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AI in Local Government: What It Means for Your Office

An honest look at where AI helps, where it does not belong, and how to use it without putting your community's information at risk

Free webinar · October 28, 2026, 11:00 AM Central · Moneesh Arora, CEO · Josh Riney, CTO



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What AI is, how to use it safely, how to get started

Webinar for small-government offices · October 28, 2026 · 30 minutes of content, then Q&A

1 **What AI is**
How it works, and the one habit that keeps you in control of any AI tool

2 **Protect your office**
What never goes into a chatbot, which account to use, and three steps that prevent fraudulent vendor payments

3 **Where it helps**
Twelve tasks to try this week and a four-line prompt

4 **One-page policy**
Seven rules to adopt, five questions for any vendor, and free templates

5 **Getting started**
Four weeks from zero to working, with who does what

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55.7% of offices use AI, 42.9% have a written policy

Granicus 2026 State of Digital Government survey · ICMA 2024 survey of 635 local government practitioners

USE AI

55.7%

of government offices use AI for some part of their work (Granicus, 2026)

HAVE A WRITTEN POLICY

42.9%

have written rules for how staff use AI (Granicus, 2026)

IN 2024, HAD A WRITTEN POLICY

9%

ICMA, 635 practitioners. 40% came from towns of 5,000 to 24,999 residents

AWARENESS IS THE BARRIER

77%

named lack of AI awareness and understanding as the top barrier

More offices use AI than have rules for it. This session helps you write yours.

Your staff are likely trying AI already, and most offices have not written the rules yet. This session is for the clerk who also runs utility billing, the finance director who also does HR, the public works director who writes the grant, and the mayor with a day job. You all fill multiple roles and none of you likely have an IT department.

WHAT YOU LEAVE WITH

- One habit that keeps you in control of any AI tool
- Twelve tasks to try this week and a four-week plan
- Seven rules you can adopt as a policy next month

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Sources: Granicus, 2026 State of Digital Government survey (with ath Power Consulting (apc)); ICMA, AI in Local Government survey, April–May 2024

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AI predicts the next word, it does not know facts

Large language models (ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, Gemini) as used in an office

It generates the most plausible next words from everything it has read. It is less good at determining if those words are true.

GOOD AT

- **Summarizing.** A 40-page council packet into one page, with the three items that need a vote.
- **First drafts.** A letter, a memo, draft minutes from your own recording.
- **Reformatting and translating.** Change the tone, shorten it, put it in Spanish.
- **Plain language.** A statute or a budget line explained the way a resident would ask.

BAD AT

- **Facts it was not given.** Dates, citations, case names. It will invent them and sound sure.
- **Math on your numbers.** Totals, variances, a tax estimate. Check every one.
- **Knowing what it does not know.** It does not flag uncertainty. You have to.
- **Judgment.** Fairness, a vote, anything you sign.

Treat every output as a first draft. Nothing leaves the building unchecked. The rest of this session is how to do that without giving up the hours it saves.

Sources: gWorks product and engineering; Washington State Office of the CIO, interim generative AI guidelines (2023)

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You think first, AI drafts, you check and sign

A best practice for using AI so you stay in control and keep doing the thinking · Called 20/60/20 for the share of the effort, not time

	20	60	20
	First 20 · You think	**Middle 60 · AI works**	**Last 20 · You decide**
What it means	You decide what the problem is, what the options are, and what a good answer looks like.	It drafts, summarizes, researches and reformats. It offers ideas. You steer it as it goes.	You check every fact and number against the source, decide, put it in your own words, and sign it.
A resident's complaint email	You read the email yourself and decide what the answer is.	It drafts a polite reply in the length and tone you asked for.	You fix what it got wrong, add what you know, and send it under your name.
The records question	Would I hand this to a records requester? Which tool, which account?	An approved tool only. Nothing from closed session, personnel files or an open case goes in.	Could I defend this at the dais without the chatbot? Disclose where required. File the record.
If you skip it	You get a polished answer to the wrong question. The Bellingham RFP, next section.		You sign what the chatbot wrote. 23 grant letters sent as ChatGPT wrote them, next section.

The tool never does the first step or the last one. On minutes it may do 90% of the typing. The clerk still owns 100% of the accountability. The only two ways to get this wrong are skipping the thinking up front or skipping the check at the end.

