

# The New Government Workplace

The innovative strategies and technologies helping public agencies work more efficiently.







## INTRODUCTION

**T**he public sector doesn't pay as well as the private sector. It is inflexible and bureaucratic. It is slow to adopt the latest technologies and is resistant to change. These are just a few of the reasons people give for why they don't want to work for the government. But staff shortages and new technologies are forcing state and local governments to get creative, and in many pockets of the country, these descriptions of the public sector are no longer valid. New recruitment practices, pay incentives and digital tools are making state and local government an employer of choice.

Take, for example, Tennessee, where state agencies are using artificial intelligence to save workers more than 100,000 hours each year by automating certain processes. It's allowing employees to focus on other,

more fulfilling tasks. It's not just Tennessee exploring how the emerging technology can create efficiencies—a national survey found that more than three-quarters of local government IT executives are considering implementing automation technologies in their workplace. And as AI makes its way into the mainstream, IT officials are also developing frameworks to ensure employees are leveraging AI's benefits safely and responsibly.

Technology can only carry an organization so far, however. Hiring and retaining solid employees is critical to a successful agency. To that end, communities are experimenting with pay, benefits and work arrangements to attract the best and brightest. In Golden, Colorado, the city is piloting a four-day workweek in its police department. And

in several states, performance pay, which has long been a staple in the private sector, appears to be gaining new momentum in the public sector.

Route Fifty provides a look at how officials and experts are applying emerging technology and creative employee benefits to support safe, efficient and resilient government workplaces.



# CONTENTS

CHAPTER

1

Agencies Opting  
For Bots See  
More Efficiency  
- And Resistance

By Chris Teale

CHAPTER

2

Can Performance  
Pay Help States  
And Cities Hang  
On To The Best  
And Brightest?

By Katherine Barrett &  
Richard Greene

CHAPTER

3

6G Promises  
Immersive  
Communications  
For Public  
Safety

By Kaitlyn Levinson

CHAPTER

4

Staffing  
Challenges Spur  
Another Look  
at Four-Day  
Workweeks

By Elizabeth Daigneau

CHAPTER

5

AI in the  
Workplace:  
Local Officials  
Explore  
Responsible Use

By Kaitlyn Levinson





CHAPTER

# 1

## Agencies Opting for Bots See More Efficiency — And Resistance

With enterprise automation saving thousands of work hours, IT leaders are looking for ways to introduce the technology to government offices.

By Chris Teale

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**A**rtificial intelligence could save agencies thousands of work hours if they automate processes and allow employees to focus on other tasks.

Tennessee saves over 100,000 work hours each year across more than 15 executive agencies, Bob Pucci, Tennessee’s executive director of intelligent automation, said during the National Association of State Chief Information Officers’ mid-year meeting. The state plans to expand its automation initiative to the remaining eight agencies in the next couple of years, he said.

Tennessee has deployed more than 120 bots, and Pucci said the state has worked to find “common, or what we call enterprise automations” that can be used across multiple agencies and so be replicated and standardized.

It takes up to six weeks to implement a bot at an agency, and as part of the rollout, agency employees watch a video presentation that shows how the bots are taking on mundane, menial or paper-based tasks. Moving that work to the bots, the presentation said, can “ease the burden” on employees and improve customer experience for residents. Understanding that the bots are designed to relieve staff of tedious work also bolsters employee buy-in, which is crucial for enterprise-level automation.

“There is no one-man show,” he said. “It’s an orchestra” that requires everyone to be on board and to play their part.

Nationwide surveys show excitement among state and local IT executives for automation to improve efficiency of government operations. CompTIA Public Technology Institute’s (PTI) State of City and County IT

National Survey found that 78% of local IT executives are either adopting or considering automating technologies, while 65% are similarly exploring or using AI.

PTI’s Executive Director Alan Shark said IT leaders are looking at these emerging technologies to help them “maximize their ability to align with all the needs of their cities and counties.”

“The tools are out there,” Shark continued. “That excites me because I think that’s going to make government far more efficient and far more effective both in the areas of health and safety, and communications.”

