

## A Review of Digital Strategies for Strengthening Public Service Delivery Systems

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**Abstract:** Digital transformation is now central to strengthening public service delivery, yet evidence on how digital strategies collectively improve public sector performance remains fragmented. This study presents a systematic review of digital strategies for enhancing public service delivery systems, with a primary focus on the United States and supporting international insights. Drawing on peer-reviewed literature published since 2015, the review examines e-government platforms, artificial intelligence, smart government technologies, open data initiatives, and broader digital transformation approaches. A thematic narrative synthesis is used to assess implementation practices, outcomes, and contextual conditions shaping effectiveness across levels of government. The findings show that digital strategies can significantly improve efficiency, transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement when they are citizen-centered, strategically aligned, and supported by strong data governance and organizational capacity. Digitalization expands service accessibility, streamlines administrative processes, strengthens evidence-based decision-making, and enables participatory governance. However, these gains are uneven and constrained by persistent challenges, including digital exclusion, organizational resistance, cybersecurity and privacy risks, limited resources, and weak interoperability. Successful initiatives integrate technology with change management, workforce development, cross-agency coordination, and adaptive governance. This review synthesizes fragmented evidence into a coherent framework that informs inclusive, secure, and sustainable digital transformation in public service delivery.

**Keywords:** Digital strategies, public service delivery, digitization, public sector, e-government.

### INTRODUCTION

The growth of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the landscape of public service delivery, creating unique opportunities for governments to enhance efficiency, transparency, and citizen engagement. Digital strategies encompass a wide range of technological interventions, including e-government platforms, artificial intelligence applications, smart government initiatives, open data systems, and cloud computing solutions, all aimed at modernizing public administration and improving service delivery mechanisms (Gil-Garcia *et al.*, 2018). Over the past two decades, public sector organizations in the United States have increasingly recognized the imperative of digital transformation, with local, state, and federal governments investing substantially in technological infrastructure to meet evolving citizen expectations and address complex governance challenges (Epstein, 2022). The integration of digital technologies into public service delivery has evolved from basic website development in the early 2000s to more sophisticated platforms that leverage artificial intelligence and advanced analytics to create seamless, citizen-centric experiences (Kankanhalli *et al.*, 2019). This evolution reflects a broader shift from traditional and manual bureaucratic service delivery models towards more responsive systems that prioritize accessibility and efficiency.

The interconnectedness between digital strategies and public service delivery systems has become increasingly evident as governments navigate the complexities of 21st-century governance. Bhatti *et al.* (2025) demonstrate that there is a direct correlation between digital maturity and improved public sector governance outcomes. Furthermore, the integration of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies into public service frameworks has created new pathways for achieving sustainable development goals while addressing persistent challenges in service accessibility (Anshari *et al.*, 2025). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this digital transformation, compelling governments to rapidly deploy digital solutions for service continuity, thereby highlighting both the potential and limitations of existing digital infrastructure (Carter *et al.*, 2024). Contemporary research emphasizes that successful digital strategies extend beyond mere technology adoption, requiring holistic ecosystem approaches that integrate organizational culture, stakeholder engagement, policy frameworks, and strategic information systems design to create sustainable public value (Luna-Reyes *et al.*, 2024).

Despite the widespread adoption of digital technologies in public service delivery, significant gaps persist in understanding how various digital strategies collectively contribute to strengthening public service delivery systems in the United

States. While existing literature extensively examines individual technological interventions such as e-government platforms, open data initiatives, or smart government applications, there is limited comprehensive analysis of how these diverse digital strategies integrate and collectively enhance public service delivery outcomes. This gap is critical given the rapid pace of technological innovation and the increasing complexity of citizen needs, which demand evidence-based frameworks for strategic digital transformation in public sector contexts.

The overall aim of this study is to carefully review digital strategies employed in strengthening public service delivery systems, examining their implementation approaches and effectiveness in enhancing public sector performance. This study aims to examine the diverse digital strategies employed in contemporary public service delivery and identify the critical success factors and implementation challenges associated with digital transformation in public service contexts.

This study holds substantial significance. Academically, it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on digital government by providing a comprehensive synthesis of diverse digital strategies and their collective impact on public service delivery, thereby bridging fragmented research streams and identifying future research directions.

From an organizational perspective, this research offers public sector managers and administrators practical insights into effective digital transformation approaches, implementation frameworks, and best practices that can guide strategic decision-making and resource allocation in their digitalization efforts (Carter *et al.*, 2024).

