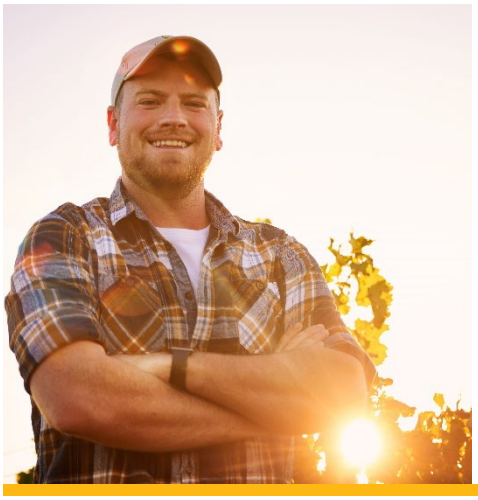
Municipal Artificial Intelligence (AI) Adoption Toolkit



Alberta Municipalities
Strength In Members

Developed with:

ACTION / INSIGHT
STRATEGY

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Introduction

Why does AI matter to Alberta municipalities?

Across Alberta, administrations and councils are being asked to deliver more with leaner teams and tighter budgets. **Using AI is not about replacing people** – it is about giving staff tools to focus on what matters most: serving residents and the community. This toolkit serves as a guide to getting started with AI in your municipality. Through this Toolkit, you'll see where AI can fit into municipal organizations, how to pilot safely, and what to watch for.

Who is this toolkit for?

It is for municipal staff and elected officials seeking a practical guide on AI.

What's inside?

- A simple AI framework
- Case studies from municipalities in Alberta
- Ways to work with AI
- Considerations and guardrails
- Pilots to get you started

What questions will this toolkit help you answer?

- What do I need to start using AI effectively?
- Where can I start applying AI in small and safe ways?
- What AI projects have municipalities in Alberta started / completed?
- What do I need to provide to AI to make it work, and how can I use it effectively?
- What guardrails should we be considering to safely use of AI?

It is a matter of 'when' not 'if' municipalities adopt AI – with this toolkit, we hope to position our members at the forefront of realizing the benefits it offers sooner rather than later.

This toolkit was developed in partnership with Action / Insight Strategy – they focus on creating fluency for leaders and their teams; their passion is helping organizations navigate the AI era with vision and confidence built from their own earned experience.

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Plain Language

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to tools that turn the data and information into useful outputs. As a whole, AI can be a very complex topic; however, we'd recommend looking at it via the two (2) approaches described below.

Empower with Generative AI

These are AI tools based on Large Language Models (LLMs) that can help staff write, summarize, translate, and explore ideas using prompts and relevant context. Staff "talk" to these tools and steer them with the context and instructions they provide.

Example(s): OpenAI's ChatGPT, Microsoft's CoPilot, and Google's Gemini. While these tools have differences, you can treat them like different brands for the same fundamental product.

Optimize with Machine Learning

These AI tools are created custom for purpose by specialists with a background in data science. A machine learning model will identify patterns and produce outputs that will improve operations. These projects often require investment to develop and maintain but can provide significant return-on-investment (ROI) when deployed.

Example(s): automated fraud detection and flagging on financial transactions, used by most major financial institutions.

Important things to consider:

Optimize tools tend to be specialists built for single job whereas Empower tools act like generalists and can be useful across many tasks. This versatility makes Empower tools suitable to support a multitude of municipal departments (i.e., one-size-fits-all). But there are some practical guardrails and considerations to keep in mind:

- Keep sensitive data secure and only use in approved enterprise tools
- Avoid uploading confidential material into public tools (e.g., ChatGPT)
- Add notices when AI-powered solutions interact with the public
- Require human review before sharing resident-facing publication(s)
- Limit scope to public and / or low-risk documents at the onset of AI adoption (expanding usage should be dependent on setting up requisite governance / oversight)

Key Terms

Core Concepts

Large Language Model (LLM): the technology behind tools like ChatGPT, CoPilot, and Gemini. These are AI systems trained on vast amounts text and information to understand and generate human-like language. They're what power the "Empower" tools in this guide.