And while automation may be useful in many areas, there will always be a need for humans to develop the software and monitor the work. Clint Dean, vice president of state and local government at





IT service management company Ensono, said automation means jobs will inevitably change, as they have throughout history with the advent of new technologies, but they will not necessarily disappear.

Rather than to shrink the workforce and automate some jobs out of existence, IT experts said automation is best used to make employees more efficient.

“You still need people to think strategically, you still need people to make those machines, to program them,” Dean said in an interview at the NASCIO conference. “It changes and probably creates new jobs as well.”

As government agencies modernize their operations, a number are turning to AI and machine learning to understand how their legacy technology works and to



**78% of local IT executives are either adopting or considering automating technologies.**

extract relevant code from aging systems. Traditionally, that work was very labor- and time-intensive, but new technologies mean staff can spend less time reading and extracting code and more time on other tasks.

Miten Marfatia, CEO of software company EvolveWare, which focuses on modernizing legacy systems, said navigating resistance from workers who believe their jobs are disappearing and helping them understand what they can do instead is key.

Rather than let employees think their jobs will disappear, EvolveWare tells them that with automation their potential for success



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is “going to increase dramatically,” Marfatia said in an interview at the NASCIO meeting. By not spending time poring over code, he said, “there’ll be so much more money and resources that they can apply to a newer generation of programming and code that they can be involved in.”

Similarly, app security company Veracode has turned to generative AI with its Veracode Fix technology that helps developers remediate vulnerabilities in code. The technology draws on the company’s 140 trillion lines of code built and analyzed over its 17 years of existence, scanning the lines written by developers to find deficiencies that must be fixed.

By automating that process, workers can focus on other tasks and produce

secure software. “Developers want to be developing,” Veracode CEO Sam King said at the NASCIO conference.

“

**You can view this as a threat, or you can view this as an opportunity.”**

Sam King,  
CEO of Veracode

Despite the potential AI and other emerging technologies hold for government, agency leaders must put proper guardrails in place

to ensure it is developed safely and manage the changes it will bring to people’s work and everyday lives. If there is not a focus on “continuous improvement,” Dean Johnson, senior executive government advisor at Ensono, warned the tools may not keep up.

“Sometimes what happens is you roll out this great technology, and in the use case that created it, it’s a perfect fit,” Johnson said in an interview at NASCIO’s meeting. “But let’s face it, we’re not managing a static environment.”

While opinions may be split on the future impacts of AI, King said it is not a reversible trend. “You can view this as a threat, or you can view this as an opportunity,” she said. “I think that we would be well served to view this as an opportunity [as] with any new technology when it comes out.”





CHAPTER

2

## Can Performance Pay Help States and Cities Hang onto the Best and Brightest?

After years in which compensation tied to performance was considered a “failed experiment,” workforce pressures are bringing it back to the table again.

By Katherine Barret and Richard Greene



It's a simple truth: States, counties and cities are not going to be able to keep up with the private sector in terms of compensation. That means, in turn, that retention is always going to be a problem when their best and brightest employees are seduced by bigger paychecks that are available in corporate America.

One approach that holds some promise is performance pay, which is commonplace in companies. Though pay incentives for exceptional work are not a new idea in the public sector, the model is rare. The far more common alternative is basing an employee's pay exclusively on longevity, "which is consistent, but it doesn't change anyone's behavior," says David Kitchen, human resources manager for Lehi, Utah.

There has been growing interest in adopting performance pay. Cara Woodson Welch, executive director of the Public Sector HR Association says that anecdotally she has been "hearing more people talking about it recently." She adds that she's also seen a number of questions come up about the topic on the association's online forum.

"Given the labor market and retention problems and recruitment issues, there has been more interest in performance pay," confirms Juan Williams, commissioner of the Department of Human Resources in Tennessee, a pioneering state in the use of compensation that takes performance into account. "You can't continue to operate the way you have and expect different outcomes."

Performance pay is a revival of an idea that had been dismissed in the past "as a failed experiment," says Leslie Scott, executive director of the National Association of State Personnel Executives. For one thing, evaluations upon which pay was based sometimes resulted in accusations of bias and favoritism, which left employees feeling bitter. Additionally, there have been concerns that performance pay creates competition among workers, which can damage a team-based environment.

