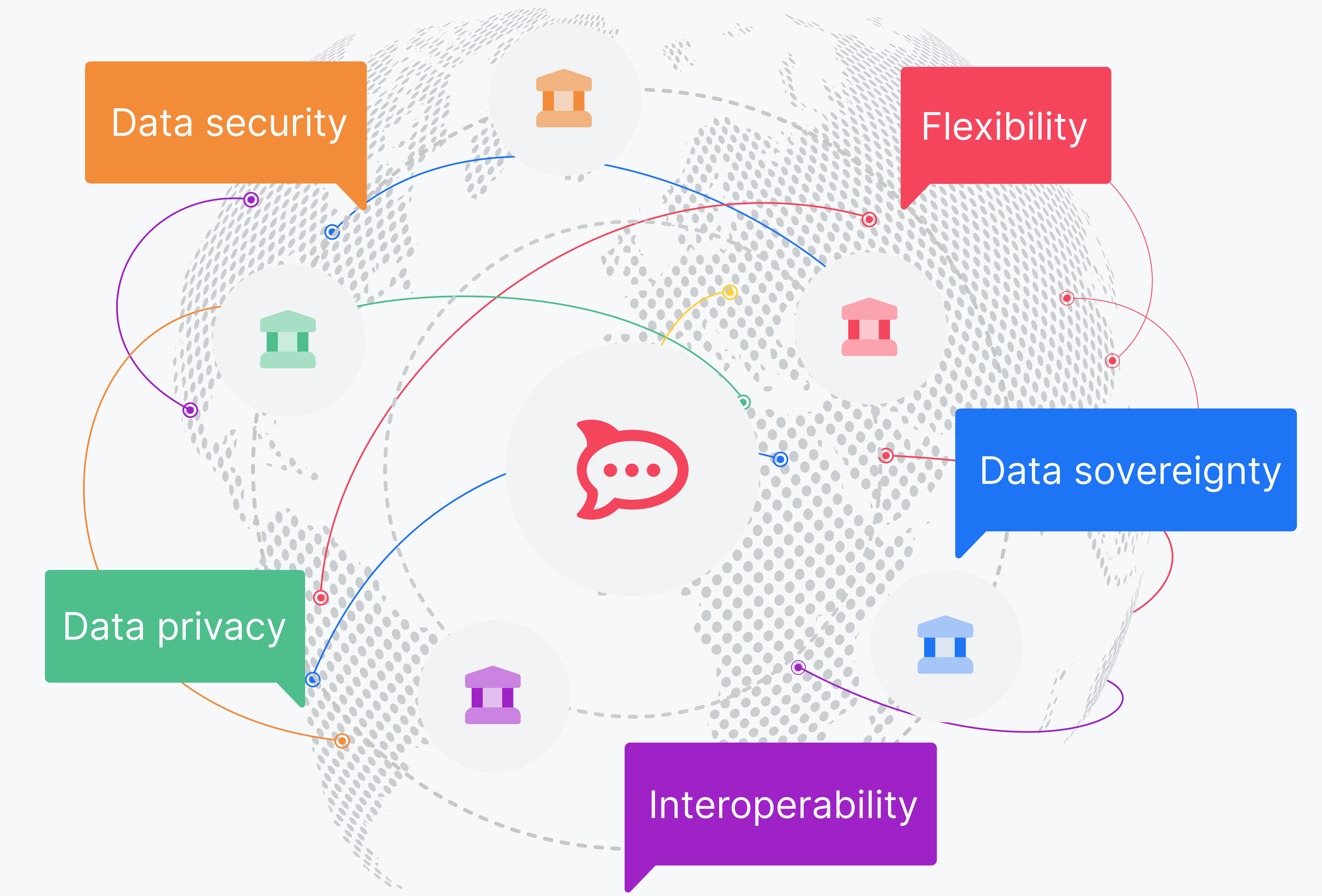
rocket.chat

Benefits of open source solutions for government organizations

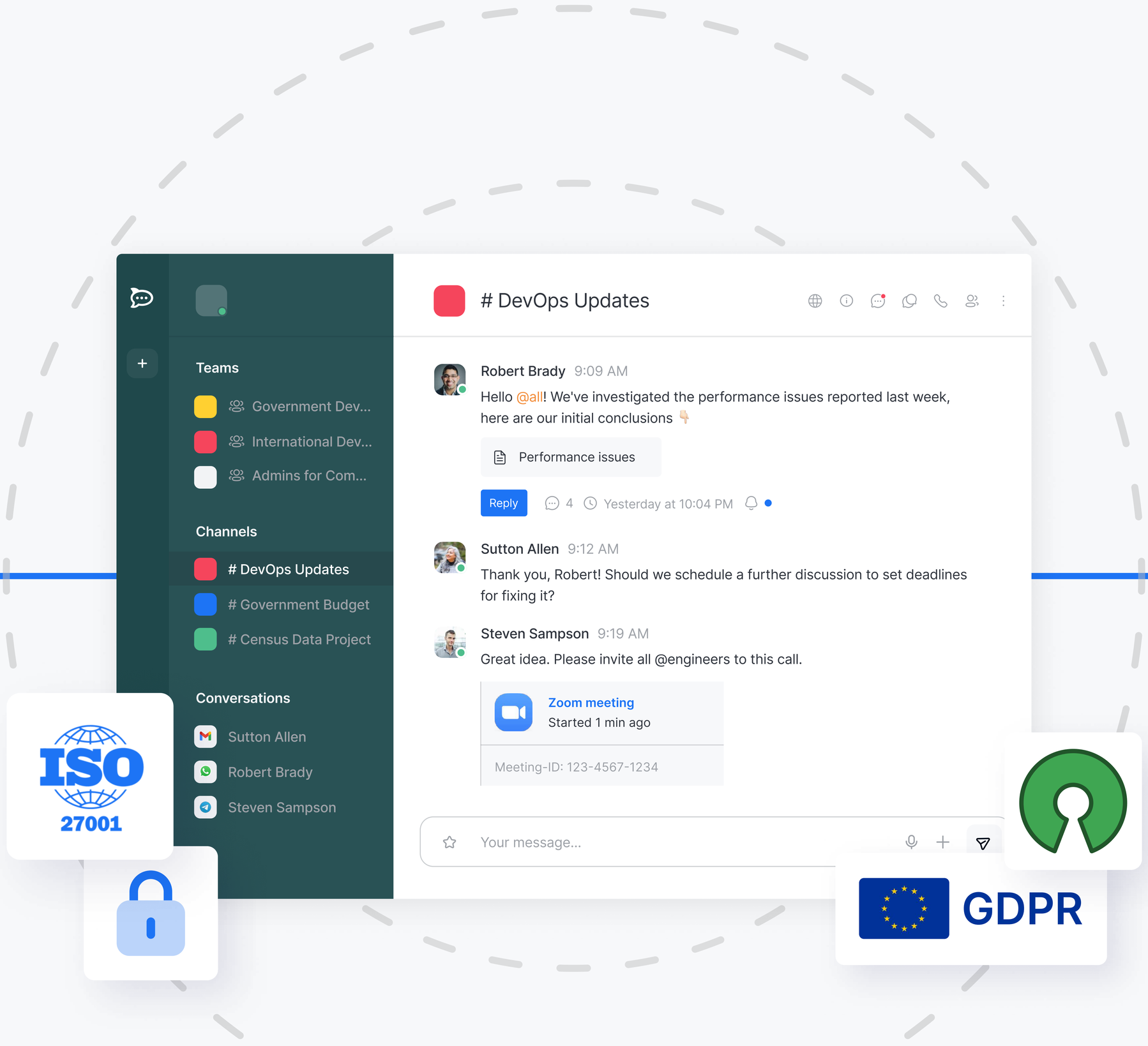
Paving the way towards digital transformation and increased quality of public services with open source



Government administrations and organizations in their ecosystem are presented with significant challenges today. Their citizens' expectations change according to the digital environment they're exposed to in their everyday lives. Yet, several **obstacles like the lack of know-how, complex infrastructure, and limited resources prevent public sector organizations from successfully carrying out digital transformation initiatives.**

However, government-related organizations are starting to see that one type of software - open source - especially fits their needs. **Commercial organizations across industries use open source software, but its use is also encouraged by the European Commission.**

This eBook is here to convince you: **open source software has numerous benefits for public sector and government-related organizations.** Throughout the eBook, you will find out how and why European Commission supports the use of open source solutions, as well as explicitly listed benefits of open source for public sector organizations. Moreover, specific examples of open source solutions in such organizations will help you realize the potential it holds for your organization.



