



# Recommendations for Transitioning Shared Services to Full Operational Capability Across the Federal Government

MAY 2022

# Introduction

The federal government needs to accelerate and reach full operating capability for shared services throughout government consistent with the three priority areas of the President's Management Agenda (PMA). In support of the PMA, the General Services Administration (GSA) Strategic Plan FY 2022-2026, also supports shared services with the strategy to "Continue to grow and streamline targeted shared services that enable the public to easily and safely engage with government.

Considering the investments to date and the significant benefits available to the government for dramatically improved mission-centric, and mission-support efficiency and effectiveness, a dedicated and deliberate approach is necessary to achieve success in shared services.

This paper defines shared services, provides a brief history, and details its benefits. It then provides a suggested high-level leadership-driven multi-year approach designed to build on the current state and make significant progress toward full operational capability to achieve the PMA's objectives. It also outlines risks and opportunities and provides next step recommendations.

We urge you to consider our approach and desire to fully engage and help create efficient and effective shared services that will improve government operations and mission-centric outcomes.

# What Are Shared Services

We define shared services as:

**The delivery of the necessary services to federal agencies and its employees through standardized, scalable, and centralized capabilities, that ensure measurable efficient, effective, and consistent solutions.**

Effective shared service execution allows agencies to better focus resources on mission-centric functions while enhancing employee and customer experience in a secure and efficient environment. Shared services can be delivered in primary areas such as human resources, financial management, grants management, cyber security, and real property. It can also be employed in secondary areas such as debt collection and records management. For example, if government had the appropriate centralized service ready to go, they could have been better prepared to move out on and address significant fraud related to Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans.

Further, some mission-centric functions could possibly be supported through a shared services or shared services “like” model, for example, to efficiently centralize certain functions to support the number of disparate agency programs that address drug control, law enforcement, education, etc.

# What Problem Is Being Solved

Over the past 20 years sincere good faith efforts have periodically focused on developing shared services as an efficient and effective government management tool. Over time, as priority toward shared services solutions development has been supplanted by other Administration priorities, a sustained momentum has not been achieved. The result has been a continued state of “catch-up” to technology obsolescence and a continued need to address waste and duplication in technology solutions across government agencies with less-than-ideal results. Achievements to date have just touched the edges. Recent new energy toward shared services, with the guidance of the current PMA, has again presented an opportunity to address needed resources and decision-making frameworks to improve responsiveness to customer needs and enable efficient and effective mission-centric performance.

Frequent observations by GAO duplication reports, high risk lists, and Congressional testimonies highlight the need to follow PMA guidance to address conditions that have continued for decades. The stark truth is that the government we have today is far from the government we need to manage 21st Century challenges. The causes of these conditions are rooted in the government’s organization, culture, and incentive structures and include:

