10 Steps

TO RESPONSIBLE AND EFFECTIVE USE OF GENERATIVE AI

Artificial intelligence (AI) technology is advancing at a rapid pace. It seems like there are new AI tools on the market every week, along with new applications of AI technology. With the introduction of tools like Microsoft Copilot and Google Gemini, generative AI is becoming more prevalent in your personal and professional lives. Because this technology is so new and evolving so quickly, many people aren't sure if it is suitable for use in local government—and if so, how it should be used. These debates aren't likely to be settled soon, but in the meantime, we've compiled the following advice you can use to encourage responsible and effective use of generative AI in your work. (For a deeper dive on generative AI in local government, check out "Building an AI Ready Government," by Micah Gaudet in the October 2024 issue of *GFR*.)

1 **Consult your organization's policies regarding use of generative AI.** If your organization has policies on use of tools like ChatGPT, take note of any restrictions or prohibited behavior. If your organization doesn't have policies consult with your supervisor, IT, HR, and/or legal representatives.

2 **Dip your toe in the water.** If you've never tried to do anything with generative AI, start with something simple and try out different tools. A quick internet search will direct you to the latest tools, including ChatGPT, Claude, or Copilot. Try using one of these to compose an email response or help plan a meeting agenda.

3 **Refrain from sharing any information that is private, sensitive, confidential, or proprietary with generative AI tools.** This one may go without saying, but you don't want to feed this type of information to public generative AI models, as it can then be shared with other users and expose you or your government to liability.

4 **Maintain appropriate skepticism** about the results provided by generative AI, which are known to "hallucinate" and provide flat-out wrong answers to questions. Review and fact-check your results.

5 **Reference your use of AI-generated content** and the way you used AI in a final document or output, particularly if you are using a chatbot to help draft a document. Also, be aware of the sources that the AI used to generate your content. AI may not realize it's a biased source.

6 **Use generative AI anytime you have a "blank-page problem"** when writing something and need help getting off the starting block. Ask for many creative options. Most of them will be bad, but there is often a gold nugget or two. Don't use the work as your own, but asking AI can be very similar to asking peers or other people for ideas.

7 **Experiment with different prompts.** What you ask generative AI to provide and how you ask it affects the results. It can be helpful to ask the AI model to assume a particular persona. For example, you might ask, "Imagine you are the CFO of a local government, and you need to complete task X. How would you approach it?" Don't forget to maintain skepticism (see No. 4 above). You probably can't take the AI's answer word-for-word, but you should get a few good ideas to build on.

8 **Maintain a list of prompts that have served you well.** As you continue to use generative AI, keep track of prompts that have generated helpful results. Share it with your colleagues and ask them to keep you posted on how well the prompts work for them. This allows you to test prompts with a larger group of users.

9 **Use generative AI to suggest formulas when you have a sophisticated operation to perform in Microsoft Excel.** Need to do a V-Lookup? Want to apply some conditional formatting? Trying to figure out index matching? Ask a generative AI tool to help you with the formulas. Again, just remember not to share any private or sensitive data with the tool.

10 **Invest in training your staff in the use of generative AI.** As Micah Gaudet points out in "Building an AI Ready Government" (*GFR*, October 2024), "Imagine the frustration of spending time to create robust accounting policies while ignoring the need to train team members on how to use accounting software. A city that does this would be rolling the dice and waiting for the inevitable audit to reveal some kind of bad practice. The same philosophy applies to generative AI. Employees need to know how to use the tools to use them safely and effectively."