Ethical AI for the City of Austin

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Executive Summary

This report presents key research findings and offers resources and recommendations for developing AI training at the City of Austin. Our major goal was to assess the knowledge and interests of City employees regarding AI, to develop curriculum materials for them, and to make some recommendations about training needs.

We highlight the key insights from AI training literature and share the results of two large surveys of city employee attitudes as well as five workshops that we developed to cultivate city employees' abilities and knowledge with using AI in their jobs. The city environment is challenging: while it seems clear that AI tools can bring new efficiencies to various city tasks, as a public institution the city is obligated to be transparent and accountable to residents. Austin joins many other cities in being dependent on vendors for AI applications, throwing procurement standards into high relief given those city obligations to the public.

Based on the five workshops, the surveys and on the clear mandate to use AI ethically, we developed training materials including an "AI 101" video and a set of training slides and related materials to assist city employees as they acquire the skills to use AI in their work.

Some significant developments have shaped AI in the municipal context in 2025:

1. A new Presidential Executive Order underscores the desire to minimize policies or regulations around AI in the interests of supporting commercial innovation.
2. The Texas legislature adopted HB 149, which preempts any local AI regulation or policy.
3. AI technologies continue to evolve, becoming more capable and usable. As use increases, demands on the power grid and water systems will escalate, a consideration for this region as well as the rest of Texas.[1]
4. Microsoft's AI tool Copilot has been chosen by the City of Austin and many other cities for its enterprise AI purposes. The Copilot Studio Government Community

[1] CHIP50 (2025). *AI Across America: Attitudes On AI Usage, Job Impact, And Federal Regulation | The COVID States Project*. (n.d.). Retrieved August 22, 2025, from https://www.chip50.org/reports/ai-across-america-attitudes-on-ai-usage-job-impact-and-federal-regulation

Cloud is designed for certain organizations (like cities) that must accommodate certain compliance and security needs.[2]

As cities integrate AI into their processes and routines, new efficiencies will emerge alongside increased potential for mistakes. Both positive and potentially problematic outcomes may occur, and in the next few years city environments will become laboratories for determining the best uses of these powerful new tools. Workforce training can limit downsides such as accidental exposure of sensitive data and other unpredictable consequences.

Our review notes that commercial market training exists for specific AI tools, but there is a **dearth of materials offering contextual information for city workers to confidently and responsibly use AI within their specific roles and workflows**. Fortunately, our surveys with City of Austin employees demonstrate a clear desire not only for basic prompt engineering training but also clarity on city policy and best practices regarding ethical and acceptable AI uses.

Our research, which included employee surveys, a literature review, results from interactive workshops, and an assessment of extant training resources, leads to several conclusions:

- Governments must proactively address AI's rapid advancement and potential negative impacts, such as algorithmic bias and transparency issues.
- Training is a vital solution to address emergent smart city issues, ensuring AI policies are effectively implemented and integrating ethical concerns into all technology trainings.
- AI tools can augment human creativity and efficiency, particularly for experienced workers, but employees must cultivate critical AI literacy to evaluate and use AI effectively.
- Fairness, Accountability, Transparency (often called FAccT) frameworks are a common thread across ethical AI frameworks, highlighting concerns like algorithmic bias.
- Deciding what is ethical in AI deployment requires deliberation and participation from both organizational members and an engaged citizenry.
- Many city workers already use AI and are positive about its potential, though a strong majority express concerns about AI risks including inadequate data privacy protections.

Our five interactive training workshops successfully built capacity among over 100 City of Austin staff, applying what we call the **Ethics-First Approach to AI**. This approach addresses critical issues such as:

- the priorities of privacy and safety; and

[2] See https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-copilot-studio/requirements-licensing-gcc for more detail.

- the related concerns of accountability and transparency, as well as fairness explored in terms of bias & hallucination, societal harms, and environmental impacts.

According to attendee feedback, the interactive, scenario-based format proved effective, with participants resonating strongly with the ethical framework and the importance of balancing innovation with responsible AI use, especially concerning citizen data and environmental costs that remain unclear. Feedback also suggested employees would like a 'community' with which to work on using AI tools and to share and improve results.

Recommendations

To strengthen future AI implementation and training, we recommend several key actions:

- **Maintain and expand the emphasis on ethical considerations** throughout all training exercises, embedding responsible AI use as a fundamental practice.
- **Regularly assess and update policy-related training** to reflect the rapidly evolving nature of AI policy and regulations, and the capabilities of the tools themselves.
- Incorporate more specific protocols and examples for **handling city data, especially sensitive citizen information**, when using AI tools.
- Ensure **layered leadership training**, where leaders first attend general ethical AI training before progressing to advanced sessions focused on their decision-making roles in shaping ethical deployment.
- **Establish a community of practice** for AI implementation to facilitate continuous learning, peer-to-peer problem-solving, and sharing best practices across departments.
- **Leverage existing online materials** for up-to-date training on specific AI tools and prompt engineering. Participating in the GovAI Coalition can help people to stay abreast of best practices and make the most out of networking with other cities experiencing the same growth pains with AI.
- **Engage the community in understanding and establishing preferences in how the city uses AI tools.**

By adopting these recommendations, the City of Austin can cultivate a robust ethical reasoning framework among its workers, ensuring thoughtful AI integration that enhances public services, mitigates risks, and maintains citizen trust. This will further solidify Austin's position as a leader in ethical government AI use.

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Introduction

Our goal in this report is to summarize insights from several activities we undertook in order to inform future ethical AI training for municipal workers in Austin. Our training materials and recommendations focus on cultivating an ethical reasoning framework for the work people will undertake using AI tools.

As more city employees use AI sanctioned tools in the workplace, new possibilities for both achieving efficiencies with routine tasks and undertaking entirely new tasks will appear. However, the potential for mistakes that can escalate in unpredictable ways, and the possibilities for accidental use or exposure of data that should not be public or shared, also escalate. The advantages and the penalties of scale are present in powerful tools.

We began with the following research questions:

1. What is the scope of AI tools and associated practices used by City of Austin staff?
2. What are the best ways to structure, develop and deliver AI training in the city environments?
3. What curriculum, including online resources, is most useful? Which content elements and instructional modes are best for which user groups?

Our research approaches included:

- Literature reviews encompassing both the scholarly and the "gray" literature from organizations;
- Surveys designed to assess employees' knowledge and use of AI;
- Workshops to design and test approaches to developing an 'ethics-first' way of thinking about using AI tools;
- An examination of records from the City of Austin's use of LinkedIn Learning tools, and an assessment of what that major resource offers in the realm of AI training;
- Resources for adopting AI in city government, especially those actively and collaboratively being created by cities themselves through the GovAI Coalition.

The following sections of this report detail insights from each of these endeavors. To conclude, we offer detailed recommendations based on our findings.

Literature on Ethical AI in the City and Work Contexts

There is no shortage of material on best practices for crafting AI policy, implementing AI systems, and training workers to use AI. In order to pinpoint the training approaches and policy recommendations best suited to an ethics-first approach for AI adoption, we completed a review of academic literature on the topics of AI, cities, and training. Appendix 1 summarizes our process.

Our literature review includes 76 pieces of research spanning academic journal articles, scholarly books and book chapters, and reports such as the United Nations Human Settlements Program's *Global Assessment of Responsible AI in Cities* (2024). The earliest piece dates from 2017, while the most recent scholarship was published in 2024. The vast majority of literature comes from public administration and smart cities research areas. For example, nine sources were published in the journal *Government Information Quarterly* and four appeared in *Smart Cities*. However, the fields of urban studies, information studies, human-computer interaction (HCI), education studies, and science and technology studies are also represented. Several pieces of scholarship also come from STEM journals, such as *Sensors* and *Environmental Chemistry Letters*. A bibliography including all 76 pieces of research is provided in Appendix 2.

AI in the specific context of local government remains understudied (see Yigitcanlar et al., 2024b). However, when viewed as a continuation of earlier literature on smart cities there is a more substantial body of research, ranging from multiple large surveys of government employees (Ahn & Chen, 2022; Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek, 2023), to fieldwork and interviews within cities and organizations implementing AI (Kelley, 2022; Jia et al., 2024, Yigitcanlar et al., 2023a), and also including systematic reviews of literature on the topics of AI and smart cities (Laupichler et al., 2022; Velander et al., 2024; Yigitcanlar et al., 2024b). Appendix 1 includes detail on our methodological approach.

The review yields six key insights.

Insight 1 – Government should be proactive with AI tools for urban environments

Public administrators need to be proactive with policy and infrastructural responses to new technologies due to their rapid advancement and potential negative impacts. The invention of the automobile did not wait for cities to build roads for them (see Agarwal, 2018). Cities should be proactive in their responses to AI with both organizational structures and regulatory and ethical practices—race "with" rather than "against" the machine (Batty, 2018, p. 4). Cugurullo et al. (2024) argue we are moving toward "AI urbanism" that the idea of a smart city no longer fully captures, where AI builds on IoT to become 'AIoT,' with cities not just sensing but autonomously acting (p. 1172).

The challenges posed by AI are discussed across the literature as involving a mix of logistical/operational challenges and ethical/legal concerns. Many of these challenges are

similar to those created in recent decades by the adoption of big data systems, such as algorithmic bias and the problems black box technologies pose for transparency and accountability (see boyd & Crawford, 2012; Eubanks, 2018).

Insight 2 – Ethical AI training can be a solution to emergent Smart City issues

Training itself is identified as a crucial means for addressing these issues at the level of use (Ahn & Chen, 2022; De Cremer & Narayanan, 2023). Training enables the implementation of AI policy documents that otherwise exist as "checklists" (Kelley, 2022, p. 880; Kinder et al., 2023). However, some scholars note a disconnect between technological solutions for improving efficiency and the ethical implementation of said technologies (Criado & O.de Zarate-Alcarazo, 2022).

Researchers of private sector organizations suggest "ethical upskilling" as a solution to this disconnect, which means being "tech-savvy enough to understand the limitations of AI systems in a business setting, while at the same time being ethically mature enough to understand the many responsibilities that they need to actively take up for ensuring that intelligent technologies are deployed towards prosocial ends" (De Cremer & Narayanan, 2023, p. 1040). Ethics are essential given public awareness of a growing list of scandals related to data and technology. While ethics courses are on the right track, key ethical concerns should be integrated into all AI and technology trainings to avoid ethics being thought of as "someone else's job" (Fiesler et al., 2020, p. 294).

Regardless of the ends of training, from South Korea to Poland, a lack of AI training and knowledge among public administrators has been acknowledged (Myeong et al., 2020; Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek, 2023). While governments may develop or purchase AI systems, they lack the labor resources necessary to maintain, update, and use these AI systems, as well as to make organizational changes for the effective deployment of AI systems (Van Noordt & Tangi, 2023, p.1). Often the problem is not a lack of educational options, but rather finding *suitable* training (David & McNutt, 2019).

Insight 3 – Human labor can augment Ethical AI deployment

Given the amount of experience government employees often possess in their roles, the use of AI tools offers a means of greater efficiency and even creativity at work. Jia et al. (2024) found "employees can achieve AI-augmented creativity, but this desirable outcome is skill-biased by favoring experts with greater job skills." (p. 1). On the other hand, AI tools in the hands of inexperienced workers can inhibit their development of critical and analytical abilities (De Cremer & Narayanan, 2023). In other words, existing skills and creativity can fully leverage AI's ability to augment human labor. Workers who have not cultivated these abilities can stagnate at the level of accepting AI-generated outputs with little alteration or critical evaluation.

The development of human labor and AI tools are synergistic. AI engages in "reckoning" while humans exercise "judgment" grounded in uniquely human dimensions of experience and knowledge, including practical knowing and decision-making under conditions of uncertainty (Dede et al., 2021). The most value might lie in humans augmented by AI,

especially when it comes to the unexpected (Batty, 2018, p. 5). Training, or upskilling, should enhance workers' judgment.

Insight 4 – Define AI literacy in terms of critical evaluation capabilities.

While what constitutes AI literacy is variable, one highly cited definition comes from Long & Magerko (2020): "a set of competencies that enables individuals to *critically evaluate* AI technologies; communicate and *collaborate effectively* with AI; and use AI as a tool *online, at home, and in the workplace*" (p. 2; emphasis added). This definition captures insights described so far on the importance of approaching AI as a means of augmenting human labor, and it introduces the importance of an ongoing process of critical engagement with AI and other emerging technologies. As with the earlier point on AI exacerbating preexisting problems of a datafied society, Long & Magerko emphasize *digital* literacy as a prerequisite for AI literacy due to the use of digital technologies in accessing AI tools in the first place. However, they do not extend this to *computational* literacy, understood as coding ability, because it "would create a barrier for people who are otherwise going to be interacting with AI in their daily lives" (p. 2).

AI literacy is more about coexistence with the pervasiveness of AI technology rather than coding or machine learning skills (Laupichler et al., 2022, p. 10). It also entails a shift in the kinds of questions asked when evaluating information from the message or text of itself to its contexts: "Where can you identify the influence of computational agents in the composition and/or distribution of the text? Who built the computational agent(s), why and how do they operate? How do/can we intra-act with computational agents to create texts?" (Leander & Burriss, 2020, p.1273). There remains a need to investigate how cultivation of AI literacy enables "the ability to critically engage with its implications on individuals and society in specific situated contexts." (Velander et al., 2024, p. 157). For instance, the context of the City of Austin which we are empirically examining.

Insight 5 – Supporting Fairness, Accountability, Transparency (FAccT) frameworks is necessary

Fairness, Accountability, Transparency or FAccT, a framework increasingly discussed in academia and civil society, has been popularized by Microsoft Research and the Association for Computing Machinery. The academic literature can be productively mapped over it to enrich our understanding of what these terms mean regarding the cultivating critical AI literacy and human judgement within AI systems in city environments.

Algorithmic bias is well represented across the literature, even in studies targeting STEM audiences rather than policymakers and social scientists (see Alahi et al., 2023). A paper by Alon-Barkat & Busuioc (2023) stands out for its discussion of two important ideas. Here the authors examine *automation bias*, defined as "overreliance on algorithmic advice even in the face of 'warning signals' from other sources," and *selective adherenc*e, defined as "selective adoption of algorithmic advice when this corresponds to stereotypes" (p. 1). They found no evidence of automation bias upon the completion of their three experimental studies, but they did find evidence of selective adherence. Crucially, selective adherence appears to be

mitigated by awareness of algorithmic bias as an issue inherent to AI technologies, underscoring the need to train city employees on the AI challenge of bias and discrimination as part of an ethical AI curriculum.

Fairness also involves examining problems AI poses for legality and due process. For instance, when AI is given the discretionary power to make decisions that negatively impact people (Madan & Ashok, 2023), such as using AI to ticket or fine city residents, or even making decisions based on likelihood of recidivism in place of human judgment, the tension and the stakes between using automation versus human judgment become apparent (Ahn & Chen, 2022, p. 3). This is not to say there are not "minimal or no risk" use cases, to use the wording of the EU AI Act. For example, AI integration with existing smart city systems can save time and money in the case of waste management (Fang et al., 2023), and chatbots promise to streamline routine communication tasks. It simply means we need to be cognizant, as Cugurullo et al. (2024) argue, that "political decisions made by humans place urban AIs in the position to make decisions about the governance of cities" (p. 1175).