European Commission's support for open source software

Open source software has been recognized by one of the most important governmental institutions globally as a valuable asset to public sector organizations.

In 2014, the European Commission issued its first Open Source Strategy to support the overarching Digital Strategy. The goal? **Outlining the steps for digital transformation in all European Union governing bodies, and influencing member states' governments to follow.**

In 2020, the European Commission doubled down on its commitment to support open source. The Open Source Strategy 2020-2023 sets out a vision to leverage the distinct benefits of open source technologies in driving better services for European citizens at a lower cost.

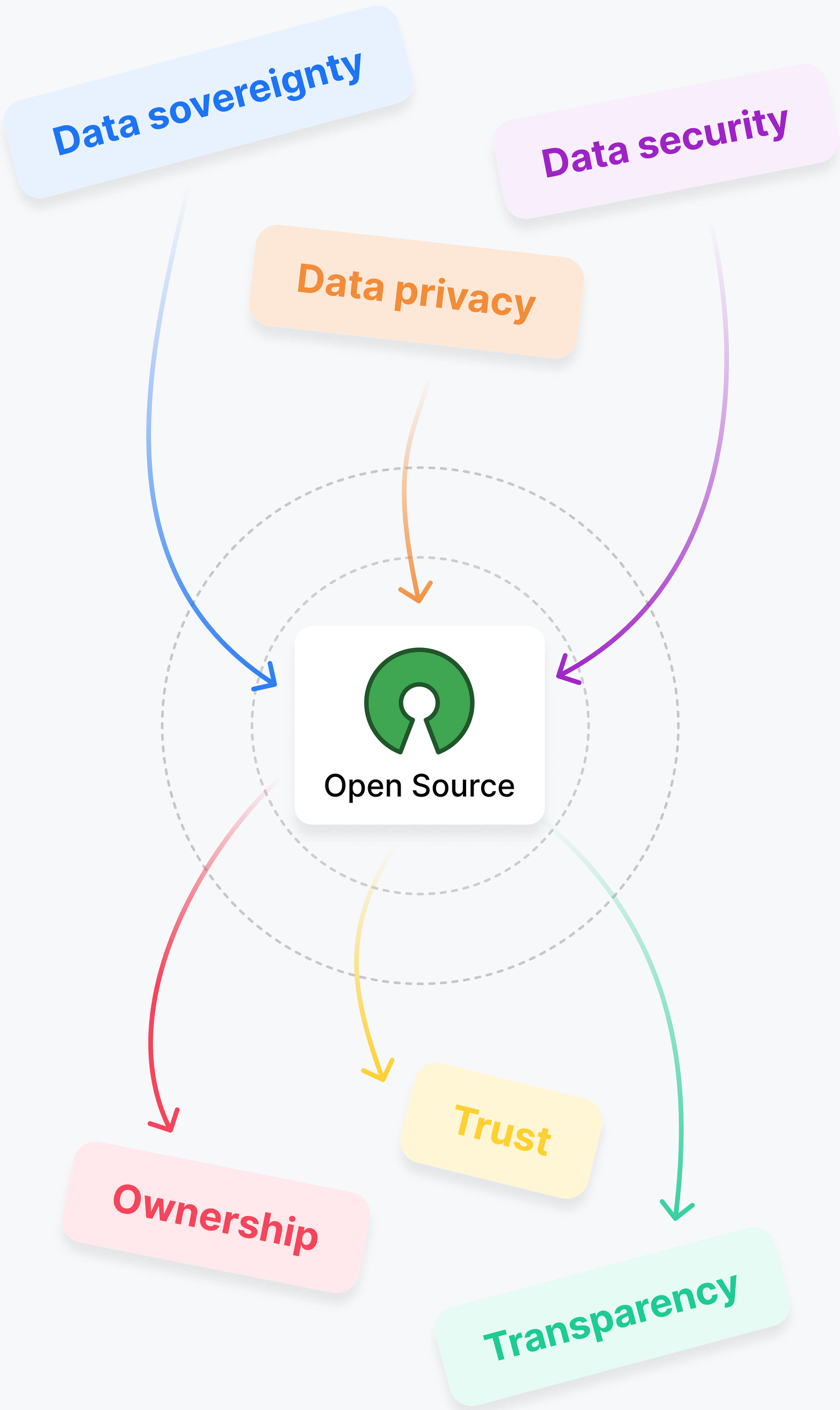
The outcomes that the European Commission expects to emerge from the increased use of open source technologies and principles are:

- Driving Europe's digital autonomy and independence
- Sharing and reusing information, knowledge, and software
- Contributing to the knowledge society
- Increasing the quality of public service.

