

# The Federal Digital Strategy: Innovating and Architecting for the Future

Posted At : May 29, 2012 3:22 PM | Posted By : Lauren Jones

Related Categories: Mobility, Technology Trends, Announcements, Office of Management and Budget, Events, Federal, Transparency, Acquisition Reform, IT Services

Last week, Federal CIO, Steven VanRoekel, and Federal CTO, Todd Park, announced that OMB had finally released the new federal digital strategy, entitled "Digital Government: Building a 21st Century Platform to Better Serve the American People." The strategy is a game-changer and fundamentally is about collaborating and architecting so that moving into the age of mobility is "done right."

Earlier this year, VanRoekel announced that a coalition of agency executives (the cross-governmental Mobility Strategy and Web Reform Task Forces) were working on a new mobile strategy that would be released in mid-March. Most were looking for it to provide guidance on mobility for federal employees, especially guidance on BYOD. However, the **strategy** morphed into a broader and more important digital strategy that embraces the Internet and mobility—the way people increasingly communicate, work and live today—as a primary means for the federal government to receive information and more quickly delivering services to citizens at lower costs. The emphasis is on multi-modal delivery of information or making government information and services accessible to citizens anywhere, anytime, on any device." Doing so at lower cost is critical to the strategy as well, which emphasizes "innovating more with less" and sets the stage for innovators in the federal government and private sector to work together to propel the federal government forward and "leverage government data to improve the quality of services to the American people."

The strategy recognizes the accomplishments of leading-edge agencies, but points out that innovation can create the same types of silos, or out-of-control growth (such as the proliferation of domain names and rouge websites) they have wrestled with in the past. Instead the strategy emphasizes coordination; "to keep up with the pace of change in technology, we need to securely architect our systems for interoperability and openness from conception. We need to have common standards and more rapidly share the lessons learned by early adopters."

## Information-Centric:

The strategy puts forth a conceptual architectural model for separating information creation (the information layer) from information presentation (the presentation layer). The idea is to create content once for reuse and presentation in a multitude of ways. The focus shifts to data availability and veracity and interoperability. This involves creating and tagging discrete pieces of data and opening up systems with web APIs so that the data can be securely shared, through a shared platform, mashed-up, and presented as content to end-users. This approach also supports open standards and device-agnostic security and privacy controls at the data level, so that agencies can concentrate on securing the data and not the device.

## Shared Platform:

With a shared platform agencies can reduce costs through shared or streamlined development, using consistent standards in the creation and delivery information while ensuring security and privacy of data. The approach should be "customer-centric" taking an outside-in viewpoint of ease of use as a customer accessing federal sites and data. A shared platform will enable agencies to speed adoption of new technologies, while also lowering costs and reducing duplication. GSA will establish a Digital Services Innovation Center to work with agencies on shared solutions and training to support infrastructure and content needs that will focus on three initial strategy implementation actions:

- **Identify shared and open content management system (CMS) solutions** and support implementation, through things like code sharing and modular development.
- **Help agencies develop web APIs** by providing expert resources to enable developers, entrepreneurs, and other end users take advantage of government data and content.
- **Launch a shared mobile application development program**, with the Federal CIO Council, that will help agencies develop secure, device-agnostic mobile applications.

Also to support a shared platform, a Digital Services Advisory Group made up from members from the CIO Council will also be formed that will:

- **Help prioritize shared services needs for the Digital Services Innovation Center** and work with them to determine the best shared solutions that leverage existing agency work and commercial options to the extent practical.
- **Foster the sharing of existing policies and best practices** using online platforms and communities of practice to provide more structure to existing ad-hoc collaboration efforts. For example, the Advisory Group will work with the Federal CIO Council to develop government-wide BYOD guidance.
- **Identify and recommend changes to help close gaps in policy and standards.** For instance, revising policies governing identity and credential management for a mobile world or revising telework rules.

This approach is fundamentally different from the approach that most federal agencies have now as they piece together silos of information or applications as best they can and force their customer citizens to navigate the patchwork to deal with them. This should open many opportunities for vendors, initially in the area of consulting and planning but followed rapidly by actual implementations. Watch for agencies to move quickly as Obama also issued a directive for agencies to open data in two systems within one year.