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a systematic literature review methodology to comprehensively examine digital strategies for strengthening public service delivery systems in the United States. The systematic review approach was selected for its rigor, transparency, and capacity to synthesize diverse scholarly contributions into coherent evidence-based insights (Sharmin *et al.*, 2017). This methodology is particularly appropriate for the current study, given the interdisciplinary nature of digital government research, which spans public administration, information systems, policy studies, and technology management disciplines.

### Data Sources and Search Strategy/Data Collection

The data collection process utilized multiple academic databases to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant literature on digital strategies in public service delivery. Primary databases searched included Google Scholar, Web of Science, Scopus, JSTOR, and the Emerald Insight database.

The search strategy incorporated several keywords and keyword combinations to capture the multidimensional nature of digital strategies in public service delivery. Primary keyword strings included: "digital transformation" AND "public service delivery" AND "e-government"; "artificial intelligence" AND "public sector" AND "government services"; "smart government" AND "public administration"; "digital strategies" AND "public sector governance"; "smart government" AND "public services". Additional searches incorporated variations such as "e-governance," "digital government," "government digitalization," "technology-enabled services," and "digital innovation" to ensure comprehensive literature capture.

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance, recency, and quality of the literature, the criteria below were designed and implemented.

Inclusion criteria required that studies:

1. were published in peer-reviewed academic journals or reputable institutional reports
2. directly addressed digital strategies, e-government initiatives, or technology-enabled public service delivery
3. provided empirical evidence, theoretical frameworks, or systematic analyses relevant to the research objectives
4. focused on or included substantial discussion of United States contexts or provided transferable frameworks applicable to U.S. public sector organizations.

Exclusion criteria eliminated studies that:

1. predated 2015
2. lacked peer review or academic rigor
3. focused exclusively on private sector digital transformation without public sector relevance
4. were opinion pieces, editorials, or non-scholarly commentaries without empirical grounding
5. were not written in English

### Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a thematic narrative synthesis approach, organizing findings according to the study's research objectives and emerging conceptual themes. The analysis process involved extracting key findings and empirical evidence from 17 selected studies, then organizing these elements into coherent thematic clusters that address the research gaps.

This analytical approach facilitated the identification of patterns, convergences, and divergences across studies while enabling the construction of an integrated understanding. Comparative analysis between studies identified common findings, contradictory evidence, and research gaps that require further investigation.

### Ethical Considerations

This systematic literature review adhered to established ethical principles governing secondary research and scholarly synthesis. All sources were appropriately cited following APA guidelines, ensuring proper attribution of intellectual contributions and respecting authors' rights. The review process was conducted with a strong emphasis on objectivity and transparency by employing systematic inclusion criteria and comprehensive search strategies that minimized selection bias. The synthesis process maintained integrity by accurately representing the findings and arguments of authors without misrepresentation or selective reporting that could distort original meanings.

### Limitations of the Study

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment in interpreting this review's findings. First, the restriction to English language publications may have excluded relevant studies published in other languages, potentially limiting insights from non-English-speaking contexts. Also, publication bias may favor studies reporting positive outcomes of digital strategies, potentially underrepresenting implementation failures or negative results. These constraints were mitigated through evaluation of contexts to ensure validity and reliability.

## KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Elements of Good Digital Strategies

Effective digital strategies in public service are defined not by technology adoption but by how well they improve citizen experiences and advance public goals. Citizen-centricity is the core principle, requiring governments to design services around user needs rather than institutional

convenience (Luna-Reyes *et al.*, 2024). This approach relies on rigorous user research, co-design with citizens, and end-to-end journey mapping to identify pain points and simplify interactions across service touchpoints. Continuous feedback through surveys, usage analytics, and complaint systems ensures services evolve in response to real-world use, sustaining relevance and trust.

Equally critical is strategic alignment. Successful digital initiatives begin with clearly defined outcomes such as improved access, transparency, efficiency, or engagement, and treat technology as an enabler rather than a driver of change (Carter *et al.*, 2024). Alignment with organizational missions, performance frameworks, and accountability structures secures leadership commitment and long-term resourcing. Cross-functional governance that integrates IT, policy, operations, and communications ensures balanced decision-making that reflects technical feasibility, program goals, and stakeholder expectations.

Strong digital strategies also adopt an ecosystem perspective, recognizing that transformation depends on the interaction of infrastructure, data, people, processes, and governance. Evidence shows that initiatives such as open data succeed when technical platforms are supported by clear standards, legal frameworks, stakeholder engagement, and sustainability planning (Dawes *et al.*, 2016). Because many public services span agencies and levels of government, coordination and interoperability are essential. Partnerships with private firms, academic institutions, nonprofits, and peer governments further extend capacity and accelerate learning.

