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Digital Government Review of Sweden

Towards a Data-driven Public Sector

Summary in English



Read the full book on: [10.1787/4daf932b-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/4daf932b-en)

Sweden has achieved a considerable level of digital maturity of its public sector, thanks to previous digitalisation efforts and a culture of transparency and consensus. However, the government needs to acknowledge that what worked before might not necessarily do so in the current context, and the government's efforts to govern, manage, share, open up and use data should act as a means to support broader outcomes and be driven by a whole-of- government approach.

The governance framework needs to support the overall digital transformation and avoid the silo-based and uncoordinated path followed over the past decade. Sweden needs strong institutional leadership of its digital government agenda, backed by the government's political support, as well as mechanisms to foster collaboration among public sector ministries, agencies and all relevant bodies. Enabling the availability of data as a platform to boost collaboration and public sector and civic innovation requires clear leadership and data stewardship across the public sector.

Political willingness and statements alone do not lead to results. The foundations for a digital and data-driven government need to be strengthened to support results-oriented implementation. Streamlining data management, processes and infrastructure, as well as defining data governance models will play a determining role in advancing Sweden's capacity to leverage the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and open government data to develop a data-driven public sector.

If the Swedish government intends to foster data as a platform for enhanced public service delivery, citizen engagement and collaboration among communities of practice, it needs to prioritise cultural changes. Such a cultural shift implies, for instance, the creation of safe spaces to promote digital experimentation and innovation within the public sector, and the government's openness to the vibrant digital innovation ecosystem in the country, its talent and knowledge.

Key policy recommendations

Governance

- Define clear and strategic institutional leadership for the digital government agenda, backed by the government's political support. This should fit with existing vertical and horizontal structures for policy implementation to avoid conflicting responsibilities and weak accountability.
- Use the letters of instruction or direct assignments given by the government to public sector organisations to define clear policy guidelines and enable the coherent implementation of the digital government agenda. The use of conditioned funding models and financial levers by the Agency for Digital Government (DIGG) can also be explored.
- Increase the enforcement power of the DIGG and the Expert Group on IT Investments (Ministry of Infrastructure). This would include expanding the regulatory powers of the DIGG beyond electronic invoice systems, decreasing the budget threshold for project revisions, and attributing powers to pause or cancel ongoing IT projects when benefits are not realised.
- Conceive and promote the DIGG as a driver of change. The agency should avoid being trapped in bureaucratic approaches and provide the space for digital innovators to lead its way of working.

Incentives for attracting talent should be supported by a conducive cultural context and agile talent-procurement models.

- Involve all relevant actors within and outside the public sector to assess the results of the 2015-2018 Digital First agenda, and use these insights as a source of knowledge to inform the next digital government agenda. The open and inclusive development of the digital government agenda would be useful to set government-wide priorities, build recognition and ownership across the public sector, and be clear in terms of expectations and roles.

Co-ordination and collaboration

- Draw upon the value of existing informal inter-institutional bodies to enable co-ordination and collaboration, and use them as a driving force to advance the ambitions of the Swedish government for the digitalisation of its public sector.
- Use the DIGG as a mechanism to enable government as a platform for collaboration, digital experimentation and public sector innovation. Crowdsourcing public sector intelligence and promoting experimentation can help in advancing the goals of the digital government agenda to the benefit of citizens and communities of practitioners inside and outside the public sector.
- Fully leverage the value of Sweden's Innovation Agency, Vinnova, as an ally in the promotion of public sector innovation. Vinnova can help to build bridges between the public sector and external practitioners and to seed-fund innovation projects in the public sector.

Data-driven public sector

Strengthening data governance in the public sector would require to:

- Develop a data policy for the public sector. A whole-of-government data policy would help connect all data efforts and elements of the data value chain under one single policy instrument. The development of a data policy should be connected with, and support, the eventual development of an AI strategy for the public sector. A clear and solid data policy can help identify common challenges across public sector organisations in order to define government-wide policy priorities, and enable greater cross-government data integration, interoperability, maturity and stewardship.
- Consider reinforcing the mandate of the DIGG to emphasise its leading and co-ordination role for the public sector's data policy. The Swedish government can consider the creation of a position – e.g. chief data officer – in charge of moving forward the broader data policy for the public sector.
- Develop an institutional leadership model that supports the implementation of the data policy and AI goals across the public sector. Such an initiative, for instance through the establishment of a network of data stewards, should include both technical and strategic efforts to promote data policy and AI goals.
- Consider the creation of a steering committee or task force to support data stewards in advancing their efforts to increase AI uptake in the public sector.
- Define the needed digital and data skills and develop related job profiles and career paths to guide a needs assessment, identify gaps, decide on the skills and talent to attract, and retrain personnel.
- Create a repository and pool of pre-approved external talent to build a more dynamic and agile procurement process.

Open government data

- Use ring-fenced funds for open data as an incentive to support relevant initiatives and as an instrument to deliver quick wins, while building capacities across the broad public sector to ensure sustainability of efforts.
- Develop an open data strategy setting clear goals, identifying actions and key actors, and defining a timeline for implementation. The open data strategy should not be conceived as a stand-alone document, but should be linked to broader data and AI efforts in the public sector, and acknowledged as an element of a potential umbrella data policy for the public sector.
- Develop a national data infrastructure (inclusive of open data) to move forward data-driven innovation in the country and better collaborate with specific user communities (e.g. the financial and health technology ecosystems).
- Enable the central open government data portal opnadata.se as a platform for multi-stakeholder collaboration and data crowdsourcing.

- Sustain the efforts aiming to establish HackforSweden as a platform for engagement and collaboration with the digital ecosystem in Sweden.

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