Government of Alberta
Digital Service Standards

Revised Edition: June 11, 2024

Ministry: Technology and Innovation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE DIGITAL SERVICE STANDARDS

The Digital Service Standards set clear expectations on how the Government of Alberta will deliver better, faster, smarter services. Through the standards and new supports and guidance, we're shifting how teams develop and produce user-centred products for citizens and businesses in a safe and secure manner.

The Standards are part of a broader effort to outline and enable Alberta's Digital Strategy.

On July 12, 2023, the Ministry of Technology & Innovation was asked through its mandate letter to…

*…develop and implement **a government-wide digital strategy** that respects and places the security and privacy needs of Albertans at its core while accelerating the adoption of technology and innovation **to deliver better, faster, and smarter services**, provides them with **more control** over their personal information and data, **saves them money**, makes government **more efficient**, and makes Alberta the **most modern and innovative jurisdiction** in Canada.*

The forthcoming Digital Strategy will include a set of **14 Digital Service Principles** outlining the Government of Alberta's vision for effective digital service development.

The services covered by the Digital Service Standards are public facing services, although delivery teams are encouraged to adhere to the criteria outlined here and in supporting documentation for all types of digital design and delivery.

This document presents a set of **5 Digital Service Standards** that will support the operationalization of the Digital Strategy's Principles. Each Service Standard is closely aligned to two or more Principles, as shown below:

DIGITAL SERVICE STANDARDS

	Standard 1	Standard 2	Standard 3	Standard 4	Standard 5
	Design with users	**Build multidisciplinary & agile teams**	**Focus on outcomes**	**Use technology responsibly & transparently**	**Design for safety & trust**
ASSOCIATED PRINCIPLES	*Understand users & their needs before the solution*	*Establish and empower the right team*	*Operate a reliable service*	*Choose the right tools and technologies*	*Create a secure, ethical service that protects user privacy*
	Make the service accessible & inclusive	*Iterate & improve frequently*	*Design & test the service from end-to-end*	*Work in the open*	*Make the service simple to use*
		Structure budgets & contracts to support agile delivery	*Measure performance*	*Use & contribute to open standards, common components, & patterns*	
				Make data useable	

The Service Standards frame expectations and actionable behaviours, that should help our teams meet the aspirations represented by the Principles and the broader GoA Digital Strategy. The Standards are not mutually exclusive, but overlap and work in tandem to help teams deliver excellent experiences for Albertans.

NOTE – *The following document outlines the ambitions and ideal behaviours represented by the Digital Service Standards. Criteria for meeting the standards, roles and responsibilities. Governance, processes, practice guidance and other supporting materials will be provided in a separate set of documentation.*

STANDARD STRUCTURE

STANDARD NO. X | [Call-to-action representing the Digital Service Standard]

RELEVANT PRINCIPLES | *The standard's aspirations*
[A set of Digital Principles associated with each Digital Service Standard; together, they describe the ideal service design state and goals the Digital Service Standard aims to meet.]

OVERVIEW | *What the standard represents*
[2 – 5 sentences summarizing the Digital Service Standard's primary subject matter and purpose in the context of Digital Services.]

GOALS | *Why the standard matters*
[3 – 7 bullet points outlining the different kinds of value obtained from adhering to the Digital Service Standard.]

IN ACTION | *How to follow the standard in practice*
[3 – 5 bullet points summarizing the methodologies, guidance and supports required to implement the Digital Service Standard.]

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA | *How to measure alignment to Service Standard*
[3-7 Criteria that demonstrate how a service performs against expectations of the standard]

*Note that more in depth assessment criteria and practice guidance on how to meet criteria can be found in separate resources and documentation.

