Better User Experiences with Government Agency Websites: Best Practices for Design & Maintenance

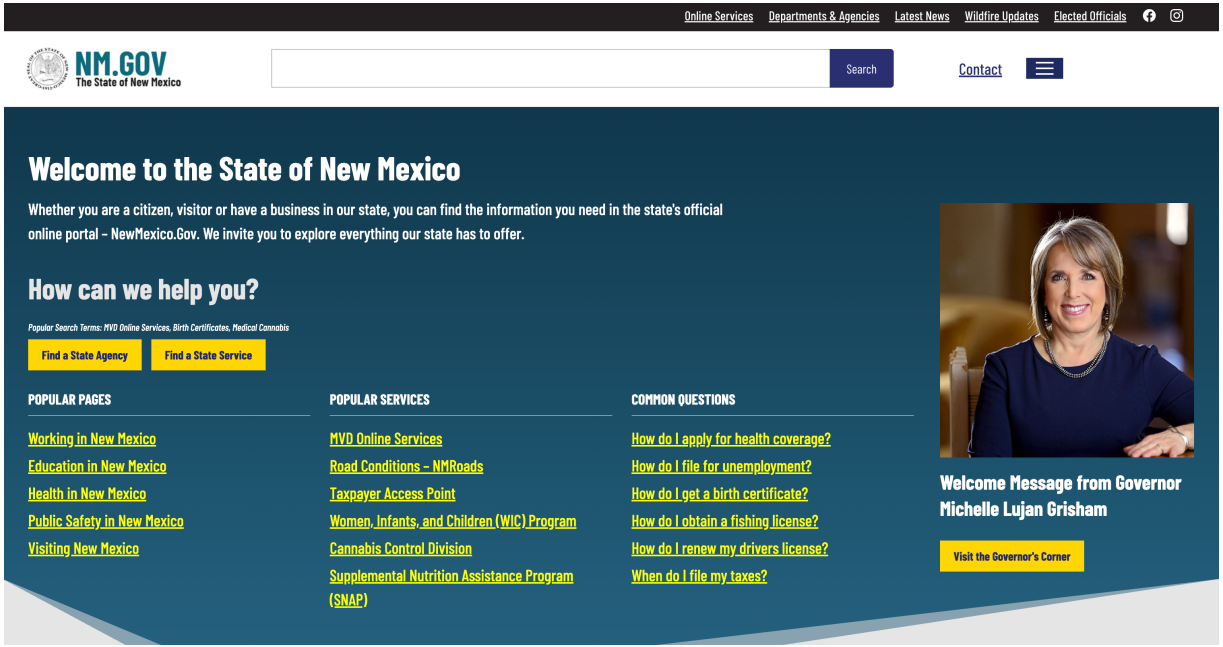
Discussion at the Sixth Meeting of the
Science, Technology and Telecommunications Committee

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Leapfrog Studio

October 29, 2026



Today's discussion



Things to think about **today**

Things to think about **moving forward**

Common uses for state govt websites

CATEGORY	EXAMPLES
Motor Vehicle Services	Renewing driver's licenses, updating vehicle registrations, changing addresses, and making appointments
State Income Taxes	Filing state tax returns, checking refund statuses, and downloading tax forms
Unemployment Insurance & Benefits	Filing unemployment claims, checking payment status, and searching for jobs via state workforce commissions
Public Assistance Programs	Applying for and managing benefits like SNAP (food stamps), TANF (temporary assistance for needy families), and state Medicaid programs
Business Registration & Licensing	Incorporating an LLC, filing annual reports, and applying for professional trade or liquor licenses
Vital Records	Ordering official copies of birth, marriage, divorce, or death certificates
Professional & Occupational Licensing	Renewing credentials for nurses, teachers, contractors, real estate agents, and other state-regulated professions
Elections & Voting Info	Checking voter registration status, finding local polling places, viewing sample ballots, and requesting mail-in ballots
Parks, Recreation, & Wildlife	Purchasing hunting and fishing licenses, reserving campsites at state parks, and checking outdoor safety advisories
Court Services & Legal Admin	Paying traffic tickets or citations, looking up public court records, and accessing legal self-help forms



What's clear to you may not be clear to your audience

Federal government

National policy, funding, and standards

State / territory government

Regulation, service systems, and delivery

Local government & partners

Permits, local services, and community needs

What about…

- Public health & Medicaid?
- Highways & road maintenance?
- Natural disasters & emergencies?
- Law enforcement?

It depends.



