
GERMAN
CITIZEN
SERVICES
LAB

Digital Citizen Services Lab

Masterplan for BMDS AI Innovation Lab

Strategy

This plan outlines a fast-moving *Digital Service Lab* within the new Federal Ministry for Digital Affairs and State Modernisation (BMDS) to prototype citizen-centric services on low-code platforms.

It aligns with the BMDS's mandate as a "Ministry for Implementation" focused on concrete, fast results.

The lab's vision is to deliver **visible digital progress** – less bureaucracy, more service, faster decisions – exactly as the BMDS promises.

By operating in 90-day startup-style sprints, it embodies the ministry's goal of overcoming silos and using agile, cross-disciplinary teams beyond classical structures.

This initiative supports Germany's broader digital agenda (e.g. a **central citizen account**, digital ID, once-only data entry), accelerates AI adoption, and feeds into Mittelstand innovation networks.

It will deliver early "quick wins" to build momentum, while laying groundwork for long-term modernization (e.g. register reform and AI hubs).

1. Strategic Vision & Objectives

- **Accelerated Digital State**:

  Align with BMDS's mission to *"get things done"*, cutting red tape and rapidly launching new services. The lab's objectives should mirror BMDS priorities: modernizing registers and IT (digital identities, once-only data), strengthening data-driven government (data economy, AI), and expanding broadband & digital infrastructure.

- **Citizen-Centric Services**:

  Focus on public value: easier interactions (e.g. online applications, case tracking), inclusive design (support for those preferring analog help), and tangible time/cost savings. German citizens overwhelmingly support *"Digital Only"* administration (2/3 in a 2025 survey); the lab must turn this readiness into improved user experiences.

- **Cross-Government Innovation**:

  Support key initiatives like the national *Once-Only* data hub (NOOTS) and a unified citizen platform (per coalition plans). Embed the lab's prototypes into federal/state digital strategies by collaborating with the IT-Planungsrat and OZG (Onlinezugangsgesetz) efforts. Ensure each prototype advances goals like reduced bureaucracy or AI integration, contributing to the BMDS's high-level targets (e.g. **visible successes by 2025**).

2. Team Composition, Recruitment & Governance

- **Core Roles:**
  - **Chief Acceleration Officer (CAO)** – *Elias Kouloures* as CAO to lead vision, strategy, and Agile coaching.
  - **Product Owner/Business Analyst** – defines service needs, liaises with ministries, Länder and municipalities.
  - **Technical Lead / Low-Code Developer(s)** – responsible for building prototypes; expertise in platforms (e.g. Mendix, ServiceNow, etc.) and integrations.
  - **UX/Service Designer** – ensures user-centered design (usability, accessibility, clear language).
  - **Data Architect/Security Specialist** – plans data flows (leveraging forthcoming NOOTS, register data) and ensures privacy/security compliance.
  - **Stakeholder Liaison/Communicator** – engages with states, municipalities, and citizens for feedback, and communicates results.

- **Team Size & Skills**:

  A small, agile squad (e.g. 6–8 people) to stay nimble. Members drawn from diverse backgrounds: digital public servants, innovation experts, freelancers/contractors, and even relevant industry partners.

  Emphasize recruitment of **agile-savvy, interdisciplinary talent** (mirroring BMDS's own model of cross-department teams). Use flexible hiring (e.g. project contracts, secondments from academia or startups) to quickly onboard specialists (including Elias as a contractor).

- **Governance Structure:**

  - **Steering Committee**:

    Meet monthly with senior sponsors (Jarzombek, Wildberger, and a representative of Merz's office) to align on goals, remove obstacles, and approve next-cycle priorities. This satisfies the BMDS ethos of *"clear responsibilities"*.

  - **Reporting Line**:

    The CAO (Elias) reports to Staatssekretär Thomas Jarzombek as project champion, with biweekly updates. A dotted line to Minister Wildberger ensures high-level coordination (given the BMDS veto power over federal IT spending).