STANDARD NO. 1 | Design with users

RELEVANT PRINCIPLES | *The standard's aspirations*

No. 1 – *Understand users and their needs before the solution. A deep and ongoing understanding of the user's experience will guide the design and evolution of the service.*

No. 8 – *Make the service accessible and inclusive. Design the service for inclusion so that all who need it can use it.*

OVERVIEW | *What the standard represents*

The Government of Alberta's approach to digital service design starts with understanding the needs, contexts, and pain points affecting users - including the public, business entities and government staff. Working with potential users from different demographic backgrounds (e.g. ethnicities, genders, socio-economic contexts, and Indigenous identities) and organizations (businesses, non-profits, municipalities) in the design of your service is critical to proactively identify and address user needs. Digital service teams can create accessible services for all Albertans while decreasing the risk of wasted time or re-work due to addressing the wrong problems or creating unnecessary complexity for users.

GOALS | *Why the standard matters*

Designing services with and for users should aim to do the following:

- **…meet the needs of users** as best as possible through employing the methods, interactions, design and attention in developing digital services as outlined in relevant Government of Alberta policies, guidance and supports.
- **…improve user satisfaction and successful outcomes** by proactively removing barriers for service use and producing services that address the real needs of end-users.
- **...increase adoption** by facilitating access to services to a broader range of end-users, through new channels and technologies.
- **…enable equitable service access** without the risk of inherent biases or assumptions through using holistic insights of diverse end-users and how they may be impacted by service experiences.
- **…inform the prioritization** of service features through analyzing user feedback.
- **…ensure compliance** with Canadian and global standards for accessible and inclusive digital experiences.

IN ACTION | *How to follow the standard in practice*

Digital service teams should:

- Identify users of the service and frame proposed services or updates around a user-centered problem or need.
- Apply qualitative and quantitative research techniques when working with potential users to understand their needs, experiences, and expectations - taking into consideration backgrounds, abilities, and preferences.
- As early as possible, build and test prototypes with users to identify gaps, barriers, and opportunities that can improve user experience and identify issues and improvements in the service interaction.
- Adopt a technology-agnostic approach, aiming first to understand user needs, then using ongoing insights from discovery, research and testing to inform technical decisions or releases.
- Regularly document and share research learnings with the wider network of service stakeholders to support better communications and governance.

- Conduct and leverage ongoing research insights throughout the service's lifecycle to ensure any decisions surrounding its design, functionalities, features and support channels, are applied throughout the implementation. Potential data and privacy implications must be considered depending on the parameters of the research.
- Routinely gather data to ensure the delivery of user value.
- Verify the service and its technologies meet relevant accessibility and plain language requirements and best practices, including the Government of Alberta *Design System* and *Digital Experience Standard*; the World Wide Web Consortium's *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0* level AA success criteria; and the *Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines (ATAG)* Part A & B.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA | *Examples of how to measure alignment to the Service Standards*

- The users, a problem and benefits/impacts have been clearly identified.
- User research and experience testing with a diverse range of end-users, and behaviours, motivations and pain points are captured, analyzed, and well understood.
- Users have a mechanism to give feedback, and feedback is documented for further investigation and implementation as needed and as appropriate in the future.
- Consistently assess, through data analysis and usability testing, whether the service continues to yield customer value.
- The team can demonstrate that website content (where appropriate) and accessibility levels are compliant with the relevant standards, such as the Worldwide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.

STANDARD NO. 2 | Build multidisciplinary & agile teams

RELEVANT PRINCIPLES | *The standard's aspirations*

No. 2 – *Establish and empower the right team. Put in place a multidisciplinary team that can create, operate, and continuously improve a service.*

No. 3 – *Iterate and improve frequently. Start small and scale the service rapidly using agile ways of working. Engage users and continuously improve services based on their feedback.*

No. 5 – *Structure budgets and contracts to support agile delivery. Apply modular contracting principles to product, service, and solution contracting and procurement.*

OVERVIEW | *What the standard represents*

Multidisciplinary teams can reduce silos and encourage new collaborations and diversity by embedding varied perspectives directly into the team's makeup. Digital service teams should include or have access to a variety of areas of expertise (e.g., service designers, user researchers, policy experts, and content designers) alongside technical roles and modern practitioners.