Machine Learning: a type of AI system that identifies and patterns from data you provide. Unlike LLMs (which are generalists), machine learning typically creates specialized tools for specific tasks – like predicting water usage or detecting waste contamination. Machine Learning powers the 'Optimize' processes in this guide.

Working with AI

Prompt: the instruction(s) or question(s) you give to an AI tool. "Summarize this council meeting" is a prompt. The clearer your prompt, the better the result.

Context: the background information you provide alongside your prompt. This could be meeting minutes, bylaws, reports, or your own written explanations that help the AI understand what you're working with. Context is your most valuable asset when using AI.

Hallucination: when AI confidently provides information that is incorrect or made up. Hallucinations are much more likely when the correct information is not presented in context to the LLM. This is why human review is essential, especially for public-facing content and / or decisions.

Training Data: the information used to teach an AI system. For Optimize projects, your organization's data (e.g., years of permit applications or utility readings) creates a new model specific to your task. For Empower projects, the model has already been created and so you don't need to train it.

Slop: the term for a generic and sub-par output from an LLM, usually because insufficient context was provided ("the report the tool gave me was slop").

AI Tools

ChatGPT, CoPilot, Gemini, Claude: these are different products / brands of AI assistants built on LLMs. They work similarly – you can think of them like choosing between Word, Google Docs, or Pages. Each have their own differences, but they function similarly.

Enterprise LLM: a paid and licensed version of these AI Assistants designed for organizations, with security features, data privacy protections, and administrative controls. These are safer for municipal use than free public versions.

Open Source Software: the underlying code and solution is publicly available and free to use. Open source tools can be customized and don't require vendor licensing, but may need technical expertise to set up and maintain.

Municipal AI Use Cases

This section features examples of how AI can fit and support municipal environments. These examples build on pre-existing processes – from council communications to infrastructure – showcasing the value offered by AI adoption in municipalities.

EMPOWER YOUR MUNICIPALITY

- Turn council meetings and minutes into concise and entertaining briefs that can help residents stay abreast to what is happening in their community
- Rewrite complex regulations for residents to better articulate what is changing, when, and why, to improve compliance
- Generate initial drafts of procurement documents based on jurisdictional comparators, and research precedents from neighbouring municipalities to accelerate the development of policies and bylaws
- Enable staff to 'ask questions' to quickly find the right documentation, form, and / or clause to keep work flowing within and across departments

OPTIMIZE YOUR MUNICIPALITY

- Use existing data (i.e., permits, bookings, calls, utility reads) to forecast the next week or month at a "good enough" level to inform scheduling and communications (e.g., a software developer can start with a freely available open-source software, such as Prophet, to develop a forecasting model or tool)
- Harness the power of data logs to identify 'out of range' values and catch issues early (e.g., pump run-times)
- Prioritize inspections and maintenance based on a combination of data such as age, condition, and work-order history on a small list of assets / infrastructure
- Route service requests faster to the right staff using auto-tagging (i.e., use AI to automatically apply metadata to forms and emails to triage, prioritize, and direct them).

Empower Municipal Use Cases

TOWN OF HANNA – AI POWERED COUNCIL PODCASTS

Opportunity: the Town of Hanna wanted a faster and friendlier way to share what happened at its council meetings.

Approach: staff use an AI tool to convert publicly available council content into a short and conversational *Hanna in Focus* podcast.

Tool: Google's NotebookLM tool creates podcasts using uploaded files and documentation.

How it works:

1. Gather agenda, minutes, and staff summaries *(public documents only)*.
2. Prompt NotebookLM to generate a short, plain language podcast that summarizes decisions / motions, discussions, among other meeting items.
3. Perform human review for clarity, accuracy, and neutrality.
4. Publish the AI generated audio summary (a video option is also possible).
5. Review listener feedback and refine prompts for the next meeting.

Results: clear and easy to follow audio summaries of council meetings that are easier for residents' to digest.

Privacy & Security: data and information inputs are limited to publicly available materials and documentation, and human reviews take place prior to publishing audio podcasts.

Try this out: visit notebooklm.google.com, create a new notebook and upload your sources. Choose "Audio Overview" and your podcast will be ready in <1 hour.

