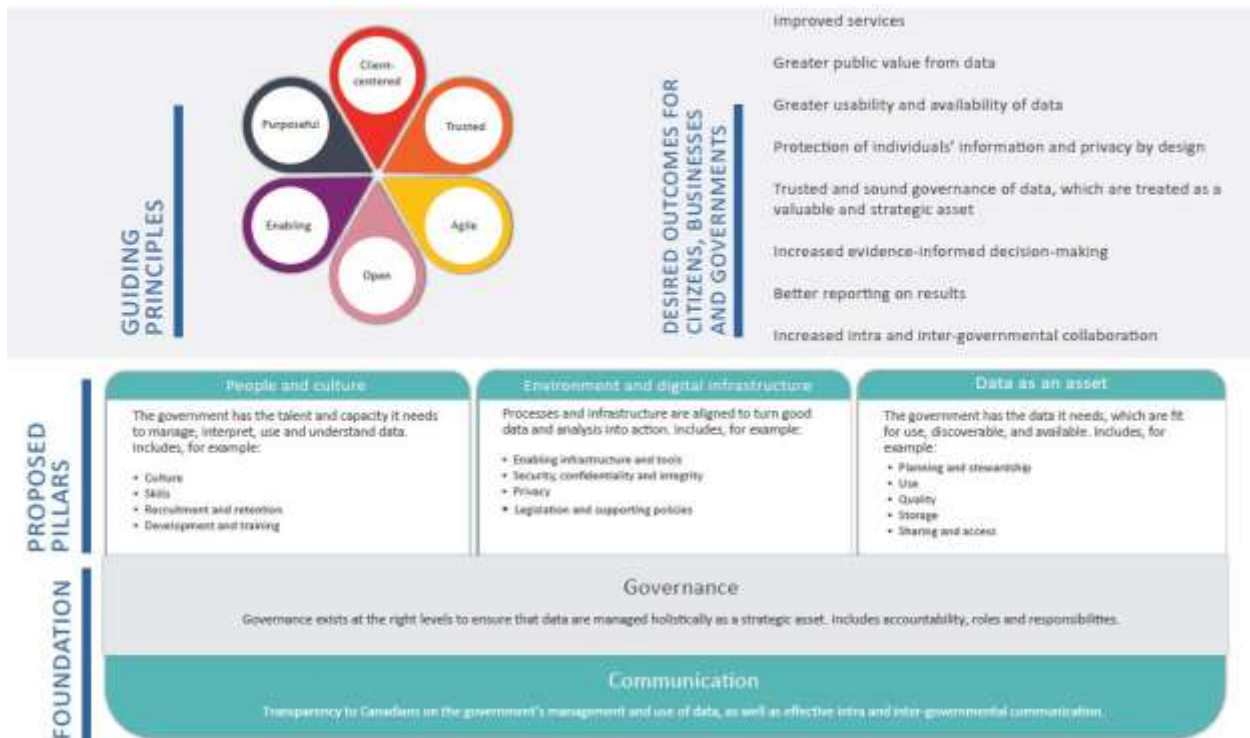
The Government of Canada holds a vast, diverse and ever-expanding array of data, including program, geo-spatial, administrative, sensor and population data. These data are often collected in ways—based on informal principles and practices—that make it difficult to share with other departments or Canadians. Their use is inconsistent across the government and their value sub-optimized in the decision-making process and in day-to-day operations.

To enable social innovation and support economic activity, a modern digital and data-enabled government should develop and consistently follow world-leading standards governing transparency, archiving, management, usability, interoperability and privacy. This would enable governments and others to unlock the value of data and provide better services, support evidence-informed decisions, create internal efficiencies and better understand the real impact of programs so that funds can be directed towards those interventions that have the greatest impact. Better management of the Government of Canada's data holdings means that Canada will become a destination of choice for researchers and entrepreneurs and Canadians will create new businesses, make scientific discoveries, improve services and find new solutions.

The Government of Canada data strategy is structured around four themes: stronger governance, improved data literacy and skills, enabling infrastructure and legislation, and more focused treatment of data as a valuable asset. The goal is to set a foundation so that the Government of Canada creates more value for Canadians from the data we hold. Organizational data strategies underpin the strategic use of data, support the transition to a digital government and ensure the public service is empowered and equipped to harness the power of data to make better decisions and create better outcomes for Canadians.

DATA STRATEGY FRAMEWORK FOR THE FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE

A whole-of-government approach to creating, protecting, using, managing and sharing data as a strategic asset, enabling informed decisions that lead to better outcomes and services for Canadians



A key part of the data strategy is the development of a Digital Charter. The Digital Charter provides a way forward for all Canadians dealing with complex questions around data collection, management and use – one that responds to the real concerns of Canadians and reflects Canadian values. The principles set out in the Charter, together with the supporting actions of the Strategy, also provide an overall framework for continued Canadian leadership with like-minded countries towards a global digital agenda.

Statistics Canada is being asked to play a key leadership role in working with Government of Canada departments to ensure world-leading standards are followed and the data holdings of the government are leverage to provide enhanced service, policy and information to Canadians.

Is the role of national data steward a role NSOs should play? Will this cause NSOs to take a more federal view than national view and start to blur the lines between public good and a government good? Is it realistic to think that NSOs will be properly resourced to take on the role of data steward? Will the role of data steward divert NSO attention away from the development of key national economic indicators towards more focused departmental indicators?