Unions often make this argument. As one leader of a teacher's union told us, "Our teachers want to be in a pay system that thrives on collaboration and working with one another. They don't want to be in a system that encourages competition. They want to be paid for their experience."



Such objections have impeded the use of performance pay but, “I get the sense that better tools and technology for fairer performance evaluations increases the likelihood of [the approach’s] effectiveness,” says Scott.

Additionally, workforce shortages and high turnover rates have fostered an environment conducive to its use. “It’s good for retention because you can reward the people you want to retain—the high performers,” she says.

Louisiana is a state that already has a solid way to provide additional compensation to outstanding employees, by providing lump-sum payments for high performers. Employees can receive up to \$2,500 in a year, or an amount no greater than 3% of their base pay. If that doesn’t seem like much of an incentive,



**\$2,500: the lump-sum payment high-performing employees are eligible for in Louisiana.**

consider this: The lowest level jobs in Louisiana state government start at \$8 an hour or \$16,640 a year. “So, an additional \$500 can help that person a lot,” says Byron Decoteau, the state’s civil service director.

Louisiana’s performance evaluation system divides employees into three tiers: those who need improvement or are unsuccessful; people who are successful; and those who are exceptional. Only employees rated as exceptional are eligible for the lump-sum payment. These evaluations are based on their supervisor’s judgment of how they perform compared to goals

set out for them. There’s a second level review, from someone higher up in the organization, in order to reduce subjectivity.

Another factor that can diminish the benefits of performance pay is a compulsion among some supervisors to rate nearly everyone at the top level to stay popular with staff. This trap has been avoided in Louisiana, as only 10% of employees can be rated as exceptional.

While Louisiana only uses performance pay in the form of one-time payments, Tennessee has long used the device more broadly to establish base pay levels. This effort began a little over a decade ago when the Tennessee Excellence, Accountability and Management Act was put into law, which placed a big





emphasis on creating performance standards aligned with the governor's priorities. Performance is based on the management formula SMART goals, which stands for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time sensitive.

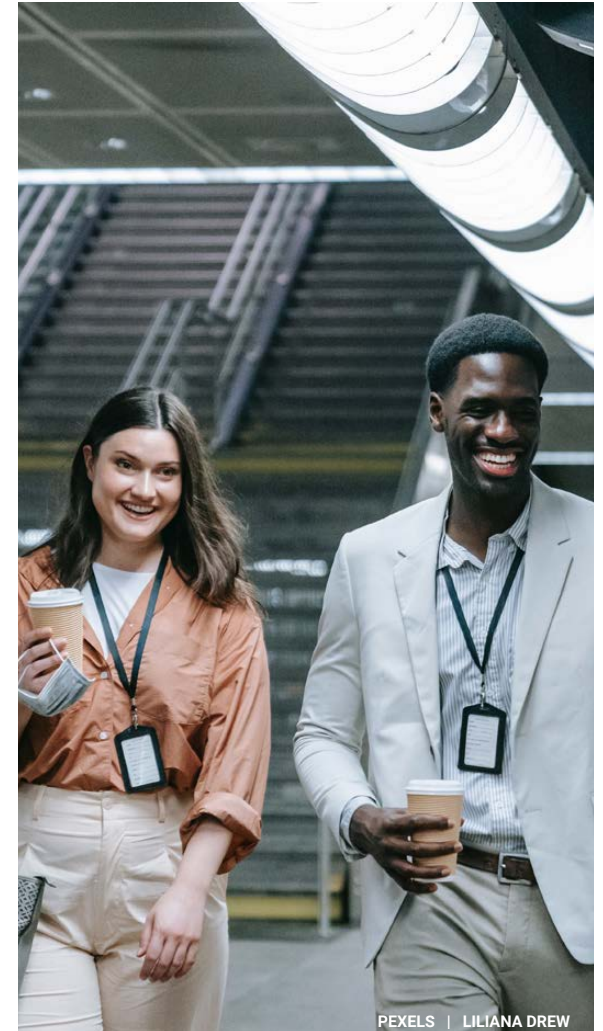
This effort evolved and in 2021-2022, the state began a four-year effort to improve its performance management plan, introducing, for example, evaluations that come not just from supervisors but also from peers and people who report to those being evaluated.