Multidisciplinary, agile teams are better equipped to design services that can navigate their end-user's needs. Digital service teams should have a product owner to facilitate the team's ability to be empowered to capture and act on insights through iterative ways of working - ensuring the team has the capability and the authority to convert insights into action. Through adopting flexibility and iteration in their delivery, digital service teams can quickly adapt to new factors – e.g., user behaviours, technologies, policies, etc. – and mitigate overall project risk.

GOALS | *Why the standard matters*

Embedding diversity and agility in service delivery teams should:

- **...set clear accountabilities** to steer service design from conception to delivery.
- **…empower the teams to have the capability and the authority** to convert insights into action.
- **...help create appropriate, and improve, initiative governance** by working in the open between ministries, digital service teams, and vendors.

IN ACTION | *How to follow the standard in practice*

Digital service teams should:

- Access, acquire and build diverse skillsets to ensure teams have the authority, capabilities, and resources – e.g., policy, research, design, QA, etc. – to support their initiative's evolving priorities.
- Ensure the initiative's budget and workplan support agile service delivery, from development through to launch, and includes ongoing service operations, maintenance, and support until eventual decommission.
- Have clear authorities, roles and accountabilities, including an empowered product owner to lead the team in agile delivery, and ensure executive sponsorship to support the vision.
- Be aware of existing structures or dependencies such as legislation or agreements that exist in the department to recognize constraints and work with the product team leadership to manage these.
- Employ agile practices (such as recurring sprints, daily stand-up meetings, demos to stakeholders, etc.) and cross-departmental/ministerial resourcing to develop.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA | *Examples of how to measure alignment to Service Standard*

- There are a Product Owner and Executive Product Owner, and these roles are engaged regularly as per the initiative governance and/or agile methodology requirements.
- Service design goals or decisions are communicated between the team and Executive Leadership in a clear and appropriate manner, on the agreed upon frequency and timing outlined through the initiative governance.

- Team resources are structured and assigned to ensure needed skill sets are available (both in house teams and/or outsourced as appropriate), and these roles and their purpose are clearly understood by partners, product owners and the team and are reflective of a multi-disciplinary approach.

STANDARD NO. 3 | Focus on outcomes

RELEVANT PRINCIPLES | *The standard's aspirations*

No. 4 – *Operate a reliable service. Ensure services operate, improve, and adapt to changing user needs with minimum disruption.*

No. 9 – *Design and test the service from end-to-end. Design a seamless, resilient experience that meets user needs. Test end-to-end, early and often, with users to validate this.*

No. 13 – *Measure performance. Measure how well all parts of the service work for users and share performance data.*

OVERVIEW | *What the standard represents*

Digital service teams should continuously monitor how effectively their services meet Albertans' expectations by collecting and analyzing data about their service. Through appropriately analyzing and using performance data and testing the service from end-to-end, Albertans will be provided with intuitive and reliable services that meet user expectations.

GOALS | *Why the standard matters*

Focusing on service performance should:

- **…increase end-user confidence** by providing consistent service performance and minimal disruptions, regardless of end-user context, technologies, or conditions.
- **…increase service resiliency and value** through identifying and addressing required changes to user needs, technology changes, and organizational priorities.
- **…drive self-serve interactions and reduce stress on resource-heavy channels** (e.g., mailing, telephone, in-person desks) by increasing the reliability and consistency of online options for accessing services.