Empower Municipal Use Cases

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT LETHBRIDGE – AI POWERED DIGITAL ASSISTANTS

Opportunity: to embed AI into its (1) business advisory services that support clients in developing their fundamental business documentation (e.g., business models, value propositions), and (2) internal operations by helping staff locate documents, training tools, and forms.

Approach: Two (2) AI assistants were created to serve different audiences; one for public-facing for entrepreneurs and one for internal for staff advisors. Both answer questions and produce step-by-step guidance grounded in curated local information, not the open web, so responses are reliable and consistent.

Tool: Finnish-based product called Digiole, which creates AI assistants using plain language and information provided by users.

How it works:

1. Content owners compile and maintain the locally focused documentation (programs, forms, contacts, deadlines).
2. The AI-powered assistant answers questions with citations to the locally focused documentation, not the public / open web.
3. Advisors use the internal assistant to quickly locate key documents, training tools, and forms.
4. Content owners keep the local corpus current using vetted resources.

Results: on-demand guidance for entrepreneurs and time savings for advisors by relying on trusted local resources rather than web search.

Privacy & Security: only vetted public resources and internal guides are inputted into the tool, content owners can make updates to source material, broader internet search(es) are not permitted.

Try this out: start by collecting your own documents and provide them along with your instructions to your AI tool of choice (e.g., Microsoft Copilot Studio, Digiole). See how the information you provide changes the quality and style of the responses. When you find the right combination that serves your purpose, save it - this is exactly what you need to create your own AI assistant.

Empower Municipal Use Cases

ALBERTA MUNICIPALITIES – AI POWERED MUNICIPAL RESEARCH & PROCUREMENT TOOL

Opportunity: municipalities across Alberta could benefit from being able to easily research council activity (i.e., jurisdictional scans on municipal topics), harness the power of publicly available procurement data to inform budgets and planning exercise, and expedite the development of procurement documentation.

Approach: staff can keyword search (1) municipal council documentation from across North America to research relevant municipal issues, (2) market solicitations and their outcomes, and (3) generate and enhance their own procurement documents using AI-powered tools.

Tool: staff and members use Beacon Bid, which is grounded in publicly available documentation from across North America.

How it works:

1. Keyword search municipal meeting documentation (e.g., attachments, packages) and / or public sector procurement documentation (e.g., RFPs, results).
2. Download meeting documentation and / or generate procurement documentation based on user input(s).
3. Review and assess based on user need and standards (e.g., legal, procurement, policy).
4. Edit based on local requirements and publish.

Results: jurisdictionally relevant municipal research is found in <1 minute, faster first drafts for both policy and procurement documentation, more informed reviews and notes for internal corporate services (e.g., budget, legislative and legal services, procurement).

Privacy & Security: data and information used by the tool are limited to publicly disclosed and available documentation.

Try this out: contact Dan Blackburn, Senior Director of Growth & Innovation (danb@abmunis.ca)

Optimize Municipal Use Cases

CITY OF LEDUC – WASTE CONTAMINATION DETECTION

Opportunity: the City's green contamination rate was about 20%, increasing risks of waste processor rejection and higher costs. It set a goal of reducing contamination to 10% via the project.

Approach: AI cameras mounted onto waste collection trucks capture photos as green carts are collected. The AI flags contaminants, especially plastic film, and staff verify each image. Verified households would receive a postcard by mail with a photo and recommended sorting guidance. Residents are encouraged to use a sorting app for collection schedules and reminders (**note**: the organization has since moved to an online platform, called Recycle Coach, to provide its residents with sorting guidance).

Tool: Prairie Robotics developed this solution in partnership with the municipality.

How it works:

1. Capture images on collection vehicles under defined conditions.
2. The model flags probable contamination; staff quality-check prior to resident outreach.
3. Send a mailed postcard with the photo, blurring non-relevant details, plus clear sorting tips.
4. Measure progress: contamination rate, postcards mailed, and repeat-address count.

Results: a waste audit found contamination fell below 10%. About 900 postcards were mailed in the first eight months, and only 13 households repeatedly triggered postcards out of ~10,000 (~0.13%). Mailer volume declined over time, likely due in part to seasonal impacts.

Privacy & Security: the municipality has since moved away from sending hardcopy postcards to publishing waste management feedback / guidance online via a platform. Residents will log into the app to access various waste feedback and learning resources.