The core principles of open source - transparency, participation, and collaboration - are aligned with the core fundamentals of European Union as a whole. In government-related and public sector organizations, the advantages of open source software can reach their full potential and serve citizens through increased quality of public service.

Since European Commission is not only recognizing, but actively supporting the use of open source software in its rows, it is signaling to member countries to do so as well. Countries like Sweden and Finland are leading the movement with preparations to switch their public sector operations to open source solutions.

Benefits of open source for government bodies



In 2021, European Commission also issued results of the study about the impact of open source software on EU economy.[1]
The economic evidence identified open source as a public good, pointing to a new era in which digital businesses are built using open source assets. Specifically, the report showed that open source helps to avoid vendor lock-in and increases organizations' digital autonomy.

Here are all the specific benefits of open source solutions for government-related and public sector organizations.

[1] Source: European Commission's Open Source Impact Study 2021 https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/study-about-impact-open-source-software-and-hardware-technological-independence-competitiveness-and

Transparency and trust

It would be useful to mention the definition of open source software here. Namely, it’s a type of software whose source code is out in the open - in different repositories available not just to its users but also anyone interested.

This is useful for several reasons, one of them being trust. **For public sector organizations, it’s important to know what’s going on with their data in the backend** - and with open source software, there’s no hidden agenda. You can see exactly how your data is being used.

Enabling data privacy

The governing regulation on data privacy in EU is GDPR. Its key principles include:

- Lawfulness, fairness and transparency
- Purpose limitation
- Data minimization
- Accuracy
- Storage limitation
- Integrity and confidentiality
- Accountability.

When it was introduced, GDPR caused a stirr in organizations that now coudln’t use customers’ and citizens’ data freely as they might have done before.

As representatives of the government, public sector organizations must be especially careful around data privacy. Their reputation and trustworthiness depends on it. With open source software, organizations can clearly see how the data is being handled, and modify the code to fit the GDPR criteria.

Increased data security

[2] Source: SonicWall
[3] Source: TechRadar

Data security is #1 on priority list for organizations worldwide. On one hand, cyber attacks are on the rise - we've seen 62% increase between 2019 and 2020[2] alone. On the other hand, most data breaches happen unintentionally - research shows that as high as 90% of them happen through human error.[3]

Most organizations are well aware of the damages that data security breaches could cause their business. Such events are financially costly and can ruin a carefully built reputation with customers, or in case of public sector organizations, citizens.

Open source software has an incredible amount of support from its community. Developers often contribute to open source projects to expand their functionality or increase security. Communities interested in a certain open source project are significantly larger than a number of developers working for the closed source software vendor. An argument made here is that **more eyes on the code lead to increased data security through open collaboration.**

Open source software is powering data sovereignty and digital autonomy by allowing on-premise hosting and full ownership over data, as well as removing the possibility of vendor lock-in.

Unprecedented flexibility

To achieve GDPR compliance and increase data ownership, public sector organizations need to make certain tweaks to the software. However, they're free to do so since the whole point of open source software is it being free to modify by its users.

This freedom to intervene in the source code is in stark contrast to proprietary software, yet **these modifications are crucial to government-related and public sector organizations due to their complex infrastructure.** Open source software, therefore, supports such organizations to cater to citizens' requirements and provide world-class public services.

Interoperability

One of the benefits of open source solutions is that they are easily modified to integrate with other tools. For governmental agencies that often have legacy software at its core, this is crucial.

Moreover, **government agencies often need to collaborate with each other, but they don’t necessarily all use the same solutions internally. In those cases, the open source solutions’ interoperability features are crucial.** They enable teams in different governmental organizations to work together seamlessly, independently of the solution they use internally.

Reduced costs

Modifications to the software are sometimes impossible with proprietary software. Even if they are, customization is often very expensive and takes long, with a lot of compromises to make on the way to the final product.

