

Towards 21st Century Government

Citizen-Centric, Seamless Government

Abstract

This document identifies the rationale for and activities to be undertaken in building 21st century governments and specifies a methodology for establishing them in the Caribbean



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1. Background

In March 2017, the CARICOM Heads of Government (CHOG) approved a Vision and Roadmap for the establishment of a CARICOM Single ICT Space to enhance the environment for investment and production in the Caribbean and to support the development of a regional digital economy. The vision articulated for the Space is *“an ICT-enabled borderless space that fosters economic, social and cultural integration for the betterment of Caribbean citizens”*.

The Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU) has consistently advocated that Governments must be early adopters of ICTs, using them effectively to serve their citizens. This view presents a strong starting point of influence for the evolution to the CARICOM Single ICT Space, as effective ICT adoption by Governments is expected to catalyse a process that would result in widespread use of ICT across all sectors.

The CTU has been working with its member countries to design and build out government wide area networks (GWANs) as a critical foundation layer for delivering digital government services. However, the CTU is concerned that the applications and processes to optimally leverage the potential of the infrastructure are not sufficiently being pursued.

The CTU is therefore proposing the definition, establishment and benchmarking of 21st Century Governments across the region. Such governments will be characterised by citizen-centric, seamless, open, interactive and efficient processes and will make effective use of information and communication technologies to deliver services to its citizens, internal and external clients.

2. Historical overview of Government

A national Government has a unique relationship with its citizens. It is the only institution that consistently interfaces with all citizens through every phase of life, that is, from birth until death. As a citizen, one must be registered at birth, one must be educated, find employment or register a business, pay taxes, register one's marriage, purchase property, license a car, receive health treatments, and ultimately, have one's departure from this life registered. The Government, therefore, is uniquely and exclusively positioned to know its citizens and has a responsibility to create and maintain systems that efficiently service their needs and enable them to participate effectively in the development of the country.

Historically, the knowledge systems governments employ have been based on independent government ministries and agencies and these systems are rooted in processes that are centuries old. The citizen is required to provide his information to every ministry or agency with which he interacts, notwithstanding the fact that the information may already exist elsewhere in government records and often in the form of physical documents. This imposes unnecessary burdens of inefficient, time-consuming and costly processing, duplicated storage, repetitive processes, security risks, and lack of transparency in the delivery of government services to its citizens.

3. 21st Century Government

The evolution of information and communication technologies (ICT) presents the opportunity to create a seamless and comprehensive information profile of each citizen pertaining to their interactions with the Government.

The use of ICTs is widely acknowledged as one of the strategic avenues for establishing the 21st century government model. It seeks inter alia to:

- Enhance the delivery, quality, adoption and usage of government e-services;
- Provide citizens with quality government information and allow for their active participation in the public policy development and feedback process;
- Realise organisational transformation, cost efficiencies and interaction in government through the seamless sharing of systems, processes and information;
- Strengthen economic competitiveness by fostering an environment of collaboration with the private and business sectors to promote innovation and sustainable development.

Caribbean governments have been investing in ICT but are yet to maximise the return on their investment by establishing a 21st Century Government - one that is citizen-centric and seamless. This is because the benefits of investing in ICT are not automatic but require a champion and leadership at the highest level of government, with the political will to change existing mind-sets, inspire citizens and to coordinate ministers and the activities of their ministries. **There must be a focus on a citizen-centric, "whole of government" approach to interacting with various constituents**, which include government, citizens and business. This effort requires commensurate reengineering of processes as well as appropriate policy, legislation and regulatory reform. All of these must be complemented by people who are educated, trained and prepared with the skills to maximise the use of ICT in innovative ways.

The designated agency responsible for e-government must be able to articulate the challenges; define the objectives; design and plan appropriate programmes that would enable the objectives to be met; implement the programmes as well as monitor and measure the progress and impact. These processes will involve consultations with diverse stakeholders and must be supported by a comprehensive communication strategy that details the type and level of engagement of users, clients and beneficiaries. Periodic revisiting and appropriate adjustment of the processes will ensure the achievement of these objectives. It is also recommended that this agency reports to the Prime Minister or highest level of Authority in the country so that the e-government initiative maintains a high priority on the national agenda.

Caribbean nations seeking to establish a 21st Century Government may have limited insight into the challenges and opportunities for effective ICT adoption. In such cases, benchmarking can be an important tool for enabling effective decision-making and planning; building metrics for monitoring and measuring progress; developing best practices; evaluating utility, costs, benefits and impact.

Finally, appropriate systems must be implemented to mitigate the potential negative societal impacts. Provisions must be made to value and protect citizens, their personal and professional endeavours, their intellectual, digital and physical possessions and their privacy. In this regard, data protection and privacy legislation is a critical enabling component of this ecosystem.