Optimize Municipal Use Cases

TOWN OF DRAYTON VALLEY– WATER TREATMENT OPTIMIZATION

Opportunity: highly variable water conditions make water treatment (i.e., chemical and coagulant dosing) difficult and costly. Moreover, long-time operators who possess valuable internal knowledge were coming up for retirement (i.e., brain drain).

Approach: as part of a broader water treatment project (i.e., new facility) an opportunity was identified to develop a machine learning solution to manage the water treatment process. While still managed and operated by humans, the solution shifted processes to performing actions every hour, and observing water quality every five minutes, from being predominantly a once-a-day control.

Tool: RL Core Technologies developed a solution taking an 'operator first' approach, whereby it supports the critical role operators perform in ensuring residents' drinking water is high quality and safe.

How it works:

1. Water is monitored throughout the treatment process, specific to various parameters.
2. AI-powered solution performs complex analysis based on water conditions.
3. Chemical dosing is applied based on the analysis and is managed within a particular range(s).
4. AI solution continuously learns and refines based on its analysis and outcome(s).

Results: the municipality has achieved better water quality using less energy and fewer chemicals. More specifically, it has generated savings for its chemical usage (75%), usage of energy (11%), and reduced water wasted during backwashing (15%).

Privacy & Security: the solution is setup locally and on-premises to the water treatment facility, with very limited remote access.

Optimize Municipal Use Cases

CITY OF EDMONTON – STREAMLINING BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATIONS

Opportunity: permit approvals for routine residential projects often took up to two weeks. Manual checks for completeness and compliance created back and forth with applicants, causing delays and tying up planners on work that could be standardized.

Approach: using an online solution that automatically approves eligible housing permits when submissions meet all zoning parameters. This solution checks and confirms standard requirements for permits (e.g., stamps, signatures) upon submission, rather than waiting for a human to manually identify this, send the application back to the submitter. This allows reviewers to spend their time on more complex items and meaningfully engage with those submitting permit applications.

Tool: the municipality developed an online solution, called AutoReview, that assists in the development and submission of development permits.

How it works:

1. Applicant signs into Edmonton only self-service portal (AutoReview) and submits drawings.
2. AutoReview runs rule-based validations against zoning regulations and checks whether submissions meet all requirement(s).
3. If all parameters and requirements are met, the permit is issued automatically, otherwise the applicant receives instant feedback and non-eligible files route to planners.
4. Records and decisions are logged in the permitting system, and complex or exceptional cases remain with human staff.

Results: reported reductions in approval time decreased from roughly two weeks to one day for eligible applications, generating an estimated savings of $5.3M and 67,600 days of effort annually.

Context (Data) Is Your Most Valuable Asset

Behind all successful municipal AI applications is context – the data and information fed into the AI solution that supports the generation of output(s). While AI tools are powerful, they don't inherently "know" your municipality's unique policies, residents, nor operational nuances. That's why providing clear and relevant context is your most valuable asset in making AI outputs truly useful to your organization. Moreover, context affirms the important role people play in every organization's day-to-day operations and its AI journey.

CONTEXT IN EMPOWER APPLICATIONS

In practice, providing context for **Empower** applications means:

Attaching the right documents: uploading specific bylaws, policies, or templates ensures the AI operates within your established frameworks.

Naming the intended audience: specifying whether the output is for residents, council, or internal staff, ensures the language used is appropriate.

Stating constraints: clearly defining the desired tone, length, and any required approval processes guides the AI's output.

Including examples of what "good" looks like: providing sample outputs or preferred phrasing helps the AI learn your municipality's style and standards.

Municipal Example(s):

- The Town of Hanna's podcast tool does not inherently know what its residents are interested in nor the local political landscape. Staff provide council documents as raw information plus specific guidance on desired tone, length, and key topics as the critical context to generate scripts that truly resonate with their community.

- Economic Development Lethbridge's business assistants are effective because they're grounded in a curated set of documentation specific to its organization. Instead of relying on a broad, generic understanding, they draw from vetted sources. This critical context— local programs, forms, contacts — transforms generic AI capabilities into a highly capable toolset that properly supports local entrepreneurs.