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Sources: 20-60-20 best practice as circulated in practitioner guidance, 2025–2026; gWorks adaptation for local government

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Never type into AI what you would not want public

In 2025 Washington cities released staff ChatGPT histories to reporters · Every state has a records act · Training means the vendor learns from your chats

NEVER GOES IN

- Resident account and payment data
- Personnel matters and performance reviews
- Anything from law enforcement or closed session
- Anything your attorney has touched

WHAT WASHINGTON HAD TO REDACT

- City code for tracking homeless encampments
- Police performance reviews
- Details of an open case

Tool	Personal account	Town account
ChatGPT	Free and Plus use your chats for training unless you turn off Improve the model for everyone in Data Controls	Business and Enterprise do not train on your data. Business is $20 to $25 a user a month
Claude	Free, Pro and Max use your chats for training unless you turn off Help improve Claude in Settings, Privacy	Team, Enterprise and Claude for Government do not train on your data
Microsoft Copilot	A personal Microsoft account can use your conversations for training unless you opt out in privacy settings	Microsoft 365 Copilot on a work account runs under enterprise data protection and is not used to train models. A government version exists

Most small offices run on free tiers with personal accounts. That is the exposure. Save work chats the way you save email, under your state's retention schedule.

Assume your chats are records and ask your attorney. A Fall 2026 article in the ABA's Communications Lawyer argues AI chats used for public business should generally be treated as public records. No court has ruled yet.

Sources: UNC School of Government; KNKX/Cascade PBS, Aug 2025; ABA Communications Lawyer, Fall 2026; OpenAI, Anthropic, Microsoft privacy pages, Oct 2026

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AI mistakes and fakes hit towns of every size

Tennessee, Washington and Missouri, 2025–2026 · Towns of 14,000 to 126,000 · What happened and what to do

ATHENS, TN (pop. 14,000)

24+

fake or misquoted court citations in appeals against the city

WHAT HAPPENED

The city's lawyers flagged them. The court fined each opposing lawyer $15,000 and made them pay the city's fees.

WHAT TO DO

Check what the other side cites, too.

BELLINGHAM, WA (pop. 97,000)

16 of 350

bid requirements came word for word from ChatGPT

WHAT HAPPENED

Staff asked ChatGPT to word a software bid so one vendor would lose. A records request made the chat public.

WHAT TO DO

Decide what is fair before you type.

EVERETT, WA (pop. 111,000)

23

grant support letters went out almost exactly as ChatGPT wrote them

WHAT HAPPENED

Letters for a $7M HUD application went to signers unchanged, then into the newspaper.

WHAT TO DO

Ask each signer what they would say.

COLUMBIA, MO (pop. 126,000)

Deepfake

video of the mayor saying vulgar things she never said

WHAT HAPPENED

Someone used AI to copy one of the mayor's real videos. A confused resident flagged it to her.

WHAT TO DO

Tell residents where your real posts live.

Size does not protect you. Check what goes out under your name, and check what comes in against it.

Sources: Whiting v. City of Athens, 6th Cir., Mar 2026 (no finding on AI use); KNKX/Cascade PBS, 2025–26; KRCG, Aug 2026

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Three steps that prevent fraudulent vendor payments

Four towns under 10,000 residents lost $1.38M in 2026 · Each paid a fake vendor payment request

WHAT HAPPENED

An email that looked like it came from a vendor the town already pays said the vendor's bank account had changed. Staff updated the account, and the next payments went to criminals.

WHAT WENT WRONG

Nobody confirmed the change with the vendor outside that email. AI now writes these emails with no typos and can clone the vendor's voice for a follow-up call, so the fake looks and sounds real.

WHAT TO DO

1 **Call back on the number already on file**

Never the number in the email or on the new invoice. A cloned voice can sound exactly like your vendor.

2 **Two people approve any vendor bank change**

The second person confirms off the email thread, on a number you already had.

3 **Treat urgency as the warning sign**

“Just this once” is how these losses started. Slow it down and follow the process.

Write it into the payment procedure this month. Finance owns it. It is rule 7 of the one-page policy.

WHAT IT COST FOUR SMALL TOWNS

$1.38M

lost in 2026

Liberty, TX (pop. 8,300)	$600K
Surfside Beach, SC (pop. 4,200)	$546K
Harpswell, ME (pop. 5,000)	$189K
Ashfield, MA (pop. 1,700)	$47K

HOW EASY A FAKE VOICE IS

On ElevenLabs, a $6-a-month plan copies a voice from one to two minutes of audio, like a few voicemails or a recorded council meeting. The copy then says anything, as often as the user wants. Copying someone else only takes a tick in a consent box.