In comparison, open source software can be customized with a lot less resources. This is also **one of the most appealing aspects of open source software for public sector organizations that undergo very strict budgeting processes.**

Some open source software is even free to use, but most commonly it offers a free version and tiered paid versions for larger users. However, the **fully priced versions of open source software are once again cheaper than their proprietary counterparts, especially considering the level of customization that can be achieved.**

Open source + on-premise: as secure as it gets

In EU, we've seen established software vendors being banned from use due to data privacy and security concerns. For example, both French Ministies and German schools estimated that is too risky to use Microsoft Office packages. Namely, it was discovered that the US Cloud Act, enacted in 2018, **empowers US government agencies to request access to customer data from all US-based companies no matter where their servers are located.**[4]

In the case of German schools and French ministries, data was stored in a EU-based cloud, as per EU data hosting regulations. However, it still wasn't secure enough.

This is why the combination of open source with on-premise hosting is one of the best solutions for maximum data privacy and security. Research from Red Hat shows that out of non-SaaS apps, 37% is run on-premise only, while 40% is run hybridly (combination of on-premise and cloud)[5]. This speaks to the popularity of on-premise solutions and not only for highly regulated industries such as government and public sector.

Indeed, the demand for the solutions that are both open source and have the on-premise hosting option has dramatically increased in recent years. In government sector, we're seeing Sweden making preparations for its entire governmental ecosystem to move towards this unique software model.

[4] Source: European Digital Rights Association
[5] Source: Red Hat 2022 Global Tech Outlook

The Swedish case: open source solution in service of public sector

Swedish government is moving its services towards a self-hosted open source model. In the report they issued in late 2021[6], they have captured a snapshot of the market and identified several solutions that, either individually or in combination, could provide a suitable digital collaboration platform for their public sector organizations.

In the words of the report authors,

“A public-sector organization should not have to spend time and resources on protecting information from a supplier. Instead, it should select an alternative supplier that does not present a risk in terms of the unauthorized dissemination and processing of information.”

In other words, **Swedish government wants its agencies to collaborate without the fear of exposing data, or it being taken advantage of.**

During 2022, every Swedish government agency will choose one of the vendors that offer chat rooms, video conferencing, kanban boards, whiteboards, and storage services. The chosen solutions will be integrated on an agency-level, but also on inter-agency level, thus allowing efficient internal collaboration as well as external collaboration between agencies.

The Swedish case is a milestone that will hopefully encourage other governments in the EU to recognize the transformative power of open source and provide higher quality of public service to their citizens.

[6] Source: Digital collaboration platform for the public sector study.

