

**DURHAM COUNTY GOVERNMENT**  
Information Services & Technology

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# Artificial Intelligence Governance Framework

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*Responsible Innovation in Public Service*

Effective Date: November 2025  
Review Cycle: Annual  
Owner: Chief Information Officer, Durham County IS&T  
Version: 1.0

## Executive Summary

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Durham County Government is committed to responsible innovation. Artificial Intelligence represents one of the most significant opportunities and responsibilities facing local government today. This AI Governance Framework establishes the principles, policies, processes, and oversight structures that guide how Durham County adopts, evaluates, and governs AI technologies across its 32 departments and enterprise-wide operations.

This framework serves three core purposes:

- Protect residents and employees by ensuring AI is deployed safely, equitably, and transparently
- Enable innovation by providing a clear, consistent pathway for evaluating and advancing AI use cases
- Demonstrate institutional accountability by establishing measurable governance standards aligned to national best practices

As a recognized leader in the NACo Digital Counties Survey, Durham County Information Services and Technology is committed to not only adopting modern technology but governing it with the same rigor applied to all public services. This framework reflects input from department leaders, the Durham County AI Working Group, and alignment with the U.S. Department of Labor AI Literacy Framework, the National Institute of Standards and Technology AI Risk Management Framework, and emerging state and federal guidance.

This framework is fully operational across Durham County's 32 departments and supports active enterprise AI deployments, including AskDCo, AskAlex, Microsoft Copilot, and AI-assisted service management platforms. Durham County has moved from AI experimentation to enterprise execution, with governance structures actively applied to all AI initiatives.

Durham County Information Services & Technology reviews and updates this framework annually to ensure it remains current with the evolving AI landscape, regulatory environment, and County strategic priorities.

# 01 Purpose & Scope

## 1.1 Purpose

This framework defines how Durham County Government evaluates, approves, governs, and continuously monitors the use of artificial intelligence technologies. It is designed to:

- Balance innovation with governance, risk management, and fiscal stewardship
- Establish consistent enterprise-wide standards for AI adoption
- Protect the privacy, civil rights, and dignity of Durham County residents and employees
- Ensure AI use aligns with the County's strategic priorities and public service mission
- Support Durham County's ongoing recognition as a leading Digital County

## 1.2 Scope

This framework applies to all Durham County departments, divisions, and employees who:

- Propose, evaluate, procure, or deploy AI technologies or AI-enabled systems
- Use AI tools in the course of County business, including vendor-supplied platforms with embedded AI features
- Manage data or processes that feed into or are affected by AI systems

This framework covers all AI modalities in use or under consideration, including but not limited to:

AI Type	Examples in Government Context
Generative AI	Drafting communications, summarizing documents, chatbots
Predictive Analytics	Resource planning, demand forecasting, risk scoring
Computer Vision	Document processing, facility monitoring
Natural Language Processing	Public-facing virtual assistants, translation services
Decision Support Tools	Case management recommendations, permit routing
Process Automation (AI-enhanced)	Workflow automation, intelligent document routing

## 02 Guiding Principles for Responsible AI

Durham County's use of AI is governed by six foundational principles. These principles apply to every phase of the AI lifecycle, from proposal through retirement.

Principle	What It Means	How We Apply It
Transparency	Residents and employees have a right to know when and how AI is being used.	We publish our AI use cases, governance framework, and oversight mechanisms publicly at <a href="https://dconc.gov">dconc.gov</a> .
Equity & Fairness	AI must not create or reinforce bias, discrimination, or disparate impact.	All AI use cases undergo an equity review before deployment. Tools that produce disparate outcomes are modified or discontinued.
Privacy & Data Protection	Personal data used in AI systems must be handled with the highest care.	AI systems must comply with County data governance standards, applicable law, and privacy impact assessment requirements.
Accountability	Human decision-makers remain responsible for AI-informed decisions.	No AI system autonomously makes final determinations that materially affect residents. Humans remain in the loop.
Security	AI systems must not introduce unacceptable cybersecurity risk.	All AI tools undergo security review by Enterprise Security & Compliance before deployment.
Public Benefit	AI must deliver measurable value to residents, employees, or County operations.	Value metrics are defined before deployment and tracked post-launch.

## 03 AI Governance Structure & Roles

Effective AI governance requires clear ownership, coordinated oversight, and shared accountability across leadership levels. Durham County IS&T leads this governance structure in partnership with department heads, legal, and HR.

