Closing the Tech Gap: Putting Trusted Data in the Hands of the Public Sector

Foreword

Rising expectations for better customer experiences have put pressure on the public sector to get its data operational. This demand has been supercharged by the adoption of generative AI and growing fiscal pressures. Government agencies know that activating their data can empower their people, increase productivity, and improve customer experiences – all while delivering greater efficiency for every dollar spent. But before we can achieve this, we must tackle the persistent challenge of siloed data and disconnected systems.

Given the sensitivity of the data government handles and the fact that people tend to engage with government at some of their most vulnerable life moments, the public service has understandably taken a highly cautious approach to data engagement. As ATO Second Commissioner Jeremy Hirschhorn advised, we need to treat data not like the new oil, but as the new uranium. Handling, storing, and disposing of data correctly are essential to unleashing its true power and doing so safely.

However, while plenty of resources are spent on storing data securely, only recently have we started to see an investment in securely activating and sharing it.

Change is underway. The recognition of the need to empower our public servants with the right tools mirrors the monumental shift we saw half a century ago from the computer server room to the personal desktop computer. Citizens, too, have given governments clear parameters for permission to share: 91% of respondents in Australia and New Zealand (ANZ) are willing to share certain data if it delivers a benefit.

Unified data solutions like Data Cloud are now putting data-driven insights directly into the hands of the people who know their operations and stakeholders best. It's the beginning of a new era where data becomes actionable information – to the benefit of all government customers and our public service.

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Data in government service delivery today

Traditionally, the public sector's approach to data has been custodial. Data was often locked away, accessible only to a select few, and required slow, manual processes to be utilised in any meaningful way. This cautious approach has limited the true power of data, confining it to server rooms rather than empowering non-technical users across the organisation.

With recent recommendations and updates to the Privacy Act 1988 strengthening data privacy laws and increasing penalties for non-compliance, it's understandable that security has often taken precedence over innovation. The public sector has prioritised safeguarding data to comply with these changing regulations. However, as expectations around data use shift, there is now a clear opportunity to balance compliance with more agile, operationalised data management practices.

In its Top Government Technology Trends for 2024, Gartner predicts that government leaders will increasingly prioritise data-driven decision-making and strategic planning. One of the top trends is programmatic data management, a systematic and scalable approach that enables enterprise-wide use of data assets.

This focus on data-driven strategies aligns with the rising expectations of citizens. According to Boston Consulting Group's (BCG) 2024 Digital Government Survey, 74% of respondents in ANZ expect online government services to match the best private sector experiences. However, 62% have encountered problems with government services over the past two years, often due to lengthy processes and technical challenges – issues that integrated data can easily resolve.

The urgency to invest in data is being felt across the public and private sectors. While 92% of IT and analytics leaders say the need for trustworthy data is at an all-time high, 94% of business leaders believe they're not getting enough value from their data. With predictive and generative AI on the rise, the demand for connected, reliable, and value-generating data has never been greater.

Early adopters in both the private sector and government are already using AI to enhance service quality and productivity. In ANZ, 29% of service organisations are fully implementing AI, and 39% are exploring or experimenting with the technology. Agents assist service representatives with secure verification, suggested next-best actions, and automated call wrap-ups. They also enhance self-service experiences for customers by delivering contextual replies powered by AI search and customer data.

New experiences provided by humans with AI are raising the bar for what people expect from good service delivery. The pressure is building for the public sector to innovate and embrace new technologies to deliver better services and experiences. But it all hinges on connected, actionable data.

