

AI IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT 2026 SURVEY RESULTS

To inform future content and programming, ICMA partnered with the Metropolitan Governance and Management Transitions Laboratory at Indiana University in August 2026 to conduct a second national survey on Artificial Intelligence (AI) use in local government service delivery and track how its adoption and applications have changed as the technology continues to evolve rapidly.[1] Administrators of 726 municipalities and counties responded for a response rate of 17 percent.

The technological capabilities of AI and implications for local governments have surged quickly in a short time frame, and local government administrators are naturally cautious. AI is creating new opportunities for local governments to improve efficiency, manage information, and respond to community needs, and ICMA members continue to cite it as a high-priority topic for new information resources and professional development. While some respondents remain skeptical or opposed to AI applications, results indicate that AI is viewed as a growing priority for local governments, and that most administrative, support, and service units are at least exploring its use. Though administrative actions such as trainings or policies to guide use are increasing, results also suggest that AI governance—as well as the regulation of digital infrastructure to accommodate expanded AI use—is an area for increased attention and leadership from public administrators.

Respondents at a Glance

	n	rate
Total	**726**	**17%**
Municipalities	646	17%
Counties	80	14%
Population		
100,000 or more	87	21%
50,000 - 99,999	63	16%
25,000 - 49,999	110	18%
10,000 - 24,999	145	14%
5,000 - 9,999	163	19%
Under 5,000	158	15%

"Although the advancements in AI are increasing exponentially, caution is warranted, and so we are being deliberate in our official posture. We have a general policy but will need to drive specific procedures as we roll out the application…

There is much to learn, and my view is positive; I believe a high degree of collaboration between local governments is important. This is a true game changer."

- Maryland small county administrator

[1] 2024 survey results are available here: https://icma.org/documents/icma-survey-research-artificial-intelligence-local-government

KEY FINDINGS

- **Local governments are increasingly prioritizing AI development and use.** A majority of respondents indicate that developing or using AI is a moderate (44%) or high (13%) priority for their local government. This is a notable shift from ICMA's 2024 survey results, when AI rated as a low or non-priority for two-thirds of respondents. Over half of respondents rated their level of "AI maturity" as beyond skepticism or awareness, with 41% in an exploration stage and 15% in an operational stage.
- **Administrative actions related to governance and implementation of AI are increasing, but not yet widespread.** The most common administrative actions reported include establishing an organization-wide policy or strategy for AI usage (39%) or purchasing/providing enterprise licenses of AI tools for staff use (37%).
- **Most administrative, support, and service departments across the local governments surveyed are currently exploring/piloting or actively using AI, often to support internal needs such as policy research/analysis or grant writing**. Administration, communications, and information technology are among the units/functions most actively using AI.
- **Local governments report limited full adoption of AI to assist with public-facing tasks and services, but are exploring possibilities.** Nearly half of respondents are exploring/piloting or actively using AI-powered Q&A chatbots (46%) or translation services (45%).
- **Use of AI for management, modeling, and forecasting of traffic, energy, water, or service demand is uncommon.** Most local governments are not exploring these applications of AI technology at this time.
- **Information technology staff and other department heads are key internal enablers of AI use and adoption.** Local governments are typically using (77%) off-the-shelf tools such as Copilot or ChatGPT, while 26% report developing applications in-house by local government staff.
- **Some barriers to AI adoption, such as lack of awareness, trained personnel, policy guidance, or funding, are lessening.** However, factors like legal/regulatory compliance and cybersecurity concerns are adding complexity to AI use decisions. Lack of AI awareness and understanding remains the most common barrier to AI adoption, cited by 53% of respondents (down from 77% in 2024).
- **Growth in digital infrastructure—i.e., data centers and networks—is putting pressure on energy and land use, but is seen by some as an economic opportunity, especially if managed appropriately.** While approximately half of respondents viewed increased investment in digital infrastructure as an economic opportunity for residents, just 15% of local governments agree that its energy demands are being managed in an environmentally responsible manner, or that development incentives and tools are being effectively leveraged for measurable community benefit.
- **While local governments continue to explore the use of AI, it is not expected to impact staffing in the short term.** Few respondents (9%) anticipate reducing staff roles due to AI-powered efficiencies in the next year, and just 6% anticipate hiring additional staff in the next year to serve as "humans in the lead" for AI deployment.