IMPORTANT LIMITATION(S)

Modern AI tools have a 'context window' – the tool's working memory – that limits how much information you can provide at one time. Assume a maximum of approximately 20,000 words for most tools – after this, the tool may begin to 'forget' the beginning of your input or conversation. Some tools, like Google's Gemini Pro 2.5, can process hundreds of thousands of words at once.

CONTEXT IN OPTIMIZE APPLICATIONS

Even a data-driven **Optimize** tool, while seemingly objective, still requires curated context to be truly effective. For example, the Town of Drayton Valley's water treatment AI solution doesn't just analyze sensor data, it incorporates crucial contextual factors like seasonal weather patterns and the impacts of wildfires. This context ensures it is not only accurate, but that it properly optimizes operations specific to its environment.

Working with AI = Iteration

AI requires us to adopt new habits for working, while also drawing on the familiar patterns of collaboration we are used to. Regardless of whether you are using an Empower or Optimize solution, successfully using AI lends itself to being a process of iteration ('the loop' shown in the image below) – it is not a one-and-done task but an ongoing cycle of planning, providing context, checking the output, and refining.

USE CASES DEMONSTRATE 'THE LOOP'

AI-powered water treatment process:

- **Plan:** Optimize chemicals used for water treatment
- **Provide:** Capture and input relevant data, practices, and variables
- **Check:** Operators review chemical usage for safety and adequacy
- **Refine:** Learnings and proper actions are continually reinforced

AI-assisted procurement drafting:

- **Plan:** Create RFP scope matching municipal standards
- **Provide:** Search similar projects and identify requirements
- **Check:** Review against procurement policy and budget
- **Refine:** Adjust specifications, add local requirements

Human judgment remains central and indispensable throughout the above example(s). For instance, the Town of Drayton Valley's AI-powered water treatment tool operates within a range based on historical data inputs. Over the course of each day, operates review and assess how it is operating, and make changes based on their tests and data collected. In practice, 'the loop' ensures that AI continually enhances the services delivered and the human expertise supporting it – not replacing it.

STARTING YOUR OWN LOOP

Iteration isn't just a concept – it's how AI becomes useful in real work. To start your loop, begin with a task you do often and break it down. By planning, adding context, and reviewing outputs, you'll see how AI can speed up your process without sacrificing accuracy or trust.

WHERE TO BEGIN

Pick something small but meaningful: choose a task that you already know well, such as drafting a response to a resident inquiry or summarizing meeting notes.

Plan: write down the steps of your process and consider how you would explain it to a colleague, as well as your expectations for the final output – relay this to the AI tool

Provide: what context do you have to support AI with this task? What files or information are necessary? Locate and input relevant pieces of information into your AI tool.

Check: does the output provided match your expectations? What specific direction(s) or example(s) could you provide to support AI in meeting your needs.

Refine: always review AI outputs for accuracy and appropriateness. Double check facts, links, and use your discretion on what needs to be edited or polished.

Helpful reminders:

- Using AI may not be faster the first time you try applying it to a task – give yourself time to learn how best to use it and anticipate faster results as you build your intuition and skills with these tools.
- Not every task needs to be supplemented by AI – AI may only be useful for part(s) of your task compared to tackling the entire process start to finish.
- Experiment with different AI tools – particularly to get the right capability, tone, or output you are seeking.
- Ask someone else how they'd approach the task with AI – chances are your colleague(s) are experimenting too and may have useful insights or ideas to try out.

Check out the 'Eight (8) Tasks to Try' section if you need inspiration on ways you can start your own 'loop'

Before you Start: Security & Guardrails

AI can help municipalities work smarter, but it also brings new responsibilities. Protecting resident data and maintaining public trust are essential. Alberta's Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA) and your municipal policies still apply when using AI. Security is not just a technical detail, it is a foundation for safe innovation.

