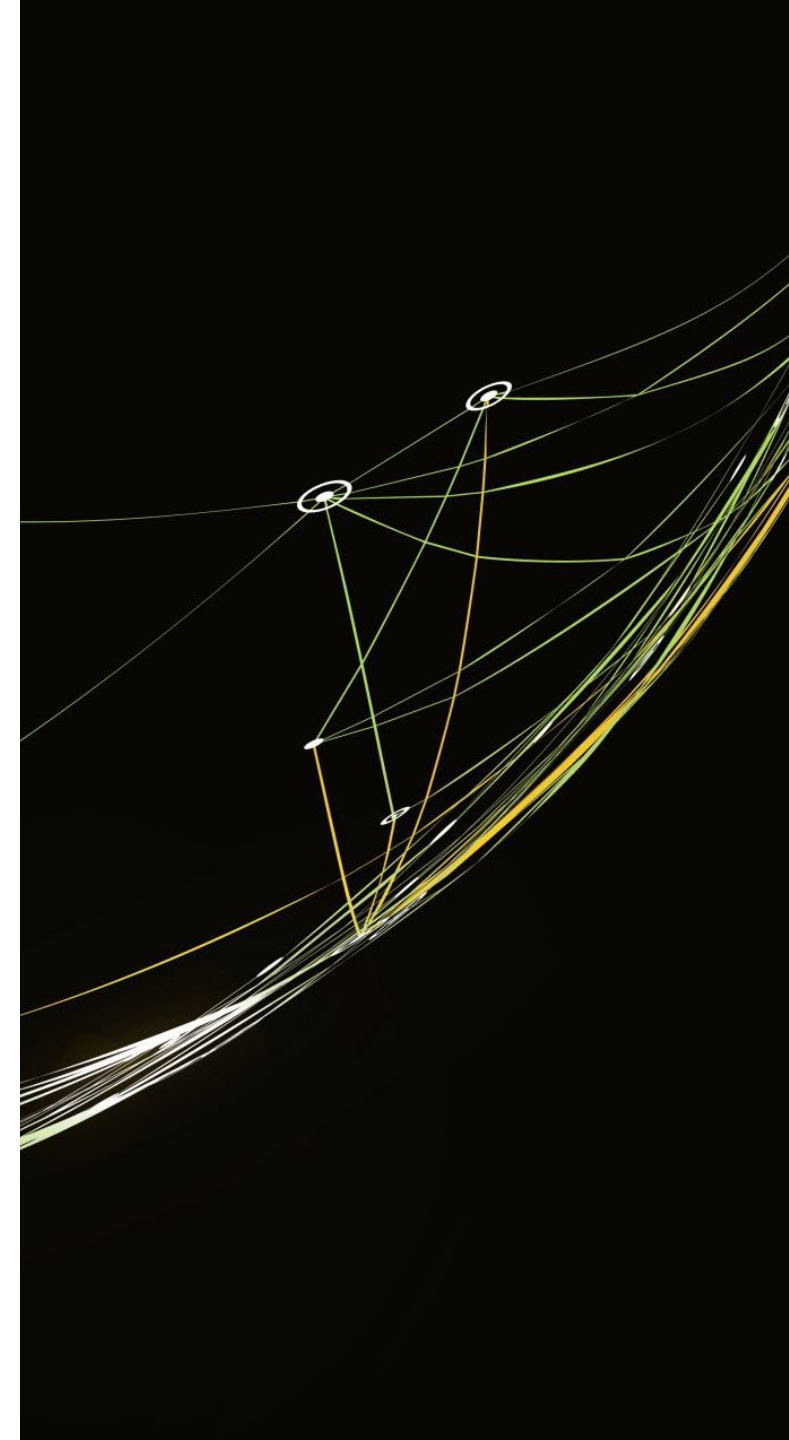# AI FOR PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

"PRACTICAL TOOLS AND RESPONSIBLE USE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT."