IN ACTION | *How to follow the standard in practice*

Digital service teams should:

- Track their service's performance using metrics from available sources and channels to ensure an inclusive definition of success. Where possible, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) should be developed to measure the success across five thematic areas: *Cost, Adoption, Processing time, Productivity, and User Satisfaction*.
- Use research insights to define KPIs that track observable outputs and outcomes rather than proxy performance measures (e.g., successful benefits delivery versus landing page hits).
- Incorporate various conditions – e.g., different devices, channels, assistive technologies, and connectivity – within the service's testing activities to ensure its usability across contexts.
- Assess service performance against similar types of service categories within the Government of Alberta and across jurisdictions to find ways to benchmark with similar services.
- Continuously scan the service's environment to identify and create a plan to address potential disruptors – usage spikes, system failures, new technologies, etc.
- Monitor the service use (and related supports) to optimize task completion rates across end-users.
- When a disruption is necessary, inform users in advance with appropriate notification methods.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA | *Examples of how to measure alignment to Service Standard*

- Initial/baseline performance measures have been captured for this service and documented appropriately before the start of service design improvements.

- Performance measures are monitored and evaluated throughout the development of a service and is there a plan in place to capture them once a service is live.
- Actions and decisions based on the results of performance measures, analytics and feedback are captured and documented for further investigation and implementation where appropriate.
- Service enhancements are prioritized, scoped, planned for delivery, and aligned to the team's expectations and product owners and executive sponsors are engaged in this process as appropriate.
- The solution is tested from end-to-end with users and other automated tools for testing are leveraged throughout development and into operations.
- Financial controls have been implemented and monitored throughout the service delivery cycle and after a service is live.

STANDARD NO. 4 | Use technology responsibly & transparently

RELEVANT PRINCIPLES | *The standard's aspirations*

No. 10 – *Choose the right tools and technologies. Choose technologies that are scalable, interoperable, secure, and accessible.*

No. 11 – *Work in the open. Explore appropriate ways to make new source code and non-sensitive data open and reusable. Explore appropriate ways to share research, learning, and progress openly throughout the service's design, build, and operation.*

No. 12 – *Use and contribute to open standards, common components, and patterns. Build on open standards, common components, and patterns from inside and outside of the Government of Alberta.*

No. 14 – *Make data useable. Inform and support the forthcoming Data Strategy to ensure alignment with objectives and initiatives related to initiative delivery.*

OVERVIEW | *What the standard represents*

Government services should set the bar for trustworthy usable and consistent digital experiences. Digital service teams should ensure the technologies they are using adopt common components that are interoperable with other systems, and core system data can be integrated with other data services within the Government of Alberta. Costs are proportionate to the benefits being delivered by digital products and using common platforms and re-usable components or processes can help to manage costs. Through working openly throughout the service's design, build, and operations, teams should explore appropriate ways to make new source code and non-sensitive data open and reusable and build on open standards and patterns from inside and outside of the Government of Alberta.

GOALS | *Why the standard matters*

Using technologies responsibly and transparently should:

- **…develop trust and collaboration** between the government, practitioner communities, industry partners, and the public by following transparent delivery practices that enable insight sharing and resource reuse.
- **…increase service usability and integration when applicable** by selecting tools, formats and technologies that are standardized, scalable and interoperable.
- **…reduce the risk of malicious attacks** by meeting established security and risk requirements and enable internal teams to better respond when they happen.
- **…decrease costs** by re-using code and common components.
- **…promote a culture of service delivery efficiency** by facilitating open access to existing and new data where appropriate, while ensuring the privacy and security of user data.

IN ACTION | *How to follow the standard in practice*

Digital service teams should:

- Follow existing Government of Alberta technology frameworks (e.g., *Data and Information Management Framework*, the *Cloud Strategy*), approaches (e.g., the *Digital Experience Standard, Design System*), and policies (e.g., IMT Policy Instruments, the forthcoming *Data Strategy*) to facilitate integration and ensure the organization's systems operate cohesively.
- Use Alberta.ca and the Alberta.ca Account as the front-end for the digital service.
- Explore the use of existing components from available common component libraries before embarking on new development projects.
- Meet the criteria of the Government of Alberta Tech Code of Practice (not yet published).
- Use and contribute to industry open standards (e.g., Open Data Standards, OpenAPI Specification) when possible, to provide transparency and support the wider digital public service community.
- As often as possible, share learning, outputs, or solutions with internal and external audiences to contribute to trust, community building and service advancement in/outside the Government of Alberta.
- Promote a responsible data sharing and reuse culture, emphasizing interoperable data formats and platforms and a consistent understanding of data stewardship.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA | *Examples of how to measure alignment to Service Standard*

