DEVELOPMENT GATEWAY
An IREX Venture

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FY 2026-2028

Strategic Plan

Where We Are - The Global Context

Digital and Data for Stronger, More Effective Institutions

Dramatic shifts in global power dynamics and technological innovations have created simultaneous geopolitical fragmentation and interconnectedness of global digital tools, society, and economies. The financial and geopolitical landscapes have shifted from theoretical risk to immediate disruption. Drastic cuts in foreign assistance have stripped away the financial safety net for many digital initiatives and Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMIC) government systems, making the pursuit of data and digital sovereignty a matter of practicality and pragmatism, rather than policy preference. In parallel, when deployed responsibly, Generative AI enables low-resource environments to leap over legacy hurdles. However, the rise of Generative AI threatens to widen the cost of the digital divide for billions of individuals, as our partner institutions grapple with the risks inherent in adopting models and tools they neither own, control, nor often fully understand.

These political and funding shifts have made the appeal of implementing new technologies, such as Generative AI, stronger than ever, as resource-constrained governments are asked to do more with less when providing services to their citizens. Technological advances have promised to improve efficiency and effectiveness across many sectors, including government services, but proper care must be taken to ensure that these advances do no harm first.

Global shifts underscore the need for strategic systems transformation. They highlight critical gaps: siloed investments, fragile trust, and technology that fails to prioritize human needs. Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) investments, the shared digital systems that enable public and private service delivery, are pushing societies digitally forward, yet the full potential for sector-specific service delivery remains to be seen. Simultaneously, governments face budget shortfalls and limited capacity in a policy environment that demands multi-agency alignment, where ministries remain structurally fragmented with siloed digital systems. Strategic use of AI offers a pathway to mitigate these capacity and resource gaps – automating routine tasks and enhancing decision-support systems – allowing public institutions to focus on delivering better services to citizens. Capturing this potential requires contextual design and thoughtful implementation.

Sweeping foreign aid cuts exposed systemic vulnerabilities in the digital foundations of many aid recipient countries, sparking renewed interest in **digital and data sovereignty**, or the power to control technology according to the country's own laws and interests, without unwanted and unmitigated dependencies. Rather than merely managing a crisis, these disruptions have created the necessary friction to catalyze a path toward a more resilient digital future. The turn toward sovereignty provides a natural entry point to revitalize and strengthen open-source approaches, and a growing need for Development Gateway: An IREX Venture (DG)'s 25+ year ethos of designing and building with empowered partners who have ownership of the end result. By increasing sovereignty while adopting more powerful technologies, countries can ensure that their digital foundations are adaptable, transparent, and immune to sudden external divestment. The rise of DPI provides an opportunity to center interoperable data exchange as a core component of the digital transformation of government policy-making and service delivery. Interoperability ensures different systems can join data and share information in a standardized way, allowing fragmented institutions to move beyond siloed systems and toward a unified digital infrastructure that scales across sectors.

There is an opportunity and a necessity to reimagine and rebuild government digital systems with country ownership, interoperability, scale, and resilience as core principles. By leaning into these shifts, we are moving beyond the era of foreign-led implementations and supporting a model where digital foundations are primarily built by, and for, the countries they serve.

Where We've Been - Our Evolution

For over twenty-five years, DG has navigated multiple technology trends and development funding disruptions. Throughout, we have remained committed to **our mission to support the use of data, technology, and evidence to create more effective, responsive, and trusted institutions**. Through the evolution of our structure and capabilities, our technology expertise has deepened while our ability to deliver large-scale change has accelerated through our partnership with IREX.

Capability Changes: DG has intentionally moved into sector-based work in agriculture, health, education, public financial management, and digital governance through expanding partnerships with sector experts. Integrating digital foundations into these sectors is the primary driver of **increased reach** and **scaled impact** of DG's work. This approach allows us to maintain focus on digital transformation while harnessing the deep technical expertise that already exists within sector and sub-sector ecosystems. In centering institutional transformation – versus applying specific products – our goal is sustained uptake of the right technology for better impact. We have concurrently strengthened how our programs, technology, and policy expertise blend within our implementations.