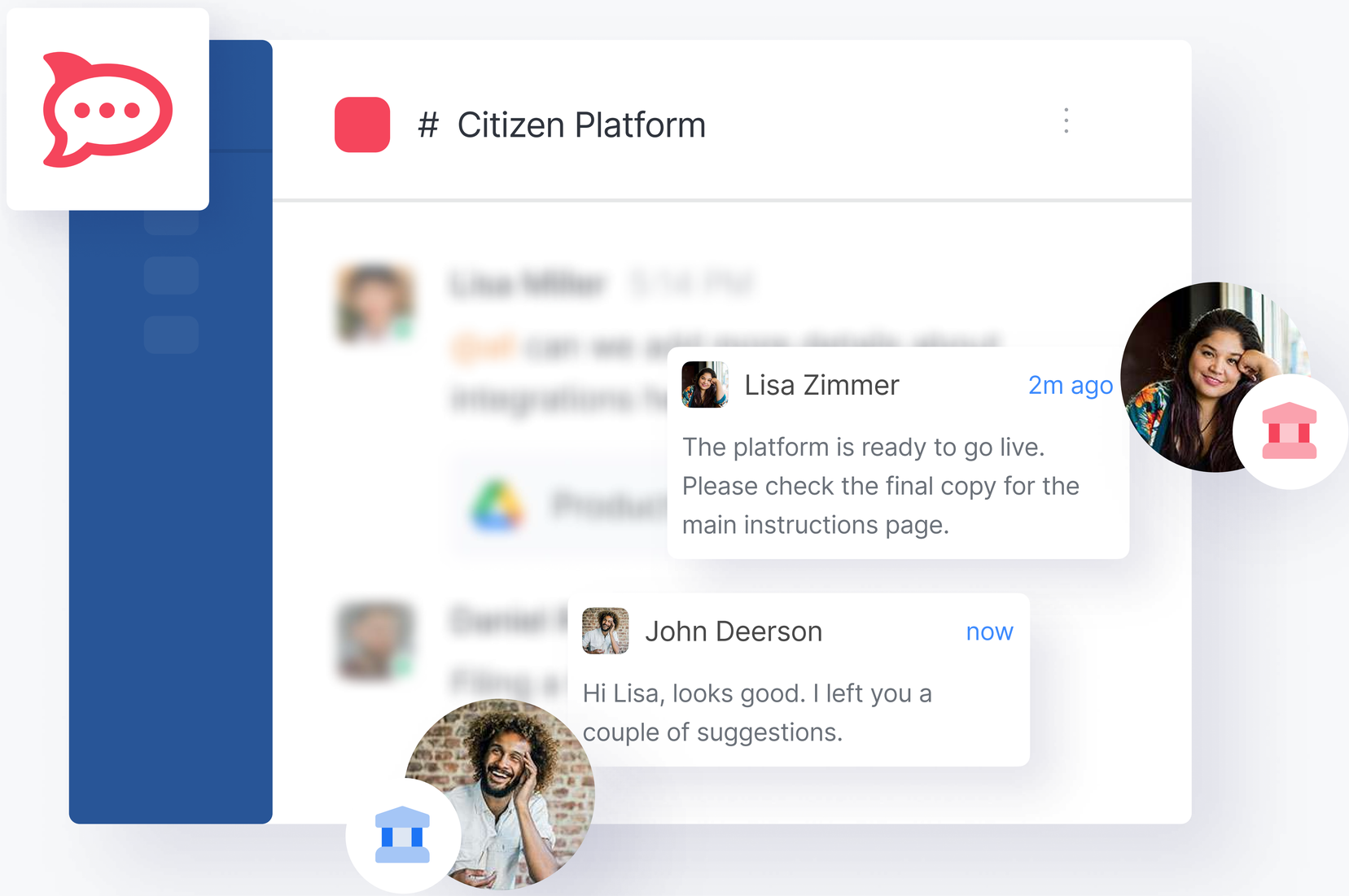
Rocket.Chat: secure open source solution with versatile use cases

Rocket.Chat is a versatile open source solution that government organizations can deploy on-premise or in the cloud. It can be used for several purposes:

Secure team collaboration

Long gone are the days when email was the main channel of digital communication. Nowadays, employees prefer instant messaging solutions that allow them to quickly communicate and collaborate with colleagues or jump on a video call if they need to align synchronously.

Government-related organizations are also undergoing digital transformation. **To provide a more effective collaboration to public sector organizations, Rocket.Chat provides a user-friendly messaging platform with nuanced security features.**



Interoperability: key for successful collaboration with external stakeholders

Public sector organizations frequently work on joint projects and their employees need to sync and collaborate to deliver the best end-result. However, they don’t necessarily use the same systems for communication. Rocket.Chat’s interoperability feature is crucial in this scenario. **Since it also includes federation features, public sector organizations can communicate via Rocket.Chat with external partner organizations and collaborators,** independent of the solution they use on their end.

Check out how the Government of British Columbia uses Rocket.Chat to solve their issues 10x faster securely.

Working with partners from external organizations via Rocket.Chat

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It’s much, much easier for us to work with developers from external organizations in Rocket.Chat than it has been in other collaboration platforms. Other platforms purposely separate our developer community. Whereas in Rocket.Chat, everything is open by default.

