Local Government REIMAGINED

Artificial Intelligence in Local Government
SUMMARY OF 2024 SURVEY RESULTS

ICMA | survey research

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is typically used to describe machine-learning-powered technologies that can complete tasks historically associated with human intelligence, such as pattern recognition, data analysis, problem solving, and content generation. ICMA surveyed local government practitioners in April and May 2024 to gauge their perspectives on AI and its use in local government service delivery and operations. The survey received 637 responses, the vast majority (83%) of which were provided by the CAO/ACAO of their respective local governments. Forty percent of respondents represented communities with populations between 5,000 and 24,999 residents, with just under 10% of respondents representing communities with less than 2,500 residents.

Key Findings

- Almost half of respondents (48%) say that AI utilization is a low priority for their local government, while less than 6% of respondents have placed a high priority on utilizing AI in local government service delivery.
- A small number of communities indicated that they have delegated personnel to oversee their organization's AI efforts (10%) or they have established an organization-wide policy to govern AI usage (3%).
- The top area identified for AI potential is resident engagement (55%), including streamlined service interfaces and AI chatbots for FAQs. Local policy applications, such as budget modeling and policy analysis, are seen as having significant potential by 38% of respondents.
- The most significant barrier is a lack of AI awareness and understanding, cited by 77% of respondents.
- The top concern is the use of AI-generated disinformation/misinformation to illegitimately impact public policy, cited by 69% of respondents. Similarly, over half of respondents (56%) indicated concerns about public perception and trust associated with use of AI.

The use of AI as a core practice of local government in the United States is clearly in its infancy. There are some communities that have exuberantly embraced AI. Others are approaching this emerging technology with the utmost caution, as illustrated by this open-ended response from the survey, provided by the administrator of a small West Coast city:

> *"There is an irrational exuberance that is building up in the profession from championing AI use in local government. I see it trumpeted as a miracle answer to manage workload, with lip service towards accountability for AI outputs. It can alleviate workload, but only in exchange for more rigorous oversight and a greater need for personal accountability for automated output, i.e., a different kind of work, but work nonetheless...*
>
> *...Local government must reliably deliver basic day-to-day services while striving to balance excess demand for services in a scarce-resources environment. As stewards of our communities, we should always curiously and prudently experiment with efficiency and effectiveness to a degree that aligns with our elected officials' community vision. For example, a city may wish to be on the bleeding-edge of AI deployments as a '21st Century City,' while another city may reject AI deployment because it consumes so much power that it drives the persistence of coal and natural gas generation stations. That's just one lens to view AI in local government."*

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Survey Results

Q1: How high of a priority is your local government currently placing on developing and/or using AI? (n=637)

Response	Percent (%)
High	5.5
Moderate	27.5
Low	48.0
Not at all	19.0

Q2: Has your local government taken any of the following actions related to the use of AI by your organization? Check all that apply. (n=622)

Response	Percent (%)
Established an organization-wide policy or strategy for AI usage	9.0
Adoption by the governing body of a resolution on AI usage	0.6
Implemented an organization-wide training on the use of AI	4.5
Appointed a committee, commission, or task force on AI usage	6.4
Hired or appointed internal staff to guide AI strategy and/or usage	10.3
Inclusion of a budget line item for AI implementation/usage	5.5
Other	10.8
None of these	68.7

Q3: How is your local government currently utilizing AI? Check all that apply. (n=596)

Response	Percent (%)
Resident engagement (streamlined interface for services, AI chatbot for FAQs, etc.)	11.7
Transportation (transportation management, traffic insights, etc.)	4.4
Built environment (building management systems, planning insights, etc.)	4.0
Energy (smart meters, energy use modeling, etc.)	11.4
Water/wastewater (smart meters, automatic leak detection, modeling, etc.)	19.0
Public safety (crime prevention, emergency modeling, fleet management, etc.)	8.0
Local policy (budget modeling, policy analysis, etc.)	12.6
Other	17.1
None of these	51.0

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Q4. Where do you feel there is the most potential for AI use within your local government? Check up to three. (n=588)

Response	Percent (%)
Resident engagement (streamlined interface for services, AI chatbot for FAQs, etc.)	54.8
Transportation (transportation management, traffic insights, etc.)	17.9
Built environment (building management systems, planning insights, etc.)	14.1
Energy (smart meters, energy use modeling, etc.)	25.5
Water/wastewater (smart meters, automatic leak detection, modeling, etc.)	35.5
Public safety (crime prevention, emergency modeling, fleet management, etc.)	34.2
Local policy (budget modeling, policy analysis, etc.)	37.6
Other	6.3
None of these	8.2