Agile implementation enables governments to manage uncertainty and complexity by delivering value early and adapting based on feedback. Iterative development, pilot programs, and modular system design reduce risk while allowing services to improve through real-world testing (Hujran *et al.*, 2023). When adapted to public sector requirements for transparency and accountability, agile methods support innovation without undermining oversight or public trust.

Finally, robust data governance and sustained capacity building anchor digital strategies over time. Clear rules on data ownership, quality, security, privacy, and access ensure information is reliable, ethical, and fit for purpose (Janssen *et al.*, 2023). As advanced technologies such as artificial

intelligence expand analytic and predictive capabilities, governance frameworks must evolve to address bias, automation risks, and rights protection (Anshari *et al.*, 2025). Parallel investments in training, leadership development, knowledge sharing, and change management build the human and cultural foundations of transformation. Digital strategies endure when organizations develop the skills and norms needed to innovate continuously while remaining accountable to public values (Gil-Garcia *et al.*, 2018).

### **Benefits of Digitalization on Public Service Delivery**

Digitalization has reshaped public service delivery by improving how governments operate and how citizens access essential services. Research consistently shows that higher levels of e-government development are associated with stronger government effectiveness, improved regulatory quality, reduced corruption, and greater adherence to the rule of law (Bhatti *et al.*, 2025). By streamlining administrative processes, digital strategies reduce delays, lower operational costs, and expand service accessibility for diverse populations. From the citizen perspective, digital service delivery generates clear public value through greater convenience, faster transactions, and easier access to information, enabling 24/7 engagement with government without the burden of physical office visits (Luna-Reyes *et al.*, 2024).

Digitalization has also strengthened transparency and trust in public institutions. Open government data initiatives broaden access to public information, allowing citizens to track spending and scrutinize decision-making (Janssen *et al.*, 2023). Real-time digital communication improves the speed and reach of government messaging, particularly during policy changes or emergencies. Evidence shows that open data frameworks support democratic participation and reinforce institutional trust by making government actions more visible and verifiable (Ruijter *et al.*, 2017). Increased transparency, supported by digital audit trails, further reduces opportunities for corruption and strengthens administrative integrity.

Advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and smart systems have expanded governments' capacity to deliver personalized and proactive services. AI-driven analytics enable agencies to anticipate demand, target resources more effectively, and tailor services to individual needs (Anshari *et al.*, 2025). Predictive tools

support early interventions in areas such as social services, while automated chatbots improve responsiveness and reduce service backlogs. Smart government initiatives using Internet of Things technologies have similarly improved urban management through real-time traffic control, environmental monitoring, and energy optimization (Kankanhalli *et al.*, 2019).

Digital platforms have also transformed citizen engagement by enabling direct, two-way interaction between governments and the public. Online consultations, participatory budgeting tools, and crowdsourcing platforms invite citizens to shape policies and services, expanding participation beyond traditional channels (Hujran *et al.*, 2023). These tools are especially effective in reaching younger and marginalized groups, while social media integration allows governments to monitor public sentiment and respond quickly to emerging concerns.

Finally, digitalization delivers measurable efficiency gains and cost savings. Long-term evidence from U.S. local governments shows that automation and digital records reduce paperwork, accelerate service delivery, and lower administrative costs (Epstein, 2022). Cloud computing further enhances flexibility by scaling services on demand and reducing infrastructure expenditures (Carter *et al.*, 2024). Digital payment systems improve revenue collection and strengthen financial management, allowing governments to reinvest savings into service quality and expanded coverage.

### **Challenges and Barriers**

Despite its conspicuous benefits, digital transformation in public service delivery faces persistent challenges that limit its effectiveness and equity. The digital divide remains the most fundamental barrier, as gaps in internet access and digital skills restrict who can benefit from online services (Grimmelikhuijsen & Feeney, 2017). Rural communities, older adults, low-income households, and people with disabilities are disproportionately affected, raising the risk of a two-tier system in which digitally capable users gain advantages while vulnerable populations face reduced access. Addressing this imbalance requires intentional digital inclusion strategies and the continued availability of non-digital service channels (Anshari *et al.*, 2025).

Organizational resistance within government agencies further constrains transformation efforts.