State of play

Digital Government Index for the United States

68.0/100 2025 **DGI score**

▲ **+6.3%** from 2024 (64.0)
▲ **+0.9%** from 2023 (63.4)

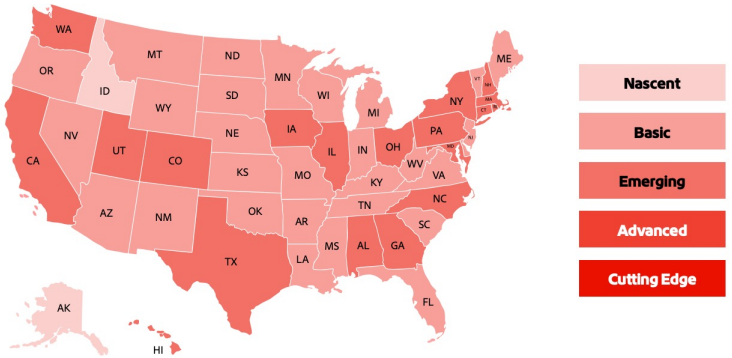
Customer Experience	Site Performance	Digital Self-Service
2025	2025	2025
66.6	**65.1**	**71.7**
▼ **-1.6%** from 2024 (67.7)	▲ **+16.9%** from 2024 (55.7)	▲ **+5.0%** from 2024 (68.3)
▲ **+1.7%** from 2023 (66.6)	▼ **-3.2%** from 2023 (57.6)	▲ **+3.5%** from 2023 (66.0)

Nascent	Basic	Emerging	Advanced	Cutting-edge
<60	60-70	70-80	80-90	90-100



https://business.adobe.com/resources/reports/digital-government-index-for-united-states.html

Digital Government Index for the 50 states



The DGI scores across the states show that two are classified as nascent, 30 are in the basic maturity category, and the remaining 18 are considered emerging.

Setting the pace and accelerating performance

Beyond the national distribution of scores, some states stand out for their DGI leadership, while others are building strong momentum. In most cases, top-ranking states are outperforming peers on all three core metrics.

DGI rankings

#1 New York	#2 Pennsylvania	#3 Washington	#4 Ohio	#5 North Carolina
2025 DGI score 77.7 (+6.4 yoy)	**2025 DGI score** 74.8 (+10.2 yoy)	**2025 DGI score** 74.5 (+11.4 yoy)	**2025 DGI score** 74.4 (+7.2 yoy)	**2025 DGI score** 73.7 (+4.3 yoy)

Fastest DGI movers

#1 New Jersey	#2 Washington	#3 Pennsylvania	#4 New Mexico	#5 South Dakota
2025 DGI score 66.35 (+11.7 yoy)	**2025 DGI score** 74.5 (+11.4 yoy)	**2025 DGI score** 74.8 (+10.2 yoy)	**2025 DGI score** 63.6 (+10.0 yoy)	**2025 DGI score** 67.4 (+9.7 yoy)