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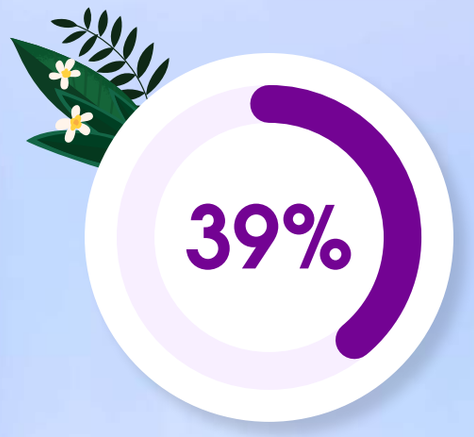

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The benefits of data in the public sector

Imagine a work day where employees didn't spend hours hunting for information scattered across systems. Unified data makes this a reality by seamlessly bringing together information from various sources, providing quick access to customer data and significantly cutting down the time spent navigating disconnected platforms. In other words, employees can respond faster, make informed decisions, and have the power to access the data they need right at their fingertips – without having to ask a separate business unit or tech operations team for the relevant information. Unified data not only transforms service delivery through personalised experiences but also lightens the load on public servants, allowing them to focus on more human-centric support.

Unified data is also the backbone of automation and AI-driven tools, which further reduce manual workloads and free up employees to handle more complex or sensitive tasks. In fact, 90% of professionals in AI-equipped service organisations in ANZ acknowledge the time-saving benefits of AI. The top AI use cases for these ANZ organisations include automated summaries and reports, customer-facing intelligent assistants, and AI-generated responses that customer representatives can review, edit, and send.

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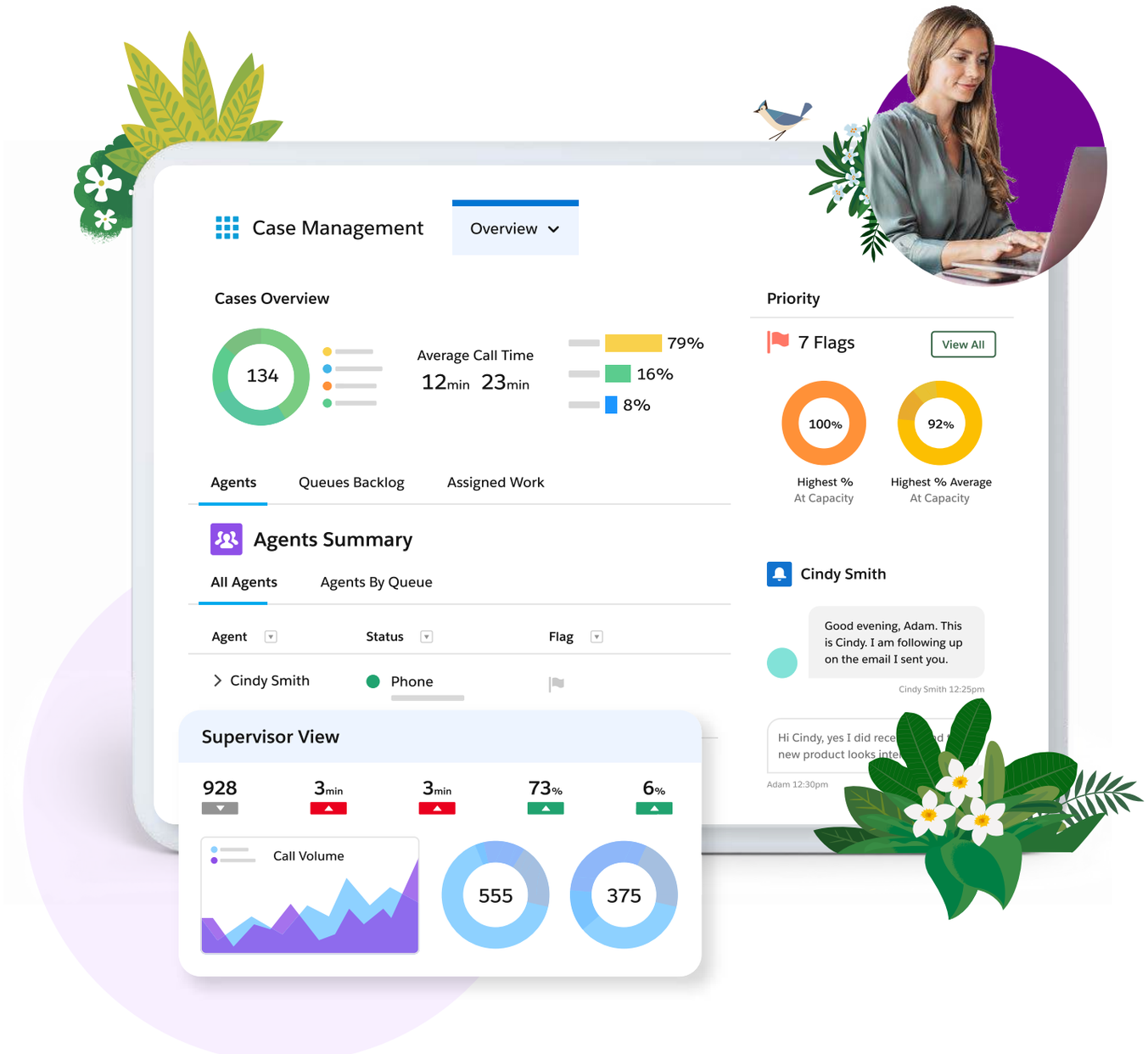
Personalised and convenient service experiences