Long-standing bureaucratic routines, hierarchical structures, and risk-averse cultures often conflict with the flexibility required for digital change. Employees may resist new systems due to skill gaps, job security concerns, or skepticism about their value, while rigid civil service rules and political constraints limit rapid workflow redesign (Gil-Garcia *et al.*, 2018). Siloed agency cultures also obstruct data sharing and collaboration, undermining integrated service delivery and reinforcing fragmentation.

Cybersecurity and privacy risks pose serious threats to public trust in digital government. Government systems face increasingly sophisticated cyberattacks, and high-profile breaches have intensified concerns about the protection of personal data (Hossain *et al.*, 2025). At the same time, governments must balance transparency goals with privacy obligations, particularly in open data initiatives that expose sensitive information if poorly governed (Dawes *et al.*, 2016). Meeting security standards and maintaining resilient infrastructure demand sustained investment that many agencies struggle to afford.

Financial and technical constraints compound these challenges, especially for smaller and resource-limited jurisdictions. Digital transformation requires significant upfront and ongoing investments in infrastructure, cybersecurity, and workforce development, while rapid technological change drives continual upgrade costs (Epstein, 2022). Lengthy procurement processes often delay implementation, leaving systems outdated upon deployment. Interoperability problems further limit impact, as legacy systems and incompatible data standards prevent seamless service integration (Carter *et al.*, 2024). Together, these barriers highlight that successful digital transformation depends as much on governance and coordination as on technology itself.

### **Solutions to Challenges**

Closing the digital divide requires integrated strategies that pair infrastructure expansion with skills development and inclusive design. Governments must extend broadband to underserved areas through public-private partnerships, targeted subsidies, and sustained investment in telecommunications infrastructure (Grimmelikhuijsen & Feeney, 2017). Digital inclusion efforts should provide low-cost training, public access points in libraries and community

centers, and user interfaces designed for varied skill levels. Applying universal design principles ensures accessibility for people with disabilities through features such as screen reader compatibility and flexible input options. Equally important, hybrid service models must preserve in-person and non-digital channels so digitalization expands access rather than limits it.

Reducing organizational resistance depends on deliberate change management that addresses both culture and capability. Strong leadership commitment signals priority, secures resources, and creates accountability for adoption across agencies (Carter *et al.*, 2024). Training programs should build practical digital skills while reinforcing that technology supports, rather than replaces, professional judgment. Involving employees in co-design increases ownership, while pilot projects demonstrate value and reduce risk. Performance systems that reward digital proficiency and innovation reinforce change, supported by targeted recruitment and the establishment of chief digital officer roles to provide strategic and technical leadership (Gil-Garcia *et al.*, 2018).

Protecting cybersecurity and privacy demands layered defenses supported by clear governance. Robust security architectures such as encryption, multi-factor authentication, continuous monitoring, and regular testing reduce exposure to evolving threats (Hossain *et al.*, 2025). Zero-trust models limit breach impact by verifying every access request. Privacy-by-design approaches embed data protection into system development through data anonymization and transparent governance rules that strengthen public trust. Legal frameworks clarifying data responsibilities and citizen rights provide accountability and reinforce confidence in digital services (Janssen *et al.*, 2023).

Financial and technical barriers require coordinated solutions that maximize value and sustainability. Grants and intergovernmental funding can support smaller jurisdictions, while cloud services and shared platforms lower costs and scale efficiently (Epstein, 2022). Phased implementation and strong business cases help demonstrate returns and sustain investment. Achieving interoperability depends on enforceable standards, open architectures, and shared governance structures that enable data exchange and prevent vendor lock-in (Dawes *et al.*, 2016). Together, these measures shift digital

transformation from isolated projects to resilient, system-wide public infrastructure.

### Implications for Local and Municipal Governments

Local and municipal governments face unique challenges and opportunities in implementing digital strategies, requiring approaches tailored to their specific contexts and capacities. Resource constraints are particularly acute for smaller municipalities, which often lack the financial capacity and technical expertise of scale of larger jurisdictions (Epstein, 2022). These governments must prioritize investments in high-impact services directly affecting citizens' daily lives, such as permit applications, utility billing, waste management, and public safety communications. Cloud-based solutions offer cost-effective alternatives to on-premise infrastructure, providing scalable capabilities while raising governance considerations around data sovereignty and long-term costs.

Collaborative arrangements, including shared services and regional partnerships, help municipalities pool resources and expertise. County agencies, regional planning bodies, and state-sponsored programs can facilitate joint procurement, system development, and technical support that individual municipalities could not sustain alone (Grimmelikhuijsen & Feeney, 2017). Successful collaboration requires clear agreements on cost-sharing, governance, and exit strategies, as well as trust-building to overcome historical interjurisdictional competition. Peer networks and digital government associations further enhance learning, reduce duplication, and promote interoperability, with state governments providing technical standards, guidance, and grant support.