Personalization is key



Services and updates

Language translation and other accessibility features

Effectively supports a wider range of users



Site search

Dynamic search to provide real-time suggestions

Delivers relevant results to reduce user effort



Frictionless enrollment

Activate custom eligibility recommendations across user journey

Connects users to the services they want and need



Chat assistance

Interactive chatbots to provide (24/7) assistance

Reduces wait times and guides user to discover relevant services & resources



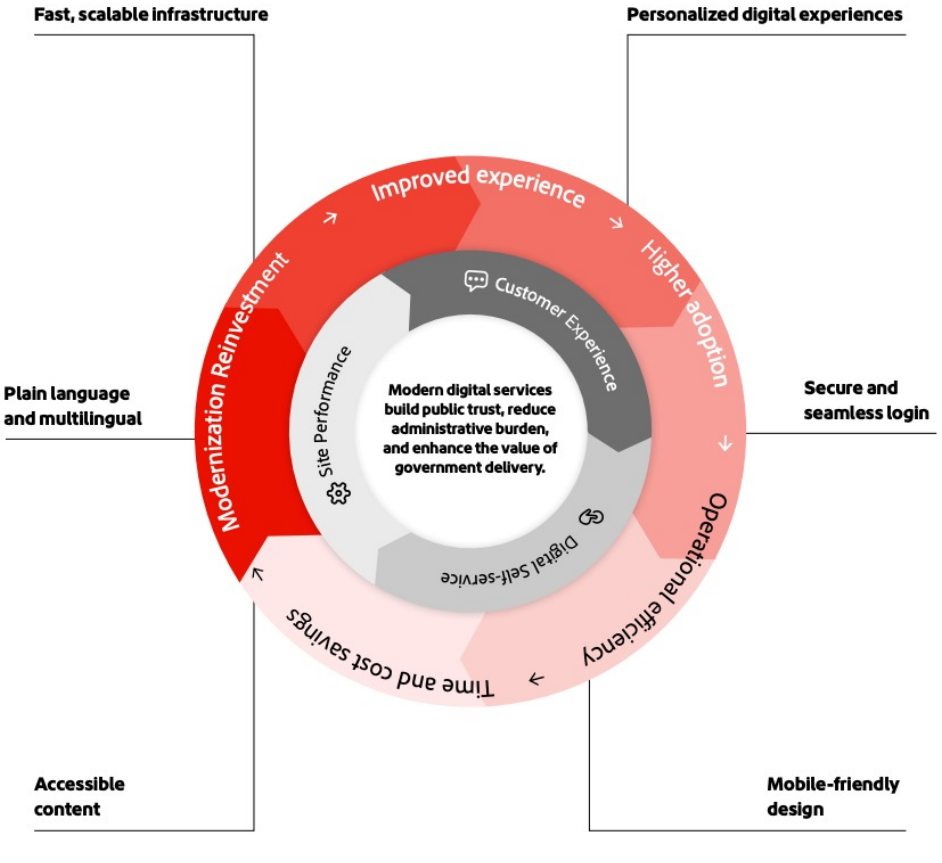
Personalized dashboard

Dynamically tailored content & experiences based on audience segmentation

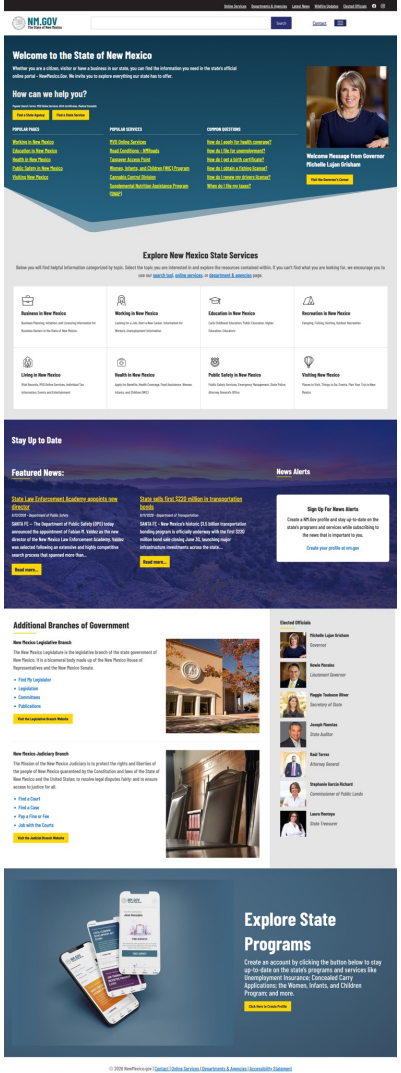
Provides pertinent information to make users feel understood and in control

Towards a successful outcome

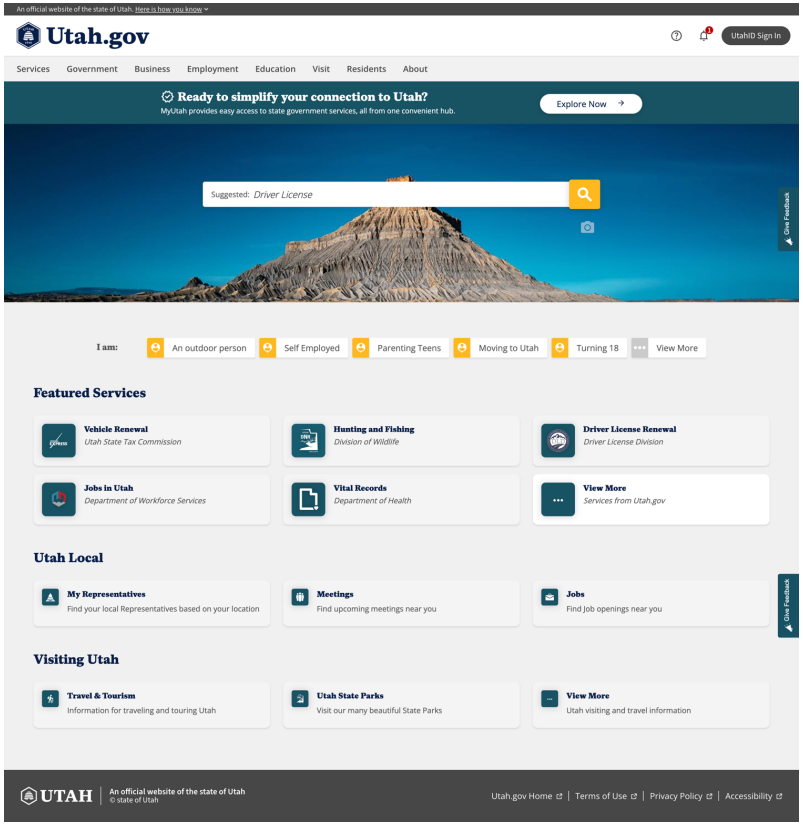
The modern digital services flywheel: driving participation, efficiency, and public outcomes