All of this is automated, and employees are evaluated in one of five categories: unacceptable, needs improvement, meets expectations, exceeds expectations and exceptional. Employees who meet expectations receive an increase in base salary; those who exceeded that get more

and people rated as exceptional get the most. The percentages vary from year to year depending on how many people are in each of the categories and the amount of money available in the budget.

Tennessee has been able to avoid accusations of unfairness by ensuring that supervisors meet with direct reports four times a year. During these meetings, supervisors give employees the feedback they need to avoid feeling blindsided when it comes time to establish their next year's pay level.

Says Williams, "There's a commitment to it. We want our employees to perform at the highest level and performance-based pay has been a mechanism to accomplish that. We've been able to retain higher performers because we're rewarding them. With this effort, we are more



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**We want our employees to perform at the highest level and performance-based pay has been a mechanism to accomplish that.”**

Juan Williams, Commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Human Resources

similar to the private sector firms with which we compete for jobs because we reward on performance and not just longevity.”

While performance pay can be used for almost any employee, it appears to be gaining traction particularly as a device to retain teachers, who are in very short supply in most cities and states.

Fueled in part by a desire to effectively utilize the state’s huge anticipated \$1 billion surplus in the current fiscal year, the Oklahoma Senate has come out with a plan that would provide bonuses capped at 5% of pay and given to no more than the most outstanding 10% of teachers.

The specifics haven’t been worked out, according to Curtis Shelton, policy and research fellow for the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs. But there’s a reasonable expectation, he says, that it would be based on evaluations that

are currently in place for teachers—in part on peer and administrative evaluations, as well as several other non-performance-based criteria like participation in extra-curricular activities. And there is real support for the approach in the executive branch, as both the governor and the state’s elected superintendent of schools made rising student test scores a central part of their platforms in the last election.

Similarly, the North Carolina General Assembly is considering creating a pilot program in between five and 15 geographically and demographically diverse districts that could introduce a new compensation plan that would go beyond rewarding teachers solely for years of experience. Under consideration are a portfolio of evidence points



including growth in student proficiency and evaluations from principals, assistant principals and peer teachers.

Says Van Dempsey, chair of the Professional Educator and Preparation Standards Commission, which provides oversight and recommendations about all aspects of education, “No single evaluation tool should be used and no teacher should ever be subjected to the judgment of one person.”

The pilot program, if passed, will give the state the opportunity to assess approaches to this work and the weighting of the various tools for evaluation.

“We’re in a state of crisis in education in North Carolina now with great difficulties attracting and retaining

teachers,” says Dempsey. “Compensation isn’t going to solve these problems by itself, but we believe that this new structure has a great amount of potential.”





CHAPTER

3

## 6G Promises Immersive Communications for Public Safety

The next-generation cellular network is poised to massively upgrade situational awareness for public safety agencies, experts say.

By Kaitlyn Levinson



For decades, public safety workers have depended on land mobile radio communications and push-to-talk capabilities to share mission-critical information, but these systems are giving way to wireless data networks as broadband capabilities have expanded.

For instance, data networks can help fire departments use 3D location services to track personnel inside buildings for increased situational awareness and safety, and emergency medical services can transmit real-time data and images to hospitals ahead of arrival so they can be more prepared, according to a recent report from Next G Alliance, an initiative under the Alliance for Telecommunications Industry Solutions dedicated to advancing wireless

technologies across the country. These evolving wireless networks have supported first responders' growing use and dependence on data, video and image transmission, enhanced location tracking, data analytics and other elements crucial to an effective emergency response, the report stated.

But there is always room to improve. Enter 6G: the next-generation cellular network that will operate in higher frequencies, such as millimeter and terahertz communications. It will build upon previous systems by offering users enhanced data rates and bandwidth availability, according to Eirini Tsiropoulou, an assistant professor at the University of New Mexico's Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering.

6G provides “substantially lower latency compared to its predecessor 5G cellular technology,” she said in an email to GCN. When latency is less than 1 millisecond, connected users can take advantage of haptic cyber-physical applications, she said.