The question of political decision-making related to AI brings transparency and accountability to the fore. Transparency and explainability are emphasized as crucial ethical considerations by global organizations like UNICEF and OECD (Ng et al., 2021, p.9). AI systems and their uses need to be transparent if government is to be held accountable for its actions. This becomes particularly important given research that has found AI creates a "moral buffer" or "moral disengagement" when it is used in place of, or in conjunction with, human judgment (Alon-Barkat & Busuioc, 2023; De Cremer & Narayanan, 2023, p. 1038).

Insight 6 – Use deliberation and employee and citizen participation for deciding what is ethical

Many scholars argue for deliberation and participation as determining factors for what is deemed ethical in a given context (Dede et al., 2021; Kinder et al., 2023). Noting that deliberation that comes with a healthy democracy is messy and often an inefficient process, Ben Green (2019) argues for "meaningful inefficiencies" in government like participatory budgeting. Others argue for a productive "friction" in decision-making, suggesting that time and dissent can result in superior outcomes. For example, while an AI with access to large amounts of operational data might be able to generate a budget based on historical trends in mere moments, it does not hold the same transformative potential for the lives and needs of constituents as a process in which those people are involved and can speak to their needs and particular circumstances.

Kinder et al. (2023, p. 5) argue ethical deployment of AI requires citizen involvement to understand their lives and needs:

> Our approach then deems whatever ethical principles people affected prefer as relevant to evaluation, without suggesting that because AI technology is new that a new synthesis of ethical schools is necessary. There will be other new technologies and other new designs for public services.

Ethical AI means aligning with what is deemed to be normative through inclusive deliberation among those affected. This is similar to the logic behind Habermas' discourse ethics (see Glasser & Ettema, 2008; Varma et al., 2023), although the idea of norms when it comes to AI represents a changing terrain (Nissenbaum, 2009).

Deliberation might mean members of an organization being involved in collectively deciding what constitutes ethical AI in their work context as opposed to top-down executive orders. In the case of cities/government this means involving citizens and residents. David and McNutt (2019) emphasize that government officials require not only technology management and data analysis abilities, but also community engagement skills. There are numerous "thorny ethical urban questions" to which AI is already being applied, such as predictive policing, and so "the AI's side of the story must be carefully examined and debated in a collective manner" (Cugurullo et al., 2024, p. 1177).

Just as the deployment of AI benefits from the involvement of the public, its implementation within organizational structures also stands to gain from a collaborative approach among leaders and front-line employees in creating organizational culture that can accommodate it. In one study, interviewed employees emphasized the importance of deliberating on ethics within their organizations (Kelley, 2022, p. 881). Whether arriving at what is ethical or cultivating a culture of innovation more generally (Myeong et al., 2020), enabling a bottom-up means of co-creation is key.

This point on deliberation rather than moral imperatives seems well-suited to the current US political environment and to the changeable capabilities of AI; a deliberation principle also is adaptable to other political and cultural contexts. Kinder et al. (2023) ground deliberation in "standards of conduct," such as fairness and equity, qualities that enable deliberation and participation in the first place. A focus on deliberation and participation does not abandon key democratic ideals but rather avoids politicized language.

Summary

These highlights from the literature review nicely set the stage for designing the core elements of ethical training for using AI in the city context. Many of these same points emerge in both our surveys of employees' use of and attitudes toward AI, and they surfaced as well in our workshops.

Survey Findings

We developed and pretested two surveys that investigate how employees are thinking about AI, their current use of AI-related tools (especially generative AI tools such as ChatGPT), and their thoughts about its application to their work at the City of Austin. One targeted all of the more than 16,000 employees in the City, and another was designed for data-centric positions. Both were approved under the University's policies for Human Subjects (IRB00006769). Respondents to both were self-selected as with any survey but were broadly distributed among many city departments. We relied on city staff to distribute the questionnaires.[3] Selected frequencies from the general survey can be found in Appendix 4. The questionnaires are in Appendix 8.

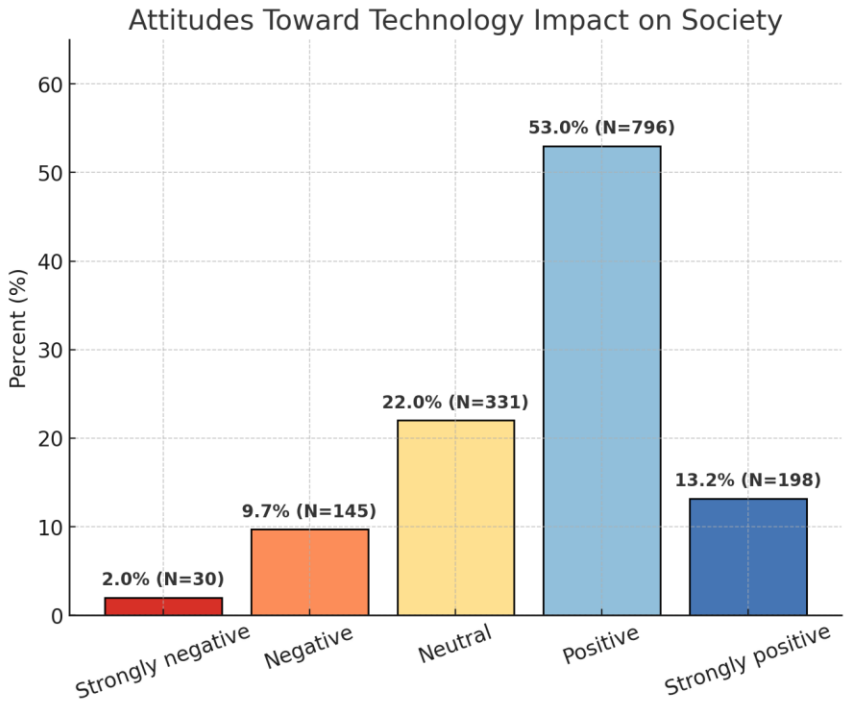
Findings from the General Survey

Based on 1502 completed responses, most respondents are full-time workers (91%), 4.6% are temporary employees and 2% are contractors. The majority (57%) are in the 35-54 age category. Respondents came from many different city units, with heaviest representation from Austin Energy, the Public Library, Transportation, Public Health, Watershed, and Development. About 58% report being in non-supervisory positions.

Everyone in the sample had heard of AI, and most employees were somewhat positive overall in their feelings about the overall impact of technology on society (Figure 1 Attitudes toward technology).

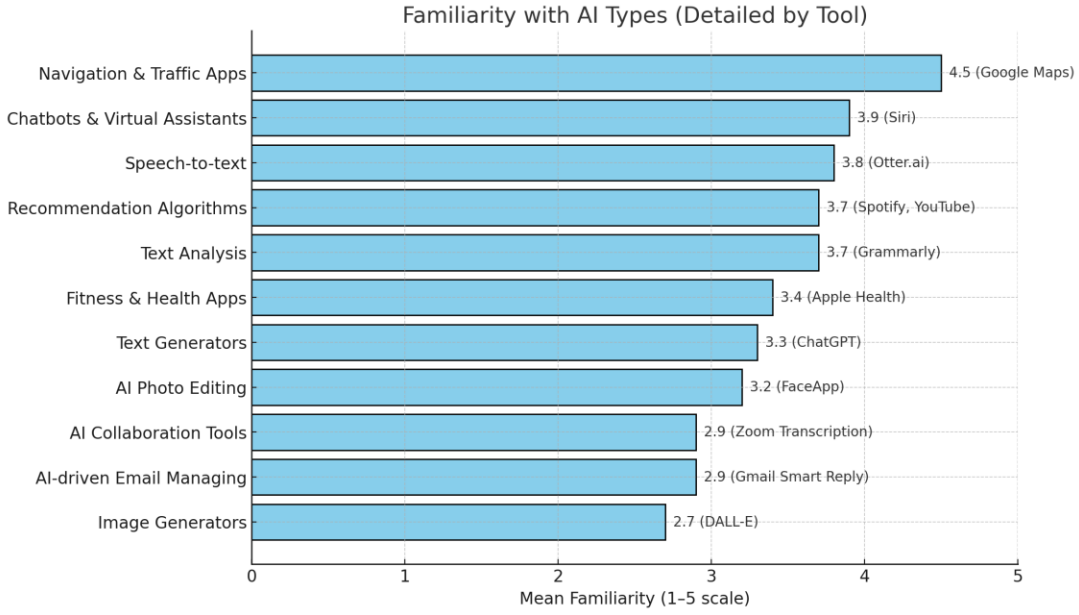
[3] The University team did not have direct access to employee emails or contact information.

Figure 1 Attitudes toward technology



Familiarity: When it comes to specific types of AI familiarity varied, with older applications such as Google maps enjoying high familiarity, while newer tools such as the collaboration tools built into Zoom or image generating systems like DALL-E were less familiar (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Familiarity with AI tools



N=1502

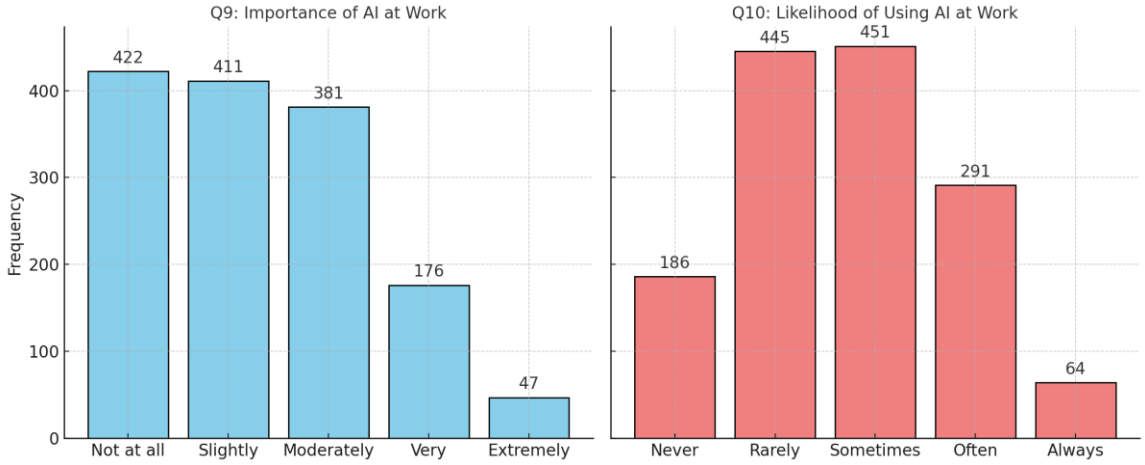
Almost 25% of the sample had in fact used some AI tool. Among them, ChatGPT was the most mentioned AI tool. Voice assistants and navigation AI were the next most commonly cited tool, followed by creative, photo or design tools.

Attitudes toward AI: The majority of workers feel positively about the impacts of AI, but there are (statistically significant) differences across positions, with 'higher level' positions (Directors, Managers) being more favorable about AI.

Drilling down into AI specifically, positive attitudes toward AI tools were associated with feeling positive about technology impact more generally, how important AI is or could be to one's work, and how likely one will use AI at work.[4] We did not observe a relationship between being familiar with AI tools and position within the City in terms of being a manager, but there is a relationship between familiarity with AI and age, with older workers reporting less familiarity in general with various AI tools.

Work and AI: Only a small percentage (15.5%) felt AI is 'very' or 'extremely' important to their work, while others felt it was slightly or moderately important at this stage (52.8%) and 29% rated it as not at all important to their work. The percentages were higher regarding how *likely* people thought it might be that they would use AI at work – only 13% thought they would never use it, while about 25% thought they would often or always use it at work. In other words, most City of Austin workers seem to believe AI has application to their jobs (Figure 3). The mean importance rating was 2.31 while the likelihood mean is 2.72.

Figure 3 Comparison of Importance of AI at Work v. Likelihood of using AI at work



N=1502

[4] These associations were statistically significant.

Current use of AI: When asked what tasks they use AI for currently – even though relatively few have *authorized* access to the enterprise licenses the City had in place at the time of the survey – people cited categories that included:

(1) communication/reporting (32%)
(2) creating content (24%)
(3) analyzing data (23%)
(4) undertaking tasks such as work scheduling (10%) or managing traffic (7%), with smaller percentages reporting safety monitoring or equipment maintenance.

Open-ended responses showed a great deal of creativity in what people were using AI applications for, including brainstorming, assistance with coding and data cleaning, forecasting, grammar and text work, reviewing and summarizing survey and interview responses.

In keeping with the focus on responsible and ethical AI, a series of items asked about behaviors and assessments of AI systems (Table 1). Most responses are in the mid-range ("neutral" or 3) except for peoples' belief that AI technologies are biased, with which there was strong agreement.

Table 1 Agreement with statements about AI

Statement	**Mean***
The content generated from AI tools like ChatGPT, Gemini and others is true	2.75
AI-powered technologies are biased to the experiences of certain populations	3.77
I am comfortable with AI making decisions that affect my work	2.11
AI-powered tools like ChatGPT help me write emails quickly	2.93
AI technologies help me schedule meetings easily	2.79
AI technologies help me fill out forms faster	3.06
AI-powered tools help me summarize important information	3.25

*1-5, strongly disagree to strongly agree
N=1502

Attitudes toward AI's impacts elicited cautious assessments (Table 2). City workers appear to be concerned about privacy and possible mistakes and have a healthy belief in the need for data or AI transparency. There is concern about AI's impact on jobs.

Table 2 Attitudes toward AI impacts

Statement	**Mean**
AI should be transparent in how it makes decisions	4.47
AI may impact data privacy	4.24
AI could make mistakes that affect safety	4.18
AI may lead to job loss	3.87
AI reduces human interaction	3.84
AI can be used to monitor workers too closely	3.78

N=1501

People also tended to agree that it may reduce human interaction, lead to job loss, and be used to monitor workers too closely.

Training Preferences: We inquired about training preferences, and most people (about 80%) agreed that training was important to understand and use AI technologies at work. About 34% were willing to spend 1-2 hours in training about AI, with another 48% willing to spend even more time in training.

The desirable training topics included:

(1) basic introduction (58%)
(2) AI impacts on specific tasks (67%)
(3) AI safety (62%)
(4) troubleshooting AI issues (57%)

However, many open-ended responses captured some unique ideas for AI uses. Open-ended responses on training and AI also illustrate some deep ethical concerns with these technologies, in part because of worries about flaws, inaccuracies, and lack of trust.

Summary

In general, city workers responding to this survey appear to be primed to learn more about AI, and about one quarter of the sample have used or are using some form of AI tool in

job-related capacities. They especially would like training tailored to their specific needs, perhaps preceded by a basic introduction to AI. The sample brings helpful skepticism to using AI, an attitude that augers well for AI users to be critical of the work these powerful tools do, alongside a willingness to explore how AI can be beneficial.

Findings from the Advanced Survey

The advanced survey is based on responses from 280 city workers. These individuals were targeted from a slightly larger group of people the City of Austin identified as working with data or leading data efforts. Somewhat higher numbers of respondents were employed in the Library, Austin Energy, Austin Water, Transportation, Communications & Technology, Austin Public Health, Development Services and Financial Services (Table 3).