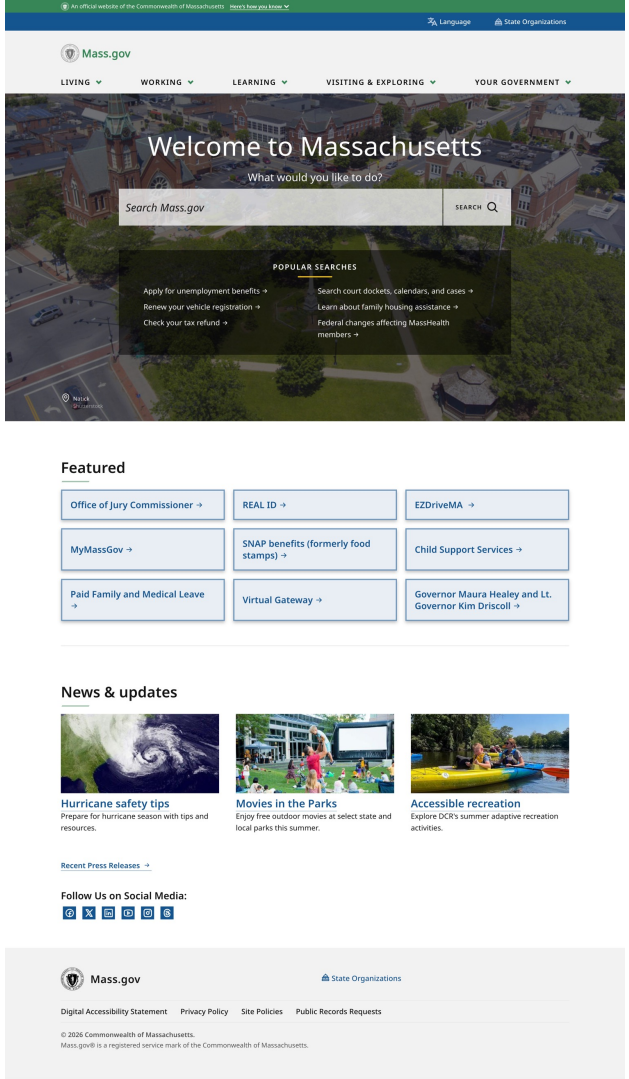


Inward-looking



Outward-focused





Getting to content

RECOGNITION



Browsing

Help users understand what they will find on the site, how it might be relevant to them, how they can get to it, how they know that they've found it, and how they know they trust it

LIFE EVENTS, CATEGORY-BASED NAVIGATION & LOCAL NAVIGATION TO SUPPORT WORKFLOW

RECALL



Searching

Allow users to directly get to the information that they already know (or expect) on the site , and how they know where they are when they get there

POWERFUL SEARCH & MEANINGFULLY-ORGANIZED LISTS

Multiple audiences for NM gov sites websites



Everyday citizens & residents



Businesses & corporate entities



Licensed professionals & contractors



Tourists & non-residents



Researchers, media & watchdogs

Distinct needs



Multilingual & diverse demographics



Native American tribes & sovereign nations



Rural & low-bandwidth citizens



Aging population (seniors & caregivers)



High-value “target industry” businesses



”Authenticity-seeking” tourists

Some implications



Content can't just be English: need culturally-sensitive translations and navigation pathways



Focus on mobile-first and low-data-use sites, accessible via weak signals and public networks



Beyond typical business / corporate support & filings, sites must support nuances of particular NM economic / industries priorities



Sites must facilitate G2G collaboration



Need for particular attention to accessibility standards, support for intermediary users, …



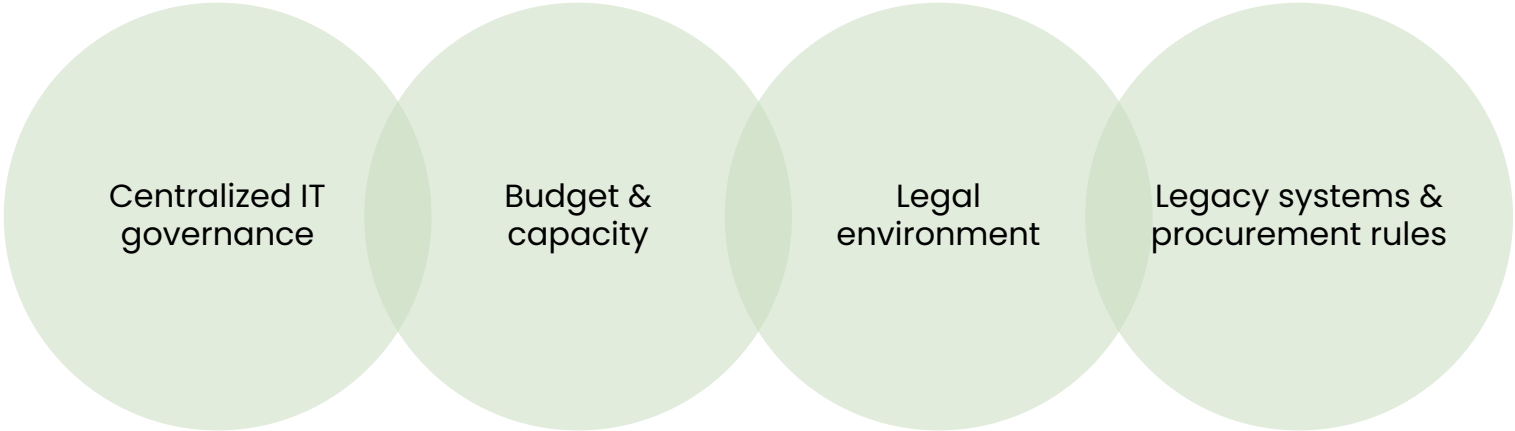
Need to support transition between administrative services and evocative travel marketing sites