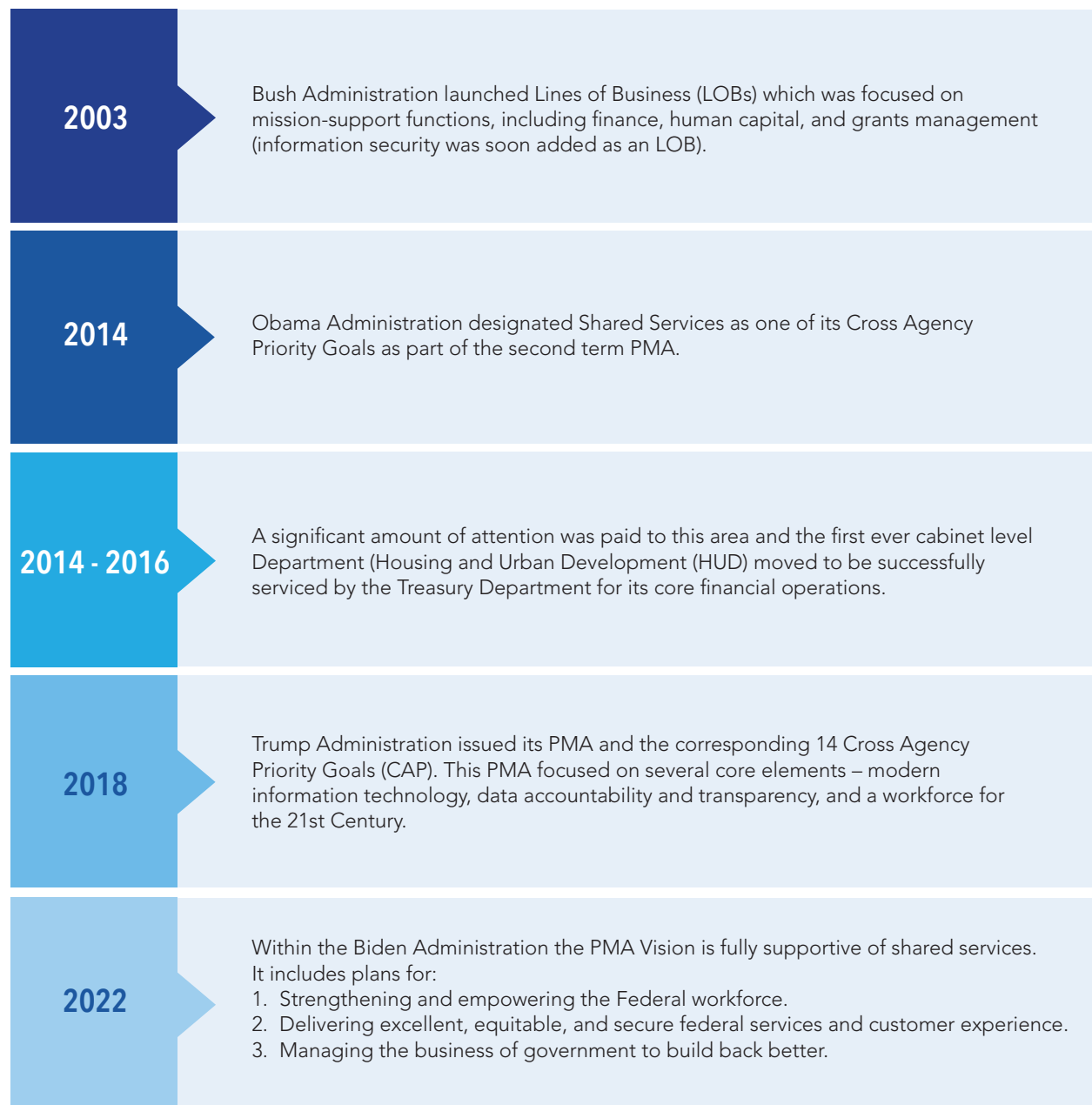
- A lack of ownership and collaborative problem-solving at the highest cross-branch government-wide levels with responsibility, resources, and accountability for modernization.
- Under-leveraged industry investment and innovation in the design and delivery of services in the Federal shared services marketplace.
- A path of least resistance approach leading to lack of focus and activity toward solving large, difficult problems, and also enable continuing resolutions that impede flow of funding.
- The absence of political constituencies demanding improved management performance.
- A lack of capacity to determine and manage the government’s cost of doing business, customer service, and other key performance indicators.

The stark truth is that the government we have today is far from the government we need to manage 21st Century challenges.

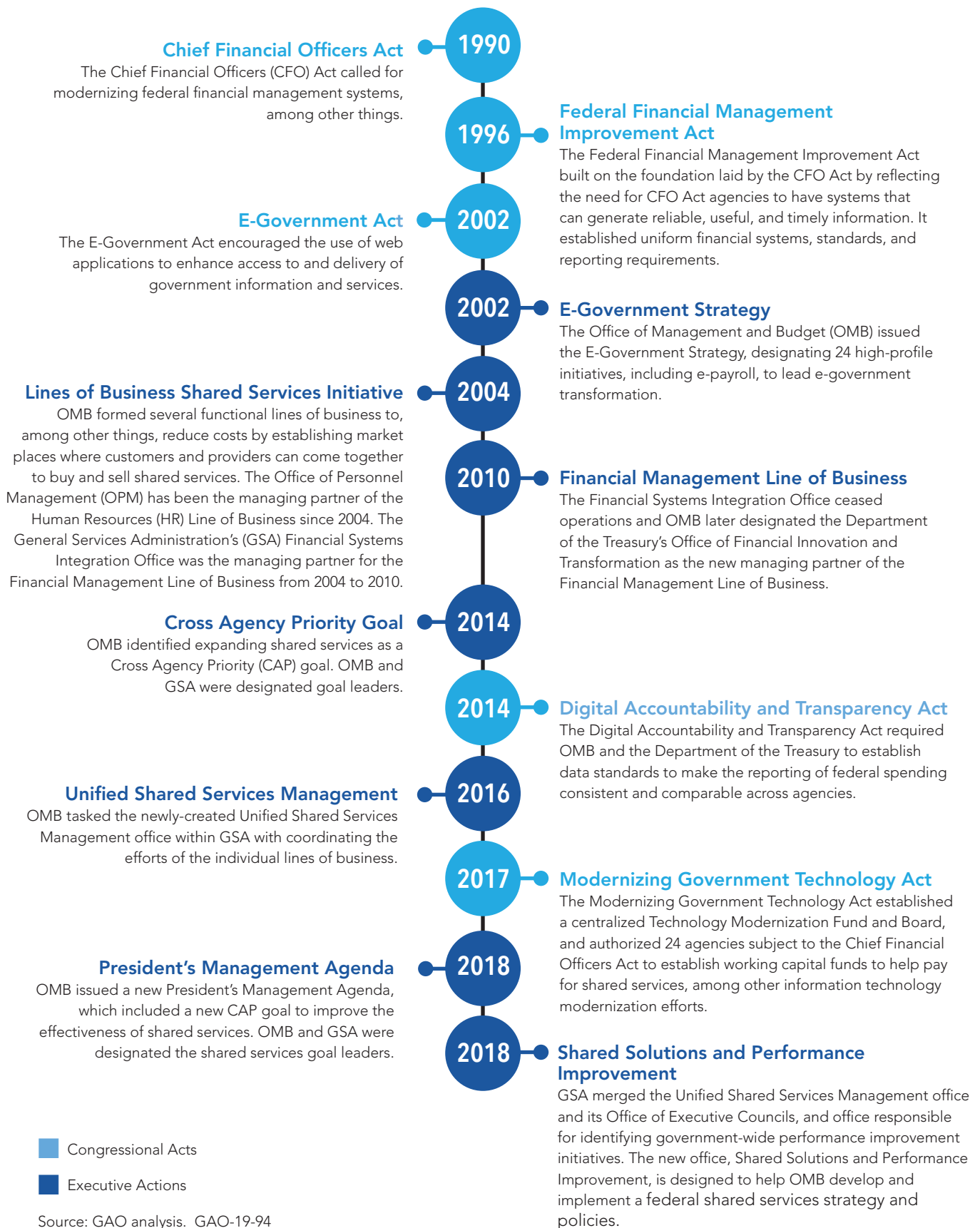
# History of Shared Services in the Federal Government