  - **Advisory Board**:

    Include stakeholders (e.g. state CIOs, municipal associations, user representatives) to vet ideas. The team should also engage the IT-Planungsrat (the federal-state digital steering board) and relevant Fachministerkonferenzen to integrate feedback. This governance balances agility with oversight, enabling *"delegated freedom"* while keeping projects on track with legal/strategic constraints.

3. KI-Roadmap (Year 1, 90-Day Cycles)

Implement in 4 x 90-day Sprints (approx. Q1–Q4) with iterative review. Below is an illustrative timeline:

Phase	Timeline	Key Activities & Milestones
Preparation (Month 0–1)	Weeks 1–4	• **Assemble core team** (hire CAO/Elias, lead dev, designer, etc.). • **Set up infrastructure** (workspace, low-code licenses, dev environment). • **Define mission & OKRs** with stakeholders (e.g. select first two service domains).
Cycle 1 – Kickoff & Discovery	Days 1–90	• **Identify prototypes**: conduct rapid user research/workshops with citizens and officials to find pain points (e.g. permit requests, social benefit applications). • **Select 2 pilot services** (e.g. "digital permit re-issue", "online scheduling"), vetted against strategic impact (alignment with once-only, OZG etc.) and feasibility. • **Design sprints**: create user journeys, wireframes; gather early feedback. • **Develop MVPs** on no-code/low-code platforms. • **Quick Launch**: demo live prototypes internally; collect feedback (analytics, user tests). • **Review & adapt**: End-of-cycle demo to Jarzombek/Wildberger; refine plan based on outcomes.
Cycle 2 – Expansion & Integration	Days 91–180	• **Iterate Prototypes**: incorporate Cycle 1 feedback, improve features, fix issues. • **Scale & Pilot**: deploy prototypes in a limited real-world pilot (e.g. one city or agency), working with that authority. • **Add Second Wave**: select additional service(s) (e.g. integrating a **citizen help chatbot** using AI, or a landlord registry app), using lessons learned. • **Technical Integration**: Begin aligning prototypes with national stacks (e.g. ensure compliance with NOOTS once available, integrate federated logins/identities). • **Stakeholder Engagement**: share progress with IT-Planungsrat; coordinate on common data standards (start using open APIs). • **Mid-year Review**: collect metrics from prototypes, adjust roadmap.

Cycle 3 – Consolidation & User Testing	Days 181–270	• **User Acceptance Tests**: extend pilot usage, gather broad citizen feedback (surveys, interviews). Ensure services are user-friendly (address needs for simplified language and assistance highlighted in eGov Monitor). • **Interoperability Effort**: enhance integration with federal registers and state systems as they come online; for example, plug in the new national ID and Once-Only data connectors (NOOTS) to eliminate duplicate form-filling. • **Governance Liaison**: refine legal-compliance with data protection; adjust architecture per BMDS guidance (leveraging *"Datenschutz-Cockpit"* if needed). • **New Prototype**: pilot a third service, potentially an **AI-enhanced backend** (e.g. auto-triage of citizen inquiries) to showcase AI usage in government (supporting coalition AI goals). • **Third Quarter Review**: evaluate cumulative impact (users served, time saved), publish interim report, prepare for scale-up cycle.
Cycle 4 – Scale & Transition	Days 271–360	• **Deployment & Scale**: roll out the most successful prototypes to additional departments or regions. Transfer ownership/training to permanent IT teams (e.g. regional IT centers, or commercial integrators). • **Process Documentation**: codify lessons (roadmaps, code samples, UX guidelines) into a "digital service playbook" for other projects. • **Metrics Finalization**: finalize key performance results (service usage, satisfaction, reduced processing time, cost savings). • **Strategic Handover**: Ensure each prototype feeds into a long-term roadmap (e.g. integration into the national service portal, or leading to formal development contracts for full rollout). • **Year-End Review**: Present successes to Jarzombek, Wildberger, and stakeholders (via showcase event). Plan continuation or expansion for Year 2 based on proven results.