Delivering government services well online isn't trivial

Example permit application process

STAGE	USER ACTIONS	FRONTSTAGE	BACKSTAGE	SYSTEMS / DATA	NOTES
Find a permit	Searches portal, reads eligibility guidance	Landing page, search, help content	Content owner maintains content, taxonomy and rules	CMS (Content Management System), search, rules engine	User must understand which permit applies
Start application	Creates account or signs in	Login, identity prompts, save-and-return	Identity verification and case creation	IAM (Identity Access Management), case management	Reduce unnecessary account friction
Enter details	Completes form fields	Form UI, inline help, progress tracker	Validation, autosave, error logging	Forms service, database	Required fields should be clear
Upload documents	Adds files and checks status	Upload component, file requirements	Virus scan, document indexing	DMS (Document Management System), storage, OCR	Document rules need to be obvious
Pay fees	Reviews cost and pays	Fee screen, payment gateway, receipt	Fee calculation, transaction posting	Payments, finance system	Show fees before checkout
Assessment	Waits for progress updates	Status page, notifications, message center	Officer triage, compliance review, request for information	Workflow system, staff inbox	Timeline visibility matters
Decision	Receives approval or refusal	Decision letter, dashboard update	Final QA, approval, record filing	Records system, notifications	Explain decisions clearly
Ongoing use	Downloads permit, tracks renewal	Permit wallet, reminders, renewal links	Expiry monitoring, renewal triggers	Registry, notification engine	Prevent missed renewals

Multiple factors at play

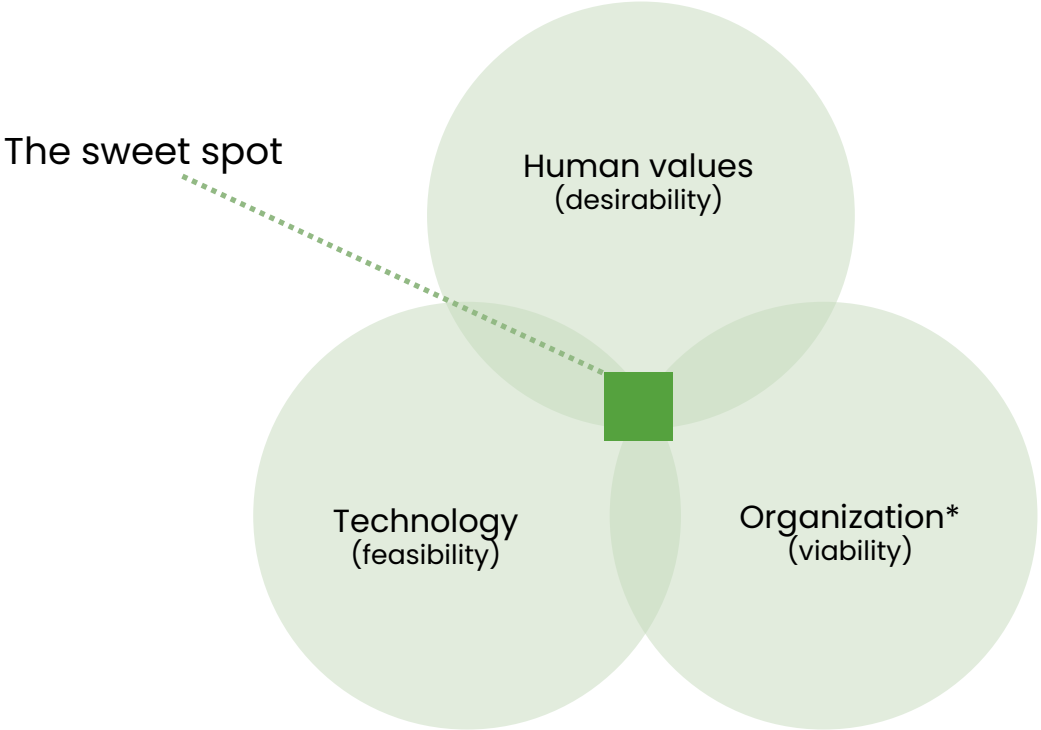


It’s not just a matter of ‘good design’

