BRIDGING THE GAP: GEORGIA'S ANALYTICS PROGRAM MEASURES DIGITAL CAPABILITY

NASCIO 2022 State IT Recognition Awards

STATE: Georgia

AGENCY: Georgia Technology Authority

AWARD CATEGORY: Data Management, Analytics, and Visualization

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The public's appetite for digital services and digital access to information has rocketed into the stratosphere. It got there faster than any Bezos, Branson or Musk spacecraft could, and it looks capable of maintaining orbit, well, indefinitely. State government can't afford to stand on the ground and just stare up. Agencies and entities need digital capabilities that can meet the new preferences of constituents. And much like you'd find in a flight cockpit, they need dials and meters, and measures to gauge whether they're on course and holding altitude.

That's where the Georgia Analytics Program comes in. GAP is a collaborative initiative among the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, the Georgia Technology Authority (GTA), and 75+ participating state agencies and elected officials. It entails providing an enterprise-wide digital performance management tool (Siteimprove), content strategy training (Digital Academy), and round-the-clock support for agency web managers. Plus, GAP goes a step farther by making agencies' web performance data public on a new website and dashboard.

Using the GAP dashboard, located at **analytics.georgia.gov**, website managers and agency leadership can now track traffic patterns, popular pages, and metrics on accessibility, readability, content quality, search engine suitability, and machine learning friendliness. These are the considerations that shape customer experience. GTA conceptualized, built, and manages the GAP dashboard. GTA also consults with agency staff and trains them to make GAP data-driven decisions for improving their websites. Since launch, 90% of participating agencies have upped their digital performance scores. And because the GAP information is publicly available, the dashboard provides Georgians a plain picture of how their government is working for them.

The Governor's Office of Planning and Budget relies on the GAP dashboard to monitor how agencies perform online. The metrics also provide basis for budget conversations and planning initiatives across the state's enterprise.
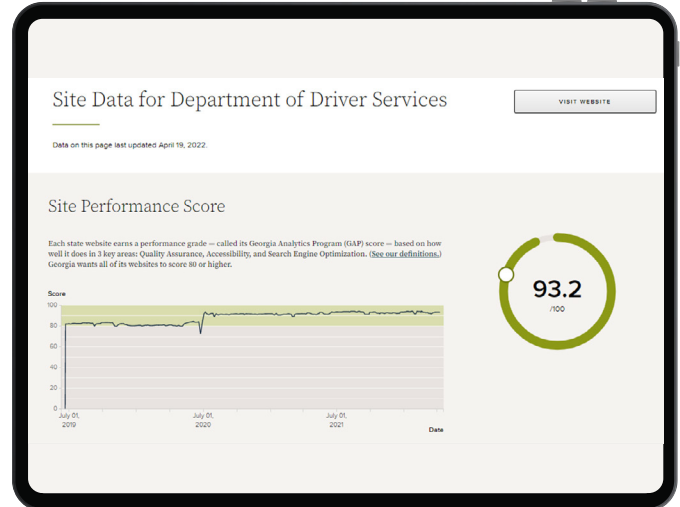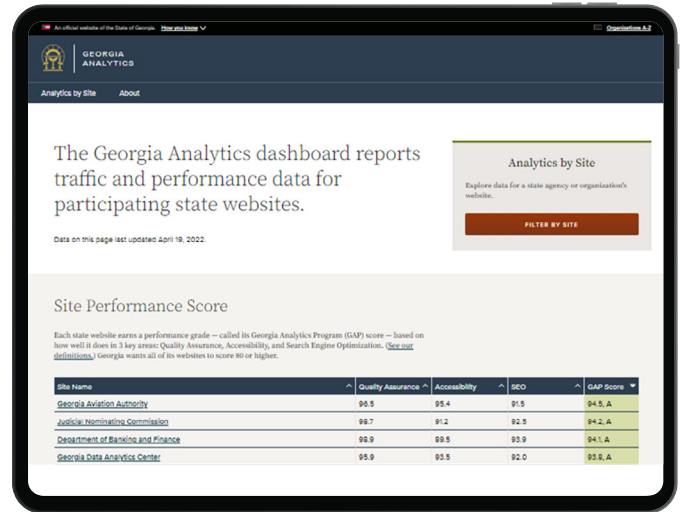
"The GAP dashboard gives us a window into the accessibility of our digital properties and what we need to do to keep our online presence compliant with accessibility standards."

