

Digital Service Act of 2019

Senator Kamala D. Harris

State and local governments struggle to deliver services effectively in part because they have difficulty implementing modern technical solutions.

Most Americans have more daily contact with their state and local governments than the federal government, especially as states and localities administer key federal programs. Although state and local governments spend nearly \$100B to deploy technology, many of the systems (by some estimates 94 percent) fail to solve the problems for which they were created.

A digital service is a proven model to enable smarter government, but state and local governments lack the funding to launch their own digital services.

A digital service is a team of technologists, designers, and civil servants that collaborates with government offices and end users to engineer a solution to a delivery challenge, from helping veterans enroll in housing programs to providing parking information to drivers. With a singular focus on delivery, a digital service transforms critical services, rethinks how the government invests in technology, and recruits top talent into public service.

The United States Digital Service (USDS) began in 2014. It has since completed more than 100 projects, improving how the federal government serves Americans – including veterans, small business owners, and every day families -- while saving taxpayers over \$2 billion dollars in only five years.

Inspired by its success, states like California, Kansas, Colorado, Georgia, New Jersey, and Massachusetts are working to launch and sustain their own digital service teams. Digital service teams require small upfront investments that produce large long-term benefits. But, with states and cities increasingly strapped for resources, initial funding remains a critical barrier to launch. Helping states become better creators, procurers, and stewards of technology is important for the federal government given that much of state investment in IT is for federal programs or uses federal dollars, directly and indirectly.

The Digital Service Act creates small, agile grants to state and local governments to launch and enhance digital service teams. It also continues support for the US Digital Service.

US Digital Service is authorized to give state and local governments 2-year grants ranging from \$200,000 to \$2.5 million per year, according to the population they serve. Grants require a 20% cost share and at least 50% of the grant must be used for talent rather than technology. Successful awardees can re-apply once for an additional two-year grant to sustain their new digital service teams. Grants are intended to support state and local efforts just long enough that they can realize and reinvest savings to sustain digital service teams on their own.

The bill authorizes \$15 million and \$50 million annually for USDS to make grants and to continue its federal work, respectively, for FY2020-2027. USDS must report to Congress on the impact of grants bi-annually.