Table 3 Respondents to the Advanced Survey

Department	N	%
Library	10	3.6%
Law Department	1	0.4%
Small & Minority Business Resources	2	0.7%
Fire Department	6	2.1%
Austin Energy	32	11.4%
Austin Water	17	6.1%
Communications & Technology Management	25	8.9%
Transportation & Public Works	14	5.0%
Homeland Security & Emergency Mgmt	4	1.4%
Emergency Medical Services	5	1.8%
Parks & Recreation	4	1.4%
Austin Resource Recovery	6	2.1%
Watershed Protection	8	2.9%
Development Services Department	14	5.0%
Austin Public Health	16	5.7%
Information Security Office	5	1.8%
Economic Development	4	1.4%

Police	8	2.9%
Aviation	3	1.1%
Financial Services	10	3.6%
Housing	3	1.1%
Office of the City Clerk	4	1.4%
Capital Delivery Services	6	2.1%
Human Resources	4	1.4%
Planning Department	2	0.7%
Budget & Org Excellence	2	0.7%
Homeless Strategy Office	2	0.7%
Office of Climate Action	1	0.4%
Missing Entry	62	22.1%

About half of this group had no direct reports, with the remainder comprised of leads (14%), supervisors (10%), and managers or directors (23%). Nearly 70% were between the ages of 35 and 54, and of those who chose to report gender, 51% were female and 42% male.

Familiarity: The level of familiarity with various types of AI tools was generally "somewhat familiar," with more respondents being familiar with predictive analytics than other domains.

Table 4 Familiarity with Types of AI tools

Type of Tool	**Mean Familiarity (1-4 scale)**
Machine Learning	2.6
Natural Language Processing	2.5
AI-driven Decision-Making	2.6
Predictive Analysics	2.7
Autonomous Devices	2.6

N=280

Sources of information for AI-related training for this group were diverse and often included taking advantage of multiple ways to learn about AI. That said, a large percentage learned about AI on their own through online courses or articles (61%) and many cited news articles or blogs as information sources (61%). The field of AI is so new that this age group was probably out of school before university-level courses on it were offered. Few (just 17%) cited university courses or professional training (19%) as sites for learning about AI. That

said, the survey illustrates that many people did engage more than one source to learn about AI, with 10% indicating they learned from at least four different sources.

Using AI at Work: This group of employees uses AI at work frequently, with 24% saying they use AI tools daily and another 30% saying they use AI at least weekly. Only 14% indicated they had never used AI in a work setting.

The types of AI capabilities people used included:

Table 5 Current AI Use

AI Application	% Using	Examples
Data analytics and reporting	67%	
Customer Service Automation	30%	chatbots
Workflow automation	60%	document processing, scheduling
AI-driven decision support	26%	
Predictive maintenance/troubleshooting	27%	
Smart City management systems	15%	

N=280

Beyond our survey items, people were invited to explain what they used AI for, and responses from about 25% of the respondents converged on utility with writing and editing, with training and development, and with unit-specific needs.

Table 6 Open-ended responses on use of AI at work

Category	Number of Responses
Writing & Editing Support	8
Content Creation & Summarization	8
Training, Development & Learning	4
Research & Idea Generation	5
Technical / Programming & Productivity Tools	5
Specialized Department / Task-Specific Applications	5
Avoidance of AI	1

These uses coincide with many of the AI applications within the municipal context that have come up in the GovAI coalition investigations of AI use cases. Large language models behind generative AI are highly used resources for creating content, so it is not surprising

that tasks related to writing and editing and analyzing text figure centrally among Austin employees.

People rate the effectiveness of AI tools highly. These respondents appear convinced of its utility, with nearly 60% rating them as effective or very effective (Table 7). That said, many also reference challenges using AI, including the lack of understanding how the AI operates (28%), its difficulty being integrated with other tools (36%), AI-generated errors (40%), the ways that AI may not be suited to job tasks (24%), among others.

Table 7 Effectiveness of AI tools in helping accomplish job tasks

Category	Frequency	Percent
Not effective at all	10	3.6
Ineffective	6	2.1
Neutral	82	29.3
Effective	113	40.4
Very effective	48	17.1
Total (Valid)	259	92.5

Data sources are important as city units develop AI capabilities. Constraints around data sources, and identifiability that may be associated with different types of data could figure into training and precautionary action around data privacy. We asked about which data this group of employees use in their current jobs. They include the following:

Table 8 Data used by respondents

Type of Data	% using
City demographic data	24%
Health data	4%
Financial data	25%
Intellectual property	11%

However, responses from about half the sample to an open-ended query regarding data use in current work are illuminating (

Table 9 Data used in current jobs can be useful in terms of what future training might address and how practice sessions with AI might be structured.

Table 9 Data used in current jobs

Category	Example Data Types	Frequency
Customer & User Data	3-1-1 calls, customer contacts, customer databases, rebate program data, library patron data, survey responses, ARR/utility user data	≈ 15
Employee & HR Data	HR performance data, employee demographics, investigation reports, training participation/evaluations, curricula, certifications	≈ 10
Operational & Administrative Data	Department documentation, SOPs, work orders, contracts, procurement, permitting, project data, event forms, programmatic data	≈ 25
Infrastructure, Technical & System Data	IT assets, IT tickets, SCADA, infrastructure calculations, crash/transportation data, geospatial data, metering, inspection reports	≈ 30
Environmental & Energy Data	Energy usage, Austin Energy compliance, environmental/planning data, tree health, cultural arts grant data	≈ 10
Public Safety & Emergency Data	EMS, fire inspection reports, crime data, crash reporting, incident management, emergency support functions	≈ 10

Finance, Business & Legal Data	Campaign finance, public records, council agenda, financial reporting, labor & materials, legal, fair housing/EEO intake	≈ 12
Performance, Metrics & Analytics	Performance measures, KPIs, staff/program metrics, website traffic, Google Analytics, risk analysis, reporting/analytics	≈ 15
Communication	Content creation, newsletters, training guides, job descriptions, research documents, knowledge articles, public info requests	≈ 8

Attitudes toward AI: A series of items assessed what people believe about AI's impacts on the workplace using a scale indicating strong disagreement to strong agreement. As Table 10 shows, these respondents are generally very positive about AI's impact on productivity, its ability to replace repetitive tasks and to improve customer interactions. We highlight that they also strongly agree that AI can make errors in important decisions. People have mixed feelings about its impact on job replacement.

Table 10 Attitudes toward AI and Work - Agreement Scale

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
AI will improve overall workplace productivity	2.7%	7.0%	16.7%	41.5%	32.2%
AI will reduce the need for repetitive tasks	1.9%	3.1%	13.6%	45.0%	36.4%

AI has the potential to make errors in important decisions	1.2%	2.3%	10.8%	34.0%	51.7%
AI could help improve customer satisfaction	3.9%	7.8%	21.3%	45.0%	22.1%
AI will replace many jobs in my field	13.6%	20.2%	38.0%	20.5%	7.8%

N=280

There also are concerns about using AI, with AI systems' lacking transparency topping the list of worries (Figure 4). That said, the respondents share a strong sense of responsibility around the frailties of AI: they strongly agree on the importance of ensuring that bias is minimized and privacy is protected. They also agree on the need for transparency in AI decision-making, that there should be a "human-in-the-loop," and that using AI should include accountabilities for errors (Figure 5).

Figure 4 AI Concerns

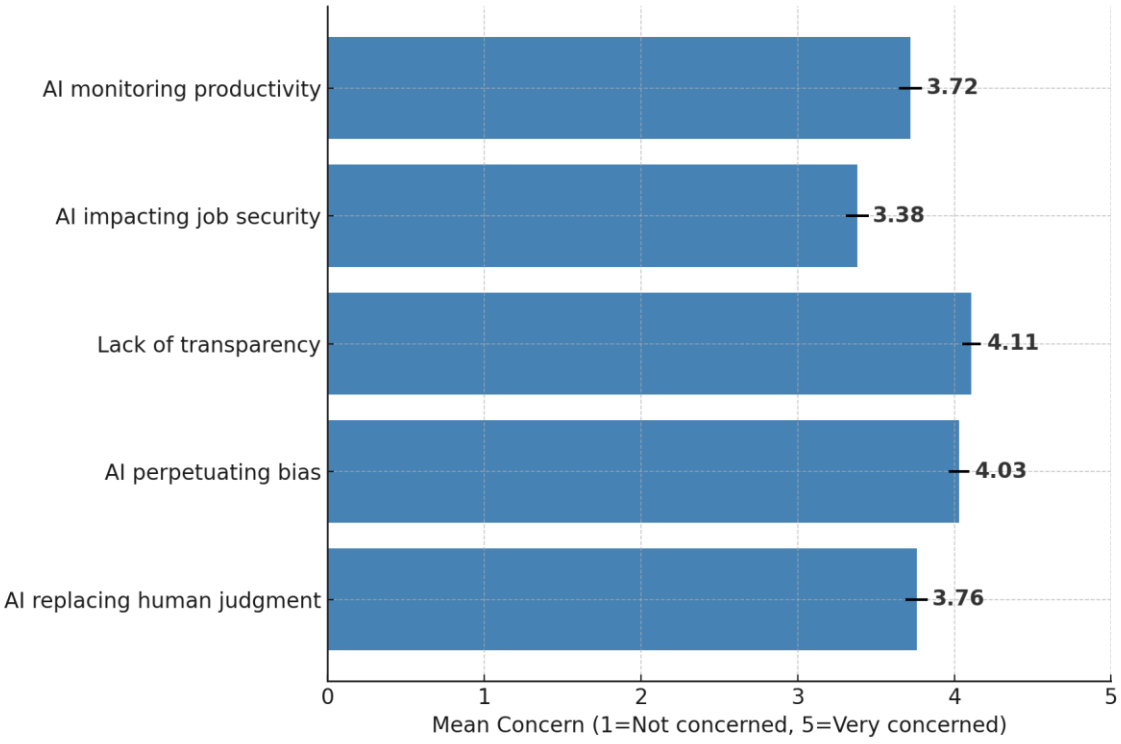
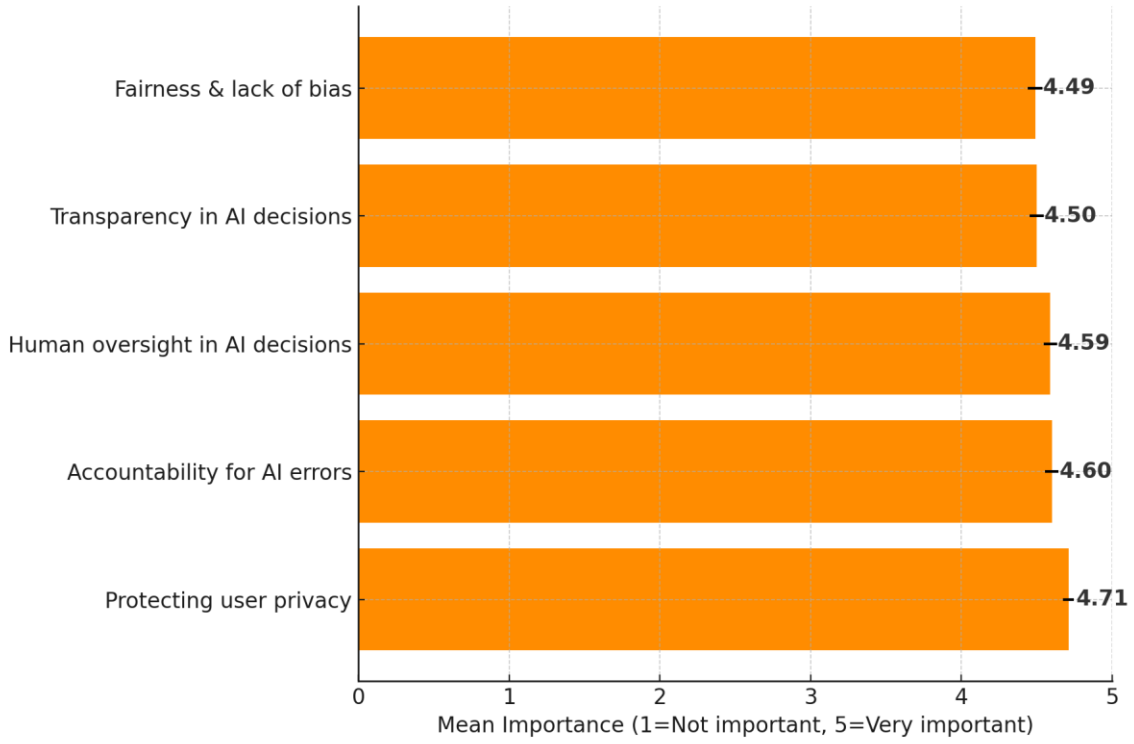


Figure 5 Importance of ethical values



These results are encouraging because they illustrate an awareness and an appreciation of the values of responsible AI. The respondents are aware of the problems with AI, particularly those accruing to matters of privacy and accountability.

Advanced Survey Qualitative Takeaways

Written responses from city workers in advanced, data-centric positions reveal optimism about AI's potential, but also awareness of challenges. Several suggestions for implementing AI were offered, as summarized in the following table (Table 11).

Table 11 Comments from Respondents on Implementing AI

	Description	**Illustrative Quote**
Optimism for Productivity and Efficiency	Strong enthusiasm for AI to automate repetitive tasks, support essential services (emergency operations, utilities, maintenance), and improve processing and response times.	"I would like to see AI used to help our emergency operations teams and operational support teams … to help with repetitive tasks that can increase response time or processing."

Job Transformation, Not Elimination	Respondents see AI as enabling job transformation rather than elimination; freeing staff for higher-impact activities (planning, recovery, development). Concerns about being "left behind" if adoption lags.	"I believe jobs won't be eliminated but transformed, especially when leadership demonstrates the vision, support, and investment needed for that change." "My greatest concern is that public orgs and governments will try and 'hold out' against AI only to be left behind…"
Awareness of Ethical Challenges and Need for Clarity, concern for decline in critical/creative thought	Employees express awareness of AI's ethical challenges: bias, accessibility, environmental impact, lack of privacy/data governance clarity, risks of over-reliance, and potential harms without oversight.	"Use of AI is counter to the City's energy/sustainability goals." "I could very easily see us employing it without knowing what we're doing, assuming it is working, and everything is left to get very messed up for years…"
Employee Suggestions for Improved AI Implementation	Calls for clearer policies, approved tools, and permission structures; comprehensive, regular, role-specific training; dedicated leadership (e.g., Chief AI Officer); gradual rollout with collaborative learning opportunities.	"There is currently a lot of uncertainty around what is allowed. There is an AI policy, but I do not think it is clear." "For AI to truly succeed at the City, we need more than just technology—we need the right people, sustainable funding, … and strong, accountable LEADERSHIP." "I'm also meeting with a colleague once a month to talk about how we use AI and we are learning from each other, too."

