

AI Readiness for Regional Government

Turning experimentation into workforce
capability and public value

Robert Hiett

Executive Director

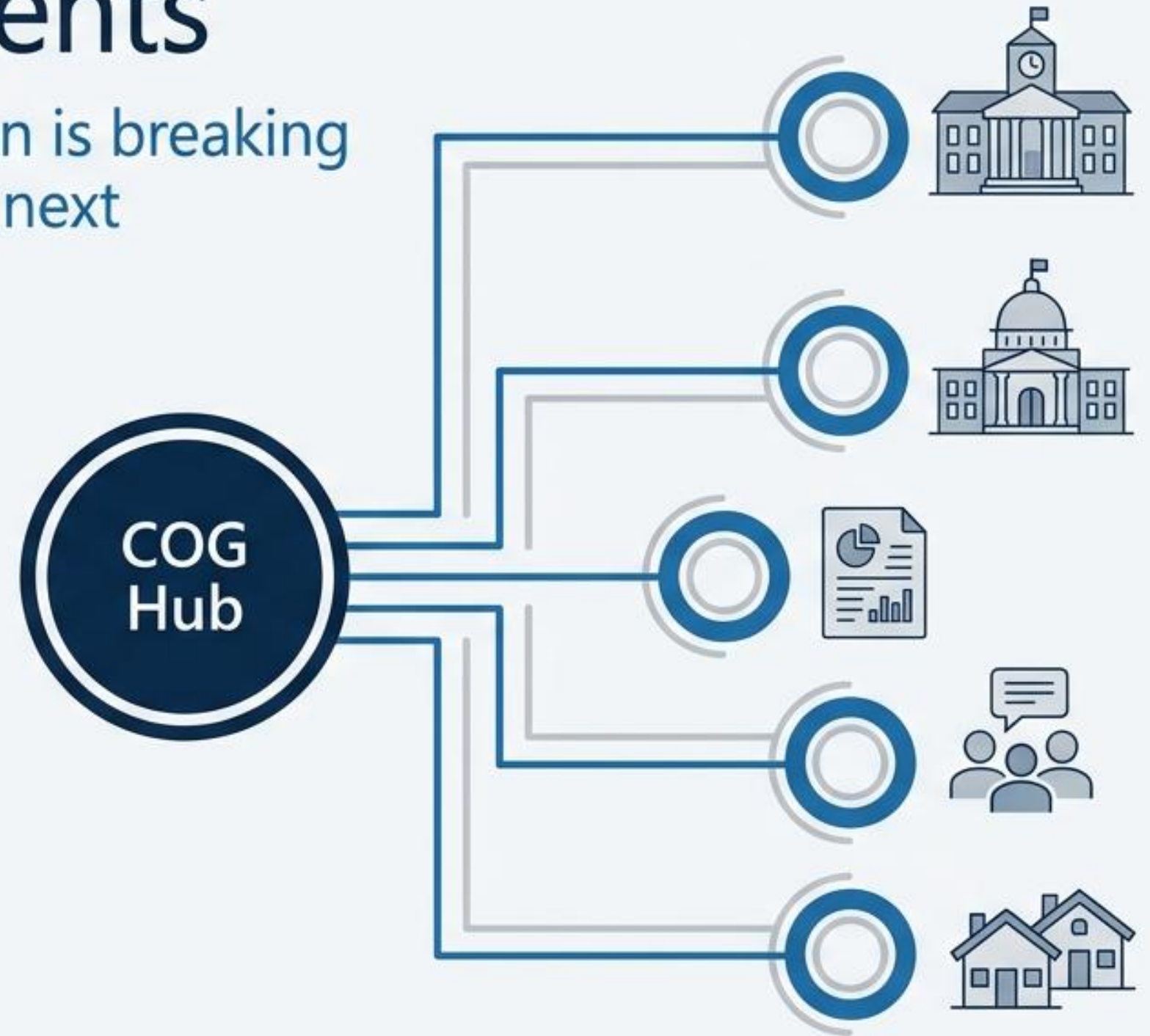
Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments



AI Trends That Matter to Councils of Governments

How people are using AI, where adoption is breaking down, and what COG leaders should do next

- How people are using AI
- Where adoption is breaking down
- What trends matter to staff, managers, and executives
- What COG leaders should do next



For councils of governments and regional public agencies.