WHAT YOU SHOULD CONSIDER BEFORE YOUR FIRST PILOT:

Data Protection & Security Practices

Start by safeguarding resident and staff information. This is both a legal requirement and a foundation for public trust, a few things to consider:

- **Never put resident data in free-to-use AI tools** (such as ChatGPT free, Claude.ai, or Gemini). Free tools may not keep sensitive information secure
- **Use enterprise versions for organizational work** (such as Microsoft Copilot or ChatGPT Enterprise), which offer stronger privacy protections
- **Start with public documents** only until governance is in place. This reduces risk and helps you learn safely
- **Remove names, addresses, account numbers, and other identifiers** before using data with AI (see below for an example of how to remove PII)

Transparency, Oversight and Safe Starting Points

Being open about how AI is used and keeping human oversight ensures accuracy and builds confidence in your organization's work:

- **Add disclosure notices when AI assists with public communications** so residents know when AI is involved
- **Require human review** before any resident-facing publication to maintain quality and trust
- **Safe starting points** include council meeting summaries (using public documents), draft policies based on templates, internal FAQ responses (with personal information removed), and procurement research using public domain information

When to Pause

Stop and consult IT or Legal if you're handling any information that is confidential, sensitive, or protected by law – including: tax or utility account information, employee records or HR data, content pertinent to legal matters, health and safety documentation, or any data any data marked confidential.

REMOVING PERSONALLY IDENTIFIABLE INFORMATION (PII)

When using AI tools that leverage municipal data, it's important to protect the privacy of residents and staff. Personally Identifiable Information (PII) includes details like names, addresses, account numbers, and contact information. Removing PII helps ensure compliance with Alberta's privacy laws and reduces the risk of accidental data exposure.

Quick PII Removal Checklist

- Replace names with generic labels: [RESIDENT], [CUSTOMER], [STAFF]
- Remove addresses or use zones: North Ward, District 3, [ADDRESS]
- Mask ID numbers: Use sequential codes (A001, A002) or [ID#]
- Delete contact info: Phone, email, social media handles
- Keep the context: Preserve the issue/pattern you're analyzing

The following examples show how to safely prepare your data before working with AI:

Example 1: Resident Email

✗ Before (Contains PII)	☑ After (PII Removed)
Subject: Water bill complaint Hi, my name is Sarah Johnson at 2847 Maple Street. My account number is WTR-2024-3847. I noticed my bill doubled this month. Can you check why? My phone is 403-555-1234 and email is sarah.j@email.com. Thanks, Sarah	Subject: Water bill complaint Hi, my name is [RESIDENT] at [ADDRESS]. My account number is [ACCOUNT#]. I noticed my bill doubled this month. Can you check why? My phone is [PHONE] and email is [EMAIL]. Thanks, [RESIDENT]

Example 2: Property Tax Data

✗ Before (Contains PII)

Roll#	Owner	Address	Phone	Amount
1234	Bob Lee	123 Oak Ave	403-555-8765	$3,200
1235	Amy Wu	456 Pine Rd	403-555-4321	$2,800
1236	Jim Roy	789 Elm Dr	403-555-9876	$4,100

☑ After (PII Removed)

ID	Category	Zone	Status	Amount
A001	Residential	North	Current	$3,200
A002	Residential	East	Current	$2,800
A003	Residential	West	Current	$4,100

Start: Your 12-Month Empower Strategy & Roadmap

The following provides a strategy and roadmap for introducing and building AI experience in your municipality over a twelve (12) month period. By organizing actions across three (3) separate roles, your organization can build experience in the right places, ensure responsible use, manage risk, and start to realize the benefits offered by AI — regardless of your organization's size and / or technical background.

Leadership

Role: *Set direction, provide support, ensure responsible use, and manage risk*

Months 1-2

- Assess and select an accessible enterprise AI tool (e.g., Copilot, Gemini)
- Draft and approve a simple acceptable use guidelines or policy referencing PIPA and municipal policies
- Garner Council or Senior Leadership approval for acceptable use guidelines and pilot project(s)
- Communicate guidelines and assign a staff member (or small team) to facilitate AI activities

Months 3-4

- Communicate the purpose and benefits of AI to your organization
- Communicate early wins and lessons learned in newsletters and / or meetings

Months 10-12+

- Review progress, document benefits, and (continually) update policies as needed
- Assess and plan to conduct AI projects in your organization for the following year

End Users

Role: *Develop hands-on experience and proficiency, identifies opportunities for AI in day-to-day work*

Months 2-4

- Conduct and complete training on selected AI tool and acceptable use guideline
- Use AI for safe and low-risk tasks, such as:
  - Transcribing meetings
  - Drafting policies from templates
  - Drafting public procurement documentation