Workshop Format and Assessment

Between March and July 2025, our team conducted five comprehensive AI training workshops for City of Austin staff, reaching approximately **125 participants across several agencies** (see **Table 1** for detailed breakdown). We facilitated three in-person and two virtual workshops, allowing us to assess different delivery formats and their effectiveness. The workshops represented an ethics-first approach to the evaluation, use, and design of AI tools within the city government context, a perspective the literature review had identified as needed. The first four targeted a general audience of city employees, with interactive exercises intended to build capacity and confidence in effective and ethical prompt engineering methodologies tailored to specific city scenarios. The final workshop, for city people at the managerial or director level, substituted prompt engineering activities with exercises designed to help decision makers assess contemporary applications of AI in city government and discuss ethical use cases for their respective departments.

Table 12 Ethical AI workshops

	Delivery Method	Time	Number of Participants
March 27, 2025	In-Person	2:00 pm – 3:30 pm	25
April 1, 2025	In-Person	9:30 am – 11:00 am	19
April 15, 2025	Virtual	1:30 pm – 3:00 pm	26
May 2, 2025	Virtual	9:30 am – 11:30 am	32
July 2, 2025	In-Person	1:00 pm – 3:00 pm	25

Workshop attendance reflected a strategic cross-section of departments but attendees self-selected; the recruitment was handled by City staff. We had good representation from numerous City departments. This cross-departmental approach can facilitate valuable interdepartmental discussions about potential AI applications and challenges specific to public sector implementation and was responsive to findings that called for creating a community of practice or peer learning environment. Our approach also was influenced by our year-long participation in the national coalition GovAI. Its subcommittee work on education and training underscored the opportunities to learning from one another without being siloed in single units or departments.

Ethics-First Approach to AI in the Public Sector

Central to our workshop design was an Ethics-First framework positioning responsibility and ethical considerations at the foundation for all AI implementation decisions. Four key pillars guide responsible AI adoption in government settings:

1. **Values Before Tools**: We emphasized the importance of evaluating AI through an ethical lens before learning implementation techniques. This sequencing ensures that technological capabilities remain grounded in public service values and citizen welfare considerations.
2. **Critical Questioning**: Participants were trained to develop the habit of asking "should we" before "can we" when considering AI applications. This deliberate pause encourages thoughtful assessment of potential impacts rather than pursuing technological capabilities simply because they exist.
3. **Contextual Understanding**: The workshops moved beyond merely acknowledging bias to actively engaging participants in a multi-stakeholder approach. This pillar recognizes that AI implementation in public contexts requires consideration of diverse perspectives and potential impacts across different community segments.
4. **Responsibility Focus**: We emphasized accountability in both the use and creation of AI systems. This dual focus ensures that city staff understand their responsibility not only in how they deploy existing tools but also in how they might influence the development of future applications.

These four principles rest upon a comprehensive foundation that considers seven issues particularly critical in government applications of AI technology. These derive in part from the City's own AI resolution as of spring, 2025:[5]

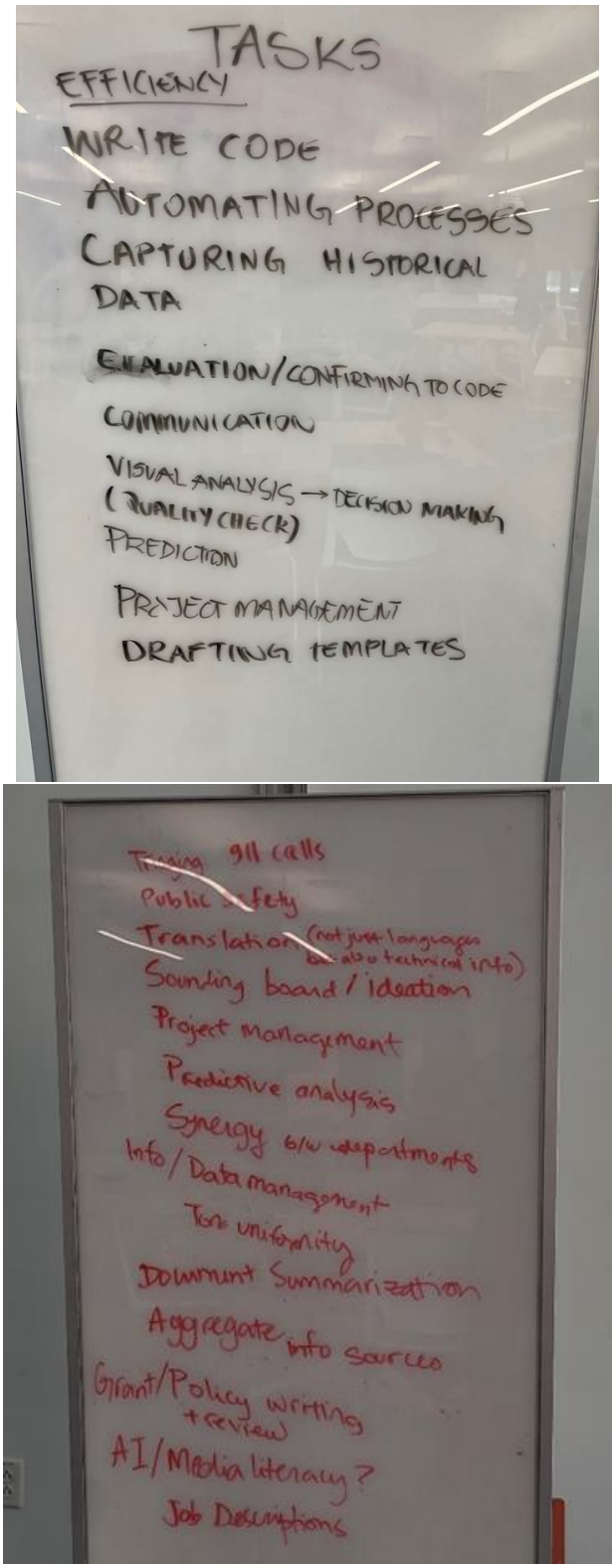
1. **Accountability:** How should cities establish clear lines of responsibility when using AI tools?
2. **Transparency:** How should cities clearly communicate to stakeholders when and how AI is being used?
3. **Privacy:** What personal or sensitive data is being used or generated when using this AI tool?
4. **Safety:** What safeguards are in place to prevent AI from providing dangerous information or instructions?
5. **Bias & Hallucination:** How might existing societal biases be reflected or amplified in the AI outputs?
6. **Societal Impacts:** Are cities considering long-term societal implications of normalizing AI for this function?
7. **Environmental Harms:** How can cities balance efficiency gains against environmental costs?

Key Activities and Approach

[5] We are aware that the legislation adopted by the Texas legislature, HB 149, preempts city policies regarding AI. Austin had adopted a resolution in April 2025 (Resolution 20250424-055) endorsing various actions to advance ethical AI practices in the city.

Our workshop design incorporated a blend of theoretical and ethical instruction, followed by hands-on practice to maximize learning outcomes. We iterated on our approach and incorporated icebreakers and interactive exercises based on participant feedback, improving each workshop as we moved forward. These activities successfully established attentiveness from the start and created a collaborative atmosphere conducive to learning. We also adapted the duration and pace of our workshop from 90 minutes to 2 hours to allow more time for participants to apply the ethical considerations they learned in the scenarios we'd designed. We tested the workshops in face-to-face formats as well as in online formats.

Figure 6: Interactive exercise "How would you use AI in your work?" Basic Workshop (left), Advanced Workshop (right)



Through our focus on ethics and city guidance, we challenged participants to reflect on who benefits from AI tools, who may be harmed or excluded, and how public agencies can embed equity and care into their AI strategies. For example, conversations addressed how historical biases in city data could be amplified by algorithms, or how residents might be excluded from decision-making if AI systems are deployed without meaningful explanation or oversight.

The general, or "basic," workshop also featured scenario-based learning opportunities where participants could apply ethical considerations to realistic city governance situations while practicing effective prompt engineering methods. These scenarios were carefully crafted to reflect the actual challenges and opportunities city staff might encounter when implementing AI tools in their daily work (see **Appendix 5** for Scenarios). The breakout group format allowed for small-team collaboration on these scenarios, encouraging peer learning and diverse problem-solving approaches.

The "advanced" workshop with city leaders involved a different set of exercises after the same presentation introducing the ethics-first approach that we delivered to participants in the basic workshop. In the first activity, city leaders assessed "AI gone wrong" scenarios by applying the ethics-first approach and working through the seven ethical considerations introduced in the workshop. Our scenarios were based on actual incidents that occurred in other cities. In the second activity, participants built on their assessments of these unethical AI use cases to reflect on the ethics-first approach and discuss with their peers in city leadership what new use cases would be ethical and suitable to the needs of their respective departments. The exercises are provided in **Appendix 9.**

Digital engagement tools, particularly Slido, proved highly effective for maintaining participant involvement throughout virtual sessions. These platforms enabled interactive exercises that kept energy levels high and ensured all voices could be heard, regardless of comfort level with public speaking (see **Appendix 6** for all Slido outputs).

Workshop Outcomes and Effectiveness

We requested that City of Austin survey the workshop participants via email (staff emails were not released to us). While not everyone responded, we summarize the thoughts from who did (46 responses from the basic workshop participants and four responses from the advanced workshop).

Overall, participant feedback indicated strong satisfaction with the workshop content and delivery methods while stressing the need for more time for breakout sessions dedicated to applied ethical AI use cases (for a detail on participant feedback, please see **Appendix 5).**

"I am very pleased with the ethical approach and the concerns that were raised. I feel that these are exactly the sorts of concerns that need to be addressed."

The interactive components emerged as particularly successful elements, especially in virtual workshops. When compared to more lecture-oriented segments, the hands-on activities generated higher engagement levels and stronger knowledge retention. Participants especially valued having extended time for scenario work and completing multiple practice sessions, which gave them confidence in applying the concepts independently after the workshop concluded.

"I was unsure what to expect; however, I like the ground-up approach and openness to allow practice developing prompts. I have a lot to learn"

An unexpected finding was related to the comparative effectiveness of virtual versus in-person formats. While conventional wisdom might suggest in-person training as superior, our virtual sessions demonstrated some distinct advantages. The digital environment appeared to minimize side conversations and peripheral distractions, maintaining stronger focus on the workshop content. This may also reflect the City of Austin staff's high comfort level with remote work environments, which became well-established during the pandemic period.

"Scenarios allowed for practicing improving prompts. Also, great discussion in my breakout group about the environmental impact of our various prompting."

The ethical frameworks incorporated throughout the training resonated strongly with participants. City staff demonstrated particular interest in understanding how to balance innovation with responsible AI use, especially in contexts involving citizen data and public-facing services. Environmental concerns appeared to be equally salient in participants' feedback. This suggests that ethical considerations should remain a cornerstone of any future AI training initiatives.

"I have very big concerns about the environmental impact of AI. We are already in an energy crisis in a climate that's getting warmer. The free for all use of AI seems extremely irresponsible to me"

Participant feedback following the advanced workshop made it clear that city leaders would also stand to benefit from attending the same basic workshop as other city

employees to build their capabilities in prompt engineering. Upon such a foundation, advanced sessions where city leaders work through AI gone wrong scenarios and engage with one another in brainstorming sessions that can peer-to-peer learning and interdepartmental collaboration on AI adoption would then be most effective.

Supplementary Online Resources

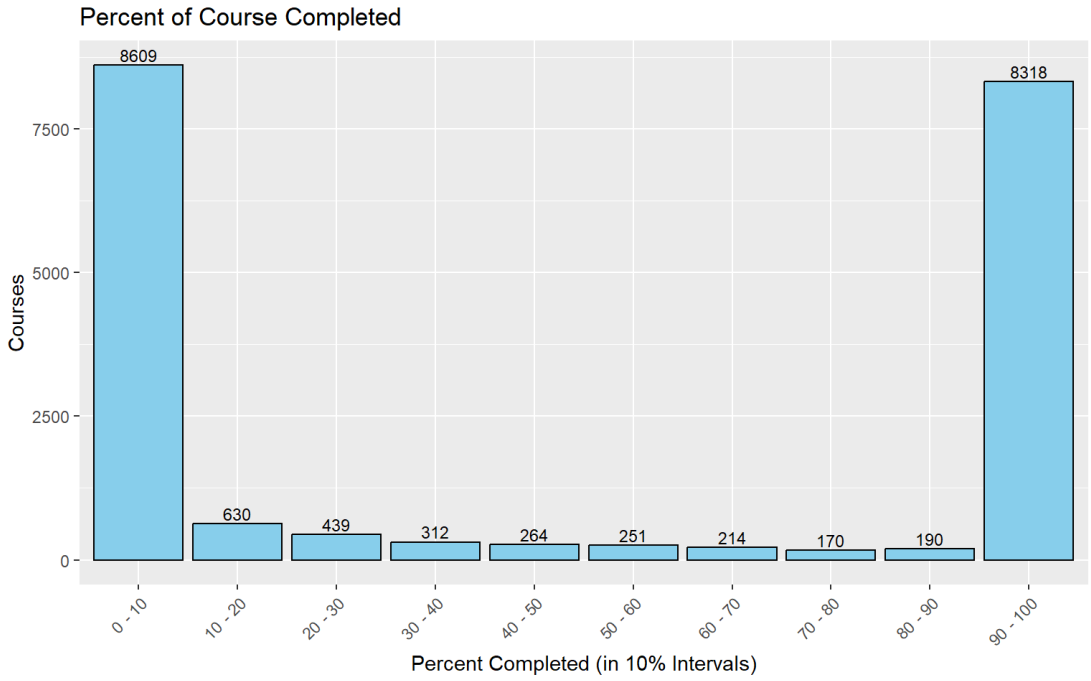
Our literature and field reviews underscore the availability and utility of the many self-learning resources which are already available to all City employees. It is not difficult to find straightforward "prompt engineering" materials online, including on YouTube. However, the municipal context and the ethical foundations are typically absent from conventional approaches.

We examined the LinkedIn learning uses among City staff and share our observations on learning styles evident in interaction patterns. Second, as noted earlier, our work intersects the work and concerns of GovAI, a national coalition of city and civic organizations working together to explore best practices for AI use in the city context. They also provide highly useful resources that we highlight below. Finally, we offer a resource list for continued training purposes.

Building on Foundations – LinkedIn Learning for Individualized Needs

Our examination of the LinkedIn Learning course utilization by city employees was illuminating. A dataset of 19,397 courses taken by 5,989 City of Austin users from August 2024 to February 2025 provides insight into learning habits and preferences. While 40% (n = 7,716) of the courses in the dataset were started but not completed beyond 1%, another 42% (n = 8,211) of the courses were fully completed. There were few users who quit courses midway. Users may shop around for courses of interest and engage them for limited time periods to see if they fit their interests, but once they decide to commit to a course, it appears that they typically see it through to the end (see Figure 7).

Figure 7 LinkedIn Course Completion in Austin TX, August 2024-Feb 2025



*The most frequent course taken related to AI was "Amplify Your Communication Skills with Generative AI" (n=319), which shows interest in incorporating AI into existing tasks. Communication tasks are the most common 'entry-level' AI task in many municipal settings – our workshops also found a lot of interest in using AI for communication purposes.

*"Power BI: Working Together with ChatGPT" (n=65) also reflects this desire to use generative AI with existing tools, in this case, data visualization software.