4. Identifying, Selecting & Validating Service Prototypes

- **User-Centered Ideation**:

  Leverage design thinking to gather service ideas. Tactics include citizen journey mapping (identify frustrating bureaucratic steps), hackathons with municipalities, and surveys. Focus on tasks where users strongly prefer digital-only options (e.g. young people's services, city permits). Engage the Initiative D21 network and NGOs for broad input.

- **Alignment with Federal Strategy**:

  Prioritize services that tie into national efforts – for example, those that can utilize the planned once-only data hub or target OZG requirements. Check each idea against coalition goals (e.g. does it increase digital IDs usage, or reduce analog paperwork?). Use a scoring rubric (impact, feasibility, legal risk).

- **Low-Code Rapid Prototyping**:

  Quickly build "minimum viable products" using no-code/low-code platforms to test assumptions. These tools allow one-week turnaround for new functionality. Integration points (APIs to government registers) should be stubbed initially if not yet available.

- **Iterative Validation**:

  For each prototype, conduct sprint reviews with real users (employees and citizens) and gather metrics (task completion rates, NPS). Use agile feedback loops: demo prototypes to stakeholders (citizen focus groups, ministry experts) and iterate. Confirm each service's value before moving to scale (e.g. compare

processing times versus paper processes; track user satisfaction).

- **Approval Gates**:

  After each 90-day cycle, prototypes undergo a “go/no-go” evaluation by steering committee. Criteria: strategic fit, user demand, technical soundness. Services that meet targets (e.g. 90% user satisfaction, 30% faster processing) proceed; others are shelved or reworked. This ensures limited resources focus on high-return projects.

5. KPIs, Feedback Loops & Success Metrics

- **Usage & Adoption**:

  Number of citizens using each service; percentage of eligible population reached; growth rate of usage over time. (Aim for progressive uptake each cycle.)

- **Efficiency Gains**:

  Measure average processing time before vs. after digital implementation (e.g. "time-to-completion" for a permit). Qualitative target: procedures **"faster and less bureaucratic"**, as promised. Also track staff time saved and cost reductions; the National Regulatory Council estimates multi-billion euro savings from register modernization, setting a benchmark for success.

- **Service Quality & Satisfaction**:

  User satisfaction ratings (surveys, D21 metrics), Net Promoter Score, reduced error/rework rates. For example, after prototyping, aim that <10% of users report confusion (in line with D21 study findings).

- **Delivery Metrics**:

  Cycle time per feature (days from idea to deploy), percentage of sprints delivered on time, team velocity. These process KPIs gauge internal agility.

- **Feedback Mechanisms**:

  Weekly user-feedback sessions during development; public beta-test feedback channels; post-launch surveys. Institute an ongoing **eGovernment Monitoring** (using D21's frameworks) to compare public perception year-over-year. Regular reflection (retrospectives) every cycle will refine methods.

6. Integration with Federal, State & Municipal Bodies

- **Föderale Koordination**:

  The lab will actively participate in the IT-Planungsrat (the joint federal–state digital steering committee) and relevant Fachministerkonferenzen. This ensures prototypes align with federated standards (e.g. OZG thematic fields, EU regulations). Prototype development will use APIs and data schemas agreed at the federal level (like XÖV metadata standards).

- **Use of National Infrastructure**:

  Prepare to plug into shared services as they go live – e.g. link apps to the planned national citizen ID and Once-Only system, and comply with the national cloud strategy (**German Stack**). If infrastructure isn't yet available, build modules to be *"NOOTS-ready"*, minimizing rework later.

- **Local Partnerships**:

  Pilot deployments should involve willing Länder and municipalities (e.g. smart-city partners or model regions). For instance, co-develop an application with a city government to test interagency data exchange, making them role models for others. Partner with local IT agencies and the *Kommunale Spitzenverbände* to champion prototypes regionally.