A Landmark for Rural Governance: UCPCOG Receives National AI 50 Recognition

THE INNOVATION GAP: RISKS & CONSTRAINTS

Challenges for Rural & Small Metro Agencies.

THE INNOVATION GAP	THE UCPCOG SOLUTION
 Severe IT and Budget Constraints	 Affordable, shared regional AI capacity
 Unmanaged "Shadow AI" Data Risks	 Governed enterprise platforms with visibillity
 Fragmented Local rules and codes	 AI-connected knowledge systems for 24/7 access



Fragmented Local Rules & Codes
Siloed knowledge systems prevent access.

The Innovation Gap vs. UCPCOG Solution

THE INNOVATION GAP	THE UCPCOG SOLUTION
 Severe IT and Budget Constraints	 Affordable, shared regional AI capacity
 Unmanaged "Shadow AI" Data Risks	 Governed enterprise platforms with administrative visibility
 Fragmented local rules and codes	 AI-connected knowledge systems for 24/7 access

AWARD-WINNING FRAMEWORK: SOLUTIONS & LEADERSHIP

AI 50 Award Seal



THE IMPLEMENTATION MODEL

The Three Pillars of Implementation



NATIONAL RECOGNITION & LEADERSHIP



First COG to Receive the National AI 50 Award.

Recognized by the Center for Public Sector AI for pioneering leadership in government technology.



Empowering Rural & Small Metro Governments.

National recognition for providing enterprise-grade AI solutions tailored to resource-constrained public agencies.



A Commitment to Governed AI Solutions.

Focused on moving AI adoption from unmanaged "Shadow AI" to secure, sanctioned alternatives.



SECURE FOUNDATION VIA GovAI ENTERPRISE

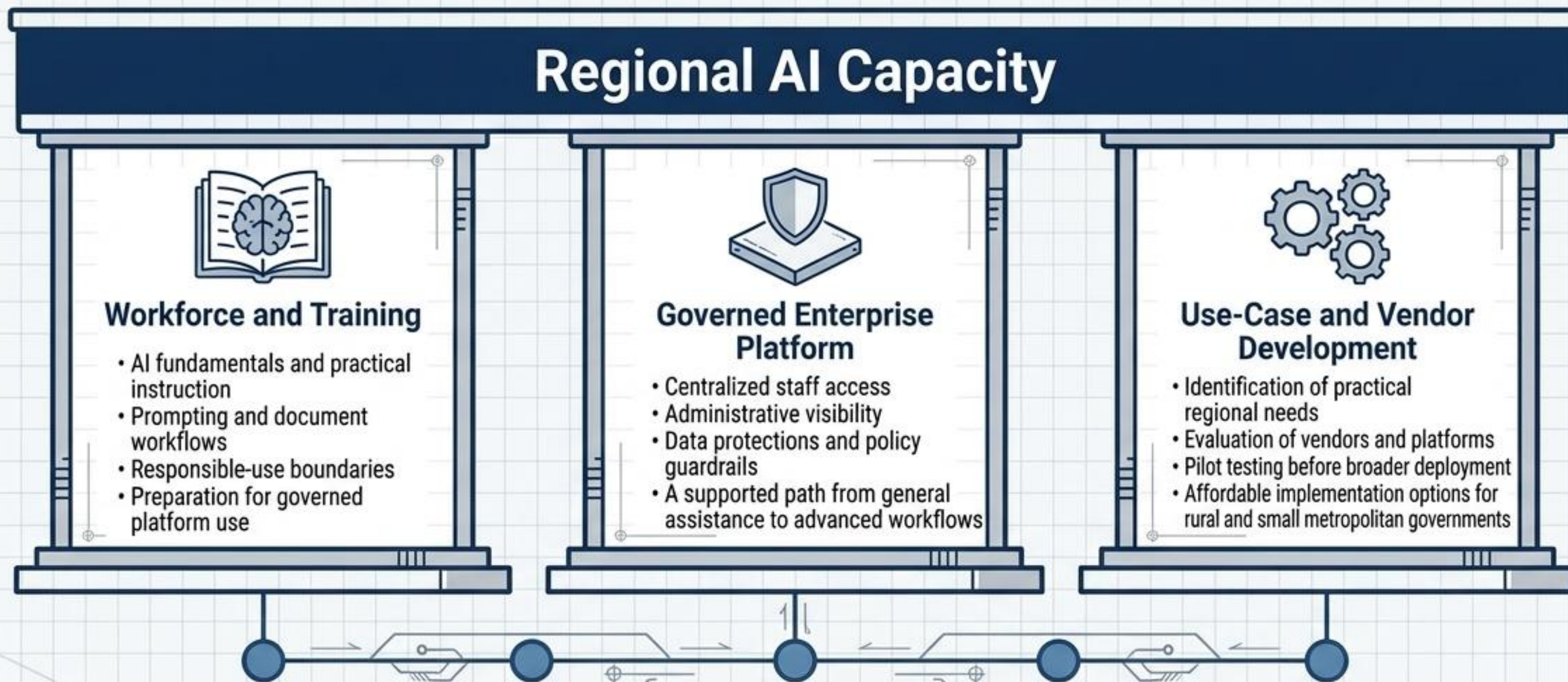
Ensures strict data protection, PII mitigation, and zero-retention controls for public documents.