### 3.1 Governance Bodies

Role / Body	Responsibilities
Chief Information Officer (CIO)	Provides executive oversight and final approval authority for enterprise-impacting AI initiatives. Sets the strategic direction for AI adoption aligned to County priorities.
Deputy CIO	Day-to-day leadership of AI governance operations. Chairs or co-chairs the DCo AI Working Group. Oversees intake, review, and reporting processes.
DCo AI Working Group	Cross-functional body responsible for evaluating AI use case proposals, applying evaluation criteria, and generating recommendations for CIO review. Includes representatives from IS&T divisions, Legal, HR, and department stakeholders.
Enterprise Security & Compliance	Reviews all AI tools for cybersecurity risk, data protection, and regulatory compliance prior to approval.
Department AI Liaisons	Designated contacts within each department who identify AI opportunities, submit use case proposals, and serve as implementation champions.
County Attorney	Advises on legal, contractual, and liability considerations associated with AI use, particularly in high-risk domains.

### 3.2 Escalation & Decision Rights

Initiative Type	Decision Authority	Escalation Path
Low-risk pilot / proof of concept	IS&T Leadership	DCo AI Working Group review → Deputy CIO approval
Departmental AI tool adoption	CIO	DCo AI Working Group → Deputy CIO recommendation → CIO approval
Enterprise-wide AI implementation	CIO + County Manager	DCo AI Working Group → CIO → County Manager briefing
High-risk or sensitive use cases*	CIO + County Attorney + County Manager	Full governance review with legal and executive sign-off

*\*High-risk use cases include AI applied to law enforcement support, benefits eligibility, child welfare, employment decisions, or any system affecting protected classes.*

## 04 AI Use Case Intake & Evaluation

### 4.1 Intake Channels

AI ideas and use cases originate from multiple entry points across the organization:

- IS&T division staff and technical teams
- CIO and IS&T leadership
- Department AI Liaisons and department directors
- Existing enterprise initiatives and pilots (e.g., productivity tools, service management platforms, digital assistants)
- Vendor demonstrations or peer government benchmarking

All proposed use cases are documented using the standardized AI Use Case Intake Form and routed to the DCo AI Working Group for initial review. Intake forms are available via the IT Service Management Portal.

### 4.2 Standard Evaluation Criteria

Each AI use case is evaluated using a consistent, enterprise-wide set of criteria across six domains:

#### A. Strategic Alignment

- Alignment with County strategic priorities and CIO goals
- Support for operational efficiency, service delivery, or modernization objectives
- Consistency with the County's IT Strategic Plan

#### B. Value & Impact

- Expected operational efficiency gains or cost savings
- Impact on constituent experience and/or employee productivity
- Ability to improve decision-making, accuracy, or service outcomes
- Measurability, can success be tracked and reported?

#### C. Equity & Civil Rights

- Assessment of potential for disparate impact on protected groups
- Review of training data for bias or underrepresentation
- Accessibility compliance, including ADA Title II and WCAG 2.1 Level AA
- Public trust and community perception considerations

#### D. Data Readiness

- Availability, quality, and reliability of required data
- Compliance with data governance and records management requirements

- Identification of sensitive or personally identifiable information (PII) involved

#### **E. Security, Privacy & Risk**

- Cybersecurity posture and threat considerations
- Privacy and data protection impacts (Privacy Impact Assessment required for high-risk tools)
- Alignment with County AI Policy and responsible AI principles
- Vendor contract review including data retention, ownership, and audit rights

#### **F. Technical Feasibility**

- Technical complexity and implementation effort
- Integration with existing systems and platforms
- Availability of internal skills or vendor support
- Total cost of ownership and licensing sustainability

#### **G. Scalability & Reuse**

- Ability to scale beyond a single department
- Potential for reuse across multiple functions or services
- Contribution to enterprise AI capability maturity

## 05 Review, Recommendation & Approval

### 5.1 Review Process

The DCo AI Working Group reviews each use case against the evaluation criteria within 15 business days of a complete intake submission. The review process includes:

- Initial completeness check by IS&T staff
- Multi-criteria scoring using the AI Use Case Evaluation Scorecard
- Equity and civil rights screen
- Security and privacy preliminary assessment
- Working Group consensus discussion and recommendation

### 5.2 Recommendation Outcomes

The DCo AI Working Group determines one of the following outcomes for each use case:

Recommendation	Description
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Advance as Proof of Concept	Low-risk proof of concept approved to proceed with IS&T leadership support. Time-boxed (typically 60–90 days) with defined success metrics.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Recommend for Enterprise Deployment	Use case meets all criteria and is recommended for full implementation with appropriate project management and change management support.
Defer	Promising use case requires additional information, data readiness improvements, or organizational readiness before proceeding.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conditional Approval	Approved with specific conditions or modifications required (e.g., additional privacy controls, accessibility remediation).
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Decline	Use case declined due to misalignment with County priorities, unacceptable risk, legal concerns, or technical infeasibility.