*"Responsible AI: Principles and Practical Applications" (n=84) highlights how self-learning can supplement foundational ethical AI training. When we examined the LinkedIn Learning records, it seems clear that AI courses do not dominate usage compared to topics like professional communication or project management.

LinkedIn Learning's AI Upskilling Curriculum is developed by a mix of experts from academia, industry, and civil society, augmented by data drawn from LinkedIn users themselves. It is organized into learning paths according to a five-level pyramid structure of increasing specialization beyond foundational knowledge (see Figure 2). Our training for the city focuses on Levels 1 and 2 of this pyramid, which cover the "what" and "how" of AI.

For example, the Building AI Literacy learning path includes over 7 hours of materials related to understanding what AI is, prompt engineering, and responsible AI that extend the

material of our 2-hour workshop. Where LinkedIn Learning shines is in its ability to produce training material focused on particular tools and applications, making it an evergreen resource as courses are added or updated in response to new AI breakthroughs and integrations. An example here is the Become a Power Bi Specialist learning path, which would be relevant to city employees in data-intensive positions. While these courses do not address ethics, they build on the foundation of our ethical AI workshop. It would be most beneficial to have city employees return to the ethical considerations presented in our workshop from time to time to align knowledge gained from application-focused trainings with their training in an ethics-first approach to AI.

We understand the City no longer offers LinkedIn Learning access to its employees. Our Learning Resource List (next section) outlines free and paid alternatives.

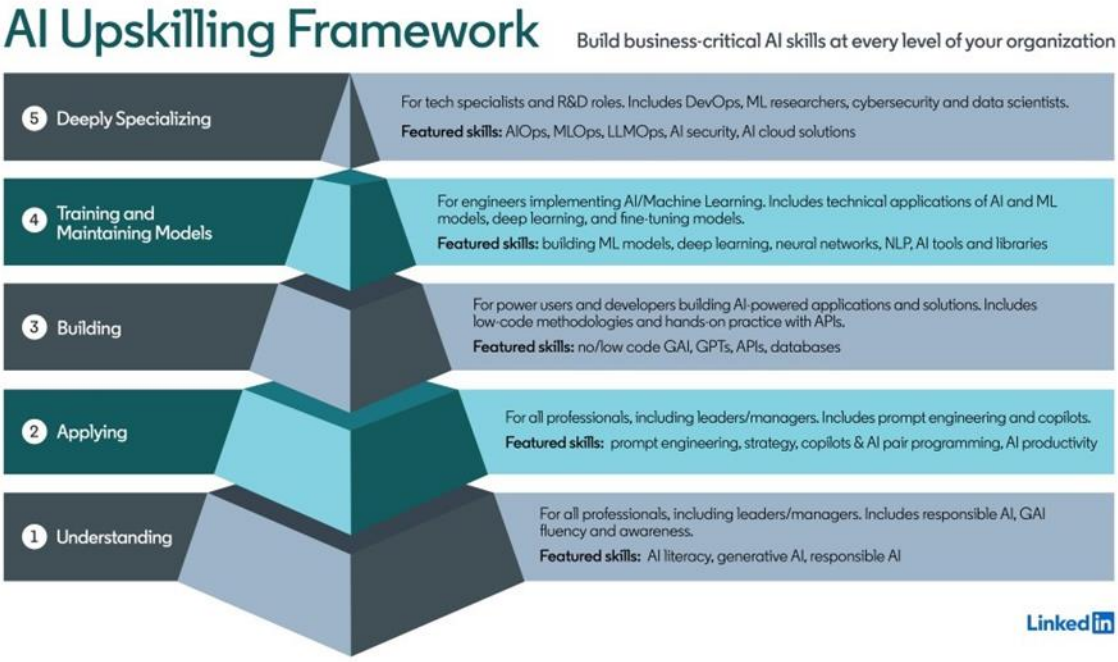


Figure 2 LinkedIn Learning's AI Upskilling Framework

Community of Practice – Gov AI Resource Sharing and Collaboration

The GovAI Coalition, "composed of government members from local, state, and federal agencies united in the mission to promote responsible and purposeful AI in the public sector," is a community of practice around AI policy and adoption where city and department leadership can benefit from a shared and evolving set of resources and the experiences of other government agencies. The coalition is currently developing best practices across five areas of activity: Readiness and Adoption, Data Governance, Procurement, Industry Relations, Use Cases, and Community Engagement. We recommend that City of Austin

leadership in these areas participate in the coalition. Participation is free and online, with resources housed on a website.

Some resources already available through the coalition address the following topics:

AI Policy and Governance

GovAI's shared resources include an AI policy template for use in developing AI policies suitable for government agencies. While the City of Austin used this resource in the development of its AI standards and policy in 2024, it is notable that GovAI also offers an AI Governance Handbook, AI Incident Response Plan, and Algorithmic Impact Assessment Form. The Algorithmic Impact Assessment Form may prove especially useful in the future as the city seeks to comply with auditing requirements. All of these policy and governance resources are helpful for ensuring accountable and transparent AI at the City of Austin.

AI Use Cases

The GovAI Coalition sources numerous use cases from its hundreds of coalition members. As a general resource, the coalition has prepared an overview of common government applications for existing commercial LLM tools like ChatGPT. The Coalition has also built more robust models and datasets related to language translation, object detection, internal LLMs, and transportation in working groups focused on each of these areas. It also has made available a repository of contributed agency use cases and a smaller procured list of AI use cases. Examples of AI use cases from various agencies include combating fare evasion and generative AI for document libraries.

Procurement and Vendors

GovAI curates a number of resources directly relevant to the process of procuring AI tools and working with vendors. These include the development of an AI Contract Hub housing example contracts submitted by coalition members, opportunities to participate in cooperative purchasing agreements, and a registry of AI vendors who have completed the coalition's AI Factsheet ensuring procurement aligns with the coalition goals of vendor accountability and responsible AI.

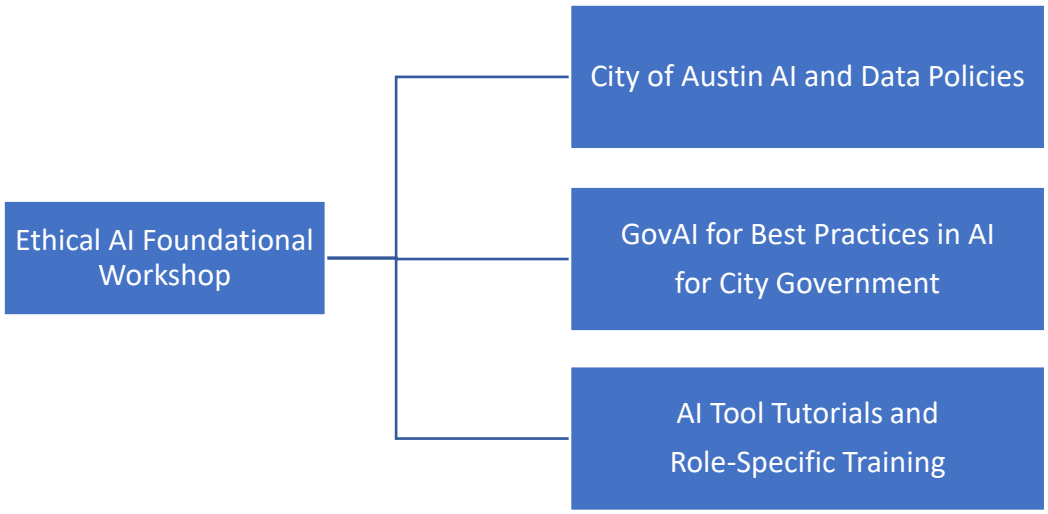
Department-Specific AI Resources

One of GovAI's main goals in 2025-2026 is to develop more resources and use cases targeted toward specific agency departments such as public safety or fire. We recommend City of Austin department leadership become involved in this process to further establish Austin as a leader in ethical government uses of AI.

A shortlist of links for signing up and getting started with GovAI is available here.

Ethical AI Learning Resources

Our 2-hour AI workshop provides an ethical foundation on which to develop AI skills and governance. We have compiled the three resource lists that follow to provide city employees with important reference materials and opportunities for self-learning, clear guidance on City of Austin policy, and an introduction to the GovAI Coalition as a community of practice for government leaders across the country.



City of Austin AI and Data Policies

Our workshop is aligned with current CoA policies. We suggest that workshop attendees check that they can access and reference the city's AI policy and related data, privacy, and information security policies as necessary. These policies include:

- Artifical Intelligence (AI) Policy
- GenAI Standards
- Data Classification Policy
- Use of AI Services for City Data Processing
- Security and Privacy Controls Policy
- Acceptable Use of Technological Resources
- Technology Selection Process
- Information Privacy Program Plan
- Information Security Risk Management Program

The most up-to-date versions of these policy documents can be found at the Emerging Technology Sharepoint.

GovAI for Best Practices in AI for City Government

The GovAI Coalition serves as a community of practice for government agencies promoting responsible and purposeful AI in the public sector. City and department leadership can benefit from the coalition's shared resources and experiences. Committees open to participants from government agencies include:

- Readiness and Adoption
- Data Governance
- Procurement
- Industry Relations
- Use Cases
- Community Engagement

In addition to the above communities of practice, GovAI also makes available policy templates, including:

- AI Policy Template
- AI Governance Handbook
- AI Incident Response Plan
- Algorithmic Impact Assessment Form

The Coalition has compiled repositories for government-related AI uses cases and contracts:

- Common Government GenAI Applications
- Repository of Contributed Agency Use Cases
- Procured List of AI Use Cases
- AI Contract Hub
- Vendor Registry (bottom of page)

AI Tool Tutorials and Role-Specific Use Cases

We have compiled various AI training and upskilling materials specific to government contexts. These include both free options and paid options.

Microsoft 365 Copilot (list provided by GovAI Use Case Committee)

- GovAI Use Case Committee Copilot Discussion
- Microsoft 365 Copilot GCC – Microsoft Adoption
- Boost Productivity with Copilot Chat | Microsoft Copilot
- Top 10 things to try first with Microsoft 365 Copilot | Microsoft Copilot
- Copilot Prompt Gallery

- Copilot Success Kit
- Microsoft Learning Path
- Data, Privacy, and Security for Microsoft 365 Copilot | Microsoft Learn
- Researcher agent in Microsoft 365 Copilot | Microsoft Community Hub
- Analyst agent in Microsoft 365 Copilot | Microsoft Community Hub

More free options

- Artificial Intelligence for the Public Sector | innovate(us)
    - We highly recommend innovate(us)'s free and frequently held online workshops.
    - Completion certificates are provided following workshop attendance.
- Enhance public sector services with generative AI - Training | Microsoft Learn
- AI Training Series for Government Employees | GSA - IT Modernization Centers of Excellence
- AI Government Leadership Program | Partnership for Public Service
- AI Fundamentals for Public Servants: Opportunities, Risks and Strategies | (apolitical.co)
- The Government AI Campus: A trusted global hub for AI excellence in government | (apolitical.co)
- Rebooting Democracy in the Age of AI Lecture Series | The Gov Lab & Burnes Center

Paid options

- IAPP Artificial Intelligence Governance Professional certification
- Comprehensive AI Course for Local Government | (civicinnovation.ai)
- AI+ Government Course | AI Training for Public Sector | NetCom Learning
- Harnessing AI for Public Service: A Course for Government Leaders | Public Sector Network
- Training and Professional Development | Public Technology Institute

LinkedIn Learning, though no longer licensed to City of Austin employees for free, offers numerous learning paths for individualized AI upskilling. Available lessons include specific AI integrations and use cases that are updated regularly. Learning paths provide impactful structure to the thousands of courses available on LinkedIn Learning. Possible learning paths relevant to city employees include:

- Get Started with Microsoft Copilot
- Microsoft Copilot for Productivity by Microsoft and LinkedIn
- Develop Your Prompt Engineering Skills
- Understanding AI for Business Professionals
- Applying Generative AI as a Business Professional
- Understanding AI for Creative Professionals

- Applying Generative AI as a Creative Professional
- Explore AI for Data Engineering
- Master Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG)
- Master Microsoft Power BI
- Foundational AI Skills for Azure Administration
- Develop with Python for AI and Machine Learning

City employees should periodically revisit the ethical considerations from our workshop to align AI applications or role-specific uses with an ethics-first approach.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This section summarizes our recommendations to the City of Austin for ethical AI use training across its operations and departments. They are drawn from our diverse research efforts, encompassing a literature review, insights from employee surveys, valuable lessons learned from interactive workshops, and an analysis of existing online resources. The aim is to equip the City of Austin and other municipal governments like it with actionable strategies to navigate the rapid advancement of AI technologies, ensuring their deployment is not only efficient but also aligns with core ethical principles and community values.

Literature Review:

Based on our literature review, there are several key recommendations for ethical AI deployment and training within city contexts:

- **Adopt a Proactive AI Strategy**: Governments should be proactive in developing policy and infrastructural responses to AI technologies due to their rapid advancement and potential negative impacts. This includes anticipating and addressing logistical, operational, ethical, and legal challenges, many of which resemble issues previously seen with big data systems like algorithmic bias and transparency concerns.
- **Integrate Ethical Upskilling into All AI Training**: Training is crucial for addressing smart city issues at the user level and enabling effective AI policy implementation. Key ethical concerns should be integrated into all AI and technology training, ensuring ethics are seen as a core responsibility rather than a peripheral one.
- **Focus on AI-Augmented Human Judgment**: Design training to enhance workers' uniquely human judgment, leveraging AI to augment human labor for greater efficiency and creativity.
- **Cultivate Critical AI Literacy**: Develop competencies that enable individuals to critically evaluate AI technologies, communicate and collaborate effectively with AI, and use it as a tool. This literacy emphasizes understanding AI's implications in specific, situated contexts (e.g., City of Austin), moving beyond coding skills to focus on coexistence with pervasive AI technology.
- **Incorporate FAccT Frameworks (Fairness, Accountability, Transparency)**:
    - **Fairness**: Train city employees on societal harms and environmental impacts as an essential part of an ethical AI curriculum. Awareness can, for example, mitigate “selective adherence” to biased algorithmic advice.
    - **Transparency and Accountability**: Ensure AI systems and their uses are transparent to hold government accountable. Be aware that AI can create a "moral buffer" leading to moral disengagement from human judgment.
- **Prioritize Deliberation and Participation**: Foster inclusive deliberation and participation among employees and citizens to collectively determine what is deemed

ethical in specific AI contexts. This collaborative approach ensures AI deployments align with community values and needs, building trust and a collaborative organizational culture by focusing on what constitutes standards of conduct like fairness and equity.