Sample Respondent Comments

"…our municipality has implemented a policy prohibiting the use of generative AI by employees in the course of their work duties. Generative AI is an untested, unproven, risky prospect that local governments have no business implementing unless and until it is no longer any of those things. It poses security risks, copyright infringement risks, and could subject the municipality to unnecessary and potentially damaging public scrutiny… Sometimes local government is criticized for being slow to adopt new technology or for being behind the eight ball when it comes to progress. When it comes to AI, local government leaders have the right, if not the responsibility, to be skeptical and cautious." – Pennsylvania small township administrator

"We are still in the "gold rush" stage of AI, similar to where we were with Internet in the late 90s. It will take some time for the technology to mature, and for the many, many vendors to consolidate. Adequate security tooling is not yet available. When AI makes mistakes with 'productivity' processes, no big deal. When AI makes mistakes with key parts of private business, there are few consequences outside of that business. But if AI makes mistakes with key parts of government, there would be widespread consequences to the people we serve. Government is and should be more cautious at this stage of the game. That doesn't mean we're not exploring and trying things, but it does mean that we don't want to move fast and break things." - North Carolina large county administrator

"A recent skeptic, I am embracing being open to how AI can be transformative in helping the extremely small, rural municipalities' staff wear their five hats and pull better information from our data to present to the elected officials to help them in their decision-making process. As I've embraced openness, so have my department heads. Moving towards any adoption is going to take time, but it's not necessarily AI - it's moving us towards more efficient, effective and economical processes (which is change, and change is hard) that AI is most likely a key component of these updated processes." – Illinois small city administrator

"We are hoping to use AI as a tool, not a shortcut. We would like to use it to automate tedious/time consuming tasks and document prep/formatting so human resources can be focused on analysis and higher value work. Rather than reducing headcount, I see it being able to allow us to maintain services without adding headcount." – Connecticut town administrator

"Our workforce ranges significantly in age - some employees are not inclined to adopt new technologies, while others entered their current roles with ample AI experience. There are some who won't buy in based on concerns about the environmental impact, data security, and implementation costs. However, we're also a small staff serving an increasingly large and elderly population. There is not much disagreement with the expectation that we will come to rely on AI, if just to meet the demand for services with fewer working age people available to provide them." – Wisconsin small county administrator

"The City needs to be intentional in how we approach AI. There are certainly opportunities to use it to improve efficiency, data analysis, and staff productivity, but we also need to ensure appropriate safeguards are in place related to privacy, cybersecurity, accuracy, and human oversight. From an economic development perspective, we should also be looking ahead and determining what investments in infrastructure and workforce development may be necessary to ensure we remain competitive as AI continues to change the way businesses and governments operate." – Maryland large city administrator

"I believe we are progressive in this space and understand/embrace AI as the future. I think this will be critical -- both operationally and from the development/land use space. AI and digital infrastructure is here and it is not going away, we need to learn to work within it, use it, embrace it, and do it responsibly. Where we struggle the most is getting our data set up and having the funds, but we know the investment has a strong ROI." – Minnesota small city administrator

SUMMARY DATA

Not all respondents answered every question. Many questions allowed respondents to select multiple topics. Percentages may exceed 100 for that reason and/or due to rounding.