Structural Changes: Throughout the past decade, DG has nearly doubled in size in programming and technical personnel. We have prioritized decentralized growth, expanding our teams outside of the US, particularly in the countries where we deliver programming. This has strengthened our ability to grow the relationships required to deliver high-quality programs, building out teams with contextual expertise. In addition to DG's growth, our partnership with IREX connects our work to a larger ecosystem, sectoral expertise, and delivery capacity.

Growing Digital Agriculture Excellence: From fertilizer, cashews, soil health, livestock, and seeds, to national digital roadmaps and diagnostics, DG's ability to match our tested methods with deep existing technical expertise has paved the way for rapid growth, specifically in the agriculture sector, over the past five years. DG is able to look across crops, animals, and inputs to support not only system interoperability, but full sector integration – a "whole of agriculture" approach beyond individual value chains. Individual farms (and farmers) require multi-layered data for decision-making, and our ambition is to support dynamic data and systems that match this need.

Supporting Civil Society: Through our work in Civic Strength Partners and management of the Open Gov Hub, DG is a steadfast leader in the civic space. We provide critical infrastructure and use our institutional knowledge to support social change organizations as peers in planning for long-term organizational sustainability.

Where We'll Go:
Approaches, Priorities, and Goals

Aligned with IREX's 2040 Ambition, DG's work aims to ensure that "people thrive in a technology-, AI-, and data-driven world." Our efforts to shape that future entail close partnership with institutions — e.g., government ministries, universities, multilateral agencies – to support the adoption and use of technology in ways that preserve individual rights while contributing to better policies, resource allocation, and services that improve lives. We have partnered directly with governments globally to own digital transformation for over 25 years. While technology persistently changes, our mission-driven history has surfaced principles and methods that consistently drive institutional change and sustained positive use of technology for the public interest.

Foundational Technical Philosophy

Through our 25 years, we have learned that our greatest impact comes when we move beyond simply building tools, focusing on solving problems and strengthening the people and processes that make institutions. We work with institutions to cut through the noise of technology that makes big promises without delivering meaningful solutions, in order to support them in choosing a path that is ethical, sustainable, and able to be practically implemented, given their specific legal, technological, and financial constraints. Without this thoughtfulness, significant resources may be wasted on technological solutions that aren't able to be used effectively or maintained over time.

Our philosophy follows the use case-driven, complexity-respecting principles we have used for decades:

Government Ecosystem Fluency

We respect the complexity of and constraints on government systems. Meaningful digital transformation, including AI adoption, requires high-quality, interoperable data. We combine technical, political, and change management expertise to modernize legacy systems, support governance for data sharing and standards, and position public sector institutions to lead into the future.

Genuine value over hype

Our process begins with a deep dive into an institution's specific mission and capacity. By distilling objectives into clear outcome-focused decision-making processes, we ensure that every digital solution is grounded in context and designed for real-world impact.

Impartial and outcome-oriented

As an *honest broker*, we protect partners from tech hype and unfulfilled potential by offering the *right* technology for their capacity level and vision; data systems and infrastructure; and use cases, mandates, and missions. We are technology-agnostic, prioritizing open-source tools that prevent vendor lock-in and preserve flexibility, while recognizing that proprietary tools have their place. We open-source our own technology and have registered multiple Digital Public Goods. In cases where governments, organizations, and other institutions have existing agreements with technology vendors, we are comfortable evaluating and working with proprietary software. Our flexibility allows us to effectively work across proprietary and open ecosystems to find the best fit for our partners' mandates.

Ethics, sustainability, and pragmatism

Our partners operate in complex environments with complex challenges. Technology alone will not solve challenges of trust and effectiveness – clear, inclusive data governance protocols are necessary to ensure technology reflects rights and accountability. DG centers flexibility, compromise, and attention to long-term sustainability for successful digital transformation and resilience.