Some considerations for the way forward



Getting it right is a balancing act



Organization*

- State
- Department
- Division
- Bureau / Center / Office
- Section / Unit / Team

Necessary, but not sufficient

Title II of the ADA
Requires that state (and local) governments give people with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from their programs, services, and activities.

This is achieved by mandated conformance to **WCAG 2.1, Level AA.**

...We recognize that digital accessibility is not just a matter of convenience but a fundamental civil right. We are dedicated to creating a website that is easily accessible and user-friendly for everyone, including those with disabilities. This commitment aligns with civil rights laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and is driven by our belief in an inclusive digital space. We understand that ensuring equal access and inclusion for all users is a continuous process, and we are committed to making ongoing technical improvements to uphold this right.

Conformance Status
We are continuously working towards conforming to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level AA, which is the recognized and accepted standard for website accessibility. These guidelines explain how to make web content more accessible for people with disabilities.

Browser Assistive Technologies
Our website is designed to be compatible with the following browsers and assistive technologies:
Browsers: Latest versions of Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Apple Safari, and Microsoft Edge.
Screen Readers: JAWS, NVDA, VoiceOver, and TalkBack.

Feedback and Assistance
We welcome feedback on our website's accessibility. Should you encounter any barriers, have suggestions for improvement, or require accommodation to submit a complaint or tip, please contact us. Services such as ASL interpretation, captioning, and various assistive technologies are available upon request.

While striving for the highest accessibility, we acknowledge that some areas of our website may have limitations. We are continually working to address these and improve overall accessibility. Where possible, alternative methods to access information will be provided. Our commitment to enhancing website accessibility is ongoing, and we actively keep our site updated with technological and standard advancements.



Conformance to WCAG 2.1 Level AA



Accessibility Audits

Evaluate websites, mobile apps, and digital content against WCAG 2.1 AA criteria - identify gaps and prioritize fixes based on impact



Monitoring

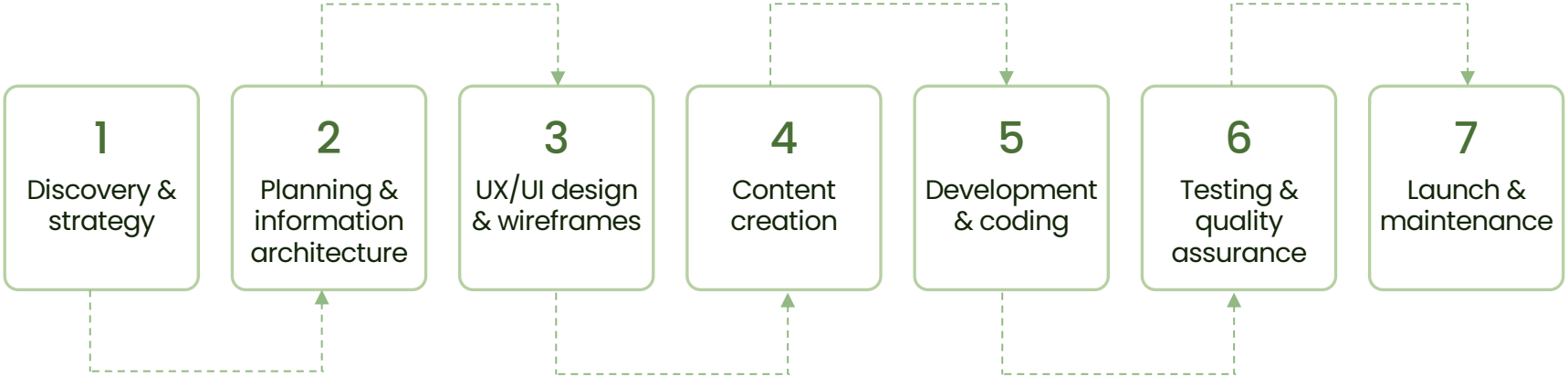
Conduct regular automated and manual testing to help ensure continued compliance as digital assets evolve



Training

Ensure designers, developers, and content creators understand accessibility to avoid issues

Typical project flow for government websites



Discovery & strategy

What is the purpose of the site?

Who do we think is going to use this? Who do we WANT to use this?

What do we want them to understand? What do we want them to do?

What priority does self-service play?

How will the various agencies be connected on the site?