Connected data doesn't just improve efficiency; it enhances the ability to personalise services based on data insights. 86% of ANZ service professionals say better access to data from other teams would improve the support they provide, with 79% of service organisations increasing investment in data integration next year.

Data systems that break down silos offer smoother, more cohesive user experiences across government platforms – on par with the convenience people expect from the private sector.

Consider a scenario where a service centre employee needs data to assist a citizen. Previously, they would have to request a report from the IT department, and by the time the report was generated – often days later – the situation may have evolved, leaving them with outdated information. This delay not only hinders their ability to provide timely support but also results in a fragmented view of the citizen's interactions with various government agencies. However, with a unified data system, they can instantly access up-to-date, comprehensive data, enabling them to offer immediate and accurate assistance.

By delivering services more efficiently, the public sector can clear backlogs, meet increasing demand, and build trust and confidence in their ability to optimise public expenditure. Imagine a government service centre proactively contacting citizens about upcoming renewals for benefits or services before they even need to reach out. With unified data, the system can flag these events and trigger automated reminders, reducing wait times and easing the pressure on service channels. This proactive approach not only increases citizen satisfaction but also prevents service bottlenecks, ensuring smoother operations across departments.



The productivity dividend of AI

BCG estimates that generative AI could unlock a USD $25 billion opportunity across all levels of the Australian government by 2030, and a USD $5 billion opportunity for the New Zealand government. And now, agentic AI is taking this potential further. With Agentforce, government can deploy AI agents to work with employees, automating routine tasks, providing intelligent recommendations, and taking action to improve efficiency and service delivery.

Regardless of whether a department or agency is ready to embrace AI in internal processes or service experiences, having well-structured, reliable data remains a critical foundation for unlocking future opportunities.

AI can streamline workflows and improve decision-making processes, leading to faster and more accurate public service outcomes. For example, automation in data processing and integration can significantly cut down the time needed to make informed decisions, boosting the overall productivity of the public sector.

Beyond efficiency, AI drives innovation in digital services, making government operations more responsive to the needs of the public. This includes developing user-centric interfaces, offering personalised experiences, and integrating services seamlessly across government departments.

Agentforce is unlocking value across government

Humans with agents are driving citizen success together.