Integrative Methods

In many sectors, there is already a wealth of data and evidence to be tapped into that could aid academics, policymakers, and other stakeholders in making informed decisions on the most effective policy solutions. But that data often cannot be accessed or used effectively, as isolated systems aren't designed to be able to share information with one another, either within or between sectors. This makes it difficult to find trends and patterns, share lessons learned, and to quickly adapt to technological advancements. Our work helps bridge the gap between collecting and using data and ensures that new tools are sustainable and responsive to changing environments to avoid becoming quickly obsolete.

Bridging Research and Evidence into Policy

We transform high-quality research and evidence into decision-making tools by breaking down silos within and across sectors. We synthesize evidence and facilitate data flows across ministries, agencies, universities, and other stakeholders through a common path:

Generative Co-design

Identifying priority problems and opportunities, and relevant decision-making processes through a participatory and collaborative approach with in-country stakeholders and experts.

Curation and Collection

Expanding and refining the evidence base across public, private, and academic sources.

Development

Building digital tools to house and visualize evidence.

Translation

Packaging and disseminating insights for policy use, carefully integrating the timing and delivery of insights into existing policy, programming, and budgetary decision-making processes.

Building interoperable, well-governed digital systems

Interoperable, well-governed, and scalable systems are a cornerstone of sustainable digital transformation. DG co-creates custom digital platforms with end users to ensure the tools we build are relevant, intuitive, and responsive to real-world needs. Partnering directly with governments ensures that interventions align with national development plans, public sector reform strategies, relevant regulations, and global data standards. We create open-source tools that enable interoperability across systems, avoiding vendor lock-in whenever possible.

Adaptive Governance Frameworks

DG works with both technical and non-technical partners in institutions to build out the governance protocols, including rules and processes, required for tool uptake and effective data management in a way that is responsive to the rapid evolution and advancement of technologies. Rather than rigid rules, we provide living guidance that can be adapted as new priorities emerge.

Future-Proof Software

We design systems, such as high-capacity data lakes capable of handling exponential growth in data volume, to anticipate the needs of emerging technologies like AI. By building for future scale and needs, infrastructure remains an asset rather than becoming obsolete as user needs change.

Institutional Technical Strengthening

Sustainability is fundamental to the success of digital solutions. We start our interventions by asking how partners will maintain and use solutions well after DG's engagement ends. This includes assessing and planning for in-house and local capacity, and anticipating what will be needed in the future. For over two decades, DG has trained thousands of users not only how to use technology, but also in how to fully own systems and processes. This ranges from training on tool use, Agile processes, and deployment methods, dashboard updates, and gathering user feedback.

Priority Sectors

DG is not purely a digital vendor. We have a unique ability to cut through complex stakeholder ecosystems and deliver technology that drives better service delivery, governance, or social welfare outcomes. Over the course of this strategy, we will reaffirm what has worked in our past: public sector support, local partnerships, and leveraging our technology expertise to be an honest broker of digital in high-impact sectors.

The following are sectors where public services greatly impact the everyday lives of citizens, and as such, the integration of technological advancements has the potential to transform not just access to services, but quality of life. Investments in the health sector, for example, can help address noncommunicable diseases, while in the agricultural sector, effective data use can help farmers better access markets or help public officials trace livestock disease outbreaks.

We loosely define high-impact sectors as those with a combination of extensive investment and potential for benefit. Importantly, climate impacts each of DG's priority sectors and is interwoven throughout the strategy, with a particular focus on the data enablers of climate adaptation.

Agriculture

We will enable the use of data across sub-sectors, value chains, and markets through future-focused, interoperable systems. These interoperable data systems, cutting across private and public partners, are vital for harnessing AI and large-scale digital transformation.