Months 5-9

- Expand scope of AI usage, such as generating presentations, analyzing feedback, or analyzing datasets
- Share useful prompts, examples, and tips in a shared folder or chat channel
- Provide feedback on what works, what doesn't, and where you might need assistance

Months 10+

- Participate in refresher training or quick-start sessions as new features or guidelines are introduced
- Help identify new opportunities for AI use

Superusers

Role: *Identify best practices, champion the use of AI, drive efficiency and quality improvement(s)*

Months 3-6

- Identify 1–2 staff who are interested in learning more about AI, and help advance their capabilities
- Lead small pilot projects and document before / after results
- Build a "context library" of best practices for users across your organization

Months 7-9

- Host informal office hours or Q&A sessions for staff
- Help review AI-generated content before it goes public
- Collect feedback and suggest improvements to guidelines and training

Months 10+

- Work with business area(s) to identify opportunities for AI to support
- Communicate to leadership

*__This strategy is directional__ – every municipality will adopt AI in accordance with its comfort and priorities; these steps can and should be adapted to best fit your organization. For organizations at the onset of their AI journey, the prevailing best practice is to 'get started and try' and learn as you go.

Navigating through 2026-27

While AI is progressing rapidly, it is still possible to be confident about what will and won't happen over the next 12-18 months. Today, chatbots and services like ChatGPT are widely available and partially adopted, but the frontier of current AI development is focused on **Agents** – these are chatbots that interact with you and perform actions on your behalf.

THE (CURRENT) AGENTIC FRONTIER

From the moment ChatGPT was released, people began to look ahead and wonder what it would be like when LLMs could interact with the real world for us – like ordering your groceries, planning (and booking) your next trip, or reading and responding to your email. There were two problems with making this a reality: models weren't reliable enough and the IT infrastructure to 'connect the dots' did not exist.

Almost three years later, both problems have been solved and these early predictions are slowly becoming a reality. Today, Agents can connect to your systems and retrieve context for you. For example, on ChatGPT or Co-pilot, you can connect a deep research Agent to your inbox and have it scan all your emails. You can ask "*who have I sent an email to that hasn't responded yet*?" or "*show me all the contacts from XYZ org and summarize the interactions to date for me*".

COMING SOON: AGENTS THAT CAN TAKE ACTION

While these tools are powerful, almost all current public implementations will restrict an Agent to passively retrieving information (i.e., one-step interaction that only gathers and summarizes information). The next major step to watch is Agents that can also take action in systems directly (e.g., not just gather and summarize an email, but draft and send a reply). ChatGPT has already signaled their move in this direction with a developer beta already underway.

This new level of interactivity will introduce new and important risks to the use of AI in your municipality while also greatly increasing the potential value of the system. Properly navigating this stage will be where your investments will pay off: policy clarity, security guardrails, and most importantly, your own personal experience in using and understanding how AI can best be applied to benefit your residents.

THE BEST TIME TO START IS NOW

With the release of ChatGPT 5 in August 2025, the world got an important update – models continue to improve, but there is no major disruption in the immediate future. AI labs will have to significantly upgrade their training and data centre infrastructure to create a significantly more powerful (LLM) model(s) than what we have today.

Don't let this time go to waste – use the next 12 months to lay the governance foundation, get hand's-on experience, and experiment with today's Agents so you can take advantage the 'next wave'. Currently, it is expected for data centre and energy projects to bear fruit in 2027, leading to another cycle of disruption and innovation.

Your organization's AI journey starts with one question:

"What would help us serve residents better?"

Start Where You Are - every municipality featured in this toolkit started with questions, concerns, a goal, and a first step.

- The Town of Drayton Valley sought to retain internal knowledge, empower its operators, and improve operations – using AI it optimized chemical usage, achieved substantial savings, and improved water quality for its residents'.

- The City of Edmonton wanted to improve and automate its permitting processes – it has since saved millions of dollars and drastically reduced wait times using an AI-powered online solution.

Each organization started with what they had: public documents, existing data, and staff willing to experiment. Your organization's AI journey starts with one question: *what would help us serve residents better?*

The answer might be faster permit approvals, clearer communications, or smarter resource allocation.