- **Parallel Initiatives**:

  Coordinate with state digital agendas. For example, if a state is setting up its own innovation hub or digital campus, the lab could co-host a prototype demo or training. Integrate feedback from **Mittelstand-Digital Kompetenzzentren** (the SME centers) which will themselves be focusing on AI and digital readiness, ensuring mutual learning.

- **Communication Channels**:

  Publish regular bulletins on Progress and Lessons Learned via the federal portal (bmds.bund.de), and share code/documentation on joint platforms (e.g. *GovData*, GitHub for public agencies). By keeping all levels informed and involved, the lab's innovations can be adopted widely rather than duplicated in silos.

7. Synergy with AI Innovation Hubs & Mittelstand Pipelines

- **Prototyping AI Use-Cases**:

  Many citizen services can benefit from AI (e.g. automated form validation, chatbots for questions, predictive analytics for service demand). The lab should incorporate *ethically-aligned AI components* in prototypes to showcase practical benefits. For example, a prototype permit system might use AI to auto-classify documents or detect fraud.

- **Link to National AI Strategy**:

  This lab supports Germany's new AI agenda (calling for AI *"real labs"* and SME support). By acting as a real-world testbed for public-sector AI, the lab demonstrates best practices that AI innovation hubs can adopt. It can pilot use of the soon-to-be-built AI supercomputing infrastructure ("KI-Gigafactory") by processing large datasets (anonymized) for policy planning.

- **Engaging Mittelstand (SMEs)**:

  The lab should seek partnerships with innovative SMEs and startups. For example, co-developing a prototype with a small AI company allows technology transfer (the SME gains a government reference, the lab gets cutting-edge tech). Such collaboration fits the expanded *Mittelstand-Digital* network's AI focus and can feed into funding programs (e.g. joint EU or federal grants for scaling proven solutions).

- **Funneling into Funding Pipelines**:

  Successful prototypes can be packaged into pitches for AI and innovation funding (e.g. Digital Innovationswettbewerb or BMBF AI funding lines). The lab can recommend the most promising prototypes for further development under programs like the National AI Strategy's Mittelstandförderung. By doing so, the model ensures a pipeline: lab → demonstrator → funded product → market.

- **Education and Outreach**:

  Collaborate with *Digital Hubs Initiative* and *KI-Campus* to organize workshops where SMEs test lab prototypes. This not only spreads awareness but can reveal new prototype ideas from industry. It turns the lab into a bridge between citizen needs and private sector innovation, reinforcing Germany's goal of an AI-ready economy.

8. Risk Management & Mitigation

- **Bureaucratic Inertia**:

  Risk that traditional processes slow innovation. ***Mitigation*:** Leverage strong ministerial backing (Merz's decree gave BMDS broad powers) to obtain "fast lane" approvals for lab initiatives. Use pilot agreements (Like a Memorandum of Understanding) with cooperating agencies to cut red tape. Keep the lab's governance lean (e.g. no lengthy procurement cycles) and frame it as an *official innovation pilot* with defined sunset/scale-up points.

- **Technical Dependencies**:

  Infrastructure (Once-Only system, digital ID) may lag. ***Mitigation*:** Build prototypes with modular architecture so they can plug into the NOOTS hub and digital identity when available. In the interim, use mock services or aggregated open data to simulate integrations. Maintain close contact with infrastructure teams (NOOTS project, FITKO) to anticipate timelines.

- **Security & Compliance**:

  Fast development might overlook security/privacy. ***Mitigation*:** Include a privacy/security expert from day one. Adopt the forthcoming *Datenschutz-Cockpit* tool (being built as part of register modernization) to ensure data handling follows regulations. All prototypes undergo a light security review (as per BSI guidelines) before public demos. This step is non-negotiable to maintain trust.