Danny Hagen – Skagit County Assessor

Matt King – WaTech, Privacy & Data Protection

WACO Conference 2025

AI is already here in government

- ✅ *Already used by local governments*

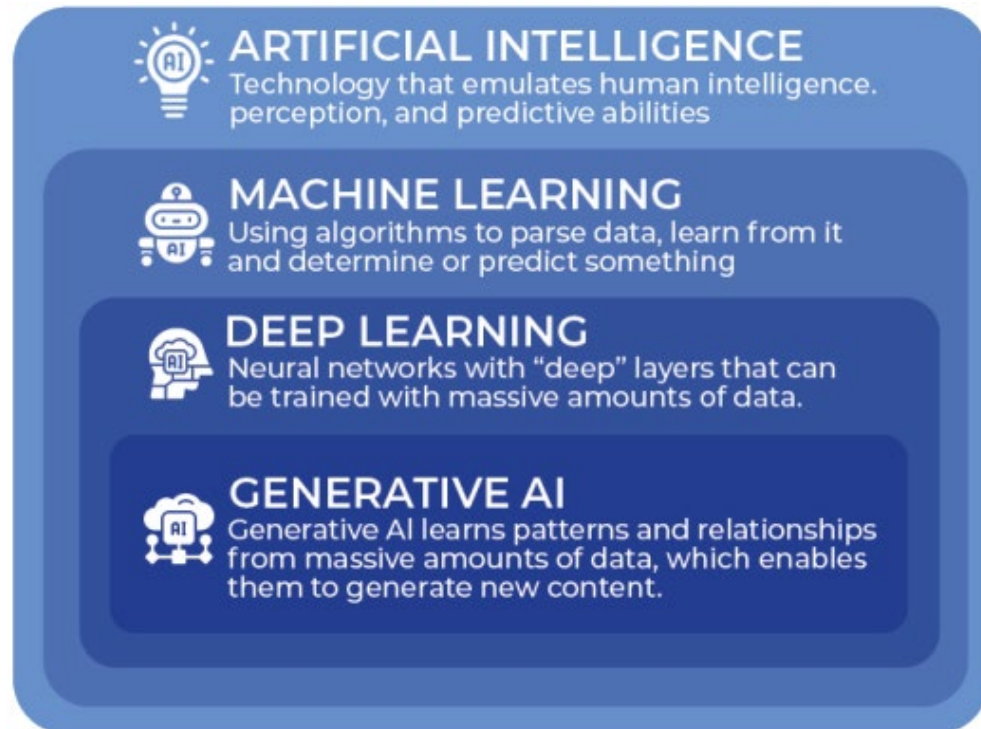- ⚠️ *Raises oversight and transparency questions*

NEWS

The Newsfeed: Records show broad ChatGPT use by WA city officials

A Cascade PBS/KNKX investigation found that AI was used to help write emails to constituents, mayoral letters and other government communications.

Paris Jackson • Aug 29, 2025

What is AI?

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
Technology that emulates human intelligence, perception, and predictive abilities

MACHINE LEARNING
Using algorithms to parse data, learn from it and determine or predict something

DEEP LEARNING
Neural networks with "deep" layers that can be trained with massive amounts of data.

GENERATIVE AI
Generative AI learns patterns and relationships from massive amounts of data, which enables them to generate new content.
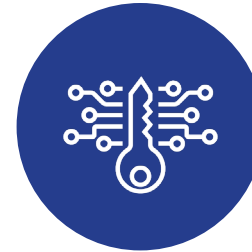
- **Large Language Model:** A specialized type of AI that has been trained on vast amounts of text to understand existing content and generate new, original content.

- **Neural Networks:** A model that, taking inspiration from the brain, is composed of layers consisting of simple connected units or neurons followed by nonlinearities.

Common Ways AI Shows Up

Generative AI

Creates content when prompted by the user. Learns from data to generate more targeted content over time (e.g. Co-Pilot, chatGPT)

Agentic AI

AI agents that are designed to perform tasks in the service of human goals, without direct human intervention (e.g. chat bots, virtual assistants)

Computer Vision

Processes, interprets, and provides insights into visual information (e.g. eel grass scanning, wildfire tracking)

Natural Language Processing

Understands, interprets, and generates human language in a meaningful way. (e.g. language translation)

Sources: WA State Generative AI Report ; Responsible AI in the Public Sector

"**Generative AI**" is a technology that can create content, including text, images, audio, or video, when prompted by a user. Generative AI systems learn patterns and relationships from large amounts of data, which enables systems to generate new content that may be similar, but not identical, to the underlying training data.

   - Executive Order 24-01.

AI in Our Technology

Text

- Chatbots
- Large language models (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Llama, Grok, DeepSeek)

Visual

- Image generation (DALL-E, MidJourney)
- Video generation
- 3D object creation
- Product design

Audio

- Voice cloning
- Music composition
- Sound effects

And More

- Synthetic data
- Robotics behavior

Generative AI in Plain English

- Supercharged autocomplete

- Predicts words from patterns in text

- Generates likely language – not facts

Autocomplete

The annual budget

meeting

Generative AI

The annual budget meeting is scheduled for March 15th, where we will review the proposed expenditures and revenue projections.

AI is like a really fast intern — helpful, but needs review.

Intentional AI

- Solutions that are acquired and used specifically for their AI capabilities

Incidental AI

- New or existing solutions that have generative AI embedded, but it's not their primary purpose

3rd Party AI

- Solutions that are used by entities that interact with, but are not a part of WA state government

What is it good for?