Q5. From your perspective, what are some of the most urgent internal barriers to AI adoption by your local government? Select up to three. (n=577)

Response	Percent (%)
Lack of AI awareness/understanding	76.6
Insufficient number of trained personnel	53.0
Lack of organizational commitment to AI use	19.2
Insufficient funding to upgrade or procure AI technology or tools	39.3
Lack of support from local elected officials	9.7
Regulatory and legal compliance concerns	22.0
No organizational policies and procedures for AI use	41.2

Q6: From your perspective, what are some of the most urgent implications of AI use by your local government? Select up to three. (n=570)

Response	Percent (%)
Potential for increased cyberattacks	47.2
Use of AI-generated disinformation/misinformation to illegitimately impact public policy	69.3
Privacy and security of resident data held by the local government	45.8
Digital divide, accessibility, and equity considerations	20.4
Workforce displacement and reskilling	12.3
Public perception and trust (transparency, accountability)	56.0
How to collaborate with other key stakeholders across organizations and sectors	11.9

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Open-ended Summaries

Policy Development and Research

- Some local governments are in the process of developing or considering policies for AI use. This includes drafting stages, awaiting larger councils' developments, and hiring consultants to create policies.
- Initial research and investigation into AI applications are common, with some governments forming dedicated teams or committees to handle AI strategy and policy.

Training and Education

- Various training initiatives are being conducted, such as department-specific workshops, learning sessions, and training for executive teams.
- There's a focus on educating staff about AI tools, with resources like intranet sites, newsletters, and conferences being utilized to enhance understanding and usage of AI.

Pilot Programs and Early Adoption

- Several local governments are piloting AI programs, signing agreements with AI developers, or implementing initial uses in specific departments.
- Early adopters within organizations are experimenting with AI tools for tasks such as writing, research, and communication, often using tools like ChatGPT and Dall-E.

Specific Applications of AI

- AI is being applied in specific contexts like marketing, communications, policy creation, job descriptions, security video systems, and smart water meters.
- There is also ad hoc use for drafting letters, creating press releases, and assisting with meeting synopses or minutes.

Strategic and Organizational Integration

- AI adoption is being strategically integrated as part of broader transformation programs and organizational priorities.
- Efforts include establishing AI registries, engaging with state AI development strategies, and utilizing AI within existing software programs to improve efficiency.

Document Drafting and Editing

- AI is used for drafting and editing various types of documents, including letters, memos, press releases, job descriptions, and reports. This includes enhancing communication through tools like Grammarly and using generative AI for brainstorming and content creation.

Grant Writing and Proposal Development

- Local governments are utilizing AI to assist with writing grants and developing proposals. This includes drafting letters of support and summarizing project details for grant applications.

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Communication and Marketing

- AI is being employed to improve communication efforts, including creating newsletter articles, social media posts, and marketing materials. It's used for drafting, editing, and organizing content for both internal and external communications.

Administrative and Program Support

- AI tools are aiding in administrative tasks such as policy drafting, email editing, and event planning. They are also used for more specialized functions like drafting annual evaluations, meeting minutes, and staff reports for council agendas.

Specific and Emerging Uses

- AI is being explored for more niche applications, such as analyzing resident traffic patterns, crime analysis, and cybersecurity. There are also experimental uses in areas like economic development, smart meter installation, and automated lawn maintenance. Some governments are beginning to utilize AI for specific tasks like permit processing and contract compliance.

Q4: Where do you feel there is the most potential for AI use within your local government? (Other – please describe) (n=36)

Administrative Efficiency and Productivity

- AI has potential to streamline administrative functions, including drafting emails, taking meeting minutes, managing records, and completing day-to-day tasks. This can improve employee productivity and efficiency across various departments.

Document and Report Generation

- The use of generative AI for writing reports, analyzing documents, and preparing press releases is seen as a key area where AI can add value, helping to reduce the workload on staff and improve the quality of written communications.

Specialized Applications and Services

- AI can enhance essential service delivery, such as permitting, contract compliance, and development assessment. It can also aid in specific tasks like grant writing, compensation plan alignment, and DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) work.

Research, Analysis, and Planning

- AI's potential for citywide modeling, planning, and general research and analysis is highlighted, providing valuable insights and data-driven decision-making support for local governments.

Sector-specific Enhancements

- AI applications in cybersecurity, finance, HR, legal, IT, and economic development are identified as areas with high potential. Automating repetitive tasks and improving efficiencies in these sectors can lead to significant operational improvements.

Community Engagement and Communication

- AI can improve social media and newsletter updates, streamline processes and responses, and support employee use of AI for presentations, creative brainstorming, and other communication tasks.

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