

# CASE STUDY: KNOWLEDGE SHARING ON USER-CENTRED DIGITAL CITIZEN SERVICES: COLOMBIA'S EXPERIENCE



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## ABSTRACT

In 2019, Colombia's Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies (MinTIC) and the United Kingdom's Government Digital Service (GDS) agreed to exchange information and share learning on the development of digital government services. This case study describes the collaboration between the two teams on reviewing and improving Colombia's digital citizen portal.

## Key messages

- Designing digital services requires a user-centred approach. A focus on the users and their needs in each design phase is crucial for ensuring uptake and usability of the services.
- The partnership with the United Kingdom's GDS was invaluable to the Colombian team. International development partners add most value when they share lessons and expertise on the challenges that the government is trying to address.

## Challenge

Colombia's MinTIC identified the absence of a standardised technological solution to facilitate the relationship and interactions between public institutions and citizens. Public service information was spread over more than 8 000 different web pages of various public institutions, all hosted on the gov.co website. This resulted in a fragmented and complex user experience, impeding citizen access to government information and services. Even though user experience is an important element of Colombia's digital transformation strategy, MinTIC's expertise in this area was limited.

Colombia partnered with the United Kingdom's GDS team to review and improve its digital citizen portal. The partnership began in October 2019, with a request via the British Embassy to help MinTIC develop and strengthen its digital foundations. The partnership has five main aims: exchange information and share experiences on creating accessible, user-focused services; help prioritise open standards for government information and software; identify opportunities for collaboration with the IT industry; develop digital skills and capabilities in government, and provide better digital public services (MinTIC, 2020<sup>[1]</sup>).

## Approach

Over the last three years, Colombia's MinTIC, in partnership with the United Kingdom's GDS, has strengthened technical solutions to improve service delivery and information provision on the 8 000 web pages of Colombia's digital citizen portal. The programme involved a review stage followed by technical implementation.

The review phase included a technical review of gov.co, focused on safeguards for a robust and secure portal hosting all public services, and a technical desktop review of the current gov.co site, leading to a set of recommendations for creating a "secure-by-default" site. These reviews enabled Colombia's Digital Citizen Services (DCS) team who manage gov.co to redesign and reshape its internal and external delivery methodologies and processes to support further development of the digital citizen portal.

For the implementation phase, the DCS team worked with the United Kingdom's GDS on:

- **Developing an approach to service design.** The DCS team held collaborative work sessions with stakeholders to share knowledge and lessons learnt on the development of digital government services from the experience of the United Kingdom's GDS team.
- **Adopting new work methodologies and learning new skills.** The DCS team were trained in agile methodologies and efficient use of project resources. The partnership with the United Kingdom helped the DCS team to acquire new knowledge and skills. In addition, MinTIC hired user-centred design experts to reinforce the ministry's internal capacity.
- **Using international models as inspiration.** In 2020, DCS adapted and launched the Estonian X-ROAD platform (e-Estonia<sup>[2]</sup>).

## Results

- The review and several workshops with the United Kingdom's GDS team resulted in **visible improvements in the user**

**experience of gov.co** and of other services, such as the Digital Citizen Folder capturing citizen's government digital transactions (Government of Colombia<sub>[3]</sub>) and Digital Authentication.

- Since the launch of gov.co 2.0 in December 2020, the portal has received **over 9 million visits**, with 126 715 visitors having signed up to the Authentication Service and 8 346 to the Digital Citizen Folder (as of 3 November 2021).
- The revamped DCS portal has generated **interest and positive responses from peers**. Colombia has shared its experience with partners such as Spain, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Brazil. In 2021, MinTIC chaired the (Red GEALC<sub>[4]</sub>) (Latin American and Caribbean e-Government Network) steering committee. This leadership role combined with the DCS experience allows Colombia to advocate for the advancement of digital services to citizens among its Latin American peers.
- Colombia's work on digital citizen services has also resulted in **partnerships with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)**.

## Lessons learnt

- **Designing digital services requires a user-centred approach.** A focus on the users and their needs in each design phase is crucial. Heeding feedback allowed the DCS

team to improve the user experience for institutions and citizens.

- **Knowledge is shared better when access to it is easy.** In July 2021 gov.co launched an online toolbox (Government of Colombia<sub>[5]</sub>) providing tools and tips for institutions and citizens on using the portal.
- **Cultivate an adaptive mindset for new work methodologies.** Soft skills in the DCS team were crucial and invaluable for the purpose of negotiating the MoU with the United Kingdom and the development of gov.co.
- **Data and research are the main drivers of service design.** Decisions to improve the government databases have been guided using the PowerBI analytics tool, which is open and accessible to all.
- **Learning from international partners adds value.** The partnership with the United Kingdom's GDS was invaluable to the Colombian team. International development partners add most value when they share lessons and expertise on the challenges that the government is trying to address. This is good practice.

This case study is also published on the OECD's virtual peer learning platform Development Co-operation TIPS • Tools Insights Practices as part of its *In Practice* series. The series presents real life responses to a diverse range of development co-operation challenges, with a focus on results and lessons learnt.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

PowerBi, Gov.co site usage statistics,

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiNzUzZmE4MTUtYjEzMi00Njc4LWFiNjAtMTBkZTUyZTk5NTE4IiwidCI6IjFhMDY3M2M2LTI0ZTEtNDc2ZC1iYjRkLWJhNmE5MWEzYzU4OCIsImMiOiJ9&pageName=ReportSection2eb8b0e9bdcd0b508d58>.

PowerBi, Digital Transactions in Colombia:

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiOTM2NWU2YWwtMGZiZi00YzQwLWlwZGMtYzIxMjQ4ZWZjZDZlIiwidCI6IjFhMDY3M2M2LTI0ZTEtNDc2ZC1iYjRkLWJhNmE5MWEzYzU4OCIsImMiOiJ9>.

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- e-Estonia (n.d.), *Interoperability services*, <https://e-estonia.com/solutions/interoperability-services/x-road>. [2]
- Government of Colombia (n.d.), *Digital Citizen Folder*, <https://carpetaciudadana.and.gov.co> (accessed on 26 November 2021). [3]
- Government of Colombia (n.d.), *Public Entities Toolbox 'Caja de Herramientas', Guidelines Library*, <https://www.gov.co/biblioteca> (accessed on 25 November 2021). [5]
- MinTIC (2020), *Review of a partnership between Colombia and the United Kingdom for the digital transformation of the Colombian State*, [https://www.gov.co/uploads/14122020\\_Blog\\_MoU%20\\_English\\_fv.pdf](https://www.gov.co/uploads/14122020_Blog_MoU%20_English_fv.pdf) (accessed on 26 November 2021). [1]
- Red GEALC (n.d.), *Red GEALC*, <https://www.redgealc.org/> (accessed on 26 November 2021). [4]



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