One way a 6G network will improve public safety applications is by combining technologies such as edge computing, fog computing and cloud computing to integrate communications and computing infrastructures, Tsiropoulou said. Indeed, internet-of-things devices are expected to explode with 6G's implementation, according to the report, with deployment of as many as 1 million IoT devices per square kilometer. For example, firefighters using augmented reality headsets





when inspecting a hazardous building could integrate data from IoT tools, such as wearables, connected vehicles and robotics, cameras and smart-city sensors, “to produce a robust picture of surrounding risks.”

6G could also strengthen network security for public safety agencies by incorporating safeguards against several types of cyberattacks like jamming, spoofing and others, Tsiropoulou said.

But there’s no rush—yet. According to Tsiropoulou, the first 6G specs are expected to be commercially available by 2030 under the 3rd Generation Partnership Project, a group of organizations aimed at developing a global mobile broadband standard.

Ultimately, 6G “will enable support for mission-critical services, the provision of immersive communications and the capacity to connect billions of omnipresent devices and sensors,” the report stated.



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CHAPTER

4

## Staffing Challenges Spur Another Look at Four-Day Workweeks

School districts think shorter weeks could attract more teachers, while one Colorado city hopes they can help address chronic staffing shortages at its police department.

By Elizabeth Daigneau



Since the Covid-19 pandemic began, interest in a four-day workweek has surged.

Just this year, hundreds of school districts in half a dozen states have opted to shorten the school week to four days. A handful of states introduced legislation this session that would experiment with four-day workweeks, including one bill in Maryland that would have provided tax credits to businesses that offer the option. And local governments—mostly smaller jurisdictions—have launched pilot programs across the country.

Golden, Colorado, a city just outside Denver in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, announced in late May that it would begin testing a four-day workweek this summer.

The pilot will start July 10 and run through the end of the year. It will include all employees in the Golden Police Department, who will move from a 40-hour workweek to a 32-hour workweek without a change to pay. The city has been careful to emphasize service levels and days open will not change. “This four-day workweek means working less hours and doing work differently,” a press release said. “It does NOT mean working less and doing less.”

Four-day workweeks are far from new, but the reasons for its recent meteoric rise in popularity are.

A decade ago, as the Great Recession squeezed state and local government budgets, the main attraction was saving money. School districts hoped to reduce transportation costs. Utah Gov. Jon

Huntsman launched the state’s “4/10” workweek—10 hours a day, Monday-Thursday—for thousands of employees in 2008 to improve efficiency, reduce overhead costs and conserve energy.

But today, the popularity of shorter weeks is a way to address staff shortages. Schools are trying anything to recruit and retain teachers in a tight labor market. The story is the same in Golden. The city of roughly 20,000 residents is rolling out its pilot to address staff shortages citywide, but especially in its police department.

“Law enforcement is a more and more challenging career path for folks,” said Scott Vargo, Golden’s city manager. “It has been difficult for us to fill openings. Our police chief has said that since 2015, the department has been fully staffed





only once. It is a constant battle, so we are trying to make it attractive to potential employees and we are trying to show how much we value employees.”