4. Characteristics of a 21st Century Government

A 21st century Government is one in which:

- All government records and information are available digitally;
- There are secure, accessible duplicated repositories on and off country for all Government information;
- Modern wide area networks are deployed to function as a central and mission critical component of government's business;
- Information is well-defined, integrable and accessible across all government ministries and agencies;
- Business continuity plans are in place;
- Use is made of data analytic tools;
- Open datasets and supporting open data policies are appropriately employed;
- A one-stop shop for citizen services is created and maintained along with alternative citizen interface channels; and
- Citizens have the facilities to participate in governance.

A 21st century Government requires:

- A Head of State or Head of Government champion to endorse and drive the national process;
- Political will and leadership at the highest levels of Government to ensure effective execution;
- An aware, engaged and appropriately trained Public Service;
- Appropriate broadband infrastructure;
- An enabling policy, legislative and regulatory environment.
- Business process re-engineering and robust project management as integral elements for implementation;
- Engagement of indigenous private sector organisations to contribute to the process and to develop broad local capacity; and
- Engagement of other stakeholders, including unions and other public-sector associations.

5. Building a 21st Century Government

The goal of building a 21st Century Government is indeed a complex undertaking. However, with political will and the determination to institutionalise appropriate governance structures and execute defined action plans, a 21st Century Government can become a reality.

The following Work Streams identify the activities that must be undertaken in achieving the goal.

Work Stream 1: Preparatory Environmental Studies

Conduct an environmental review that includes inter alia:

- Consultations with citizens, internal and external clients of the government and the private sector to determine challenges, and understand requirements;
- Assessment of Government's processes and frameworks; and
- Assessment of ICT knowledge gaps within the public service.

Work Stream 2: Create an Enabling Environment for the 21st Century Government

Reform existing frameworks to exploit the full potential of information and communication technologies. These include:

- Policies,
- Legislation,
- Regulations and
- Government public service rules, regulations and operations on a progressive basis.

Work Stream 3: Build Out Broadband Infrastructure

Establish modern government broadband infrastructure and platforms to support the delivery of electronic services and:

- Promote appropriate technology to provide mobility, security and reliability and full network coverage to reach all citizens, wherever they may be;

- Promote use of technologies that have flexibility to be re-instated rapidly after disasters;
- Support and incentivise use of underground outside plant and shared infrastructure; and
- Employ solar power installations.

Work Stream 4: Know and Develop Your Citizens

Educate citizens, establish and maintain an appropriate information profile for each. This will require the Government to:

- Develop and execute a progressive communication plan to build awareness and educate citizens;
- Establish integrated databases of citizen's information; and
- Create Electronic ID System to facilitate one-stop secure access to government services.

Work Stream 5: Know the Nation

Create integrated databases of land infrastructure and Government assets making use of GIS and satellite imagery.

Work Stream 6: Build a 21st Century Government

The basis of 21st Century Government is a digital Information profile for the country and citizens as depicted in Figure 1.

Work Stream 7: Inter-connect Caribbean 21st century Governments.

Caribbean 21st century Governments must be inter-connected to contribute to the evolution of the Caribbean Single ICT Space.