The timeline below provides an overview of the history of shared service within the federal government. The second timeline depicts a legislative synopsis created by GAO. For a more complete historical description of shared service plans and implementation, see Attachment 1.

**FIGURE 1. Administration Highlighted Actions on Shared Services**



**FIGURE 2. Timeline of Key Congressional and Executive Actions to Promote Shared Services**



Source: GAO analysis. GAO-19-94


# Benefits/Outcomes for a Government Fully Engaged in Shared Services

There are common benefits that shared services can provide to the federal government as well as individual departments and agencies. We suggest the benefits of shared services should be addressed in 4 key areas. Each should be developed with targeted Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and outcome metrics designed to demonstrate success.

- 1. Performance Improvement and Faster Scaling** – Measured outcomes in mission-support such as increased use of shared services over time, process/policy standardization/consistency, increase in quality, increase in self-service optimization, and staff productivity. Reduced technology platforms and cost, improvement in data sharing/transparency, improved data and service quality, reduced error rates, increased standardization, improved evidence-based policy/decision-making, and increased ability for predictive analytics are significantly increased in a consolidated environment. Having improvements in customer and digital abilities in place will translate into core shared services capabilities scaling at a greater pace within departments and across government.
- 2. Customer and Stakeholder Satisfaction** - Increased citizen, customer, and process owner satisfaction who are executing mission-centric requirements with urgency. A quickened pace in automated service delivery (RPA, AI), and self-service delivery will improve speed, accuracy, and provide the opportunity for less labor-intensive self-service.
- 3. Operational Improvements** – Transaction and overall operating cost reduction, process efficiency, increased quality, reduced error rates, SLAs met, reduced licensing costs, reduced technology footprint and O&M costs, improvement in regulatory and audit outcomes, and cost avoidance. This allows for a clear return on investment and reprogramming to meet mission-centric needs.
- 4. Mission-Centric Improvements** - Positive customer experience (linked to PMA), increased results achievement, easier fraud detection, and opportunities for workforce upskilling to address the critical needs of the American people.

The Technology CEO Council<sup>1</sup> in 2017 identified nearly \$1 trillion in potential savings and cost avoidances that could be realized if the government reduced its overhead cost ratio from today's approximately 30% of mission spending to 15%, a figure comparable to well managed commercial enterprises. Shared services could contribute to efficiencies of this magnitude, and if fully implemented with unleashed industry investment and innovation they can produce a modernized, right-sized, highly secure and customer responsive Federal administrative structure. Realizing this future state would also enable repurposing of resources to higher

<sup>1</sup> The Government We Need: How Proven Technology Solutions Can Save Taxpayers More Than \$1 Trillion Over a Decade While Enabling More Effective Government, Technology CEO Council, January 2017.



value citizen service and mission-centric needs without adversely impacting the government workforce.