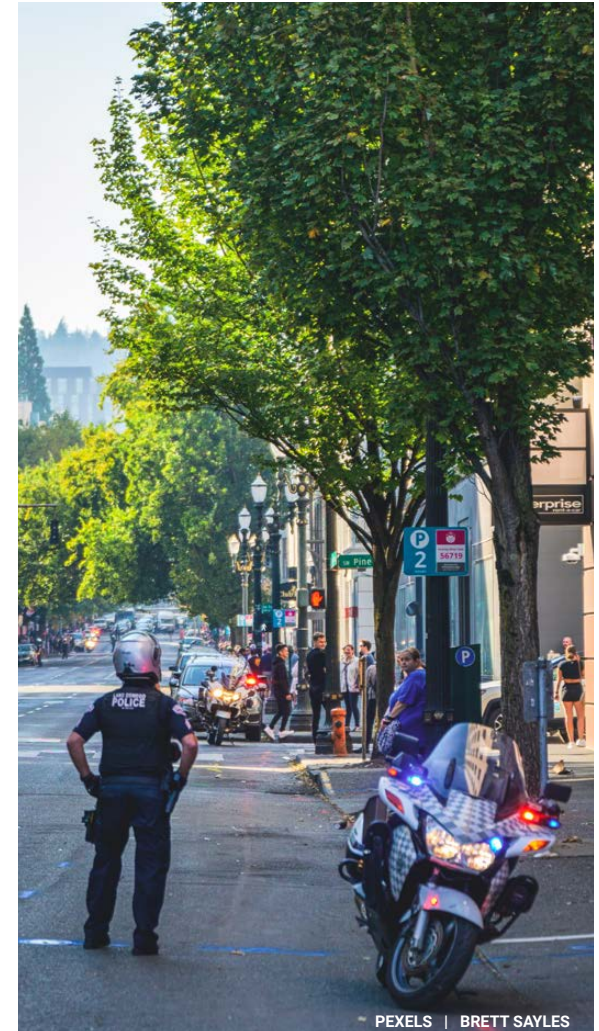
Golden also picked the police department to test a shorter week because it’s the “perfect microcosm” of government at-large, according to Vargo. The department is already flexible around scheduling changes. It provides walk-up customer service functions like many other government agencies. The agency has a variety of staff positions and a multigenerational workforce. Plus, law enforcement already tracks hundreds of metrics that the city could use in evaluating the pilot.

The city is partnering in the development and evaluation of the trial with 4 Day Week Global, a nonprofit

group that advocates for four-day workweeks. Officials will evaluate the pilot by measuring employee productivity and engagement, service to the city, potential reduction in overtime, reduced use of sick leave, and recruiting and retention. Vargo says the city will also regularly conduct employee engagement pulse surveys—“very simple red-, yellow-, green-type questions.”

“We are trying to improve the level of services we provide in the community,” said Vargo, “but we also need to increase our ability to retain staff and to recruit staff, and to improve overall employee well-being—give employees more time for family, work-life balance, mental and physical health.”

Retaining employees is an integral part of providing improving services, says







 **15%: the share of employees in a global study who said 'no amount of money' would bring them back to five-day workweek.**

Vargo. “We can’t achieve higher levels of service to the community when we are dealing with churn and high training expenses.”

Surveys of employees have consistently shown that four-day workweeks are popular with workers. 4 Day Week Global helped organize the world’s largest trial last year in the United Kingdom. More than 2,900 employees across 61 companies tested the 32-hour workweek over two months. A majority of supervisors and employees liked it so much they’ve decided to keep the arrangement. In fact, 15% of the employees who participated said “no

amount of money” would convince them to go back to working five days a week.

While employees’ well-being was probably the biggest benefit of the trial, revenues remained broadly the same over the trial period and retention increased significantly.

In Golden, officials will also look for ways to increase efficiency and leverage technology so that employees can be as productive in a 32-hour week as a 40-hour week. One idea might be to shorten and limit meetings, said Vargo. Another might be to eliminate distractions for staffers sitting in front of their computers in order to give employees more focused work time. They could turn off pop-up notifications for email, Microsoft Teams or Slack for several hours at a time. Vargo says the

city will not introduce new technology during the pilot because that would require training, but that the city will be evaluating areas where it could help.

Vargo believes Golden may be among the first in the U.S. to pilot a four-day workweek in the police department. In designing the pilot, he says there were “not other well-known examples in the U.S. and municipal government of police department models.”

Provo, Utah, has had a four-day workweek for its public employees for at least 15 years now, although the program doesn’t extend to the fire and police departments or those in customer service and cemetery employees, according to Provo Mayor Michelle Kaufusi. Another notable difference from Golden’s pilot and other current



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**We can't achieve higher levels of service to the community when we are dealing with churn and high training expenses.”**