**Jeff Smith - Department of Driver Services Chief Information Officer**

Before GAP, agencies relied on their own web performance metrics, where they had them. Each individual agency followed its own approach to optimizing its digital real estate. Agency leadership couldn't easily gauge if their digital properties were meeting quality and performance standards. Today, the GAP dashboard collects and displays data in categories consistent across the 82 participating state websites. Decision-makers can see the analytics that matter and compare how they're doing relative to their peers across the state. Plus, the public gains visibility into an increasingly important aspect of their government's service delivery.

Meeting Demand through Updated Digital Technologies

The COVID-19 pandemic super-accelerated the public's demand for digital access to state government information and services. If ever there was a time for alternatives to having to interact face-to-face at an office, we've lived it in the last two years. Also, the public increasingly *expects* their transactions with government to be convenient, intuitive, and reliable. They've been conditioned by sophisticated digital customer experiences offered by the private sector. To ensure the state's digital properties meet those expectations, you need to be able to measure the digital performance indicators that matter most to customer experience. GAP homes in on that data and points agencies to potential improvements that will resonate with constituents.

GAP is one of the first initiatives by a state to make digital performance transparent, not just among agencies but for the public too. By checking the GAP website and dashboards, all can see how well individual agencies are performing in key digital performance categories like content quality, readability, accessibility, and how well they're geared to work with search engines and machine learning. Each website earns a letter and number grade in each category and overall. Those scores are updated regularly and appear plainly on the GAP website, along with explanations of what each performance category measures. The Governor's Office of Planning and Budget expects agencies to maintain a score of at least 80, or a B. In a snapshot taken in April 2022, 76 of 82 participating websites met this standard. That's meaningful improvement from the April 2021 launch of GAP when 67 sites scored above 80. It says that website managers are acting on improvement opportunities identified by GAP.

The public transparency permitted by GAP is significant. It can build sorely-needed trust in government. And it helps keep Georgia state government accountable, promoting the kind of digital service delivery that has become central to customer engagement. No question, GAP is measuring performance in areas that directly influence customer experience. And it does so using a model that could be readily replicated in other states.
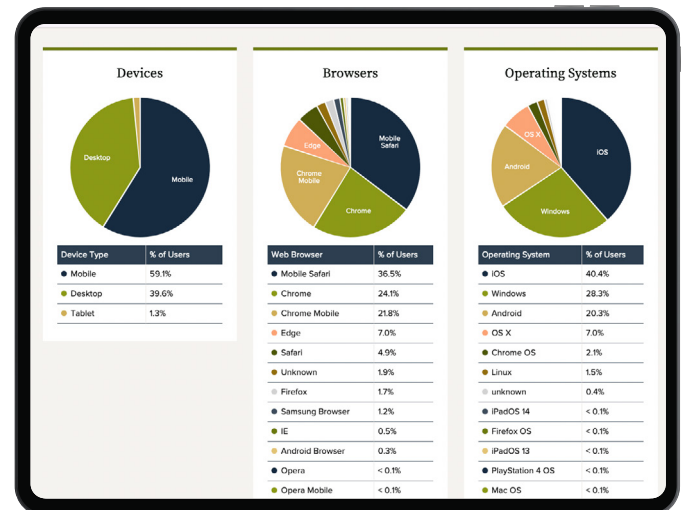
IMPLEMENTATION

GTA's Digital Services Georgia (DSGa) group partnered with the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) on the GAP project. DSGa's engineering and user experience teams worked with private-sector partners Lullabot (design and development) and Siteimprove (web governance tools) to develop the dashboard. The DSGa content strategy and training teams then developed a thorough training plan to ready agency website managers to interpret GAP data and to continuously refine website content to make it more accessible and consumable for the public.