Child Welfare
Access information faster

- Case summaries
- Policy & process guidance
- Service recommendations

Public Safety
Reduce incident report time

- Incident summary
- Procedural recommendations
- Case classification

Social Insurance
Process claims faster

- Auto-adjudication
- Diagnosis code mapping
- Claim trend insights

Motor Vehicles
Automate custom plate process

- Plate language look-up
- Generate customisation recommendations

Traffic Safety
Inspect more efficiently

- Inspection summary
- Regulation mapping
- Remediation recommendations

HR
Recruit & onboard more quickly

- Candidate resume matching
- Processing mapping for new employees

Citizen Portal
Proactively serve constituents

- Knowledge recommendations
- Augmented assistant to find services

IT
Develop apps faster

- Code completion
- Natural language to code
- Chat-based coding assistant

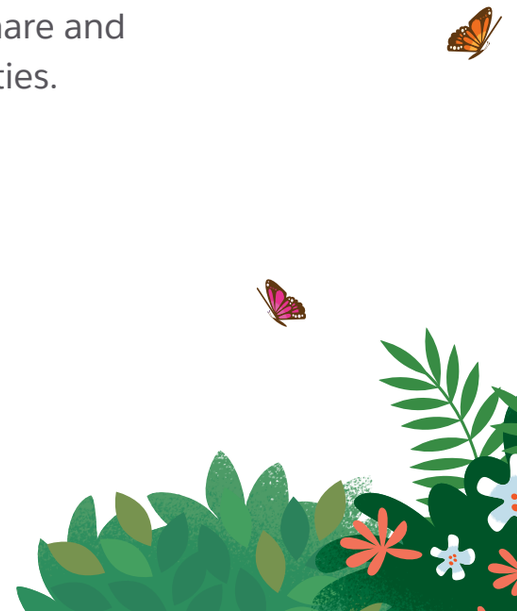
Potential hurdles to data empowerment

Government agencies are acutely aware of the challenges they face in achieving data empowerment. While the desire to enhance productivity and improve the citizen experience is clear, many organisations are hindered by vast amounts of data trapped in disparate systems.

This fragmentation prevents agencies from realising the full potential of real-time, intelligent interactions and automation, both critical for improving the experiences of public servants and the citizens they serve. The gap between having data and being able to effectively apply it to deliver better public services remains a persistent issue.

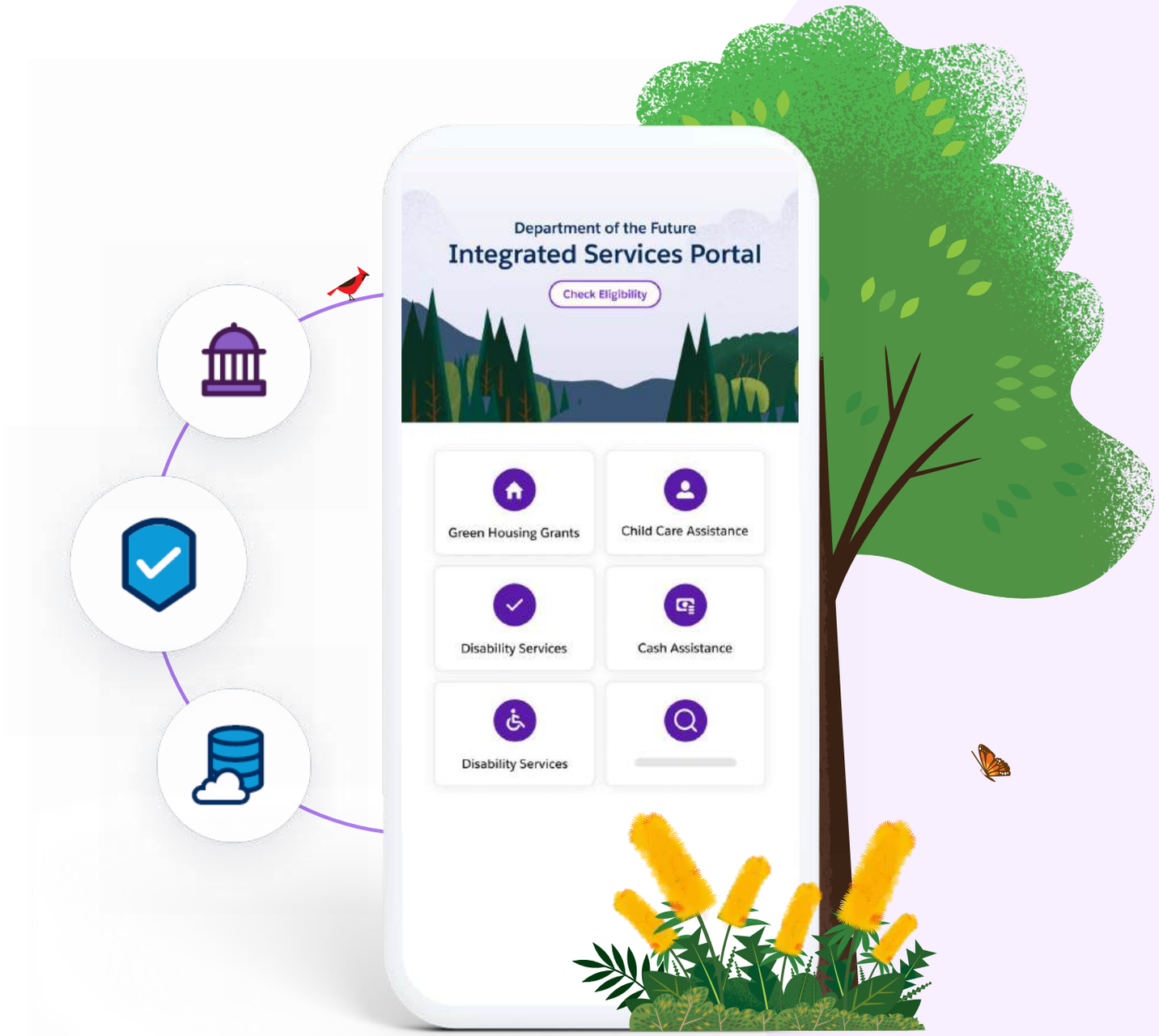
The reliance on manual processes and the need to depend on system operators or IT departments for data access and reporting only exacerbates these challenges. It's not uncommon for one department to wait days – or even weeks – for the data they need from another, leading to significant service delays.