Shared services could result in more efficient services and agile cloud-based SaaS solutions and a notable increase in data exchanges creating more powerful and proactive analytics for decision-making and program enhancement. For example, shared service can provide mission-centric specific benefits such as pandemic relief fund analytics.

The benefits are many if shared services are appropriately planned, resourced, governed, executed, and its success measured and reported.



# Risks and Lost Opportunities to Implementing Shared Services

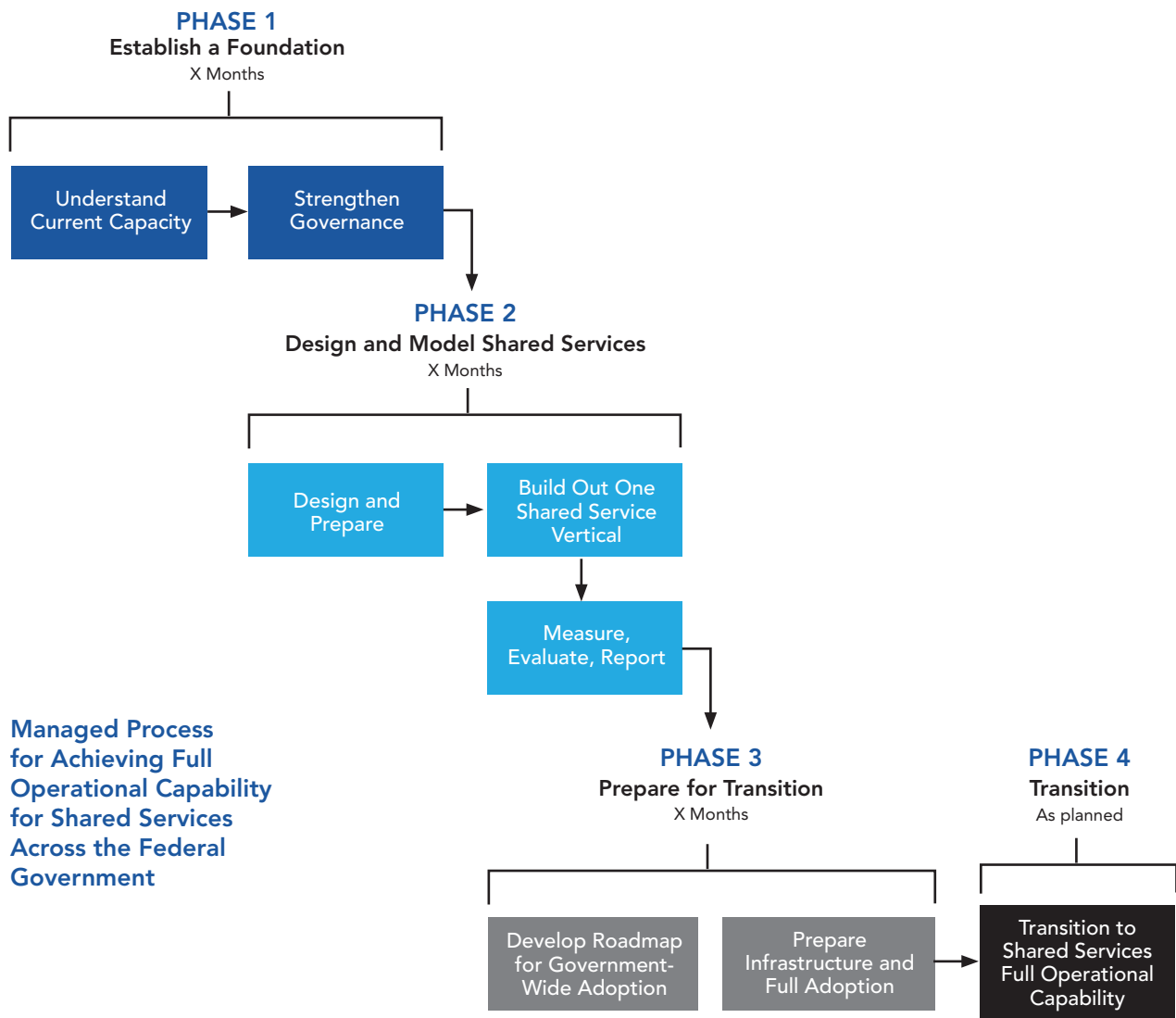
Risks have been experienced for the past 20 years with the government not moving forward with a clear plan and execution toward a state of full operating capability for shared services. The absence of full-time dedicated leadership for shared services within OMB and the lack of continuity in approach from administration to administration have been major barriers to progress. Outstanding professionals have assumed leadership roles as an adjunct to their primary responsibilities, but transformational change of this scope and complexity requires full-time, focused, and high-powered leadership. Moreover, the government has pursued inconsistent approaches to leveraging industry in service delivery and has failed to realize industry's full value as a business partner and modernization driver. As a result, significant efforts have been made and funds spent with little to no return in efficiency or effectiveness, and customer service has not improved. Risks and lost opportunities will continue if deliberate leadership and action is not systemically taken to realize full benefits. These issues are discussed in greater detail in Attachment 2.