Table 1: How high of a priority is your local government currently placing on developing and/or using AI? (n=723)

Answer Choice	Responses
High	13.0%
Moderate	44.1%
Low	34.4%
Not at all	8.4%

Table 2: Has your local government taken any of the following actions related to the use of AI by your organization? Check all that apply. (n=720)

Action	Share of Responses
Established an organization-wide policy or strategy for AI usage	38.9%
Adoption by the governing body of a resolution on AI usage	6.4%
Implemented organization-wide training on the use of AI	17.1%
Appointed a committee, commission, or task force on AI usage	18.8%
Hired or appointed internal staff to guide AI strategy and/or usage	21.4%
Inclusion of a budget line item for AI implementation/use	13.2%
Surveyed staff about their perspectives on AI use	21.3%
Purchased/provided enterprise licenses of AI tools for staff use	36.8%
Other	9.4%
None of these	31.8%

Table 3: To what extent are administrative and support departments/functions within your local government using AI?

Department/ function	n	Actively using	Exploring/ piloting	Not at all	We don't have this function
Administration	676	44.8%	43.5%	9.8%	1.9%
Legal	643	15.6%	24.1%	27.1%	33.3%
Clerk's office	660	23.9%	41.2%	28.5%	6.4%
Communications	662	39.7%	36.1%	13.6%	10.6%
Finance	663	15.1%	43.3%	38.0%	3.6%
Human resources	663	21.6%	42.2%	31.1%	5.1%
Information technology	665	39.2%	32.2%	14.6%	14.0%

Table 4: To what extent are service departments/functions within your local government using AI?

Department/function	n	Actively using	Exploring/ piloting	Not at all	We don't have this function
Public works	666	13.5%	42.3%	38.4%	5.7%
Water and utilities	655	10.5%	31.8%	35.9%	21.8%
Police/public safety	662	23.9%	43.8%	21.3%	11.0%
Fire and rescue	654	10.6%	31.5%	28.9%	29.1%
Emergency management	658	10.8%	33.4%	32.4%	23.4%
Community and economic development	662	24.0%	40.5%	21.6%	13.9%
Planning and zoning	665	22.0%	45.3%	27.2%	5.6%
Building and code enforcement	661	13.0%	42.8%	35.7%	8.5%
Parks and recreation	665	14.9%	39.1%	32.6%	13.4%
Health and human services	654	5.0%	19.3%	19.0%	56.7%

Table 5: Is your local government exploring or actively using AI tools for any of the following public-facing tasks or services? Check any that apply.

Task/service	n	Actively using	Exploring/ piloting	N/A
FOIA request processing	636	6.1%	32.1%	61.8%
Q&A chatbots	647	17.2%	28.9%	53.9%
Translation services	643	14.5%	30.9%	54.6%
Navigating or expediting permitting processes	636	5.7%	36.5%	57.9%
Service request intake and routing	637	4.9%	35.9%	59.2%
Property assessment	637	0.9%	13.3%	85.7%
Code enforcement	634	3.6%	33.1%	63.2%

Table 6: Is your local government exploring or actively using AI tools for any of the following internal operations needs?

Choice	n	Actively using	Exploring/ piloting	N/A
Policy research/analysis	654	46.2%	35.5%	18.3%
Grant writing	647	29.5%	40.6%	29.8%
Personnel management	637	13.5%	39.4%	47.1%
Preserving institutional knowledge	637	11.3%	34.5%	54.2%
Procurement support	637	10.8%	37.5%	51.6%

Table 7: Is your local government exploring or actively using AI tools for management, modeling, or forecasting tasks? (n=645)

Choice	n	Actively using	Exploring/ piloting	N/A
Traffic management	638	7.2%	20.8%	71.9%
Traffic safety analytics	637	7.5%	23.5%	68.9%
Service demand forecasting	632	2.7%	23.9%	73.4%
Water infrastructure modeling/ management	637	4.4%	21.7%	73.9%
Energy infrastructure modeling/ management	635	2.2%	14.8%	83.0%

Table 8: Is your local government using any of the following approaches to develop and implement AI-powered applications or strategies? Check any that apply. (n=647)

Choice	Share of Responses
Developing in-house by local government staff	26.0%
Outsourcing to/engagement of consultants	16.1%
Using off-the-shelf AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, etc.)	76.8%
Partnering with vendors to custom-build applications	17.8%
Collaboration with other local governments	15.5%
Guidance from an advisory board or commission	6.0%
None of the above	17.5%

Table 9: How would you characterize the following stakeholder groups' influence on AI use by your local government?