### 5.3 Decision & Approval Authority

- Low-risk pilots / proofs of concept proceed with IS&T leadership approval to encourage innovation and learning.
- Departmental AI tool adoption: Requires formal CIO review and approval.
- Enterprise-impacting or high-risk initiatives: Require CIO approval and County Manager briefing.

<b>KEY PRINCIPLE</b>	This tiered approach enables rapid experimentation while maintaining executive oversight for higher-risk or higher-impact initiatives. Innovation speed and governance rigor are not mutually exclusive.
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## 06 AI Lifecycle Management

Governance does not end at approval. Durham County applies an active lifecycle management approach to all deployed AI systems.

### 6.1 Pre-Deployment Requirements

- Defined success metrics and baseline measurements established
- User training and AI literacy support completed for affected staff
- Public-facing disclosures published where applicable (see Section 7)
- Vendor contract terms reviewed and approved by County Attorney
- Security and Privacy Review Signed Off by Enterprise Security & Compliance

### 6.2 Post-Deployment Monitoring

All active AI systems are subject to ongoing monitoring:

Monitoring Activity	Frequency
Performance vs. defined success metrics	Quarterly
Equity and bias review	Semi-annual
Security posture assessment	Annual (or upon vendor change)
User feedback collection	Continuous
Vendor compliance review	Annual
AI Use Case Registry update	Ongoing — within 30 days of material change

### 6.3 AI Retirement

AI systems that no longer meet performance, equity, or strategic standards are evaluated for retirement. Retirement decisions follow the same approval tiers as initial deployment. Data retention and deletion obligations are enforced in accordance with County records management policy.

## 07 Transparency & Public Accountability

Durham County believes residents have a right to know how AI is used in government services that affect their lives. Transparency is not optional; it is foundational to public trust.

### 7.1 Public AI Use Case Registry

Durham County IS&T is implementing a public AI Use Case Registry to provide transparency into how AI is used across County operations. The registry includes the following information:

- Name and description of each deployed AI system
- Department(s) using the tool
- Purpose and intended outcomes
- Data types involved (without exposing sensitive configurations)
- Vendor name (where applicable)
- Date of deployment and last review

### 7.2 Public-Facing AI Disclosures

Wherever residents interact with an AI-powered service, such as the dconc.gov AI chatbot, Durham County ensures the following:

- Clearly disclose that the service is AI-powered
- Provide plain-language explanation of what the AI does and does not do
- Offer a human escalation path for residents who prefer not to interact with AI
- Include a link to this Governance Framework for residents who want to learn more

### 7.3 Annual AI Accountability Report

Beginning in fiscal year 2027, which starts July 1, 2026, Durham County IS&T will publish an annual AI Accountability Report to provide transparency into AI outcomes, governance performance, and continuous improvement efforts. The report will summarize:

- Active AI use cases and outcomes achieved
- Equity findings and any remediation actions taken
- New use cases evaluated and decisions made
- Lessons learned and framework updates

### 7.4 Public Feedback

Residents can submit questions, concerns, or feedback about Durham County's use of AI through the County's Public Information Office.

## 08 Funding, Procurement & Vendor Management

### 8.1 Funding Approach

- Early-stage initiatives are funded through innovation reserves within the IS&T operating budget.
- Approved initiatives are integrated into existing project budgets or advanced through formal Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) or budget amendment processes.
- Departments seeking to fund AI tools through their own budgets must complete the AI use case intake and approval process.