There is a need for Congressional/Executive Branch collaboration, transparency, and funding stabilization.

# An Approach to Realizing Full Operating Capability for Shared Services

SSLC recommends a high-level roadmap the federal government should take to realize full operational capability and a return on investment for shared services. By implementing this approach over four overlapping phases it will reach this capability incrementally and be completed over a multi-year timeframe. Descriptions below highlight some of the critical activities in each phase which will result in full operational capacity of shared services across the government. This approach should incorporate and leverage much of the work that has already been accomplished (e.g., leverage and strengthen QSMOs) and progress made within the LOBs and at GSA.

**FIGURE 3. Realizing Full Operating Capability for Shared Services**



## PHASE 1 - ESTABLISH A FOUNDATION

Begin by understanding and strengthening existing capacities.

**Understand Current Capacity.** The federal government should create a true understanding of shared services capacity and challenges across the government landscape. For example, create an inventory of current shared services, technology, and other assets to potentially be leveraged.

- Understand legacy system status, current agency operations, data system capacity, staff capacity, policy, process, and other factors that will support or challenge shared services.
- Profile the operating, transactional, and technology costs currently borne by the government.
- Profile current legislation, governance, political and management systems, and other factors which can currently support or challenge shared services.

If a strong shared services model is believed to exist, incorporate that into the phases below to possibly accelerate the timeline. Assess the capacity of this model, its KPI's and outcomes, and use it to inform the process.

**Strengthen Governance.** The federal government should appoint a high-level dedicated executive for shared services that reports to the OMB Deputy Director for Management (DDM) and codify it legislatively as soon as possible. In addition, the government should:

- Engage key stakeholders to align around shared services and create a stakeholder advisory committee(s).
- Achieve agreement on a common definition of shared services and a forward approach.
- Identify opportunities and tools for investments.
- Strengthen the GSA Office of Shared Solutions and Performance Improvement (OSSPI) to lead this effort with funding, expert staff, technology, research, and other capacities.
- Strengthen the role and responsibilities of the QSMOs.
- Develop operating processes and policy.
- Lead collaboration between the Executive and Legislative Branches to ensure spending, legislative, and policy initiatives consider the move to shared services resulting in reduced spending on major individual agency related investments until shared services are ready for execution.
- Develop, approve, and share a business case supporting federal shared services as an operating model for CFO Act and other agencies.
- Create initial KPIs and outcome metric targets.
- Incorporate a rigorous Organizational Change Management (OCM) initiative.
- Engage and align critical political stakeholders across the Executive and Legislative Branches.
- Develop shared service vertical selection criteria to prepare for Phase 2.

## PHASE 2 - DESIGN AND MODEL SHARED SERVICES

Based on outcomes of Phase 1, design and solidify the federal government's model for shared services.

**Design and Prepare.** The federal government should create and overlay a design of the major components and prepare budgets, structures, accountabilities, major functional elements, and processes for shared services.

- Incorporate the current OMB, GSA, QSMO and other functional entities with revised purpose and accountability.
- Identify all stakeholders and their roles.
- Identify and prepare foundational elements to build out one shared services vertical (cyber, HR, etc.) such as data systems and standards, architecture, technology, policy.
- Create common technical, business, and operating models.
- Identify opportunities to share common systems.
- Prepare mandates for agencies to adopt shared services.
- Conduct analysis of government operated, private sector operated, or a public/private partnership option. Develop plans and policy on a chosen model or sub-model.
- Use a customer-centric human centered design approach. Prepare investment funding, and employ the Technology Management Fund (TMF), or other similar resources.

**Build Out One Shared Service Vertical (e.g., Grants, HR, Cyber).** Based on the one shared service vertical selected, the federal government should fully design, invest, build, resource, and operate one shared service across the federal government. This will serve as a model for further promulgation of other verticals.

**Measure, Evaluate, and Report.** Based on the design create above, during the development and operation of the selected shared service vertical, OMB should report on progress and achievements. Ensure predictive analytics capacity is created. Demonstrate a return on investment where appropriate. Evaluate its design and implementation and adjust. Strengthen the process and metrics created earlier.