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Sources: KPRC, Bluebonnet News, WFAE, Moneywise, Portland Press Herald, Forbes and BMO, 2026; ElevenLabs voice cloning docs, Oct 2026

JR

Twelve safe tasks to try this week, three per role

Low-risk tasks on a town account, each with the check that goes with it · Keep a log of what it saved and what it got wrong

Role	Try this	The check before it leaves
Clerk	• Draft minutes from your own recording • One-page summary of a 12-page ordinance • Acknowledgment letter for a routine records request	• Every vote, name and number against the recording • The attorney reads the summary • The letter carries your statute’s deadline
Finance director	• Plain-language budget narrative for council • Variance explanation for a line that moved • Questions council is likely to raise on the budget	• Every number ties to the ledger • The variance reason is yours, not the tool’s guess • Answer each one yourself before the meeting
Public works director	• Training manual for the transfer station or plow route • One page on what a 40-page state rule requires, by when • Resident notice for a scheduled road closure	• The person who does the job reads and fixes it • The state’s deadline table is the source • Dates, streets and detours match the work order
Mayor and council	• Questions for staff from a 60-page packet • A statute you are voting on, in plain words • Newsletter column draft, then write your own opening	• Ask staff the questions, do not vote on the summary • The statute text is the source • Read the column out loud before it goes out

Keep a log for a month. What it saved, what it got wrong, and what you fixed. You can build a staff manual the same way. The log is the first revision of your policy.

Sources: gWorks client conversations; UNH T2 Center, 2025

JR

Four lines to type for an answer you can use

A prompt is just what you type in · Four lines turn a question into a request you can defend, and remember it is also a record

1

Who you are and who it is for

City clerk, town of 4,000, replying to a resident. Tone and length follow from this.

2

What you are giving it

Paste the source. The resident's email, the ordinance section, the budget line. Never ask it to remember or look up what you can paste.

3

What you want back

A draft reply under 120 words, two options, a table, a plain-language summary. Say the format and the length.

4

What to flag

Ask it to mark anything it is unsure of and anything it needed that you did not give it.

AN EXAMPLE PROMPT

I am the city clerk in a town of 4,000. A resident emailed to say her street was not plowed after Tuesday's storm. Her email is below, with her name and address removed. Our plow log shows two passes on her street Tuesday night. Draft a reply under 120 words that thanks her, says what the log shows, and tells her how to report it next time. Flag anything you are unsure of.

Then the check. Read the log yourself. Fix the tone. Send it under your name.

JR

Seven rules for a one-page AI policy you can adopt

What we hear from clients and see in published city policies, written so a town of 3,000 can adopt them as is · Not legal advice. Adopt what fits, refine next year

1 **Use the town's account, never your own**
The town buys the tool and gives each person a login. A personal account keeps what you type, and the town cannot get it back.

2 **Nothing you would not hand to a reporter**
Resident account numbers, personnel matters, police files, anything the attorney has touched.

3 **AI drafts, a person signs**
Nothing goes to a resident, the council, a funder or a court until a named person has read all of it.

4 **Check every number and citation against the source**
If it quotes a statute, open the statute. If it gives a total, add it yourself.

5 **No AI in closed session, before or after**
The clerk keeps the minutes or recording the law requires. No AI note taker in the room, and no typing the discussion in afterward.

6 **Say when you used it, keep what led to a decision**
A line on grant and public documents where asked. If the output shaped an ordinance or a vote, it stays in the file.

7 **Money moves only after a phone call**
Any change to where a payment goes is confirmed on the number you already had, by a second person.

WHO OWNS WHAT

- Council adopts it, one agenda item, with your attorney's read on your state.
- Finance buys the town accounts and adds rule 7 to the payment procedure.
- The clerk owns the training and the log.

If your town has nothing today, these seven are a start. The GovAI Coalition template is the next version.

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Sources: gWorks client conversations; GovAI Coalition policy template; Washington State Archives; UNC School of Government; BMO; NIH

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700+ governments share free AI policy templates

Where to get a policy, retention guidance and prompts without paying anyone · As of October 2026

Resource	What you get	Where to get it
GovAI Coalition	Policy templates, vendor questions and contract templates any agency can borrow and adopt, led by San José	AI policy template **sanjoseca.gov/govai**
Your state municipal league	Guidance written for your state's laws, plus training. Ask before you adopt anything	Their AI policy model **Your league's website**
MRSC (Washington)	Plain guidance on AI and public records, with city and county AI policies collected in one place	Search “artificial intelligence” **mrsc.org**
Your state archives	Whether AI chats are records and how long to keep them. Washington's advice sheets are a model	Generative AI advice sheets **sos.wa.gov/archives**
OpenAI Academy	A free prompt pack for city and county clerks, one of several written for local government roles	Government club, clerk pack **academy.openai.com**

GOVAI COALITION

700+

governments, 2,000+ public workers (ICMA, February 2026)

START WITH TWO

The GovAI policy template and your state archives’ guidance on AI records.