A major tension also exists between protecting data privacy and the growing need to use data more efficiently to improve services. Current data governance frameworks often prioritise security to the detriment of accessibility, creating greater user anxiety and hampering the ability to share and operationalise data across government entities.



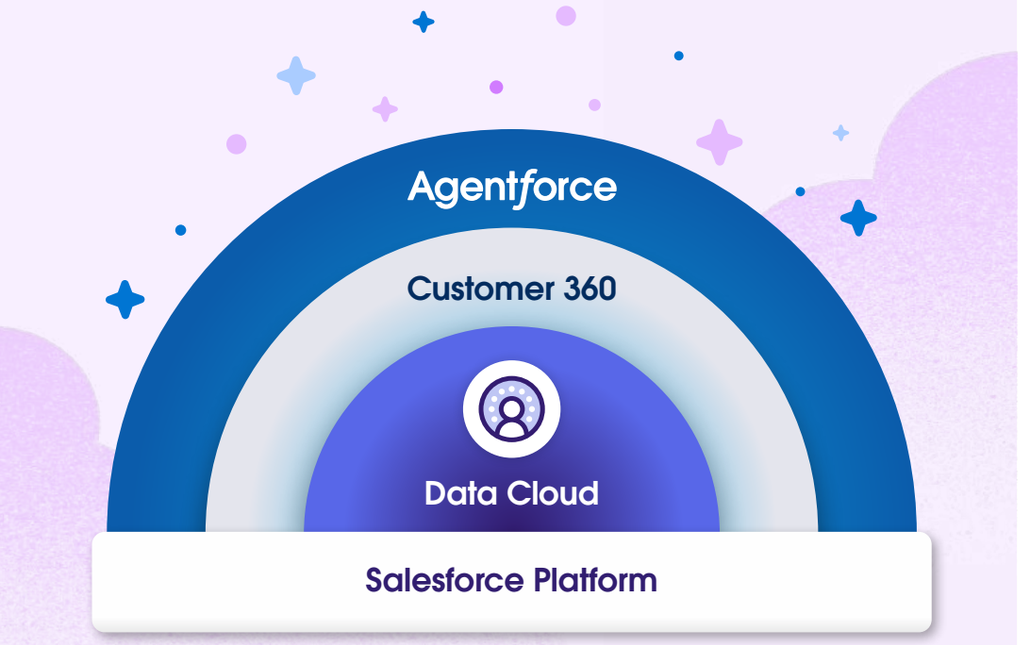
Moreover, the rapid advancement of generative AI is magnifying existing skills gaps and exposing weaknesses in data readiness. The recent policy for the responsible use of AI in government, brought into effect on 1 September 2024, acknowledges AI's potential to enhance efficiency, improve decision-making, and transform service delivery. However, the policy also recognises that public sector preparedness and maturity vary widely, and requires the introduction of accountable officials and published transparency statements. There's an urgent need to upskill existing employees or hire talent to meet these demands and achieve the policy's purpose of positioning government as an exemplar in the safe and responsible use of AI.