Why Communication is Hard

- Public demand for speed, clarity, and accessibility

- Dense laws and regulations

- Not enough staff time

- Miscommunication undermines trust

AI as a Communication Assistant

- Summarize long reports into short briefs

- Draft press releases, emails, talking points

- Translate legal/technical into plain English

- Adapt tone for citizens, press, staff

- Brainstorm metaphors, visuals, outreach ideas

Turning Tax Jargon into Plain English

Tailoring the Message for Your Audience

Give me one-two sentence bites. One for my county commissioners, one for my local newspaper, one to use with taxpayers, and for a Facebook post.

Here are four tailored versions, each shaped for the audience you named:

For County Commissioners
"We adjust assessed values each year by analyzing actual sales compared to our records—state law requires us to keep assessments aligned with the market so the tax burden stays fair."

For Local Newspaper
"Each year we study property sales across the county and update assessed values so they reflect the real estate market, as required by Washington law."

For Taxpayers
"Your value changes because we look at what homes like yours are really selling for; if they're selling higher or lower than our values, we adjust so everyone pays their fair share."

For Facebook Post
"We don't pick numbers out of thin air—state law requires us to study property sales every year and update assessed values to keep taxes fair and in line with the real market."

Outreach Strategy

I want to get the word out about change of value notices going out in Skagit County and why values are changing. Think like an outreach guru and come up with 3-4 ideas that will help me spread the word.

Here's how you could go beyond the usual press release and make sure people actually *see, hear, and understand* what's happening with their values:

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1. Short Video Explainer (2 minutes max)
Film a simple "at the desk" or "walking downtown" video where you explain—in plain language—why values are changing, when notices are hitting mailboxes, and what people should do if they have questions. Post on Facebook, LinkedIn, and share with local media. Bonus: add captions so it's easy to watch without sound.

2. Graphic + One-Liner for Social Media
Design a clear, branded graphic that says "Change of Value Notices Are in the Mail" with your office logo. Pair it with a one-liner like: "We study actual property sales each year to keep values fair. Your notice explains your 2025 value—check your mailbox this week." Share across Facebook, Nextdoor, maybe even ask partner cities and the county to re-share.

3. Commissioner + City Council Talking Points
Provide a one-page sheet to County Commissioners, Mayors, and Councilmembers with three quick talking points they can use when residents ask them about it. That way, local leaders amplify your message instead of sending people to social media rumors.

4. Radio/Podcast "Office Hours"
Do a short spot on KSVR or another local station offering a 15-minute Q&A session about the notices. People who don't follow county Facebook pages are often still loyal radio listeners. It also shows openness and accessibility.

SUMMARIZATION

- Public demand for speed, clarity, and accessibility

- Dense laws and regulations

- Not enough staff time

- Miscommunication undermines trust

Why It Matters for Staff & Citizens

- 👨‍💻 Staff: less drafting, more engaging.

- 📢 Citizens: clear, usable info.

- 🌍 Accessibility: plain language + translations.