Stakeholder	n	Significantly enabling	Somewhat enabling	Neutral	Somewhat constraining	Significantly constraining
Elected officials	630	6.3%	24.9%	59.7%	6.0%	3.0%
IT staff	630	20.8%	33.0%	34.0%	9.8%	2.4%
Department heads	636	13.7%	47.5%	31.6%	5.8%	1.4%
Local business community	627	2.7%	10.5%	82.9%	2.9%	1.0%
Technology vendors	628	17.2%	31.4%	47.9%	2.9%	0.6%
Residents	631	1.1%	12.4%	75.4%	8.6%	2.5%

Table 10: From your perspective, what are some of the most urgent internal barriers to AI adoption by your local government? Select up to three. (n= 648)

Choice	Share of Responses
Lack of AI awareness/understanding	52.9%
Insufficient number of trained personnel	39.7%
Lack of organizational commitment to AI use	15.6%
Insufficient funding to upgrade or procure AI technology or tools	32.6%
Lack of support from local elected officials	2.3%
Regulatory and legal compliance concerns	28.9%
No organizational policies and procedures for AI use	23.8%
Cybersecurity concerns	39.4%
Issues with data readiness (lack of clean, standardized inputs)	20.8%
Public perception or feedback	11.9%
Challenges with interdepartmental coordination	2.9%
None of the above	2.9%

Table 11: From your perspective, which option best describes your local government's overall level of AI maturity? (n=643)

Choice	Responses
Skepticism (resistance or caution)	13.5%
Awareness (learning and discussion)	28.5%
Exploration (setting up basic governance/ethics policies, experimenting with simple pilots)	41.1%
Operational (deploying standardized applications for simple internal efficiencies and basic resident-facing services)	14.8%
Integration (cross-agency deployment with enhanced collaboration, compliance, and security frameworks)	1.9%
Transformation (AI is core to operations and decision-making)	0.3%

Table 12: Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about digital infrastructure impacts.

Statement	n	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Digital infrastructure development is creating land use or siting challenges.	623	17.3%	26.3%	41.3%	11.9%	3.2%
Growth in digital infrastructure is increasing local energy demand.	623	21.3%	35.5%	32.3%	8.0%	2.9%
Expansion of digital infrastructure is being managed in an environmentally responsible manner.	624	2.9%	12.5%	52.9%	20.7%	11.1%
Energy demand from digital infrastructure is being addressed through efficiency or renewable energy strategies.	624	2.1%	12.7%	50.0%	24.8%	10.4%
Increased digital infrastructure investment is expanding economic opportunity for residents.	622	9.3%	36.3%	39.2%	9.5%	5.6%
Development incentives and tools ensure digital infrastructure delivers measurable community benefits.	624	3.2%	12.0%	51.1%	19.7%	13.9%

Table 13: Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about anticipated impacts of AI on your local government and community.

Statement	n	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
AI is creating new, high-quality job opportunities for residents in our community.	624	3.0%	11.7%	49.0%	25.3%	10.9%
AI will have a significant net positive impact on our local economy within 5 years.	624	5.9%	29.6%	44.2%	13.3%	6.9%
We anticipate hiring additional staff to serve as “humans in the lead” for AI deployment within the next year.	624	1.0%	4.6%	30.3%	39.7%	24.4%
We anticipate reducing staff roles due to AI-powered efficiencies in the next year.	622	1.4%	7.9%	28.1%	39.2%	23.3%