



A DIVISION OF FUSION LEARNING PARTNERS

Best Practice Brief:

2024: 12 PREDICTIONS FOR CITIES AND COUNTIES (AI STARS IN ALL)

Once again, it is that time of the year when we dust off our digital crystal balls and develop predictions for the year ahead. This year's predictions are remarkably different with far-reaching implications. And as in years past, I offer my annual take on what trends will be most prevalent in cities and counties across the nation. We begin the new year with renewed fear regarding political insecurity. While in the recent past we expressed concern over the digital divide, we must now face the ever-widening cultural divide and the increased mistrust of government and its institutions. This of course has led to an alarming increase in baseless conspiracy theories and mistrust of science and technology. The coming year is also a presidential election year where election-based technologies are under attack, which only adds to the cultural divide. Everyone in the public sector both personally and professionally are affected. Nevertheless, here are my predictions, and I am happy to report that there are many areas for optimism and growth. And no surprise—artificial intelligence (AI) plays a lead role in each.

1. AI—The recognition of human machine partnership

Once regarded as technology in government as a set of tools we find ourselves at the precipice where AI technology is starting to be viewed as a *partner*. This is a monumental shift in how we view and relate to technology as we will now collaborate with machines as never before in history.

2. AI policies and guidelines

State and local governments will shift from banning AI to embracing AI with new policies and guidelines. As 2023 draws to a close at least 20 cities and counties have adopted policy and guidelines on proper AI use. Other areas of policy will include AI decision-making in areas like criminal justice and social services where questions of ethics and bias have been raised. Local governments will need to establish guidelines and oversight mechanisms to ensure fairness, transparency and accountability in AI systems.

3. AI and cybersecurity

AI in cybersecurity will enhance or supplement the ability to protect sensitive data, infrastructure and systems from cyber threats. Local governments will also use AI to better monitor network systems and seek out anomalies and intrusions and at the same time take immediate remedial action to mitigate any cyber incident. AI can and will implement robust cybersecurity measures and ensure compliance with data protection regulations.

4. AI in public safety

AI is already being used to enhance public safety through predictive policing, traffic management, and emergency response. Expect to see more AI applications in these areas, with an emphasis on reducing crime rates and improving disaster preparedness and response.

5. AI training and certification programs emerge

The Public Technology Institute (PTI) conducted its first ever City and County AI Study. Among its findings, more than 80 percent wanted AI training for themselves and staff. 2024 will usher in new online and college-based instructional training and given the ever-changing nature of AI technology, it is entirely possible to see professional certification programs either add AI to existing programs or create entirely new ones. PTI has already announced AI instruction will be added to all its certification programs in 2024.6. Data and technology management

6. AI as my co-pilot

Microsoft will initially dominate with its Office 365 offerings with its just-released Co-Pilot. It works alongside popular Microsoft 365 Apps such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, Teams and more. With Co-Pilot, users will be able to get AI assistance in every aspect of their workflows on the different applications. The caveat here is will local governments be willing to pay \$30 a month per user.

7. AI sustainable technology solutions

With growing concern over climate change, greater use of AI will lead to a much greater emphasis on green technology and sustainable practices, including energy-efficient buildings, electric public transportation, and renewable energy projects. Local governments will utilize AI to monitor and combat climate change by analyzing environmental data, managing waste, and optimizing energy consumption. AI will also assist in disaster prediction and response for natural disasters like wildfires and hurricanes.

8. AI and smart city technologies

The continued expansion of smart city initiatives, using IoT devices and sensors for traffic management, public safety and environmental monitoring because of AI infused data and information.

9. AI and data analytics for public services

AI will assist local government managers to better use big data analytics to improve public services, from waste management to health care, by analyzing trends and optimizing resource allocation.

10. AI and traffic management and transportation

AI-powered traffic management systems can reduce congestion, improve public transportation efficiency and enhance road safety. Expect more AI applications in this area, including autonomous vehicles and smart traffic lights.

11. AI and administrative efficiency

AI will be applied to streamline administrative tasks within local governments, such as document processing, customer service through chatbots and data analytics for decision-making.

12. AI and community engagement

AI will facilitate better communication and engagement between local governments and their constituents. Chatbots and virtual assistants can help answer citizens' questions and gather feedback.

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