Proximity to citizens positions local governments to develop user-centered services informed by direct community feedback (Luna-Reyes *et al.*, 2024). Participatory co-design, pilot programs, and ongoing engagement enable services to reflect local needs and preferences. Yet, this closeness also generates expectations for personalization and responsiveness, requiring a balance between efficiency through standardization and tailored solutions for diverse populations, including elderly residents, non-English speakers, low-income households, and individuals with varying digital literacy.

Political dynamics shape digital transformation trajectories. Elected officials with short terms may

prioritize visible, quick-win projects over long-term infrastructure investments, while council members may advocate for initiatives benefiting specific districts (Hujran *et al.*, 2023). City managers and appointed administrators provide continuity and can stabilize digital strategies amid political transitions, though their authority varies by governance structure. Building coalitions, managing stakeholder expectations, and maintaining transparent communication are essential to sustain initiatives, with champions among elected officials often critical for shielding projects from political disruption.

Finally, service integration at the local level enables holistic, citizen-focused experiences. Many interactions such as starting a business span multiple departments. Integrated digital portals and shared platforms simplify these processes, reducing redundant applications and enhancing convenience (Carter *et al.*, 2024). Achieving integration requires overcoming departmental silos, aligning business processes, and negotiating data-sharing arrangements while respecting legitimate autonomy. Enterprise architecture, standardized data elements, federated authentication, and GIS-based platforms provide the technical and organizational foundations for seamless, coordinated local services that enhance efficiency, transparency, and citizen satisfaction.

### Summary of Findings

This systematic review shows that digital strategies can substantially strengthen public service delivery when they are implemented with a clear purpose and strong institutional support. Evidence confirms that e-government platforms, artificial intelligence, smart technologies, and open data can improve government effectiveness, transparency, citizen engagement, and efficiency by enabling continuous access, more responsive services, and new forms of democratic participation. Yet these gains are uneven, constrained by digital divides, organizational resistance, cybersecurity risks, limited resources, and weak interoperability. Successful initiatives share consistent features such as citizen-centered design, strategic alignment, agile implementation, sound data governance, and sustained capacity building that distinguish genuine transformation from surface-level digitization.

Local and municipal governments sit at the center of this transformation, delivering services that shape everyday citizen experiences while facing acute resource and capacity constraints. The

evidence underscores that lasting digital progress requires committed leadership, adequate investment, skilled personnel, cultural change, and governance structures that balance innovation with accountability and equity. Addressing persistent barriers demands integrated approaches that combine infrastructure expansion, digital literacy, change management, cybersecurity, and cross-sector collaboration. As emerging technologies continue to reshape public service possibilities, governments must remain adaptive while anchoring digital innovation in democratic values, privacy protection, equitable access, and public value creation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings, the review has birthed two key policy recommendations:

Governments should advance digital inclusion by combining expanded digital access with sustained support for those least able to navigate online systems. Effective inclusion extends beyond connectivity to digital literacy, accessible and multilingual design, and community-based support delivered through libraries, community leaders, and municipal centers. At the same time, agencies must preserve in-person, telephone, and paper services to prevent exclusion of older adults, people with disabilities, non-English speakers, and unhoused populations. Digital transformation should widen access rather than narrow it, guided by regular equity assessments and direct input from diverse communities to ensure services reflect real user needs and capabilities.

Local, municipal, state, and federal governments must adopt integrated governance frameworks that align technology, data, and decision-making across agencies. Innovative digital leadership, shared data standards, and interoperable systems are essential to reducing fragmentation and improving user experience. Agile governance models allow systems to evolve while maintaining oversight. Lasting digital transformation depends not only on technology, but on institutional coordination, cultural change, and political commitment that embed digital strategy into core government operations while upholding equity, accountability, and citizen-centered values.

## CONCLUSION

Digital transformation in public service is no longer optional but central to the future of American governance, demanding execution that balances technological innovation with democratic values and inclusive access. This review shows

that meaningful progress requires moving beyond fragmented, technology-driven efforts toward citizen-centered strategies that address inequities, strengthen cross-agency coordination, and build organizational capacity for continuous innovation. Success will depend on leadership willing to invest not only in digital tools but in the human skills and institutional frameworks that ensure technology serves public values. Ultimately, digital government should be judged by its ability to deliver equitable, high-quality services that strengthen communities and sustain public trust across all segments of society.

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