Scott Vargo, City Manager  
of Golden, Colorado

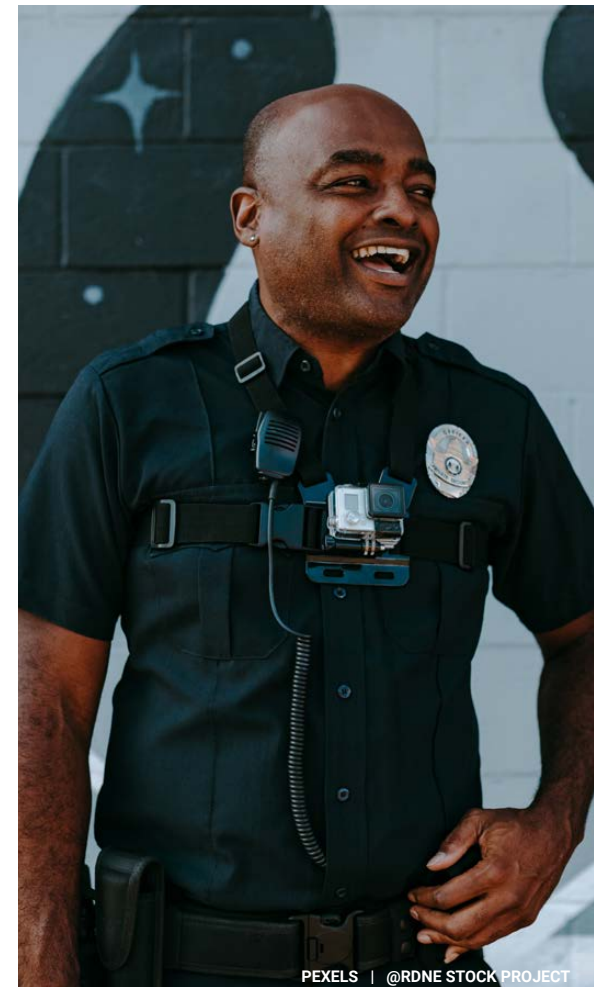
four-day workweek pilots is that Provo utilizes the 4/10 approach. City offices are open Monday through Thursday, from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Kaufusi says the city regularly surveys employees and the model remains

popular. “It has been loved, literally loved by everyone in the community and in this city,” she told KSL NewsRadio.

Golden will provide updates to the community at the three- and six-month marks of the pilot. If the trial is successful, the city will look into expanding to other city departments. But Vargo notes that the city doesn't know if this will be successful or not.

“It could be that we end up with some functions that are fine with a 32-hour week, and some that are not compatible at all,” he said. “What we are trying to do is instill a culture of creativity and innovation here. Whether this is successful or not, we hope this shows how much we value our employees and want to do our best for Golden.”



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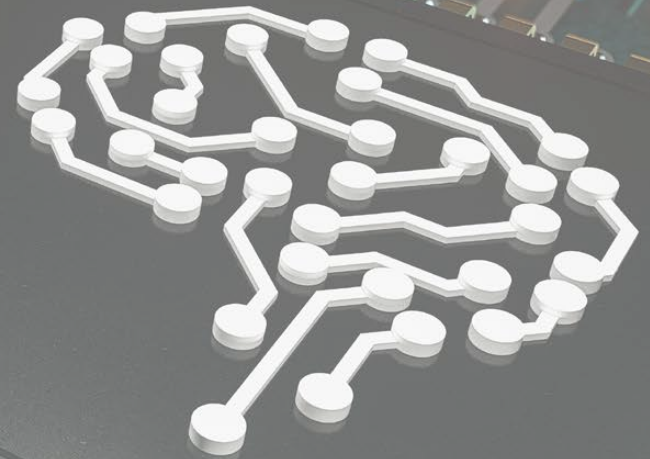
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## AI in the Workplace: Local Officials Explore Responsible Use

As more governments experiment with artificial intelligence, local leaders are considering how to leverage AI's benefits safely and responsibly.

By Kaitlyn Levinson

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Artificial intelligence is a valuable tool for agencies automating mundane tasks and conducting data analytics, but recent calls for its regulation emphasize the technology’s potential privacy and security risks when not used responsibly.

As the Biden administration rolls out its AI frameworks and recommendations on the appropriate use and development of AI systems, local agencies have started drafting their own policies.

The National Association of Counties, for example, has formed an AI Exploratory Committee that will examine the intersection of AI and county policies and practices, workforce productivity, government services, privacy and

security, and other elements, the organization announced in late May.