Employee Surveys:

The employee surveys indicate a city workforce largely primed for AI adoption, displaying enthusiasm for its potential benefits coupled with healthy skepticism regarding its biases. Based on these findings, several key recommendations for ethical AI deployment and training within city contexts emerge:

- **Acknowledge Worker Concerns:** Recognize and address significant employee concerns, including data privacy, bias, and potential AI errors affecting safety. These concerns highlight the need for risk mitigation in AI policy and training.
- **Provide Situated and Role-Specific Training:** Deliver AI training that is specifically tailored to employees' work-related tasks and use cases, moving beyond general introductions to cover AI's impact on specific duties, safety, and troubleshooting. Advanced users also identified challenges with understanding AI operations, integration with existing tools, and managing AI-generated errors.
- **Establish Safe Experimentation Environments:** Create controlled "sandboxes" or environments for employees to experiment with AI tools, supported by clearer policies, approved tools, and defined permission structures to reduce uncertainty around appropriate AI use.
- **Prioritize Data Readiness and Ethical Governance:** Address the identified challenge of data not being prepared and ready for AI due to siloing, emphasizing the need for robust data governance and integration. Reinforce ethical principles such as minimizing bias, protecting privacy, ensuring transparency, maintaining a "human-in-the-loop," and establishing accountability for errors.
- **Support Job Transformation and Leadership:** Capitalize on employee optimism for AI to transform jobs rather than eliminate them, and address concerns about being "left behind". This requires strong leadership vision and clear guidelines to guide appropriate AI use. Informal peer learning currently occurring among colleagues suggests a foundation for broader knowledge sharing.

Workshop:

The workshops successfully built capacity across multiple City of Austin agencies, laying groundwork for responsible AI adoption throughout municipal operations.

- **Effective Interactive Format**: The interactive format proved especially effective, with virtual settings demonstrating unexpected advantages for staff already comfortable with remote collaboration.
- **Promising Foundation**: Participants' existing familiarity with AI concepts indicates a promising foundation for continued technological advancement within city government.
- **Ethics-First Approach**: The workshops revealed a healthy balance of enthusiasm for AI's potential benefits alongside appropriate caution regarding ethical implementation. The Ethics-First Approach proved particularly effective in helping participants navigate the complex terrain between technological opportunity and public responsibility.

Based on observations and participant feedback, the following refinements are recommended to strengthen future Ethical AI workshops at the City of Austin:

- **Maintain and Expand Emphasis on Ethical Frameworks**: It is suggested to maintain and even expand the emphasis on ethical frameworks throughout all exercises, ensuring ethical premises frame every activity to instill responsible AI use as a fundamental practice.
- **Regularly Assess and Update Policy-Related Training**: The workshop's policy overview should be frequently assessed and updated to reflect the rapidly evolving nature of local, state, and federal AI policy and regulations, extending the workshop's relevance and utility.
- **Incorporate More Specific Protocols for City Data**: Future workshops should include more specific protocols and examples for handling city data, especially sensitive citizen information, when using AI tools. This could involve decision trees for appropriate use cases and procedures for data sanitization.
- **Ensure Layered Leadership Training**: City leaders need ample time to discuss AI implementation within city governments. An advanced workshop, following their attendance at the basic workshop to cultivate foundational ethical AI knowledge and generative AI skills, should be entirely devoted to learning about real-world use cases and developing ethical use cases suited to the City. This will ensure employees receive clearer guidelines from leadership for appropriate AI use in their roles.
- **Establish a Community of Practice**: The enthusiasm shown by participants suggests an opportunity to establish an ongoing community of practice to enhance the long-term impact of these initial training efforts. Creating a dedicated channel (e.g., on Teams or Slack) would provide a sustainable ecosystem for AI knowledge sharing and innovation across departments and teams within the City of Austin.
- **Sustainable and Customizable Program Design**: Core slides and facilitator scripts can be periodically refreshed for evolving AI policies and technologies. Individual departments are encouraged to tailor aspects including exercises and scenarios to their specific contexts while maintaining consistency in fundamental concepts and ethical

guidelines. This model is well-positioned for continued expansion across additional agencies with targeted refinements.

Supplementary Online Learning Resources:

We uncovered a wealth of **online self-learning resources** that can significantly contribute to employees' AI fluency and responsible use. To effectively leverage these options, we recommend:

- **Utilize Evergreen Online Platforms**: Encourage employees to engage with online platforms that offer continuously updated content on AI tools and applications. While LinkedIn Learning served as a prime example for its capacity to provide tool-specific training and expand foundational knowledge on "what" and "how" of AI, other free and paid alternatives outlined in the **Learning Resource List** should be explored, especially given the discontinuation of LinkedIn Learning access.
- **Reinforce Ethical Integration**: Stress the importance of periodically revisiting the ethical considerations presented in foundational AI training. This ensures that knowledge gained from application-focused online courses remains aligned with an **e**thics-first approach to AI, preventing ethical considerations from being seen as secondary.
- **Engage with Collaborative Communities (e.g., GovAI)**: Actively participate in and draw upon resources from communities of practice external to the City like the **GovAI Coalition**. This national initiative offers shared and evolving resources on AI policy, governance (including policy templates and algorithmic impact assessments), procurement, and various use cases, enabling city leadership and departments to stay abreast of best practices for responsible AI in the public sector.

The successful and ethical integration of AI into city operations requires a multi-faceted and ongoing commitment to proactive strategy, robust training, and continuous ethical governance. By addressing critical concerns such as data privacy and algorithmic bias, fostering critical AI literacy and AI-augmented human judgment, and establishing safe experimentation environments, the City of Austin can build a foundation of trust and effective AI utilization. Ultimately, these recommendations pave the way for AI to responsibly transform public services and enhance efficiency, while ensuring that human values and accountability remain at the forefront of technological advancement.

Appendices

1. Literature Review Search Terms
2. Literature Review Bibliography
3. LinkedIn Learning
4. Selected Survey frequencies
5. Scenarios
6. Workshop Slides
7. Workshop Feedback
8. Questionnaires for General survey and Advanced survey
9. Advanced Breakout Exercises

Appendix 1 - Google Scholar Search Terms (12/1/24 – 2/24/25)

1	AI Training in Cities	14	Human Resources AI
2	AI Training in General	**15**	AI Cities Education
3	AI Upskilling	**16**	AI Training Cities
4	AI Alignment	**17**	City Personnel AI
5	AI Local Government	**18**	City Workers AI
6	AI Curriculum Design	**19**	Smart City AI
7	Continuing Education AI Curriculum	**20**	Smart City Training
8	Public Administration AI	**21**	Smart Cities Training
9	Smart City Upskilling	**22**	City Workforce AI Development
10	Employee AI Training	**23**	AI Training City Workers
11	Employee Staff AI training	**24**	AI Training Review
12	Staff AI Training	**25**	AI Skill Training
13	Human Resources AI Staff Training		

Methodology: Our literature review centered on Google Scholar searches and spanned the period of December 1, 2024 to February 24, 2025. We reviewed roughly the first 10 pages of GS results for each search until results became irrelevant or were not frequently cited. We found relevant insights once we started to look at the literature on AI, smart cities, and training more broadly as they pertain to research in public administration, continuing education, and human resources development. A list of search terms is provided in the Appendix 1.

We limited our search to scholarship published in the past five years due to the emergent and evolving nature of AI technologies. Exceptions to this include writings by influential scholars frequently cited by more recent literature, such as Agarwal's (2018) "Public Administration Challenges in the World of AI and Bots." The results of our Google Scholar searches were augmented by our preexisting knowledge of seminal works in the topic area, such as Ben Green's *The Smart Enough City* (2019) and Helen Nissenbaum's (2009) work on contextual integrity and privacy. Relevant grey material including organizational white papers and reports from the past 1-2 years were also included in our literature review. These reports

move more quickly than academic research, and we decided to take them into account to reflect the most recent intellectual reflections on generative AI developments.

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Appendix 3 LinkedIn Learning Information

Table 1 Top 50 Courses (8/2024-2/2025)

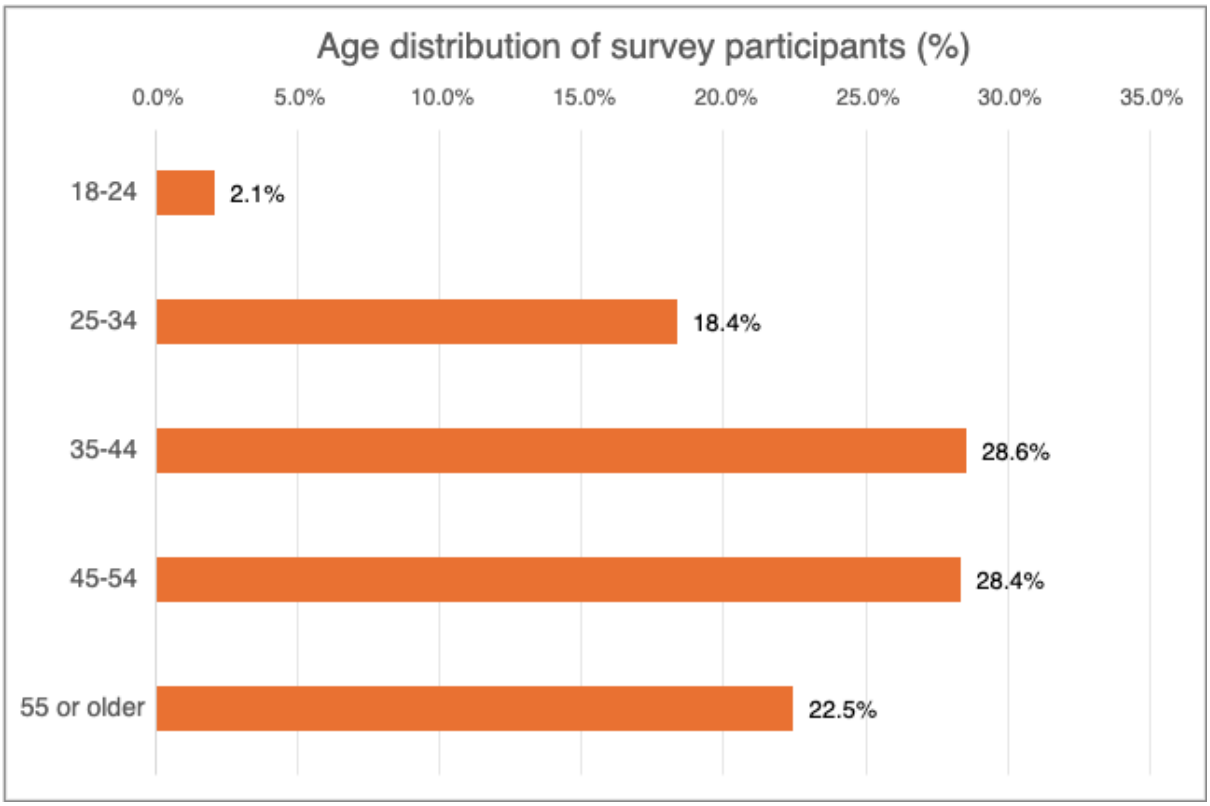
Top 50 Courses (08/10/2024 – 02/12/2025)

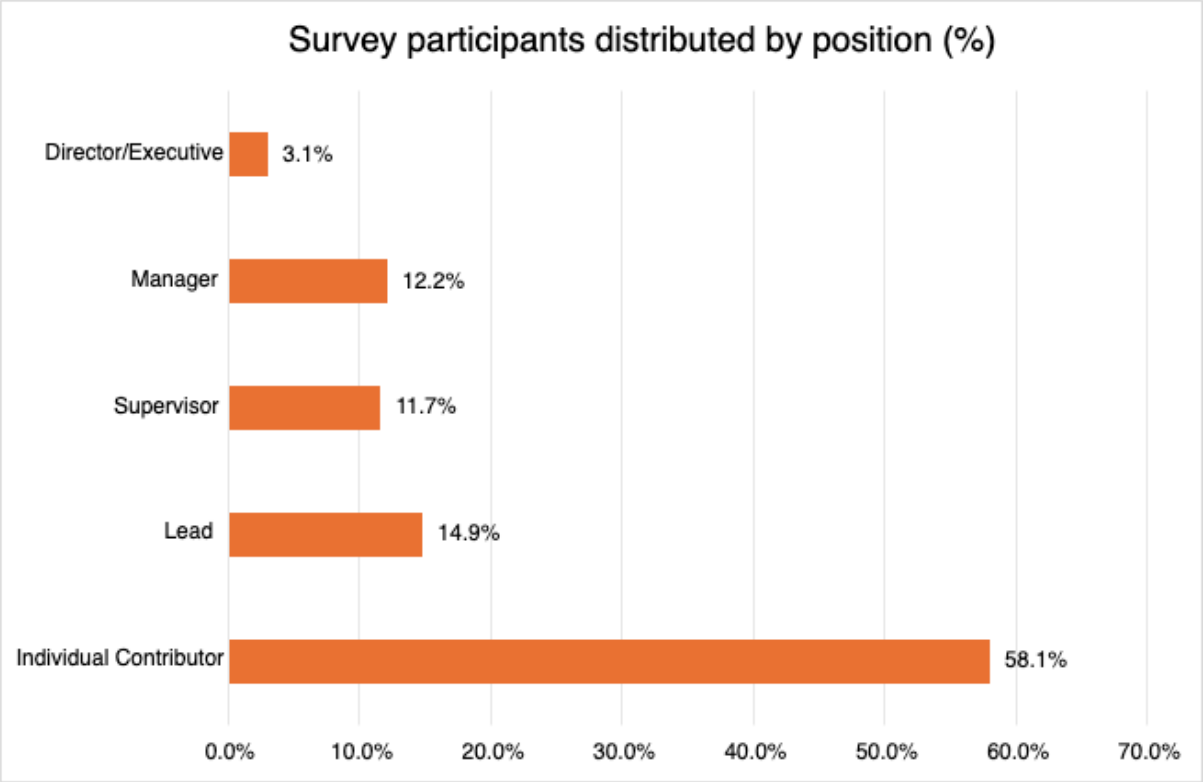
Course Title	n		n
Experiencing Culture Change: 8 Strategies to Set Yourself Up for Success	405	Business Etiquette: Phone, Email, and Text	48
Amplify Your Communication Skills with Generative AI	319	Time Management Fundamentals	48
Communicating with Confidence	289	Empathy at Work	43
Train Your Brain to Unwind Stress and Anxiety Habits	269	Mindful Communication for Less Conflict and Stronger Relationships	41
Customer Service Foundations	207	Building a Better To-Do List	38
Excel Essential Training (Microsoft 365) (2022)	179	Communication Foundations (2018)	38
Building the Reputation and Skills to Become a First-Time Manager	175	Tips for Writing Business Emails	38
Be More Productive: Take Small Steps, Have Big Goals	128	Communication Foundations	37
Skills to Build Stronger Work Relationships	125	Interpersonal Communication	37
Project Management Foundations	124	Develop the Skills to Lead During Times of Change	36
Conflict Resolution Foundations	102	Intro to Service Management with ITIL® 4	36
Power BI Essential Training	101	Leading and Motivating People with Different Personalities	36
Working with Difficult People	88	Windows 11 Quick Tips	36