### 8.2 Procurement Standards

All AI vendor procurements must include contractual requirements for:

- Data ownership: County retains ownership of all data provided to or generated by the vendor
- Data residency: data must remain within approved geographic and jurisdictional boundaries
- Audit rights: County reserves the right to audit AI system outputs and vendor practices
- Transparency: vendors must disclose material changes to AI models or training data
- Security: vendors must meet County cybersecurity standards and provide SOC 2 Type II or equivalent documentation
- Exit provisions: contracts must include data return and deletion obligations upon termination

### 8.3 Vendor Risk Classification

Risk Tier	Description & Review Requirements
Tier 1 High Risk	AI systems that inform decisions about individual residents (benefits, permits, employment). Require County Attorney review, Privacy Impact Assessment, and CIO approval.
Tier 2 Moderate Risk	AI systems supporting internal operations with indirect resident impact. Require standard procurement review and CIO approval.
Tier 3 Low Risk	Productivity tools with embedded AI features (e.g., grammar checking, meeting transcription). Require IS&T leadership approval and security review.

## 09 AI Literacy & Workforce Development

Durham County IS&T recognizes that governance frameworks are only as effective as the people who implement them. A foundational commitment to AI literacy across our workforce is essential.

### 9.1 Staff AI Literacy Program

Durham County's AI literacy curriculum, aligned to the U.S. Department of Labor AI Literacy Framework, is delivered through Durham County IT department. The program includes:

Training Track	Target Audience
AI Foundations for County Employees	All County staff - baseline awareness of AI concepts, risks, and responsible use
AI for Public Service Leaders	Department directors, managers, and supervisors - applying AI governance concepts to service delivery decisions
Technical AI Implementation	IS&T staff and department tech leads - hands-on implementation, prompt engineering, and tool evaluation
AI Ethics & Equity	HR, Legal, and policy staff - bias, civil rights, and fairness in AI-powered government services

### 9.2 Department AI Liaison Network

Each department designates an AI Liaison responsible for:

- Serving as the department's primary contact for AI use case intake
- Completing annual AI governance training
- Reporting AI tool usage and outcomes to IS&T
- Championing responsible AI practices within their department

### 9.3 Public AI Literacy

Durham County IS&T supports community AI literacy through digital equity programs, library partnerships, and public workshops to ensure residents understand how AI affects the services they receive.

## 10 Compliance, Legal & Regulatory Alignment

Durham County's AI governance practices are designed to comply with applicable law and align with emerging national standards. These requirements are actively incorporated into Durham County's AI governance processes and applied to all AI systems in use.

### 10.1 Applicable Legal & Regulatory Requirements

Requirement	Relevance to AI Governance
ADA Title II / WCAG 2.1 Level AA	All public-facing AI tools and AI-generated content must meet accessibility standards. (Compliance deadline: April 2026)
North Carolina Public Records Law	AI-generated records, logs, and decisions are subject to public records requests in accordance with North Carolina law.
FERPA / HIPAA / PII Protections	AI tools handling education, health, or personally identifiable data must comply with applicable federal privacy law.
NC G.S. § 132 (Public Records)	Vendor contracts must address AI-generated records and audit log retention.
Executive Order on AI Safety (Federal)	Durham County monitors federal AI governance guidance and updates practices accordingly.
NIST AI Risk Management Framework	Durham County uses the NIST AI RMF as a reference standard for risk assessment and lifecycle management.

### 10.2 Policy Relationship

This Governance Framework operates in concert with the following County policies:

- Durham County Information Security Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy
- Data Governance and Records Management Policy
- Procurement and Contract Standards
- Non-Discrimination and Equal Opportunity Policy

## 11 Framework Maintenance & Review

This framework is a living document. The AI landscape evolves rapidly, and Durham County's governance must keep pace.

### 11.1 Annual Review

The AI Governance Framework is reviewed annually by the DCo AI Working Group and the CIO, with updates approved by the CIO. Reviews consider the following:

- Changes in the regulatory and legal environment
- New AI technologies and risk categories
- Lessons learned from implemented use cases
- Peer government benchmarking and Digital Counties Survey criteria
- Input from department AI liaisons and employee feedback

This review process ensures that Durham County's AI governance practices remain aligned with evolving technology, regulatory requirements, and organizational priorities.

### 11.2 Version Control

Version	Date & Summary
1.0	November 2025: Initial framework publication
1.x	Future versions are documented here as updates are approved

### 11.3 Contact & Feedback

Questions about this framework or Durham County's AI governance practices can be directed to:

<b>CONTACT</b>	Office of the CIO, Durham County Information Services & Technology   <a href="https://dconc.gov/Info-Services-and-Technology">dconc.gov/Info-Services-and-Technology</a>   (919) 560-0000
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