

Better Government by Design

Public systems do not fail for lack of intent. They fail at the level of design — and design is a choice.

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The gap between a government scheme and a government outcome is rarely a gap of money or intent. It is a gap of design: the forms citizens cannot complete, the process that requires three offices to agree, the system built around the department's structure instead of the citizen's situation. These are not administrative details. They are the outcome.

India has already proven the counter-case at scale. Its digital public infrastructure showed what happens when the state builds **rails rather than portals** — simple, interoperable foundations that others compose services upon. The lesson is not that every problem needs a platform. The lesson is that design quality is a governing choice, and it compounds.

What designing well actually means

Start from the citizen's journey, not the department's chart — and walk it as the least-equipped citizen, not the ideal one. Make the default path the honest path, so compliance is

easier than evasion. Build measurement in from the first day: a system that cannot tell you who it served, how fast, and where it failed is a system managed by anecdote. And design for the audit before it happens — provenance of decisions matters as much in administration as it does in AI.

A citizen experiences the state through its interfaces. Improve the interface and you have, in the only sense that matters, improved the state.

The capability question

None of this is possible if design capability lives only with vendors. Institutions that outsource all design end up governed by their suppliers' assumptions. The durable pattern pairs external expertise with an internal owner — someone inside the institution accountable for how the system treats the person standing in front of it. That is not a technology decision. It is what better government, by design, actually requires.

If a public system in your charge deserves to work as well as its intent, that is the conversation to have.

Integral advises public institutions on designing systems that serve citizens as they are — and can prove it.
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