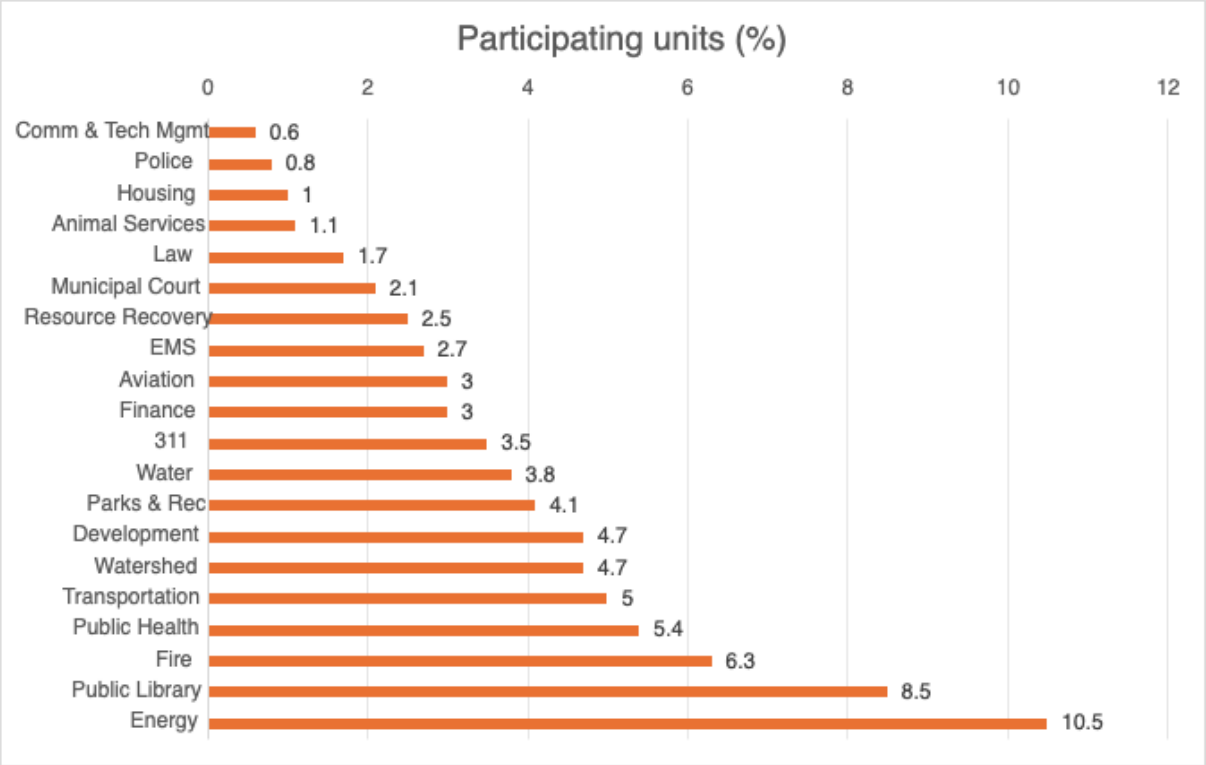
Responsible AI: Principles and Practical Applications	84	Master Microsoft Excel	35
Master Microsoft Power BI	79	Decision-Making Strategies	34
Getting Started with AI	77	Excel Quick Tips	34
Leadership Foundations	71	Excel: PivotTables for Beginners	34
Power BI: Working Together with ChatGPT	65	Introduction to Artificial Intelligence (2023)	34
Communicating with Confidence (2015)	61	Preparing Yourself for Change (2021)	34
Effective Listening	60	Teamwork Foundations	34
What Is Generative AI?	58	Python Essential Training	33
Building Trust	56	Speaking Up At Work	33
Business Writing Principles	55	The Three Pillars of Effective Communication	33
Developing Your Emotional Intelligence	54	Developing Self-Awareness	32
Understanding Bias in AI	52	Holding Yourself Accountable	32

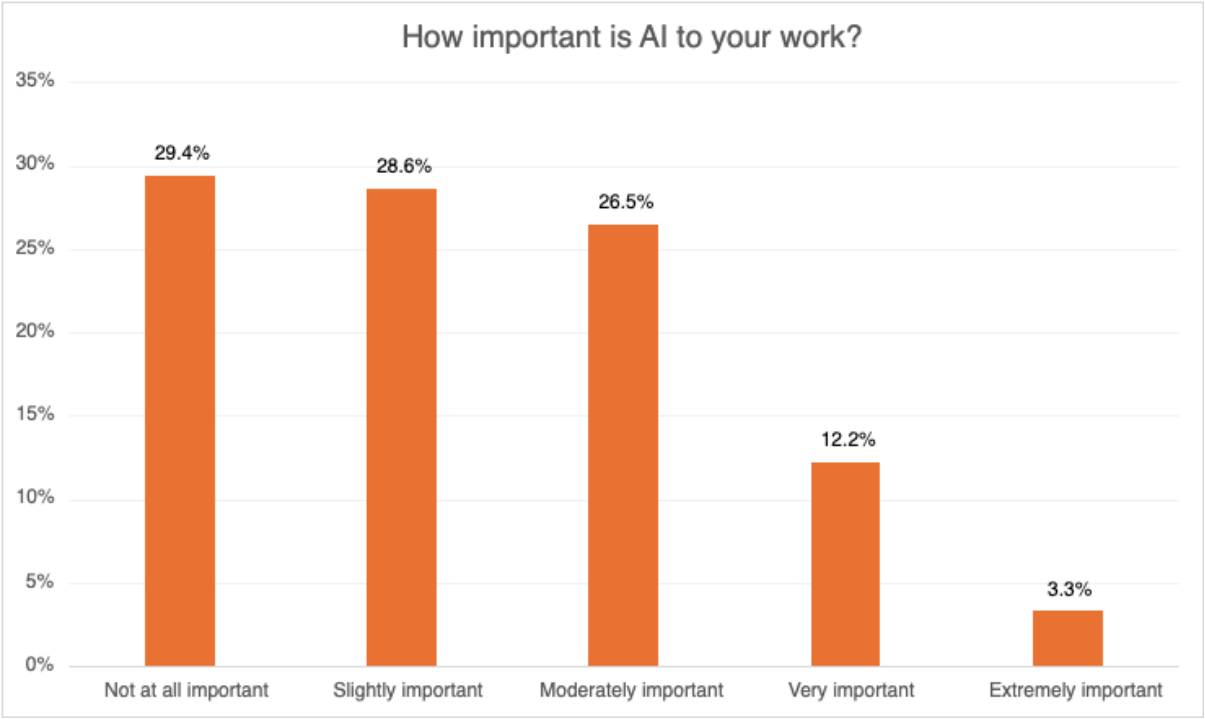
Figure 1 Wordcloud of Top 50 Skills Trained in LinkedIn courses

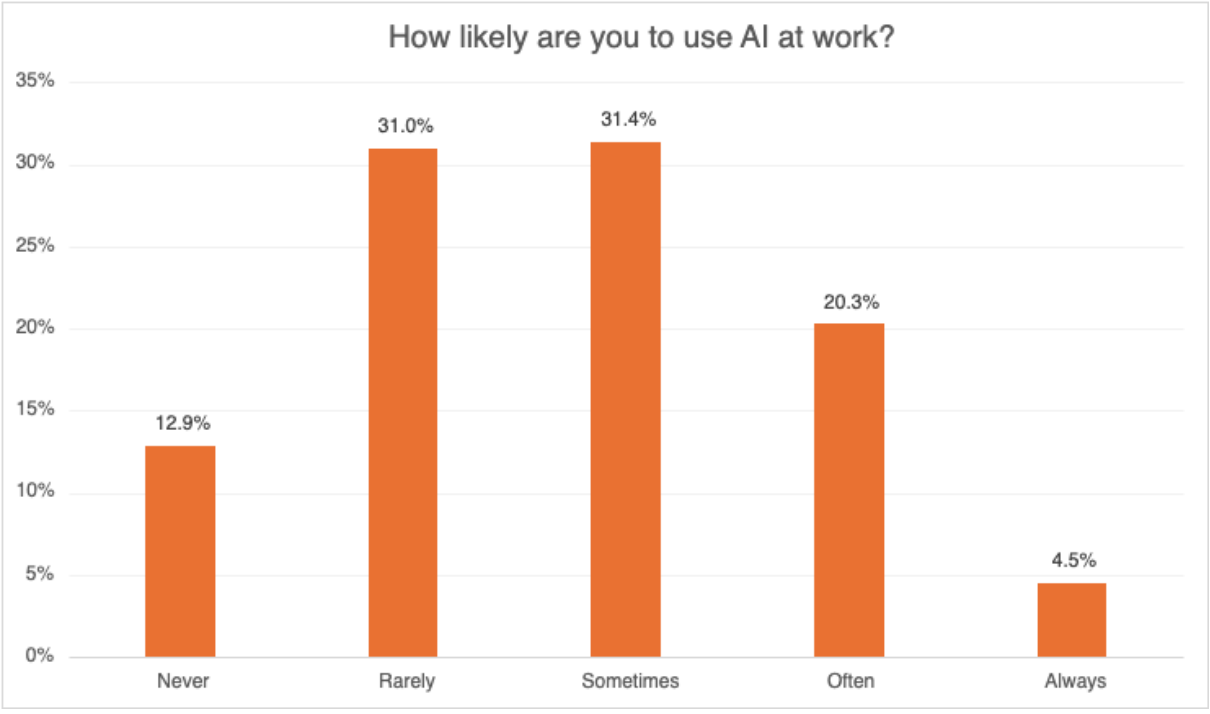
Appendix 4: Selected Frequencies from the Employee Survey

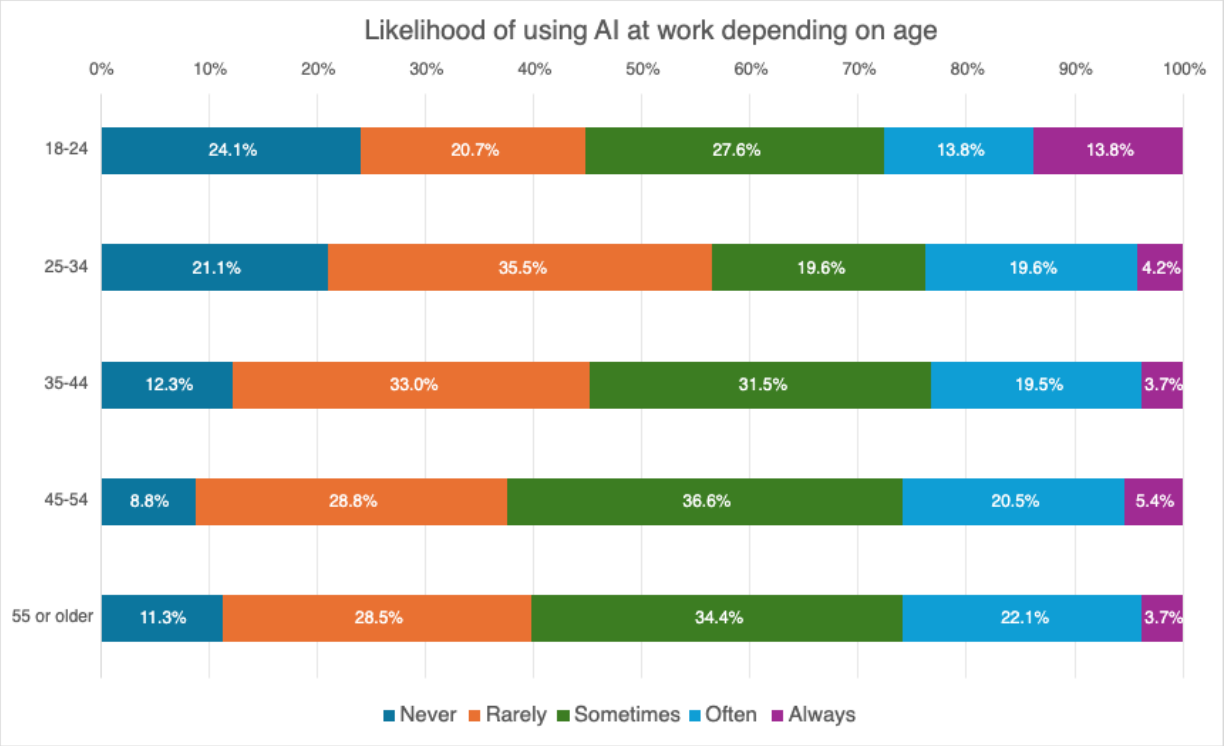


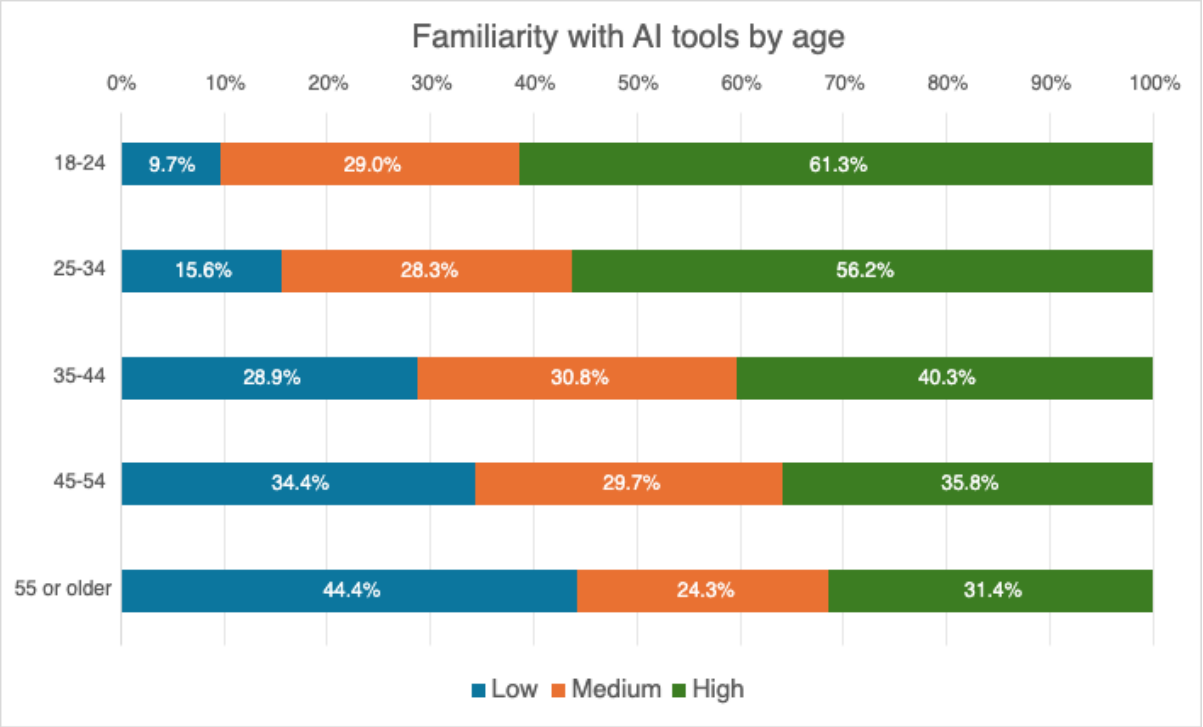

Survey participants distributed by position (%)
Director/Executive
3.1%
Manager
12.2%
Supervisor
11.7%
Lead
14.9%
Individual Contributor
58.1%
0.0%
10.0%
20.0%
30.0%
40.0%
50.0%
60.0%
70.0%