The idea of collecting digital performance metrics and using them to guide continuous improvement across state websites had simmered for a few years. Then in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic turned up the heat on the need for convenient, effective digital services and information. OPB and GTA fast-tracked the Georgia Analytics Program. With help from vendors Siteimprove and Lullabot, GTA moved aggressively to deploy the GAP dashboard.

The project roadmap stretched into summer 2021:

Select the analytics tool:

In 2019, DSGa selected and implemented the website performance measurement tool Siteimprove. Siteimprove measures quantitative and qualitative site impacts. It became a standard part of the state's web publishing platform, GovHub. (GovHub is a Drupal-based content management system GTA offers to state agencies and organizations for website hosting.) DSGa also extended its Siteimprove use to websites outside the GovHub family and to high-impact government applications. As each website or application is added to Siteimprove, it is also added to the GAP dashboard. That creates more consistency of measurement across the state. Georgia Gateway, a tool used for processing benefits eligibility for multiple public support programs, was added to the dashboard. So was the heavily trafficked Secretary of State's website. Siteimprove is so thorough, agencies have in some instances prioritized it over Google Analytics even.

Train content managers:

With the introduction of Siteimprove, DSGa needed to train agencies on how to interpret and use the web performance data to improve their sites. Initially, targeted training was offered by request, then as part of a larger Digital Academy training regimen launched in summer 2021. DSGa has created on-demand virtual modules, making needed information even more easily accessible to agency website managers.

Build the dashboard:

DSGa took an agile approach. The GAP dashboard needed to display performance data at a glance and in a format that could be easily understood by not just website managers, but also agency leaders, other interested parties, and the public. The minimum viable product featured a dashboard with scores for quality assurance, accessibility, search engine optimization, and an overall GAP score. Agency sites are ordered by score, from highest to lowest. (That has sparked friendly competition among agencies.) The dashboard shows most-viewed pages and device used for access (i.e., desktops, tablets, mobile) for all participating sites. Charts indicate where an agency stands in relation to the state benchmark score of 80. DSGa monitors dashboard usage and seeks user feedback to guide future enhancements.

Support users:

By July 2021, DSGa had created 12 virtual, on-demand training modules to ready website managers to use Siteimprove and improve their GAP scores. Training covers everything from understanding digital performance categories, to identifying website issues, to resolving them. To date, 27 website managers have taken advantage of the training, with 13 completing all modules. DSGa also created a GAP consultation option for agencies which provides a detailed exploration of an agency's audience, goals, and analytics. It identifies quick wins and provides a roadmap for using GAP to continuously improve customer experience. Where an agency prefers a longer consultative engagement, DSGa will provide a top-to-bottom website refresh recommendation, information architecture design and testing, content copywriting, page layouts, and more. Across all options, GAP data is relied on to guide improvements in the state's digital services.

Enhancing Data Access, Transparency and Overall Customer Experience

By addressing key determinants of customer experience common across agencies, GAP promotes continuity in digital service goals statewide. GAP creates awareness of website issues and gives clear instruction on how to make improvements. On the strength of an extended marketing and training campaign, DSGa is seeing more Georgia agencies participating in the Georgia Analytics Program and raising their website performance scores. Three of the agencies achieving the largest improvements happen also to have broad impact among Georgians. The Departments of Driver Services, Revenue and Labor have increased their overall GAP scores by 10 points or more since the program began.