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Sources: San José GovAI site; ICMA, Feb 2026; MRSC, Sept 2026; WA State Archives, June 2024; OpenAI Academy, Sept 2026

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Five questions to ask any vendor, including gWorks

Ask them of every software company that mentions AI, and of us

#	Question	A good answer sounds like	Red flag
1	Where does my data go, and who can see it?	A named cloud region, encryption, access logs you can read	“It is secure,” with no specifics
2	Is my data used to train your models?	No, in the contract, not just the brochure	“We may use data to improve our services”
3	Can I export everything my staff typed and everything it answered, for a records request?	Yes, from the product, with dates and names	“Ask support,” or logs kept for 30 days
4	Who reviews the output before it reaches a resident?	Your staff, with the review step built into the workflow	“The AI handles it end to end”
5	What happens when it is wrong?	A correction path, a named owner, and the error visible in the record	“It does not make mistakes”

Ask us these questions. The third one is the one that separates a tool built for government from a tool sold to it.

Sources: gWorks; GovAI Coalition vendor questions; MRSC guidance on records retention and export for AI tools

JR

Four weeks gets a small office from zero to working

Who does what, how long it takes, and what is accomplished · Written for an office with no IT department

Week	What gets done	Who	Time	Done when
1 · Pick the tool	Use the tool that matches your email. On Microsoft 365, that is Copilot. Otherwise ChatGPT Business or Claude Team. Buy logins for the people who write things, usually 3 to 8. Confirm training is off in the admin settings. Print the never-goes-in list.	Administrator or clerk, with your IT contractor if you have one	2 hours	Everyone who writes has a town login, and nobody uses a personal one
2 · Set interim rules	The clerk issues the seven rules as interim office rules. Finance adds the phone-call rule to the payment procedure the same day. Send the draft to your attorney and ask for it on the next council agenda.	Clerk, finance, town attorney	1 hour	Everyone with a town login has signed the interim rules
3 · Try the tasks	Each desk runs its three tasks from the twelve-task list. Keep a one-page log. Task, minutes saved, what it got wrong, what you fixed.	Every desk	30 minutes a day	Every desk has three logged tries
4 · Review and adopt	A 30-minute staff meeting over the log. Keep what worked, drop what did not, and revise the rules. Council adopts them at its next regular meeting. Add the five vendor questions to your next software purchase.	The clerk runs it, council adopts	30 minutes, then one agenda item	Council has adopted the policy, and it is on the website and in the handbook

What it costs. $20 to $30 a person a month for ChatGPT Business, Claude Team or Microsoft 365 Copilot, which sits on top of your Microsoft 365 license. For five people that is $100 to $150 a month. No consultant, and a policy you wrote from your own month of use.

Sources: gWorks; published list prices for ChatGPT Business, Claude Team and Microsoft 365 Copilot as of October 2026, verify before quoting

JR

Five moves to make in your office this month

One move for each part of today's session · The slides go to every attendee after the webinar

1

What AI is

Think first, let AI draft, then check every fact and sign it yourself. The tool never does the first step or the last.

2

Protect your office

Use a town account, type nothing you would not release, and call back on the number on file before any bank change.

3

Where it helps

Each desk picks its three tasks this week, writes each request with the four-line prompt, and keeps a one-page log.

4

One-page policy

Council adopts the seven rules with your attorney's read. Ask every vendor the five questions, including gWorks.

5

Getting started

Follow the four-week plan. Town accounts for five people cost $100 to $150 a month, and the log tells you what to keep.

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Questions

Send them in the chat now. We answer every one, live today or by email after.

gWorks · October 28, 2026 · Moneesh, CEO · Josh Riney, CTO



Sources: who uses AI, what it is, staying safe

Every figure, case and quote on the presented slides, with where to find it · Checked October 2026