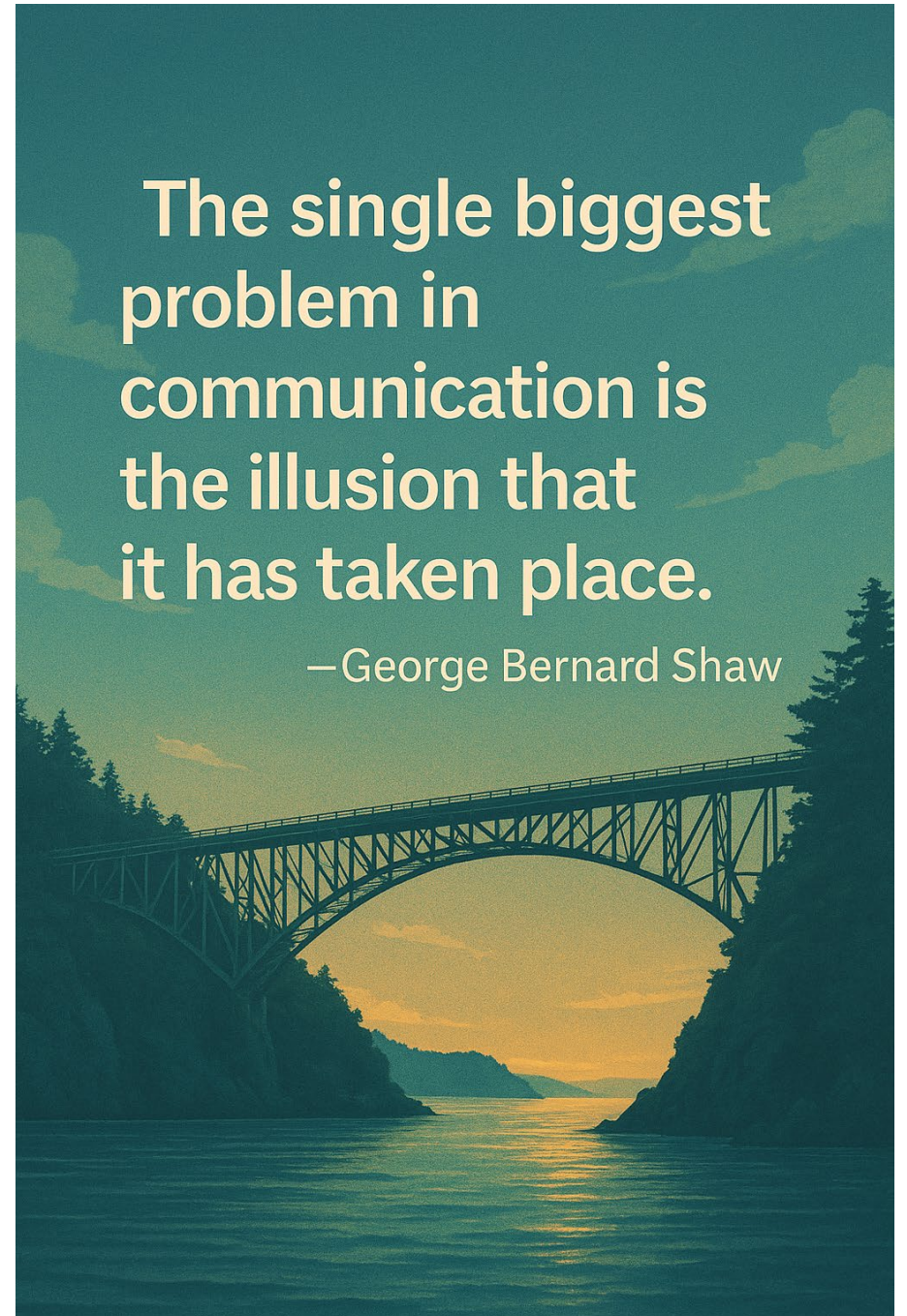- 🕙 Faster answers, quicker corrections.

Trust Through Clarity

- Clear, fast, accessible.

- Government that feels approachable.

- Informed citizens, less frustration.

The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.

—George Bernard Shaw

Best practices for responsible AI

Washington AI Principles

- Safe, secure, and resilient
- Valid and reliable
- Fairness, inclusion, and non-discrimination
- Privacy and data protection
- Accountability and responsibility
- Transparency and auditability
- Explainable and interpretable
- Public purpose and social benefit

- Compared to existing technology, AI can:

  - **Pose similar risks,**
  - **Magnify existing risks, or**
  - **Introduce new risks**

- Risks may or may not decrease as technology advances

- More creativity = less predictability

- **Data privacy**: Impacts due to leakage and unauthorized use, disclosure, or de-anonymization of biometric, health, location, or other personally identifiable information or sensitive data.

- **Confabulation**: The production of confidently stated but erroneous or false content (known colloquially as "hallucinations" or "fabrications") by which users may be misled or deceived.

- **Human-AI configuration**: Arrangement or interactions between a human and an AI system which can result in the human inappropriately anthropomorphizing GAI systems or experiencing algorithmic aversion, automation bias, over-reliance, or emotional entanglement with GAI systems.

- **Do** designate person or group with responsibility for AI use
- **Do** establish clear expectations for staff
- **Do not** put confidential information into free tools
- **Do not** put confidential information into systems without appropriate agreements
- **Do** exercise caution putting confidential information or personal information into systems, even with appropriate agreements
- **Do** document and provide transparency about AI use

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- Conduct human review for any use that involves decision making or public communications:
  - **Is the content accurate?**
  - **If based on other data, is all information up to date?**
  - **Could output be harmful or offensive?**
  - **Is the tone appropriate?**
  - **Does the output reflect potential bias?**
  - **Could the information cause confusion?**

- Humans are ultimately responsible for all content

Live Demo and Q&A

- Presenting budget requests = high-stakes.

- AI drafts a clear case in minutes.

- You bring the facts → AI builds the script.

- Humans refine and deliver.

- Now let's test this with a real scenario from this room.

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Artificial Intelligence Resources

- **Interim Guidelines for Purposeful and Responsible Use of Generative AI**

- **Executive Order 24-01**
    - State of Washington Generative Artificial Intelligence Report
    - Initial Procurement Guidelines for GenAI
    - Implementing Risk Assessments for High-Risk AI Systems
    - Guidelines for Deployment of Generative AI
    - Report of Impact of GenAI on State Workforce
    - Guidance on determining AI risk level

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