Based on the one shared service vertical selected, the government should fully design, invest, build, resource, and operate one shared service across the government.

## PHASE 3 - PREPARE FOR TRANSITION

Based on the outcome of Phase 2, prepare to transition to full operating capability for all identified shared service verticals across the government.

**Develop Roadmap for Government-Wide Adoption.** The federal government should develop a strategic and operational roadmap for the implementation of shared services across all selected verticals. This may require improved governance, policy, legislation, centralized technology solutions, transitioning plans for agency operations, etc. Develop and provide a design template for each shared service vertical to adapt and prepare their plans. Develop retraining and career plans for federal employees.

**Prepare Infrastructure and Full Adoption.** Seek and obtain any necessary authorities and budgets. Continue to engage stakeholders. Finalize any redesigns and prepare to infuse them. Select the best public and/or private sourcing of shared services fit for government. Revise metrics and data sources as needed. Prepare to manage a phased development and roll out plan across verticals.

## PHASE 4 – COMPLETE TRANSITION

Based on the plans developed through Phase 1-3, implement the transition plans to realize full operating capability of shared services across government (across service verticals and agencies). Use a continuous improvement or agile approach to ensure strong foundational capacity. Continue to report on successes and challenges and ensure risk management is a central part of governance.

The goal should be a future state in which delivery by dedicated government or commercial shared service providers is the default business model for managing common mission-support services.

# Summary of SSLC Recommendations

We urge the Administration to articulate the business case for change, achieve a future state that delivers improved customer experience and mission-centric performance from mission-support services, and actively seeks and gathers support from all stakeholders. It will be critical to clearly demonstrate how optimized shared services can move the needle and deliver on its value proposition. To these ends and more specifically, we recommend the Executive Branch:

1. **Adopt the definition** of shared services included in this paper for consistent application across the government.
2. Establish a full-time, **dedicated shared services executive** in OMB with responsibilities, authorities, and resources to drive shared services forward, vertical by vertical.
3. Communicate a **clear vision** and implement a **defined vertical by vertical roadmap** (as well as agency by agency) to realize full operational capability for shared services. The goal is a future state in which delivery by dedicated government or commercial shared service providers is the default business model for managing common mission-support services.
4. Adopt the **four-phased implementation model** presented above to build capacity, strengthen governance, and focus resources on selected vertical, its QSMO and customer/stakeholder ecosystem; build out this vertical to completion, measure its results, and iterate for successive waves of modernization, vertical by vertical, following a similar implementation approach.
5. Strengthen integration with and **leverage the full power of the federal budget and legislative process** to implement a mandate for shared services, vertical by vertical. Demonstrate a true return on investment. Establish a dedicated fund for shared services investment or use the Technology Modernization Fund (TMF). Consider capitalizing the fund from year-end “sweeps” of unused funds.
6. **Create a shared services marketplace** that is as open, competitive, and innovative as possible. Enable robust industry participation to provide the greatest range of high quality and affordable services to customer agencies. Attracting this industry investment and innovation will require that:
  - The government communicate a clear commitment, plan and timetable for migrating agencies to shared services providers.
  - Government demand for services is sufficient to provide industry reasonable return on investment opportunity.
  - Unreasonable barriers do not block the entry of new providers into the marketplace, discourage firms from offering industry leading solutions, or inhibit agency switching from one provider to another.
  - Government and industry collaborate in business partnerships with higher levels of trust and transparency.
  - KPI and outcome metrics be established and required of government and industry.

**7. Engage collaboratively with Congress** in promoting shared services.

- Emphasize both the immediate benefits to be realized in government efficiency, effectiveness, and customer experience, and the synergistic role shared services play in government modernization, i.e., how shared services leverage IT modernization, data structure and analytics, cyber security, reskilling and up-skilling human capital, and other benefits.
- Engage appropriators and oversight committees proactively before issuing mandates and negotiate “win-win” outcomes, such as repurposing savings for mission-centric application; anticipate and neutralize agency appeals for exemptions up front.

**8. Adopt zero-based budgeting as a **cost management discipline**** for mission-support services and create a baseline for calculating ROI on shared service investments, beginning with the selected vertical for transformation. Commit to a schedule for regularly updating the cost basis of each service every few years, or a certain percentage of services every year.

**9. Issue a **mandate that all agencies**** must migrate to a shared service environment for transformed verticals within a defined time frame. Internalize lessons learned from the past, including:

- Voluntary migrations do not work; agencies are change-resistant and require clear direction, accountability, and a mandate.
- Investment funds and resources for migration costs must be provided with mandates to address perceptions of “unfunded mandates.”