Despite the challenges, public sector employees and decision-makers understand that increasing data and AI maturity is imperative. Emerging, accessible solutions are making it increasingly easier and safer for everyone to turn data into actionable information, empowering public servants to deliver better, faster, and more personalised services.



Tools for a data-empowered future

As the public sector moves to reduce overreliance on external expertise and bring crucial skills back in-house, the empowerment of employees with the right skills and tools becomes increasingly important



Salesforce solutions bridge the gap between keeping data secure and using it effectively. These tools enable public sector employees to access insights, contextualise information, and provide superior service experiences. As employees build data literacy through these solutions, a culture of competence and self-reliance emerges within the public service.

Data Cloud securely integrates data across departments, breaking down silos and creating a unified view that enables better decision-making and personalised customer interactions. No longer relegated to disparate data islands that only data engineers and data scientists can engage with, data is now at the fingertips of every employee.

As more public sector employees embrace the power of data, the outlook on automation and trusted AI grows increasingly positive, too. With Agentforce, organisations can build autonomous AI agents to support employees and customers, grounded in the Salesforce Platform and Data Cloud. These AI agents work with employees to streamline tasks, provide intelligent recommendations, and automate routine processes – all while ensuring secure, transparent interactions with data.

The Einstein Trust Layer makes it possible to use AI responsibly across the organisation. With safeguards like dynamic grounding, zero data retention, and toxicity detection, it protects sensitive data while maintaining high standards of security and compliance. Public sector teams are empowered to confidently integrate AI into their workflows, knowing that every interaction is underpinned by transparency and trust. By putting these protections in place, the Einstein Trust Layer helps create a solid foundation for ethical and effective AI use in government.

In this new era, data is everyone's responsibility and benefit. By unifying data with organisational strategy and equipping all employees with the tools they need, Salesforce helps the public sector realise the full potential of trusted data and AI to better serve their communities.

Where to start with data empowerment

The value of unified, operational data and generative AI is clear. The next step is identifying which processes and experiences to improve. Start by asking these three fundamental questions:

1. **What is the outcome we are seeking to achieve?**

   Identifying friction points and business blockers will clarify whether change is necessary and what that change should look like. Change for the sake of change is unlikely to gain the support of stakeholders. A clearly defined outcome ensures alignment and purpose.

2. **Do we have internal and external alignment?**

   Empowering the public sector with data requires collaboration between business units and often across multiple organisations. Be deliberate and clear about the purpose and end goal, particularly when creating a data strategy. Alignment ensures a shared vision and smoother implementation.

3. **Do we have a data strategy?**

   Start with a data audit. Does your organisation understand the data it needs to achieve the agreed outcome? Consider regulatory and cultural barriers to accessing that data, the consent models in place, and what else might be required. A robust data strategy is foundational for effective activation.

Taking a task-driven approach to data activation and generative AI use also enables more precise risk assessment. By focusing on the specific task AI will perform, you can evaluate the associated risks and determine whether they can be effectively managed.

Empowerment starts with clarity. By answering these questions, public sector teams can lay the groundwork for a data and AI strategy that delivers meaningful, secure, and impactful outcomes.

Ready to learn more?

The Unified Data Roadmap for Government

Discover practical ways to get started on your data empowerment journey.

Get the guide

Modernise Government Service with Salesforce

Learn more about trusted data and AI tools designed for the public sector.

Speak to an expert