Justin Hewitt | Senior Director of DevOps Platform Services

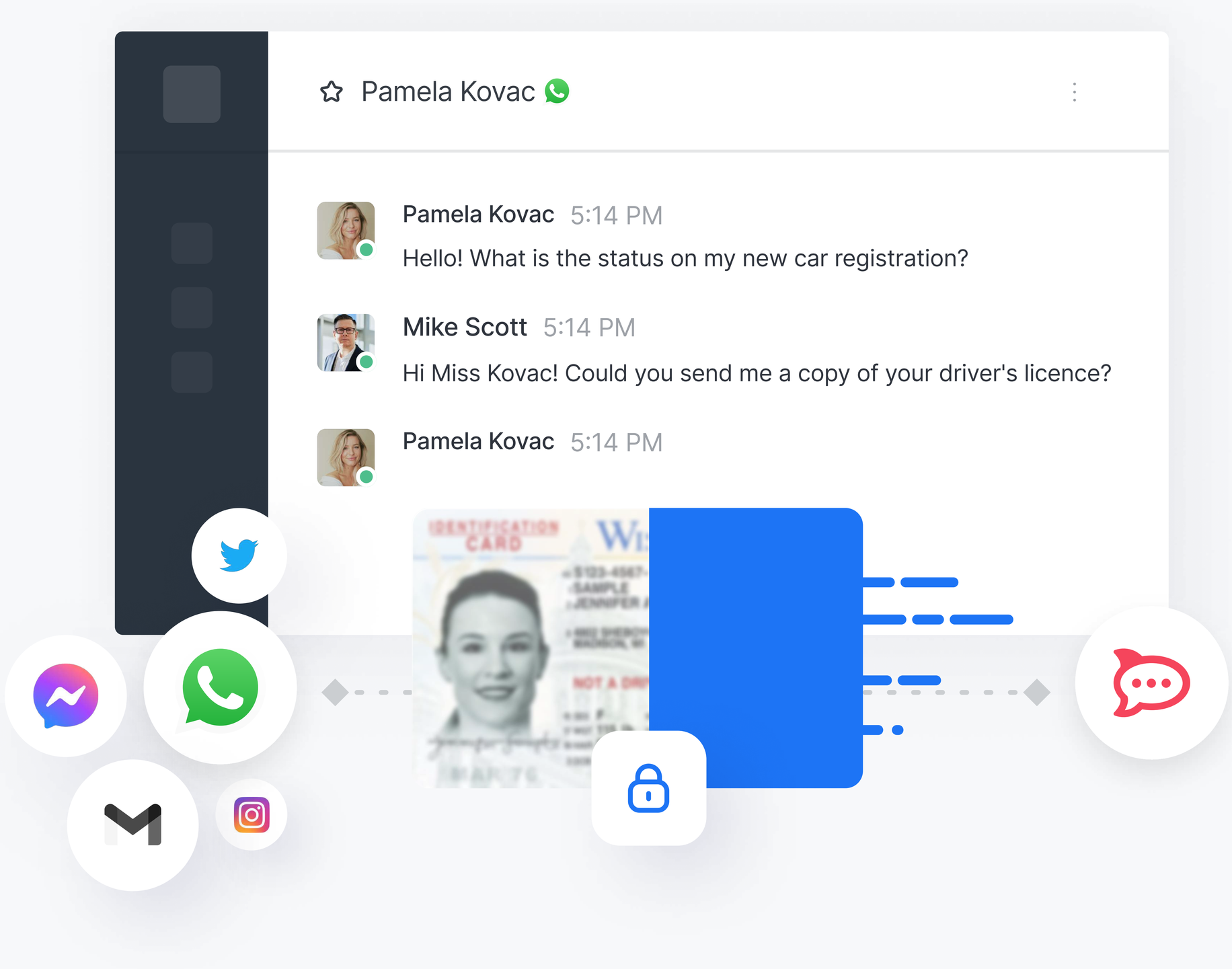
Citizen support via omnichannel customer service

Public sector organizations that receive citizen inquiries via different channels - such as email, SMS, Twitter, WhatsApp, or Facebook Messenger - can use Rocket.Chat as a unified platform to provide exceptional quality of public service.

Having all inquiries organized under a single Rocket.Chat umbrella allows organizations to always stay on top of all requests and manage their precious time more efficiently.

Check out how Rocket.Chat is transforming public safety communications in the US.