Georgia Department of Driver Services

Georgia Department of Revenue
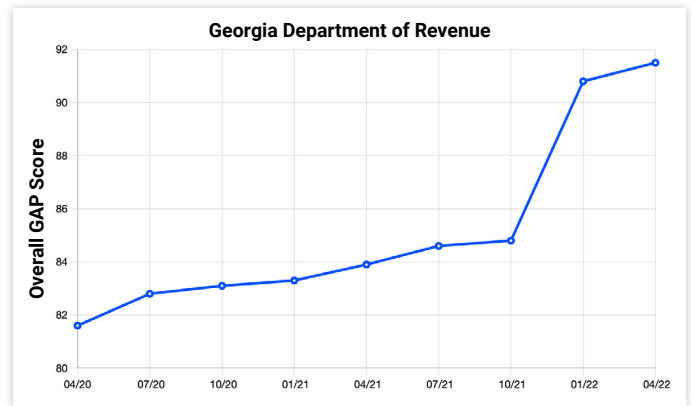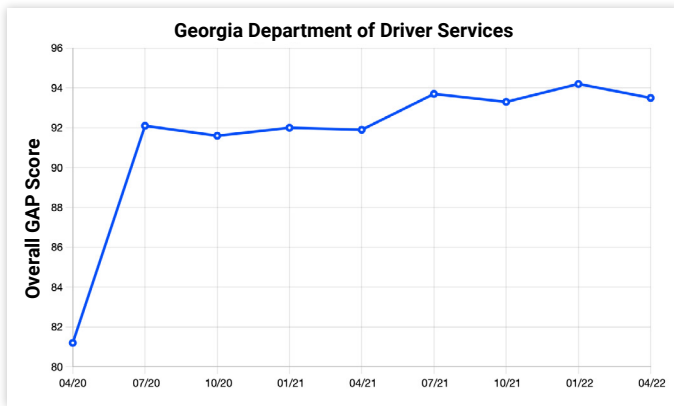
Since initiating the Georgia Analytics Program in 2021, DSGa has fielded hundreds of website support requests about GAP-identified website issues. Agencies have demonstrated strong interest in improving their website performance. And yes, no doubt, COVID-19 pandemic pressures have fueled a sense of urgency. But expectations for highly effective websites are expected to endure.

Georgia Department of Labor

The most dramatic website performance improvements have come for sites outside the state's GovHub web publishing platform (i.e., sites not hosted by DSGa). Over the past year, scores for those sites improved 5.1 points for quality assurance, 2.5 points for accessibility, 9 points for search engine optimization, and 8.3 points for overall GAP score. GAP is making real impact on website attributes that influence customer experience.
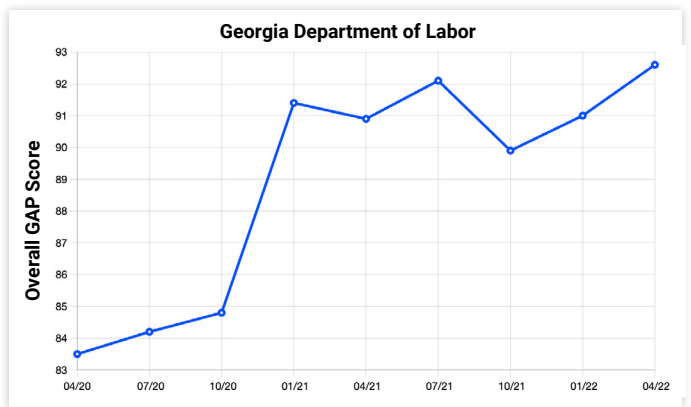
As Office of Planning and Budget Director Kelly Farr observes, convenient, easy and reliable digital interaction with state government is increasingly what Georgians expect. "The GAP website and dashboard are incredible tools for evaluating the effectiveness of our essential digital interactions with the public, and then making improvements. When we enhance digital options for Georgians, we improve our citizen engagement and customer service. Digital is the environment they prefer."

Plans include increasing the number of GAP participants, with emphasis on high-profile or high-traffic transactional applications. The ones most heavily relied on by Georgians seeking state government services. With these, GAP stands to facilitate widely felt improvements in customer experience.

Training is to be conducted to address not only website managers, but also agency leadership. Those leaders would learn more about the importance of digital maturity and accessibility, how to interpret their agencies' web performance scores, and what they can do to support improvements. DSGa also envisions complementing GAP by capitalizing further on its design system, making that system available to agencies beyond the state's GovHub platform, and broadly helping agencies turn their digital presence into an invaluable asset.

The Georgia Analytics Program is evolving and expanding, with an enduring focus on enhancing citizen engagement and improving Georgians' interactions with their state government. And as with commercial space travel, the sky is no longer the limit.

"By increasing digital options for citizens, we can improve our citizen engagement and customer service and interact with them in an environment they prefer. GAP metrics can help agencies drive business decisions to enhance the customer service experience."

Kelly Farr - The Governor's Office of Planning and Budget Director

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