How will the various channels (digital, telephone, face-to-face) interoperate?

What languages do we need to provide?

How will help be provided to users?

What's the delta between what we currently have and what we need?

How do we plan to keep it going (in terms of technology, support, and maintenance)?

How does this fit with our organizational imperatives and long(er)-term digital strategy?

Stakeholder & user research
Define business goals, target audience, and key metrics

Competitor analysis
Review similar websites to find industry benchmarks and gaps

Project scope
Outline the budget, timeline, and required features



Planning & information architecture

How much autonomy does each agency have?

What legacy systems must remain?

What tech capabilities do we have/can we acquire/support in the long term?

How does what we're doing fit with everything else?

How much consistency is desired/required across agencies?

In addition to accessibility compliance, what outside requirements are imposed??

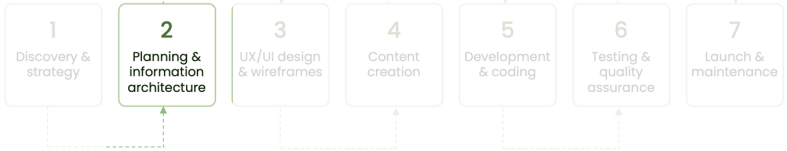
How will we future-proof our approach?

What's the development methodology and governance process? How does sign-off happen?

What is the makeup of the project team? How will it operate?

Sitemap blueprint
Map out the hierarchical structure and navigation menus

Tech stack selection
Choose the right CMS, hosting environment, and programming languages



UX/UI design & wireframes

How will we understand how users want to approach their tasks?

How can we map this to online activities?

How will we get their feedback about our direction before it's too late?

How will we instill consistency in the look and feel?

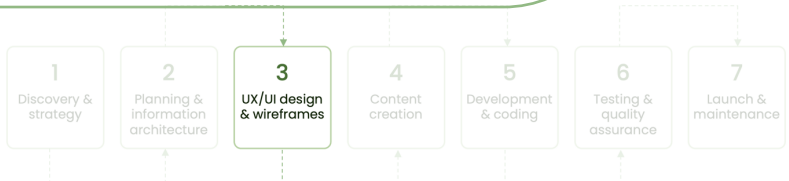
How will we support the various digital platforms (desktop and mobile)?

How will we design for compliance to accessibility standards?

How will we validate it all before finalizing the build?

Wireframes
Sketch low-fidelity layouts to map page hierarchy and user flow

Visual design
Build high-fidelity mockups, style guides, and responsive desktop / mobile views



Content creation

How will we determine what content needs to be created? Updated? Retired?

How will the appropriate voice & tone be determined?

What needs to be translated into other languages?

How will the content be tested to be sure it is understood?

How will SEO / AI SEO be addressed?

What is the governance process?

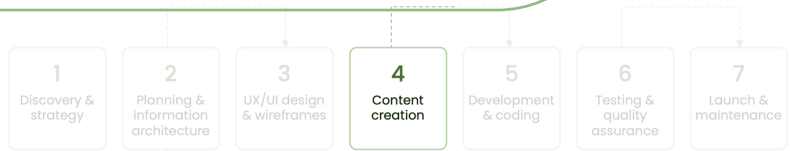
Who is going to create the content?

Who is going to own/manage the content in the short-term and longer-term?

How frequently will content be reviewed for updating or retirement?

Copywriting
Write brand messaging, headings, and call-to-action text

SEO / AI SEO & migration
Optimize metadata, keywords, and import legacy data



Development & coding

How will the teams be formed and managed?

Where are we going to get the skills we need?

How do the teams communicate?

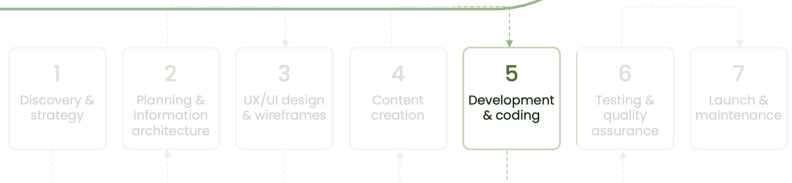
How will the schedule support ongoing feedback during development?

How will the data/content be migrated?

How will we confirm conform with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level A and AA for public-serving websites, mobile apps, and digital documents?

Front-end building
Translate designs into code using HTML, CSS, and JavaScript

Back-end building
Set up databases, server logic, APIs, and CMS integration



Testing & quality assurance

Will usability testing been considered (and separate from QA)?

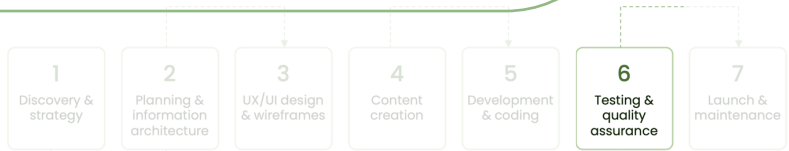
How will it be done (and by whom)?