Secure messaging platform to communicate across US government agencies

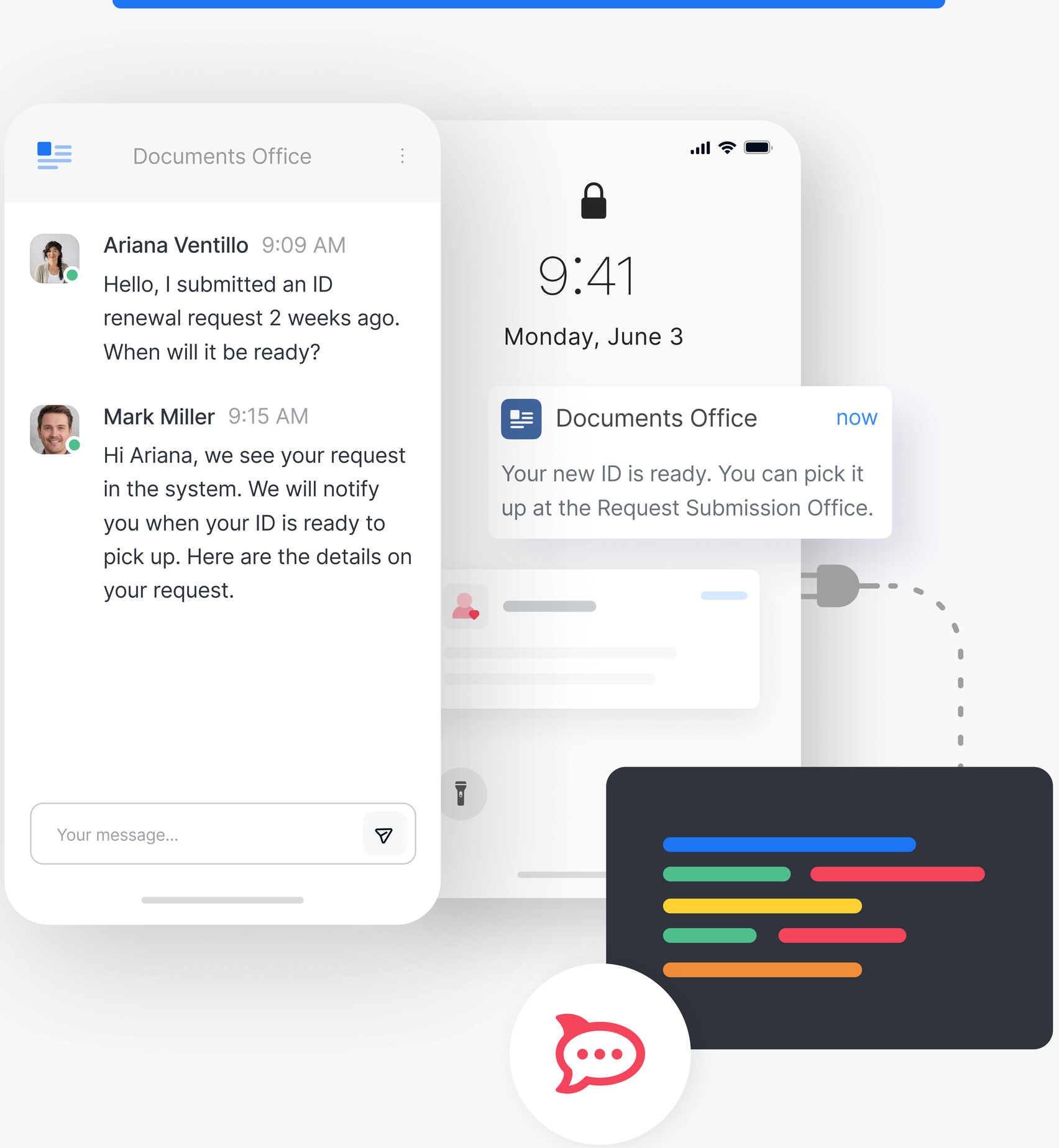


Exceptional conversational experience via in-app chat

Governments producing apps for public use is not a rarity anymore. For example, several governments issued apps to manage incoming tourists' vaccination and COVID-19 tests.

To provide an exceptional conversational experience and support citizens, public sector organizations can use Rocket.Chat in-app chat engine. It can be white-labeled to completely match the style of the app. The in-app chat can be integrated with systems and tools that organizations use every day to streamline workflows.

Find out more about Rocket.Chat's in-app chat



The #1 communications platform for government institutions.

Knowing all the benefits of open source solutions, it’s no wonder that so many government-related and public sector organizations choose to implement it and use it.
Here at Rocket.Chat, we’ve been happy to assist a number of organizations working with or related to governments in facilitating collaborative best practices.

Rocket.Chat is flexible enough to fit into the complex IT infrastructures of public sector organizations while enabling effective communication between organizations’ employees, their external partners, and citizens.

Find out more about Rocket.Chat solution for government-related businesses or contact our team to see how Rocket.Chat can benefit your organization.

Talk to an expert

Find out more