**10. Create, manage, and **report critical performance indicators and outcome metrics,**** vertical by vertical.

**11. **Strengthen agency responsibility and accountability**** for results. Establish consistent roles, responsibilities, and authorities for designated shared services “Senior Accountable Points of Contact” (“SAPOCs”) in all agencies and establish “dotted line” reporting relationships of the SAPOCs to the OMB shared services executive.

**12. Consider a legislative proposal to amend the Budget and Accounting Act to create a “cost efficiency” title to **incentivize cost savings**** realized through management initiatives such as shared services.

This new title would track, score, and credit standing committees of Congress for up-front investments that yield outyear cost savings in mission-support activities in the agencies under their jurisdiction. The goal of the new title would be to incentivize the reduction in the costs of support functions, for example to 15% of program costs, a figure consistent with that of America’s best-run corporations. Since development and deployment of modernization technologies take time and require up-front investments, the proposal could employ an extended budget window for tracking and costing those investments, as enacted in recent tax reform legislation. The new title would require House and Senate budget committees to produce a public scorecard and report results to appropriators, CBO and OMB. The committees would reconcile the standing committees for authorizing language that would facilitate cost savings in mission-support activities in the agencies they oversee. This solution would also



allow appropriators to determine whether saved monies stay within the agency for repurposing to mission-centric activities or revert to the Treasury. It could also introduce competition in the provision of service efficiencies by authorizing agencies to access private sector investments in the upgrade of government functions.

## CONTACT

SSLC stands ready to support the Administration in executing this transition to full operating capacity for shared services. We are happy to engage in strategic activity with OMB to codify the recommendations in this paper and create an opportunity for effective results. For more information please contact:

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# Attachments

## ATTACHMENT 1

# Brief History of Shared Services in the Federal Government

Shared services transformation has been underway in the federal government for several decades with bipartisan support across four presidential administrations. The US federal government is the largest and most complex enterprise in the world, and it is a highly challenging change management environment. Significant efforts have been made, and numerous lessons have been learned along the way.

Beginning with the 2003 Budget, the Bush Administration launched a management initiative known as Lines of Business (LOBs) which was focused on mission-support functions, including finance, human capital, and grants management (Information Security was soon added as an LOB). The program was focused on looking for opportunities to share common systems, software, and business processes across the 24 CFO Act agencies with a goal of achieving efficiency and effectiveness and to free up funding that would otherwise be directed toward mission-centric functions.

These Lines of Business were assigned to various lead agencies to manage but unfortunately participation in the program by Cabinet level agencies was generally voluntary, with the exception and major success of the consolidation of payroll systems from 26 to 4 providers for civilian agencies.

The Obama Administration turned its attention to shared services in early 2014 when it designated Shared Administrative Services as one of its Cross Agency Priority Goals as part of the second term PMA. During the period from 2014 until the end of that Administration (2016), a significant amount of attention was paid to this area and the first ever cabinet level Department (Housing and Urban Development (HUD) moved to be successfully serviced by the Treasury Department for its core financial operations and related financial business processes. The most important recommendations implemented were the establishment of a Shared Service Policy Officer at OMB and the establishment of the Unified Shared Service Management Office (USSM) at GSA whose role was to manage the day-to-day implementation of OMB policy.

In March of 2018, the Trump Administration issued its PMA and the corresponding 14 Cross Agency Priority Goals (CAP). This PMA focused on several core elements - modern information technology, data, accountability and transparency, and a workforce for the 21st Century.

One of the CAP Goals – Sharing Quality Services – Improving Efficiency and Effectiveness of Administrative Services across Government - established an aggressive goal of improving the customer experience and achieving operational cost savings of 20% annually over 10 years (roughly \$2B).

This would be accomplished by leveraging:

1. Commercial solutions and innovative practices.
2. Providing the workforce with modern tools and access to experts.
3. Establishing a multi-year plan for continuous improvement and delivery of quality services and technology.

The plan was to achieve these by expanding the number and use of common solutions, improving the quality and delivery of shared services, and increasing the availability and use of centralized services through the creation of Quality Service Management Offices (QSMOs).

Within the Biden Administration the PMA Vision is fully supportive of shared services. It includes plans for ensuring an equitable, effective, and accountable federal government that delivers results built around three priority areas:

1. Strengthening and empowering the Federal workforce.
2. Delivering excellent, equitable, and secure federal services and customer experience.
3. Managing the business of government to build back better.

For example, it includes building a roadmap for a stronger personnel system and how work is accomplished, creating a new service design and customer experience, and improving financial management.