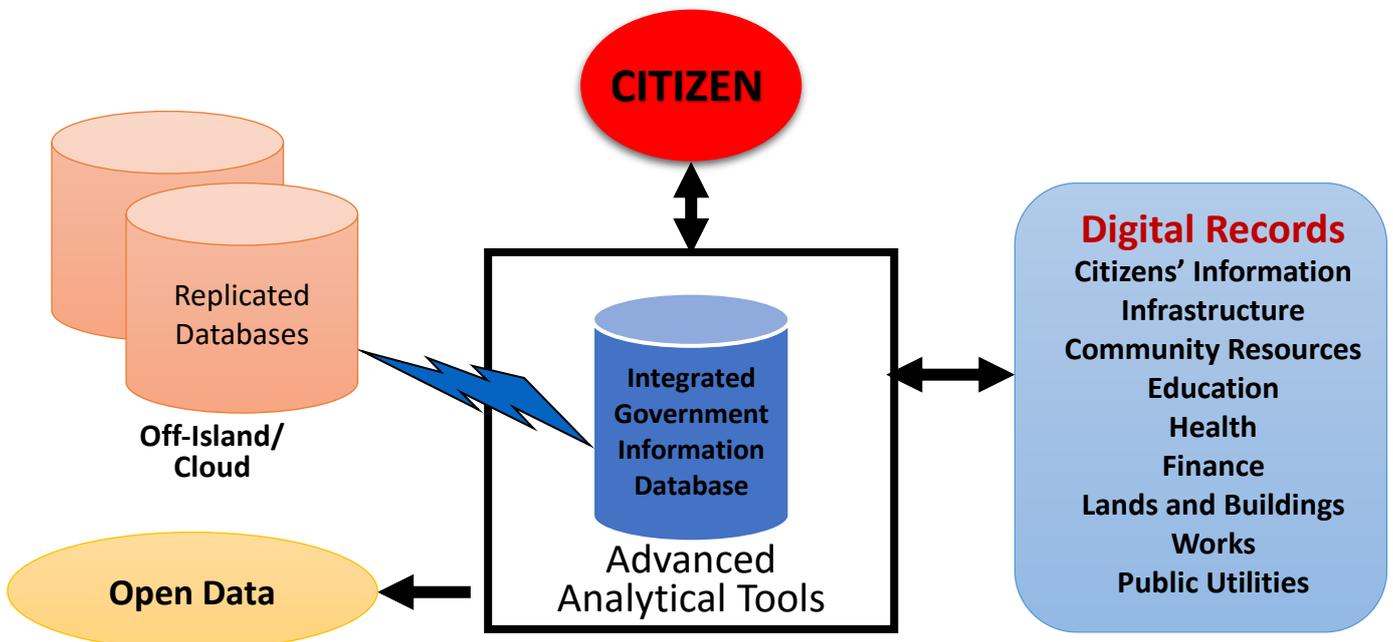


Figure 1

6. Benefits of 21st Century Government

The benefits of a 21st century Government include but are not limited to:

- Improvement in the quality and scope of government services to citizens;
- Financial benefits to Government in the form of cost reduction in the delivery of services and improved collections;
- Improved Government efficiency;
- Reduction of costs to citizens;

- Reduction in service transaction cost and times;
- Enhanced communications within government and between government and citizens/ clients;
- Greater ease of doing business which increases the country's competitiveness and is an incentive for direct foreign investment;
- Improved transparency;
- Greater levels of innovation and local content development and usage;
- ICT as a key value added sector and pillar of diversification for the economy; and
- Satisfied, engaged citizens.

An added benefit that is of particular value to Caribbean countries, is the possibility for restoration of government functions in the event of a natural disaster. By establishing collaborative relationships with other Caribbean governments, a 21st Century Government framework would support the repatriation of e-Government data to national government repositories and facilitate government business continuity.

7. Supporting the Caribbean in Building 21st Century Governments

The CTU has been advocating the principles set forth in this document for a decade. However, its primary stakeholders (Ministers of Government responsible for ICT), while in agreement with the principles, typically, are not sufficiently empowered at the national level to drive the integrated processes necessary to advance to 21st century Government.

It is apparent that a champion at the highest level of Government is a mandatory factor for success. Therefore, the CTU advocates that the Heads of Caribbean Governments be engaged to be champions for this initiative. The CTU therefore proposes to:

1. Advocate for a Summit of Caribbean Heads of Government to:
 - Present the compelling ICT-enabled possibilities for new models of Government and development;
 - Explain the successes achieved by Estonia in this regard;
 - Change mind-sets;
 - Engender political will to embrace 21st century Government;
 - Enlist champions in a coalition of willing countries; and
 - Drive action.

The Summit would seek to engage Heads of Government of countries that have been devastated by the recent Caribbean hurricane activity. The disaster presents an opportunity for these governments to leapfrog to 21st Century government.

2. Convene a symposium of technocrats of Antigua and Barbuda and Montserrat to:
 - Explain 21st Century Government and the possibilities of enhanced effectiveness, efficiency and transparency;
 - Consider the ecosystem and environment necessary for 21st Century Government;
 - Develop a systematic approach for establishing 21st century Government in Antigua and Barbuda and Montserrat;
 - Develop high level plans; and
 - Establish broad implementation timelines.
3. Work with Antigua and Barbuda and Montserrat to implement the Plan.

4. Establish a “Seamless Government Benchmark” to rank Caribbean countries by the extent to which they practice the principles of 21st Century Government.
5. Repeat Steps 2 and 3 in other willing countries.

8. Partners on the Journey to 21st Century Governments

The CTU recognises the complexity of the activities that must be undertaken in the journey towards 21st century Government. It will require collaboration of many stakeholders of which the CTU is one. The CTU therefore proposes to continue with its work to develop its members’ GWANs while facilitating and coordinating the activities of other stakeholders to establish 21st century Caribbean Governments.

The CTU proposes to engage diverse stakeholders in the journey. These include:

- Caribbean Centre for Development Administration (CARICAD)
- The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)
- The Caribbean Network Operators Group (CARIBNOG)
- Ministries responsible for ICT and Telecommunications
- Ministries responsible for Public Administration
- ICT Network Operators
- The private sector, the justice sector, and other sectors with an active digital agenda

9. Conclusion

The programme for establishing 21st Century Government in the Caribbean represents a unique opportunity for accelerating e-government service delivery and transforming the public service. The CTU and its partners are ready and able to work with each country to facilitate this work which will require a departure from the beaten tracks that no longer serve us. Ultimately, with demonstrated political will, we can begin and hasten the journey towards 21st Century Government.