- **Talent Retention**:

  Small digital teams often lose key people. ***Mitigation*:** Make lab positions attractive (clear mission, flexible work, visible impact). Offer short-term contracts with renewal based on performance, so talent is motivated to deliver. Provide mentorship and public recognition (e.g. awards for wins). The freelance nature (Elias as CAO) means continuity isn't tied to one person; processes and documentation ensure knowledge transfer if turnover occurs.

- **Lack of Uptake**:

  Prototypes might be seen as "toys" if not integrated. ***Mitigation*:** Involve end-users and decision-makers throughout (user acceptance tests with agencies, showing value metrics). Develop each prototype with a concrete implementation plan (e.g. budget needs to scale), and hand it over formally to an existing unit at project end. Document workflows so agencies can take over. Early wins and demonstrable ROI will help convince skeptics.

- **Resource Constraints**:

  Budget or time may be limited. ***Mitigation*:** Keep team lean. Use open-source or government-licensed platforms to avoid license costs. Leverage existing federal funding lines (e.g. EU digital grants) to co-finance lab work. Emphasize the team's entrepreneurial model (as per [7], *"Ministry for doing"*) to justify small fast investment vs. large slow projects.

9. Role of Elias Kouloures, Chief Acceleration Officer

Elias Kouloures – as the **Chief Acceleration Officer (CAO)** – is envisioned as the indispensable catalyst for this lab. His key added values:

- **Deep Expertise**:

  Elias brings proven experience in agile digital projects and low-code development. He "speaks both languages" of startup innovation and public administration, ensuring prototypes meet regulatory and user needs. His background means he can quickly architect solutions that integrate with federal IT (e.g. planning for NOOTS and the German Stack).

- **Neutral, Outcome-Focused Leadership**:

  As a **freelance expert**, Elias isn't bogged down by ministry bureaucracy or legacy systems. He can prioritize the lab's mission unencumbered by existing departmental turf. This outsider perspective is vital to *"break blockages and produce visible results"*.

- **Agile Process Champion**:

  Elias will instill startup methodologies – rapid sprints, MVP mentality, continuous improvement – which Jarzombek and Wildberger aim for in BMDS. His role as CAO is to keep the team lean, experiments validated, and progress transparent. Elias also mentors civil service team members in agile skills, leaving lasting capacity.

- **Stakeholder Convenor**:

  Elias can navigate among Bundes-, Länder- and local stakeholders to get buy-in. For example, his network in industry and academia will help recruit talent and partners. Jarzombek's goals (digital economy, SME support) are thus advanced by Elias bridging to German Mittelstand networks (AI centers, digital clusters).

- **Credibility & Continuity**:

  Hiring Elias signals political commitment. It shows Jarzombek is serious about an **"innovation lab"**, not just talk. As CAO, Elias will publicly represent the lab at conferences (like e.g. Germany's Digital Summit), boosting its profile. Over time, he'll build trust that the lab delivers – making it hard for critics to dismiss it.

Summary

Elias Kouloures's leadership ensures the lab hits the ground running.

His agility-driven approach and relationships accelerate service delivery, embodying the BMDS promise of *"digitaler, schneller und unbürokratischer"* government.

Mr. Jarzombek can be confident that under Elias's guidance, this team will produce pilot services that not only delight citizens but also create clear paths for scale-up and SME involvement.

Conclusion:

By establishing this specialized lab, BMDS will jump-start its digital modernization agenda with measurable successes each quarter.

The structured roadmap, skilled team, and Elias Kouloures's stewardship will demonstrate how *"Digitalisierung jetzt ganz konkret"* (digitalization concretely now) is achieved.

This masterplan equips Jarzombek (and the ministry leadership) with a clear, resourced strategy to transform citizen services — and proves that investing in agile expertise (in the form of Elias's CAO role) yields tangible governance innovation.

Sources:

Official BMDS strategy and press materials, German government Digital Strategy documents, and recent policy releases (e.g. Mittelstand-Digital press info, coalition AI plan) were used to align this plan with federal goals.