How is QA factored into the schedule?

How are potential changes (for any reason) be prioritized?

Cross-device/browser testing
Check functionality on phones, tablets, and desktop browsers

Performance & security
Test loading speeds, fix broken links, and audit security flaws



Launch & maintenance

How will internal and external change management plans be executed?

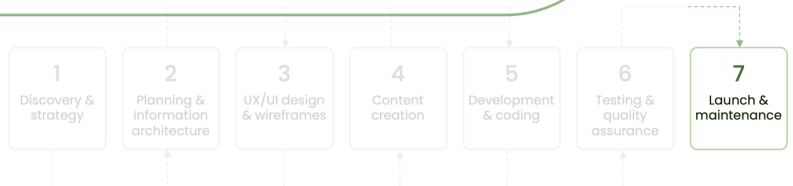
How will go-live be managed?

How will the new site(s) be supported?

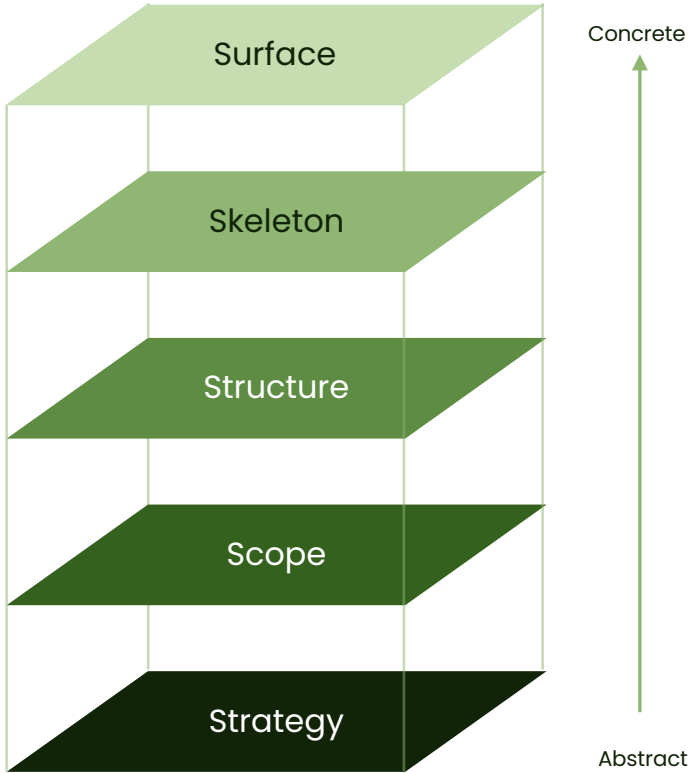
How will feedback be gathered, analyzed, and prioritized?

Deployment
Push the live code and switch DNS to the production server

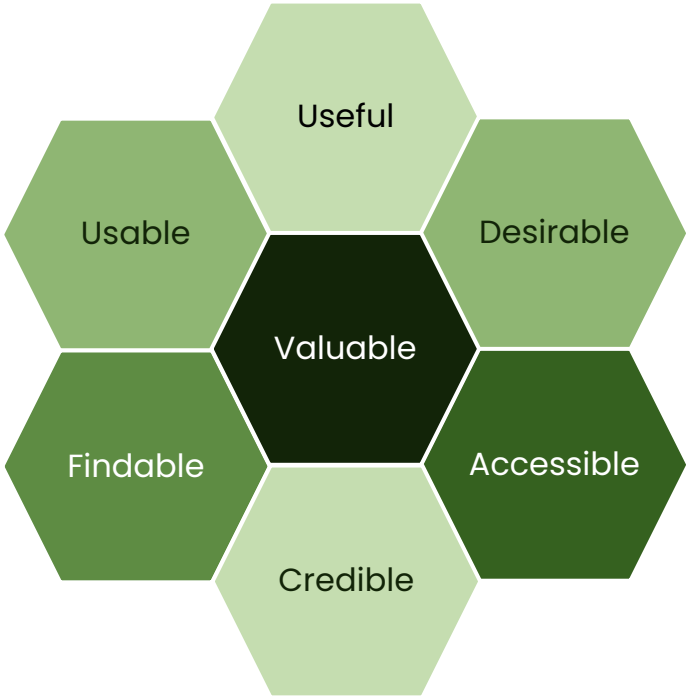
Ongoing support
Monitor analytics, patch security updates, and add new feature



Design the right thing



Design the thing right



Remember that the web is only part of the experience

Digital self-service



Assisted digital



In-person service



Design services around the channel that best fits the person and context

Thank you for listening.
What questions do you have?

Reach out to continue the discussion

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