Whatever it is, there's likely an AI application that can help — starting tomorrow, with tools available today, using information you already have.

TO RECAP:

- AI amplifies municipal expertise; it **does not** replace it
- Context is your superpower — only you know what matters locally and to residents
- Small wins build confidence and capability
- Security enables innovation when done thoughtfully
- Experiment safely today to serve your residents better tomorrow

.

Eight (8) Tasks to Try

TASK #1: DRAFT A RESPONSE TO A RESIDENT INQUIRY

Description: Every day municipal staff respond to inquiries from residents, and AI can help you draft responses in seconds rather than minutes.

How to Try: Copy a resident's email into your AI tool removing any names, addresses, and other personally identifiable information details first. Ask the AI to 'draft a professional response to this resident inquiry.' Review and edit the draft to add specific details and your municipal voice.

Tool(s): Any chat-based empower AI tool (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, Gemini)

TASK #2: REWRITE A BYLAW NOTICE IN PLAIN LANGUAGE

Description: Complex regulatory language can create barriers for residents when trying to properly interpret and comply with bylaws. AI can help to translate dense regulatory / legal text into language that is easier to understand and follow.

How to Try: Paste a section of your bylaw or official notice in an empower AI tool, and ask the solution to 'rewrite this in plain language for residents, keeping all important legal requirements but making it easier to understand.'

Tool(s): Any chat-based empower AI tool (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, Gemini)

TASK #3: SUMMARIZE A RECENT COUNCIL MEETING

Description: Turn (often) lengthy meeting minutes into digestible summaries that highlight key decisions, action items, and what matters most to residents.

How to Try: Upload or paste your meeting minutes into an AI tool and ask for 'a one-page summary with key decisions, action items, and deadlines in bullet points.'

Tool(s): Any chat-based empower AI tool (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, Gemini)

TASK #4: SUMMARIZE COUNCIL PACKAGES IN ADVANCE

Description: Help council members prepare for meetings by creating executive summaries of agenda packages. These can allow members of council to direct and focus their attention on higher priority items.

How to Try: Upload the full agenda package PDF. Ask the AI to 'create a 2-page executive summary highlighting controversial items, budget implications, and decisions'.

Tool(s): Any chat-based empower AI tool (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, Gemini)

TASK #5: RESEARCH WHAT OTHER MUNICIPALITIES ARE DOING

Description: discover how similar-sized municipalities handle similar municipal issues and / or priorities, from physician relocation and attraction policies to backyard chicken bylaws.

How to Try: Ask specific questions like 'How are municipalities with 10,000-20,000 residents handling recreational cannabis regulations?' Use follow-up questions to dig deeper.

Tool(s): Perplexity.ai or ChatGPT with web search enabled (**note**: Beacon Bid can also be used, providing users the capability to keyword search council meeting packages from across Canada)

TASK #6: ANALYZE COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Description: Assess and analyze hundreds of responses from residents or consultation comments into clear themes and actionable insights.

How to Try: Export your survey data and / or comments into formats that can be uploaded (e.g., .CSV, .xlsx, emails). Upload the file(s) into a solution and ask to 'identify the top 5 themes in this feedback and provide supporting quotes for each theme.'

Tool(s): Any chat-based empower AI tool (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, Gemini)

TASK #7: CREATE A PROCUREMENT FIRST DRAFT

Description: Generate a request-for-proposal (RFP) draft based on your project requirements and successful examples from other municipalities.

How to Try: Provide your project scope, requirements, and an example of an RFP developed by your organization, and ask the solution to 'draft an RFP based on the documentation provided and please incorporate any best practices from neighbouring municipalities in Alberta'.

Tool(s): Any chat-based empower AI tool (e.g., ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, Beacon Bid)

TASK #8: BUILD AN INTERACTIVE TOOL WITH CLAUDE

Description: Create calculators, dashboards, or interactive tools that council and residents can use to solve a simple problem - no coding experience required.

How to Try: Open Claude and describe what you want: 'Create an interactive property tax calculator where users input their assessment value and get their estimated tax.' Claude will build it instantly in an 'Artifact' you can share.

Tool(s): Claude.ai (free or Pro) - specifically use 'Create an Artifact' command

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