

Australia requires federal agencies to name AI officials and publish AI statements

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Responsible choices: a new policy for using AI in the Australian Government

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The Australian Government needs a coordinated approach if it's to embrace the opportunities of AI. The Digital Transformation Agency has released the Policy for the responsible use of AI in government, an important step to achieve this goal while building public trust.

Coming into effect 1 September 2024, the Policy for the responsible use of AI in government positions the Australian Government to be an exemplar of safe, responsible use of AI.

Designed to evolve with technology and community expectations, it sets out how the Australian Public Service (APS) will:

- embrace the benefits of AI by engaging with it confidently, safely and responsibly

- strengthen public trust through enhanced transparency, governance and risk assurance

- adapt over time by embedding a forward-learning approach to changes in both technology and policy environments.

'This policy will ensure the Australian Government demonstrates leadership in embracing AI to benefit Australians,' states Lucy Poole, General Manager for Strategy, Planning, and Performance.

'Engaging with AI in a safe, ethical and responsible way is how we will meet community expectations and build public trust.'

Enable, engage and evolve

The policy is driven by the 'enable, engage and evolve' framework to introduce principles, mandatory requirements and recommended actions.

Enable and prepare

Agencies will safely engage with AI to enhance productivity, decision-making, policy outcomes and government service delivery by establishing clear accountabilities for its adoption and use.

Every agency will need to identify accountable officials and provide them to the DTA within 90 days of the policy effect date.

Engage responsibly

To protect Australians from harm, agencies will use proportional, targeted risk mitigation and ensure their use of AI is transparent and explainable to the public.

Agencies will need to publish a public transparency statement outlining their approach to adopting and using AI within 6 months of the policy effect date.

Evolve and integrate

Flexibility and adaptability are necessary to accommodate technological advances, requiring ongoing review and evaluation of AI uses, and embedding feedback mechanisms throughout government.

Supporting agencies standards and guidance

To help implement the policy, the DTA has published a standard for accountable officials (AOs) to lead their agency to:

uplift its governance of AI adoption

embed a culture that fairly balances risk management and innovation

enhance its response and adaptation to AI policy changes

be involved in cross-government coordination and collaboration.

'We're encouraging AOs to be the primary point of partnership and cooperation inside their agency and between others,' outlines Ms Poole.

'They connect the appropriate internal areas to responsibilities under the policy, collect information and drive agency participation in cross-government activities.'

'Whole-of-government forums will continue to support a coordinated integration of AI into our workplaces and track current and emerging issues.'

The DTA will also soon release a standard for AI transparency statements, setting out the information agencies should make publicly available such as the agency's:

intentions for why it uses or is considering adoption of AI

categories of use where there may be direct public interaction without a human intermediary

governance, processes or other measures to monitor the effectiveness of deployed AI systems

compliance with applicable legislation and regulation

efforts to protect the public against negative impacts.

'Statements must use clear, plain language and avoid technical jargon,' stresses Ms Poole.

Further guidance on additional opportunities and measures will be issued over the coming months.

Continuing our significant work on responsible AI

The last 12 months saw important work to better posture the APS for emerging AI technologies including the AI in Government Taskforce, co-led by the DTA and Department of Industry, Science and Resources (DISR), which concluded on 30 June 2024.

The taskforce brought together secondees and stakeholders from across the APS for an unprecedented level of consultation, collaboration and knowledge-sharing. Its outputs directly informed this new policy and even more, continuing work to ensure a consistent, responsible approach to AI by government.

'Our AI in Government Taskforce was crucial in demonstrating that we need a centralised approach to how government embraces AI, if it wishes to mitigate risks and increase public trust,' states Ms Poole.

Keep up-to-date with news on AI in government by subscribing to the DTA's AI newsletter .

The Digital Transformation Agency is the Australian Government's adviser for the development, delivery and monitoring of whole-of-government strategies, policies and standards, for digital and ICT investments and procurement.