“We are at a unique moment in terms of artificial intelligence,” NACo Associate Legislative Director Seamus Dowdall said. With all the attention AI is getting, the committee plans “to explore the emerging policies, practices, potential applications, rules and consequences of artificial intelligence through [the] lens of county governments,” he said.

The committee’s 15 members include elected or appointed county officials, department heads and staff from state associations of counties, he said. It will be co-chaired by Florida’s Palm Beach County Commissioner Gregg Weiss and Texas’ Travis County Judge Andy Brown. The committee will address issues such

as determining appropriate use cases for AI and how it could impact the security of countywide data as well as public trust in local government, Dowdall said. “We’ve seen the federal government begin to explore how much it will approach and utilize AI at the federal level.... The same conversations are happening at the state and county level.”

Cities are also taking steps to ensure they use AI responsibly. The Seattle IT Department, for instance, recently issued an interim policy for city staff who wish to use generative AI like ChatGPT to streamline workflows or improve service delivery.

“We see the emergence of generative AI as providing both opportunities that can help us deliver our services, but





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**We've seen the federal government begin to explore how much it will approach and utilize AI.... The same conversations are happening at the state and county level.”**

Seamus Dowdall, associate legislative director for the National Association of Counties

it also has risks that can threaten our responsibilities.... Our interim policy is intended to minimize issues that may arise from the use of this technology while additional research and analysis are conducted,” officials said in a May 31 statement announcing the policy’s adoption.

Under the policy, the city’s IT Department must approve of staff members’ access to or acquisition of new generative AI products. Employees are also required to validate the information generated by AI systems, which may produce false or misleading results. This means city staff should review AI outputs for accuracy, proper attribution and biased or offensive material, officials said.

Seattle city employees are also prohibited from feeding generative AI systems “sensitive or confidential data, including personally identifiable data about members of the public.” Experts have warned that uploading code to a generative AI system could also weaken an organization’s ability to track and manage cyberthreats.

As counties, “we are community conveners in some ways [and] data aggregators in other ways—there’s a lot of different ways we’re looking at [AI],” Dowdall said. “Using AI as a tool is one component of this conversation, but there’s really a much broader approach that we want to take to think holistically about how AI is progressing.”



## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS



**Chris Teale**

Chris Teale is a technology reporter covering cybersecurity and IT modernization in state and local government.



**Katherine Barrett  
and Richard Greene**

Over the course of nearly 30 years, Katherine Barrett and Richard Greene, principals of Barrett and Greene, Inc. have done much-praised analysis, research and writing about state and local governments. Described by Peter Harkness, founder of Governing Magazine as “by far the most experienced journalists in the country covering public performance,” they pioneered “grading the cities, counties and states” in management. Related to that work, they founded the Government Performance Project. They are columnists and senior advisors at Route Fifty, special project consultants to the Volcker Alliance, senior advisors at the Government Finance Research Center at the University of Illinois in Chicago and fellows in the National Academy of Public Administration. Greene has been named chair of The Center for Accountability and Performance at the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA). In addition, they are visiting fellows at the IBM Center for the Business of Government and consultants to the National Association of State Personnel Executives.



**Elizabeth Daigneau**

Elizabeth Daigneau is the executive editor at Route Fifty where she is responsible for driving the daily news operations and overseeing the team of reporters and contributors covering the stories affecting city, county and state government officials. Before joining Route Fifty, Elizabeth was the chief operating officer at Vote.org, where In 2020, she helped run one of the largest voter mobilization programs in the civic sphere. Prior to Vote.org, Elizabeth served as the managing editor of Governing magazine for nearly a decade. In addition to her editing duties there, she wrote about energy and the environment for the state and local audience. After graduating from American University in 2002 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in journalism and literature, Elizabeth went to work at Foreign Policy magazine as assistant to the editor. Elizabeth lives in Maryland with her son and husband.



**Kaitlyn Levinson**

Kaitlyn Levinson digs into how data and analytics are used by state and local governments to boost efficiency, streamline operations and improve services delivery.



**ROUTE**



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