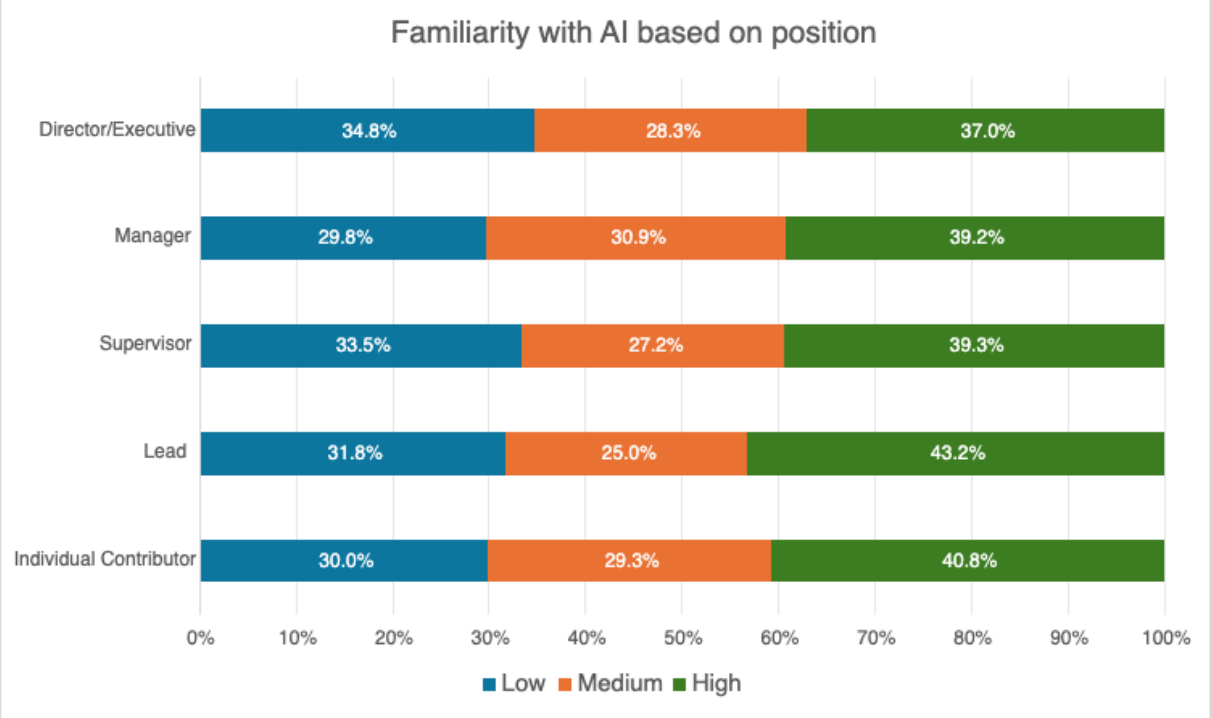

Participating units (%)
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
Comm & Tech Mgmt
0.6
Police
0.8
Housing
1
Animal Services
1.1
Law
1.7
Municipal Court
2.1
Resource Recovery
2.5
EMS
2.7
Aviation
3
Finance
3
311
3.5
Water
3.8
Parks & Rec
4.1
Development
4.7
Watershed
4.7
Transportation
5
Public Health
5.4
Fire
6.3
Public Library
8.5
Energy
10.5

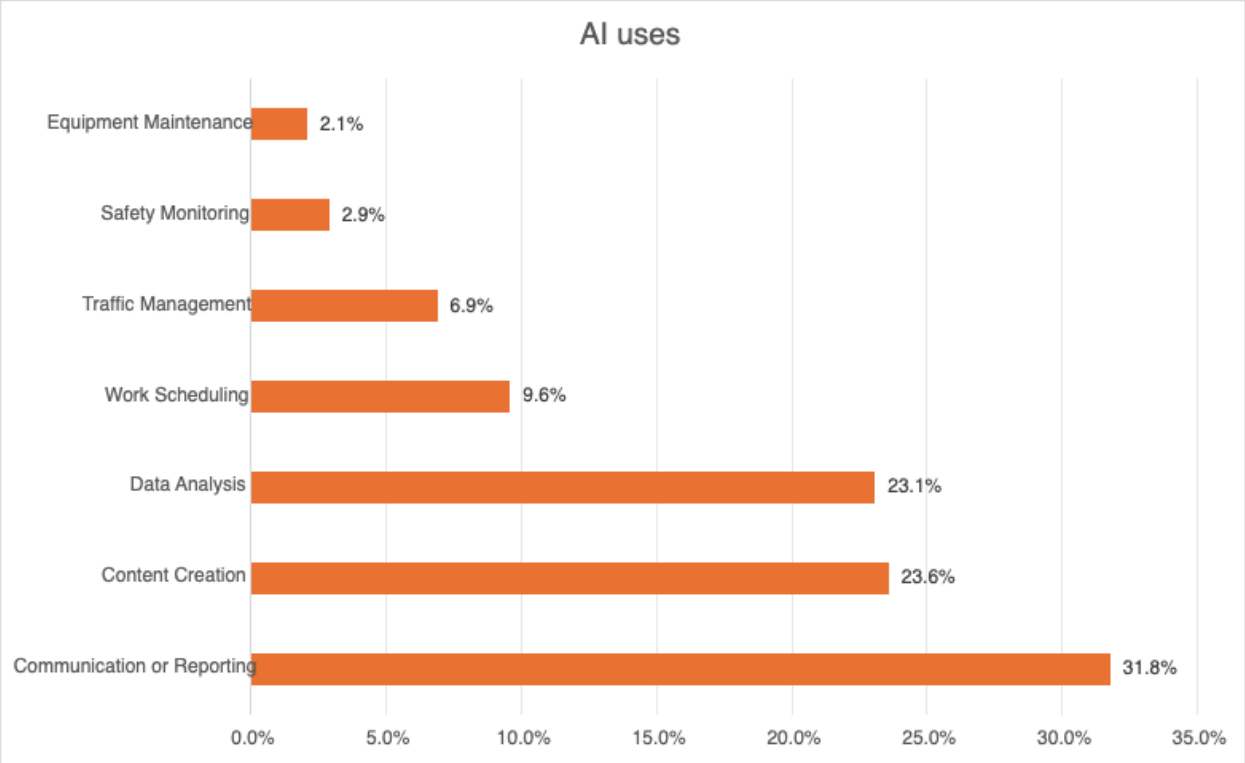

How important is AI to your work?
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
29.4%
28.6%
26.5%
12.2%
3.3%
Not at all important
Slightly important
Moderately important
Very important
Extremely important

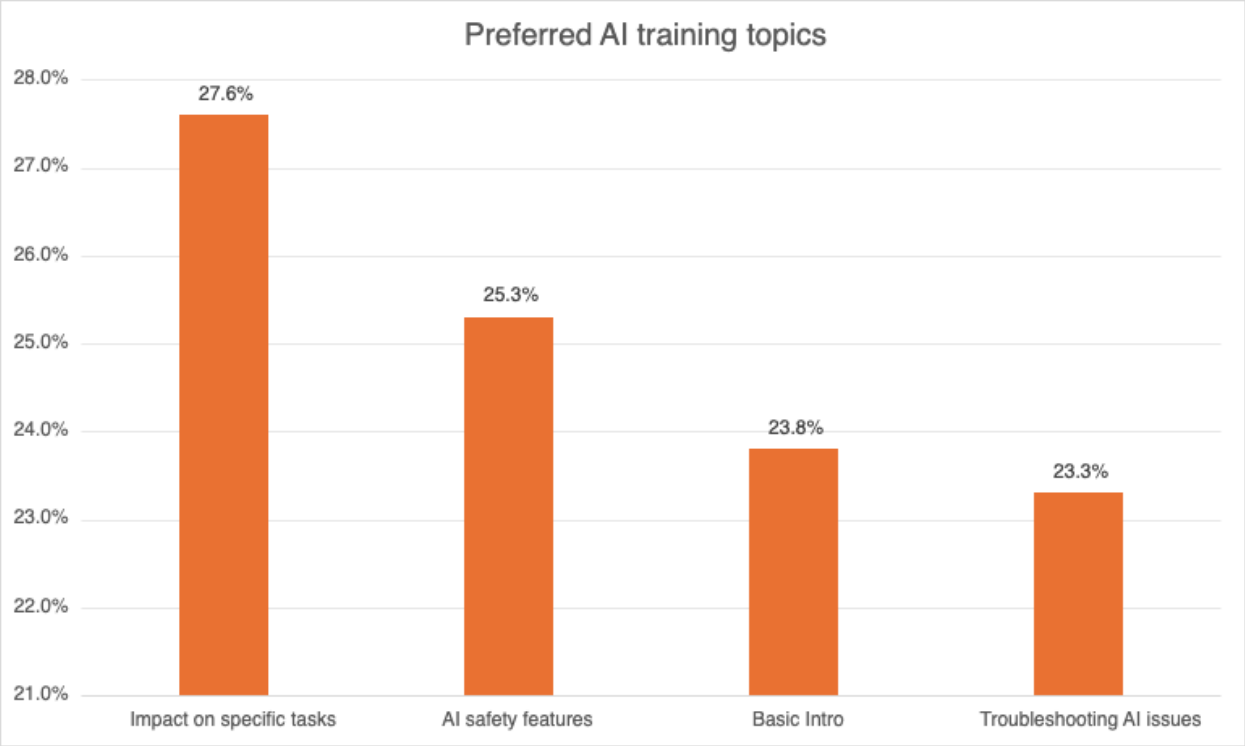

How likely are you to use AI at work?
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
12.9%
31.0%
31.4%
20.3%
4.5%
Never
Rarely
Sometimes
Often
Always


Likelihood of using AI at work depending on age
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
18-24
24.1%
20.7%
27.6%
13.8%
13.8%
25-34
21.1%
35.5%
19.6%
19.6%
4.2%
35-44
12.3%
33.0%
31.5%
19.5%
3.7%
45-54
8.8%
28.8%
36.6%
20.5%
5.4%
55 or older
11.3%
28.5%
34.4%
22.1%
3.7%
Never
Rarely
Sometimes
Often
Always


Familiarity with AI tools by age
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
18-24
9.7%
29.0%
61.3%
25-34
15.6%
28.3%
56.2%
35-44
28.9%
30.8%
40.3%
45-54
34.4%
29.7%
35.8%
55 or older
44.4%
24.3%
31.4%
Low
Medium
High


Familiarity with AI based on position
Director/Executive
34.8%
28.3%
37.0%
Manager
29.8%
30.9%
39.2%
Supervisor
33.5%
27.2%
39.3%
Lead
31.8%
25.0%
43.2%
Individual Contributor
30.0%
29.3%
40.8%
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Low
Medium
High


AI uses
Equipment Maintenance
2.1%
Safety Monitoring
2.9%
Traffic Management
6.9%
Work Scheduling
9.6%
Data Analysis
23.1%
Content Creation
23.6%
Communication or Reporting
31.8%
0.0%
5.0%
10.0%
15.0%
20.0%
25.0%
30.0%
35.0%


Preferred AI training topics
28.0%
27.0%
26.0%
25.0%
24.0%
23.0%
22.0%
21.0%
27.6%
25.3%
23.8%
23.3%
Impact on specific tasks
AI safety features
Basic Intro
Troubleshooting AI issues

Appendix 5: Workshop Materials – Scenarios

Scenario 1: Creating Guides for Accessible Trails

Background: Your Parks Department needs to create comprehensive trail guides that support residents with various disabilities. Use ChatGPT to assist you with that process.

Key Ethical Considerations:

- How can AI help the design process without introducing unintended biases?
- What privacy protections are necessary when collecting sensitive disability information?
- How might AI potentially misinterpret or oversimplify complex accessibility experiences?

Instructions:

- Decide what the process should look like
- Create a basic prompt
- Revise it to address ethical considerations
- Share your before/after prompts with the group

Usage Guidelines

1. Go to **chatgpt.com**
2. Unless you've taken a ChatGPT pilot training through the city, do not sign in with your city email.

   You can use ChatGPT without logging in.

3. Only disclose information that is okay for public exposure.

   Do not attach or input private identifiable information (PII) in any AI assistant under any circumstances.

4. Review and fact-check all outputs.

   Be skeptical of all outputs. Remember, you are responsible for the final product.

5. Maintain a record of your GenAI use in a manner consistent with your department's records and information policies.

   For the purpose of this exercise, take a screenshot of your work.

6. Cite when substantially using GenAI.

Example: "This post was drafted with ChatGPT and reviewed by City of Austin staff."

7. When in doubt, review the city's AI policy.

Scenario 2: Drafting a Communication Plan for Locations on EV Charging Stations

Background: The Transportation Department needs to communicate upcoming locations for EV charging stations. Use ChatGPT to come up with a plan to do that.

Key Ethical Considerations:

- What would you do for citizens that don't have internet access?
- What mechanisms could be designed to gather community input?

Instructions:

- Create a basic prompt
- Revise it to address ethical considerations
- Share your before/after prompts with the group

Usage Guidelines

1. Go to **chatgpt.com**
2. Unless you've taken a ChatGPT pilot training through the city, do not sign in with your city email.
   You can use ChatGPT without logging in.
3. Only disclose information that is okay for public exposure.
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   For the purpose of this exercise, take a screenshot of your work.
6. Cite when substantially using GenAI.
   Example: "This post was drafted with ChatGPT and reviewed by City of Austin staff."
7. When in doubt, review the city's AI policy

3: Community Engagement for an AI Assistant in Development

Background: The Library Department is developing an AI-assisted book recommendation system that caters to diverse community needs. Create an image and caption for social media inviting residents to an upcoming community engagement event to surface concerns about a personalized AI book recommendation system in development.

Key Ethical Considerations:

- Are AI-generated images avoiding stereotypical depictions of library users or book preferences?
- How can we ensure that promotional materials avoid bias in how AI is framed (e.g., not overly optimistic or fear-driven)?
- Are there accessible formats (e.g., text-to-speech compatibility, large print, high-contrast visuals, captioned videos)?
- How do we ensure that AI-created content aligns with the library's voice, mission, and values?

Instructions:

- Create a basic prompt
- Revise it to address ethical considerations
- Share your before/after prompts with the group.

Usage Guidelines

1. Go to **chatgpt.com**
2. Unless you've taken a ChatGPT pilot training through the city, do not sign in with your city email.

   You can use ChatGPT without logging in.

3. Only disclose information that is okay for public exposure.

   Do not attach or input private identifiable information (PII) in any AI assistant unless cleared to do so.
4. Review and fact-check all outputs.

   Be skeptical of all outputs. Remember, you are responsible for the final product.
5. Maintain a record of your GenAI use in a manner consistent with your department's records and information policies.

For the purpose of this exercise, take a screenshot of your work.

6. Cite when substantially using GenAI.
   Example: "This post was drafted with ChatGPT and reviewed by City of Austin staff."
7. When in doubt, review the city's AI policy.

Appendix 6: Workshop Slide Recordings and Question Pool

Linked at https://utexas.box.com/s/i92i66l7cmuk6ut3w1ql10lme3m2nngs

Appendix 7: Workshop Feedback

See link for Basic Workshop Feedback

Appendix 8: Surveys for General Employee Group and Targeted Employee Group

See https://utexas.box.com/s/gc38boffuaca9rjd7g0tue7fgay9d5kx.

Appendix 9: Advanced Breakout Exercises

See Advanced Breakout Exercises in folder.