Slide topic	What it supports	Source
Who uses AI	55.7% use AI; 42.9% have a written policy	Granicus, 2026 State of Digital Government: Trends in Websites and Customer Service, with ath Power Consulting (apc), about 1,300 respondents · granicus.com
Who uses AI	9% had a policy; 77% cite awareness; 40% from towns of 5,000 to 24,999	ICMA, Artificial Intelligence in Local Government: Summary of 2024 Survey Results, 635 responses, April–May 2024 · icma.org
How it works	What AI is good and bad at	gWorks product and engineering; Washington Technology Solutions (WaTech), Interim Guidelines for Purposeful and Responsible Use of Generative AI, 2023
Stay in control	The 20/60/20 method	Practitioner guidance circulated 2025–2026, adapted by gWorks for local government. No single published source
What goes in	Washington cities released staff ChatGPT logs, and what was redacted	KNKX and Cascade PBS (Nate Sanford), “As WA government officials embrace AI, policies are still catching up,” August 27, 2025 · knkx.org
What goes in	AI chats used for public business are generally public records; no court has ruled	Steven D. Zansberg, “Are the Government’s Conversations with AI Accessible Under Public Records Laws and FOIA?,” ABA Communications Lawyer, Fall 2026 (September 10, 2026) · americanbar.org
What goes in	Training defaults and town-account prices	OpenAI, Anthropic and Microsoft privacy and pricing pages, checked October 2026; UNC School of Government public records guidance
Mistakes and fakes	Athens, TN: 24+ fake or misquoted citations, $15,000 sanction per lawyer	Whiting v. City of Athens, Tenn., Nos. 24-5918/5919/25-5424 (6th Cir. March 13, 2026). The court made no finding on whether AI produced the citations
Mistakes and fakes	Bellingham, WA: 16 of 350 bid requirements from ChatGPT	KNKX and Cascade PBS, “Bellingham staffer asked ChatGPT to ‘exclude’ vendor from city contract,” January 5, 2026 · knkx.org
Mistakes and fakes	Everett, WA: 23 support letters on a $7M HUD application	KNKX and Cascade PBS, August 27, 2025 (same article as What goes in)
Mistakes and fakes	Columbia, MO: deepfake video of the mayor	KRCG, “Columbia mayor addresses AI deepfake videos,” August 25, 2026 · krcgtv.com
Mistakes and fakes; vendor payments	Town populations	U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Census, rounded. Bellingham as reported by KNKX

Sources: fraud, safe tasks, policy, first month

Every figure, case and quote on the presented slides, with where to find it · Checked October 2026

Slide topic	What it supports	Source
Vendor payments	Liberty, TX: $600K	City of Liberty news release, reported by the Houston Chronicle, KPRC Click2Houston and Bluebonnet News, October 14–15, 2026
Vendor payments	Surfside Beach, SC: $546K	WMBF and WPDE, July 2026; Post and Courier, May 2026; Moneywise, July 2026
Vendor payments	Harpswell, ME: $189K	Harpswell Anchor, May 22 and August 17, 2026; Portland Press Herald, May 28 and August 20, 2026
Vendor payments	Ashfield, MA: $47K	Greenfield Recorder and Daily Hampshire Gazette, September 17, 2026
Vendor payments	A $6-a-month plan copies a voice from 1 to 2 minutes of audio	ElevenLabs pricing and Instant Voice Cloning documentation, October 2026 · elevenlabs.io
Vendor payments	Call-back and two-person verification steps	Vendor payment fraud guidance cited on the slide: WFAE, Forbes and BMO, 2026
Start here	Twelve tasks and the check for each	gWorks client conversations; University of New Hampshire Technology Transfer (T2) Center, 2025
How to ask	The four-line prompt	gWorks product and engineering
Seven rules	Seven rules for a one-page policy	gWorks client conversations; GovAI Coalition AI policy template; Washington State Archives advice sheets, June 2024; UNC School of Government; BMO; NIH Notice NOT-OD-25-132, July 2025
Vendor questions	Five vendor questions	gWorks; GovAI Coalition vendor agreement and AI FactSheet templates; MRSC AI policies and resources page
Free help	700+ governments and 2,000+ public workers in the GovAI Coalition	ICMA, PM Magazine, “AI in Your Municipality: Implementation and Governance,” February 2026 · icma.org
Free help	Free resources listed	City of San José, GovAI Coalition Templates & Resources (sanjoseca.gov/govai); MRSC, September 2026 (mrsc.org); Washington State Archives, “Are Generative AI Interactions Public Records?” and “How Long Do Generative AI Records Need to Be Kept?,” June 2024 (sos.wa.gov/archives); OpenAI Academy, city or county clerk prompt pack, September 21, 2026 (academy.openai.com)
The first month	$20 to $30 a person a month	Published list prices, October 2026: ChatGPT Business $20–$25; Claude Team $20–$25; Microsoft 365 Copilot $30 on top of a Microsoft 365 license. Verify before quoting