Almost 20 years since the introduction of the shared services concept it has wide adoption across industry and many foreign governments as well as state, and local governments. However, within the federal government it has only seen incremental improvements toward achieving functional shared services. While significant investments have been made in time and money, much more accelerated progress is needed to realize success. The federal government could benefit from the creation of a multi-year roadmap, dedicated leadership, meaningful metrics, and investment (with a return) to realize full operational capability of shared services.

There is widely held consensus that consolidating, centralizing, and modernizing mission-support services across federal agencies has great potential to improve services, increase efficiency, and reduce costs which can then be relocated to mission-centric achievement. To do this a federal shared services model needs to be clearly defined, evolve, and acted upon to realize significant economic and service delivery value. By shifting the focus to designing a holistic delivery model that considers best-in-class options it enables better positioning for mission-centric outcome successes that delivers meaningful and measurable value to the American people.

With all this history, the federal government should be able to take full advantage of the benefits of shared services. Imagine a government where funds are most effectively used, core services are streamlined, and mission-centric requirements of agencies are accelerated.

## ATTACHMENT 2

# Risks and Lost Opportunities

The risks and opportunity costs discussed below have been experienced in past initiatives and may be expected to recur if implementation is not managed more systematically and consistently with the best practices and lessons learned described in this paper:

- **Limited Use** – The applied use and progress toward full shared services has been limited over the years for a variety of reasons. Significant effort is needed to improve dedicated and deliberate processes, policy, governance, data standardization, technology and operational centralization, potential mandates, planning and execution, and other foundational elements necessary to make this progress real and measurable.
- **Inability to Prove Value** - Insufficient focus on measurable outcomes will keep leadership from proper investments and demonstrated ROI.
- **Limited Flexibility** - Any inability of customer agencies to have flexibility to switch from poorly performing providers will reduce support for shared services.
- **Efficiency Gains Realization** - Inability to take advantage of efficiency gains by applying resources to mission-centric areas will impede results. There is a need for centralized leadership to pay attention and manage the benefits of shared services.
- **Limits to Innovation and Investment** – The federal government’s inconsistent approach to shared services, with annual appropriations is neither sufficient to capture long term impacts nor agile enough to rapidly address technology efficiencies, and is not sufficient to sustain industry interest and shared services momentum. This has and could continue to limit innovation, capacity, and competition. Further, unreasonable barriers to entry, and failure to recognize and capitalize on industry investment incentives including recouping upfront costs with outyear savings, discourages industry participation.
- **No Plans or Roadmaps will Stifle Success** – Lack of clear direction and implementation progress could exceed agency appetite to invest. A minimal number of shared service providers who may have multiple new departments to onboard concurrently without appropriate resources could prove challenging.
- **Projects May Stall Without Continuity** - Shared services is a long-term engagement for government. Passing the project to new leaders in the organization can stall long-term projects as new priorities could end a project that had already been in process for many years with funding and resources wasted.
- **Lack of Resources** - With no plan, preparatory foundational activity, and well-resourced leadership and management, shared services will be ineffective or limited at best. For example, OMB/GSA should be well resourced surrounding shared services and the QSMO function strengthened.
- **Cost of Agency Investments** - Agencies will continue to invest in their own systems and processes, costing the government billions of dollars without regard to shared service benefits. Some departments will move forward without waiting for shared services, driven by internal needs such as failing legacy environments. These departments could get ahead of the QSMOs which are still in the startup phase.

- **No Mandates** - Lack of mandates and agency coordination will continue existing inefficient stovepipes.
- **Congress Not Engaged** - There is a need for leadership at the Congressional level. Congressional appropriators can put constraints on or help accelerate shared services where agencies under one appropriations subcommittee's jurisdiction fund agencies under another subcommittee's purview. There is a need for Congressional/Executive Branch collaboration, transparency, and funding stabilization.

### SSLC'S MISSION STATEMENT

SSLC's mission is to support accelerated implementation of shared services in government by: (1) educating the government about how shared services work and deliver value to employees and citizens; (2) providing technical assistance to help government modernize successfully; and (3) advocating policies to accelerate shared services modernization.

### SSLC GOAL STATEMENT

SSLC's goal is to promote and facilitate accelerated implementation of shared services and related modernization initiatives in service of the President's Management Agenda objectives of strengthening and empowering the Federal workforce, delivering excellent, equitable, and secure Federal services and customer experience, and managing the business of government to build back better.

### VALUE PROPOSITION FOR PARTICIPATION IN SSLC ACTIVITIES

SSLC is a community of government and industry leaders who share a passion for accelerating the pace of shared services implementation and government modernization. SSLC provides opportunities for leaders to build relationships, learn from each other and become shared services evangelists, thereby creating through their combined efforts a force multiplier for cultural change necessary to sustain government-wide transformation.