- The team has assessed the use of common platforms, components for implementation of the service and where a custom based solution is being built, the reasons are well documented.
- Where artifacts built for this service contribute to a common platform, these are updated and documented into the appropriate repositories for re-use in the future.
- Technology or service delivery risks are identified, communicated, managed, and mitigated throughout development and operation of a service, including those related to the collection and safeguarding of user data.

STANDARD NO. 5 | Design for safety & trust

RELEVANT PRINCIPLES | *The standard's aspirations*

No. 6 – *Create a secure, ethical service that protects user privacy. Protect users by applying appropriate privacy, legal, ethical and security measures.*

No. 7 – Make *the service simple to use. Ensure digital services are easy to use for everyone.*

OVERVIEW | *What the standard represents*

Using digital services should be a positive, intuitive, and productive experience without any compromise to security or privacy. Digital service teams must strive to minimize legal, privacy, and security vulnerabilities and protect the end-user's data. Services should provide the necessary safeguards to ensure end-users meet their expected needs without fearing discrimination, bias, or data misuse.

GOALS | *Why the standard matters*

Secure, simple services should:

- **… bolster end-user trust** by clearly defining service data use and ownership in accordance with Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy requirements.
- **… increase service adoption and satisfaction** due to increased trust, ease of access, improved comprehension, and greater task resolution.
- **… improve service efficiency and inclusion** given decreased task complexity and barriers for interaction.
- **… ensure legal, ethical, privacy, and security considerations** are incorporated from the start and not as an afterthought.
- **… decrease operational costs and error rates** by enabling successful, equitable self-serve interactions, regardless of the end-user's contexts and digital expertise.

IN ACTION | *How to follow the standard in practice*

Digital service teams should:

- Identify and apply the appropriate combination of privacy, legal, ethical, and security measures relevant to their digital service (e.g., applicable IMT Policy Instruments including the Information Security Management Directives(ISMD), the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the *Alberta's Cybersecurity Strategy*), working with the appropriate areas in government with the subject matter expertise to advise and review services in development.
- Apply secure development practices across the full lifecycle of services to mitigate the risk of malicious activity or user information abuse.
- Mitigate unintended bias and discrimination across design choices to deliver fair service outcomes across end-user groups, regardless of personal traits (i.e., ethnicity, culture, language, religious belief, etc.).
- Consider the ethical and accessibility implications of their service, particularly how it may impact members of Indigenous, underserved, and vulnerable communities.
- Design services based on common end-user expectations around terminology, requirements, tasks, outcomes, and safeguards to streamline usability and accessibility.
- Minimize the collection and retention of sensitive user data.
- Apply robust security measures to protect user data.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA | *Examples of how to measure alignment to Service Standard*

- Has the team identified potential service disruptors or opportunities (e.g., privacy and security measures)?
- The team has worked with cybersecurity and privacy experts to identify risks and ensure compliance with safety and privacy protocols.
- The team built in privacy, financial and security enhancing features or controls, and has ensured the appropriate documentation has been completed.
- Error and vulnerability monitoring is in place and being managed for the service ongoing.
- The team has designed and tested user support materials (e.g., FAQs, how-tos, glossaries, employee manuals, etc.)
- The team has tested the service's outputs to mitigate unintended bias, discrimination, or harm towards Indigenous and underserved end-user groups.

GLOSSARY (example only, currently working towards a comprehensive TI wide glossary)

End user/User: End Users are any person or entity seeking or accessing a Government of Alberta service/program. This include but is not limited to: Albertans, Corporations, Government of Alberta Employees, other governments, etc.