Health

We will support the translation of high-quality data and evidence into policy and practice in public health, in close partnership with local universities and think tanks. Building on the methods we have developed through our continuing tobacco control portfolio, we will support additional critical sub-sectors–such as climate services for health and non-communicable diseases–to fill data gaps for policy, connect disparate digital systems, and combat industry interference.

Education and Workforce Readiness

Through our joint initiative with IREX, we will support the higher education and vocational institutions of the future, nurturing the digital workforce required for the future economy by strengthening the digital and data systems used, and the digital skills taught. Our joint efforts on supporting educational institutions and educators in the effective, ethical use of AI will help to drive improved learning outcomes and increased equity for children and emerging workers globally.

Public Financial Management

As countries rely more exclusively on domestic resources and digital sovereignty, DG will support renewed domestic focus on transparency, efficiency, and equity of public financial management systems, i.e. the collection, allocation, and accounting of public funds.

Digital Governance

Online Safety We will make digital spaces safer for all, deploying IREX's technical expertise with DG's digital excellence for improved policy and tools to combat digital harm.

Testing Global Standards and Frameworks DG will continue to serve as a middle node between global frameworks and standards, and their application. We will apply and test ethical AI frameworks, guidelines, and standards in our own work, providing feedback on the opportunities and limitations.

Our Cross-Sector Approach to AI

The AI landscape over the last several years is one of constant and rapid evolution. There is growing pressure for institutions to adopt AI solutions, while at the same time, balancing their high risks. Our approach helps institutions build their existing data systems in a way that makes it easier to implement AI, design plans that address the needs of their specific contexts, and conduct hands-on experimentation in a safe environment before solutions are rolled out to the public. This ensures that AI adoption is sustainable in the long-term and able to be implemented at scale across institutions or sectors, not just stagnated in a pilot program.

1. Building a Strong Data Foundation

Successful AI requires AI-ready data. We help partners become AI-ready by making systems interoperable, setting clear rules for how data is governed, and centering ethical considerations for AI readiness and responsible adoption.

2. Pragmatic Planning and Visioning

We do not start with the technology; we start with the need. We work side-by-side with partners to identify where AI can actually help current workflows. By assessing existing infrastructure, policies, and skills, we create roadmaps that are ambitious but realistic, ensuring strategies are context-driven and fit for purpose.

3. Finding and Testing the Right Tools Market Scanning

Our developers look at the rapidly changing landscape of AI tools to find the best match for our partners' needs. We evaluate tools beyond the tech, looking at long-term costs, energy efficiency, and data ownership.

Safe Testing (Sandboxing): DG develops a controlled environment, i.e., *a sandbox*, for safe experimentation of high-risk technology against real-world problems without compromising data, processes, or organizational integrity. Hands-on exploration allows for informed investment decisions based on how tools perform with real-world needs and risks, measuring accuracy, reliability, and cost.

4. Scale

To ensure AI implementations do not get stuck in the pilot phase, we help institutions scale. We turn experimental successes into actionable plans, advising on what to adopt, adapt, and avoid. We focus on training and ethical standards to ensure long-term uptake and ownership.

DG'S APPROACH TO AI

Strengthening data pipelines and governance

Ensure data are interoperable, and data protection, ethics, and ownership requirements are clear

Supporting pragmatic AI visioning

Establish the organizational level of AI readiness and supporting AI strategy development

Identifying the right tools

Assess and identify opportunities and risks, and sandbox state-of-the-art tools

Guiding adoption

Produce bespoke roadmaps and support implementation

Conclusion

This strategy reaffirms DG's mission to ensure institutions thrive in an increasingly technology-, AI-, and data-driven world. Built on our decades-long foundation of being an honest technology broker and prioritizing genuine value over hype, our path forward is centered on country ownership, interoperability, scale, and resilience. By focusing on deep sectoral expertise – particularly in agriculture, health, education, public financial management, and digital governance – and advancing context-driven, responsible AI adoption, we are committed to driving transformative impact alongside IREX, ultimately improving policies and services for citizens globally.