PRACTICAL IMPACT: From Planning to Public Service



Award-winning pilots like MyTown AI and AskAshleigh prove AI's value in rural contexts.

UCPCOG Is Building AI as Shared Regional Capacity

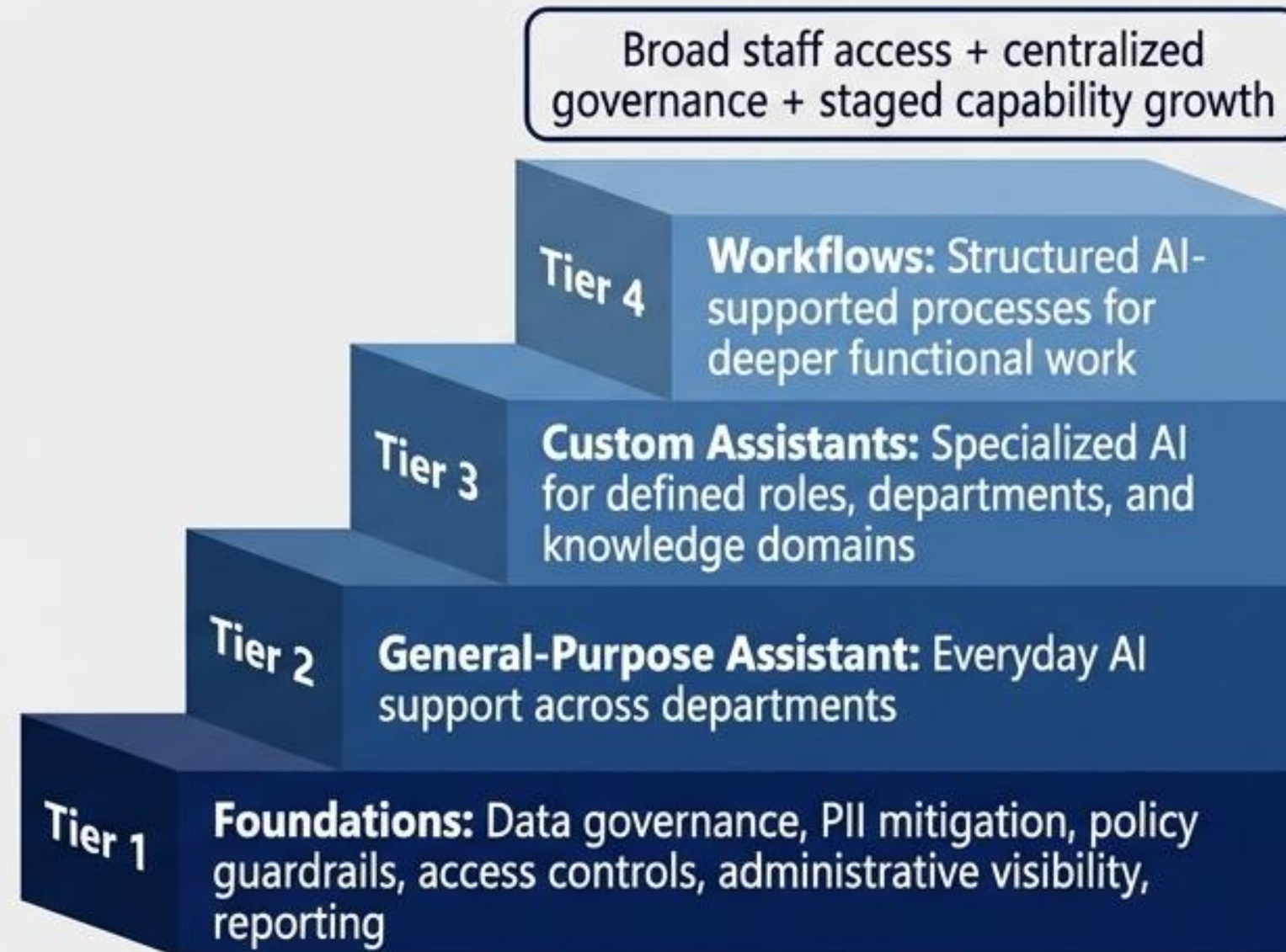


UCPCOG combines capability, controls, and practical use cases rather than treating AI as a stand-alone technology purchase.

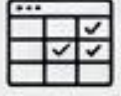
UCPCOG Uses GovAI as Its Enterprise AI Foundation

Why the Platform Matters

- Generic consumer tools can create uneven access and limited oversight
- Personal-account use can increase privacy and governance risk
- Leaders need visibility into organizational use
- Staff need a supported and consistent AI environment



Government Workflows

-  • Drafting reports and memoranda
-  • Summarizing meeting minutes
-  • Explaining regulatory language
-  • Translating public communications
-  • Supporting planning, finance, human resources, legal, and operations
- 

GovAI gives UCPCOG a governed foundation for broad staff access while allowing advanced assistants and workflows to be introduced as capability and oversight mature.

Welcome, Robert — what are we working on?

Municipal

Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments (UCPCOG)

North Carolina - United States

Executive Director

Communication and Marketing

Legal

Human Resources

Procurement

+ 18 more...

English

I'll tailor my responses to factor these in...  Modify Context

Explore Task Template Library

Analyze a Dataset for Trends and Patterns

Helps staff review spreadsheets or datasets to identify trends, counts, patterns, anomalies, and data qual...

Brainstorm Names, Titles, or Slogans

Helps staff generate clear, audience-appropriate names, titles, slogans, and short labels for programs,...

Brainstorm Program or Initiative Ideas

Helps staff brainstorm feasible program, initiative, and project concepts that support local...

Build a Spreadsheet Formula or Automation

Helps staff create or troubleshoot spreadsheet formulas, workbook logic, and office-tool automation for...

Build a Strategic Roadmap or Plan

Helps staff create a prioritized roadmap with sequenced goals, milestones, and next steps over...



Ask GovAI

gpt-5.5

 anything...

Type your prompt here!

  Automatic   Medium 



Send Enter



[Acceptable Use Policy](#)

Admin

Manage your workspace, members, and security settings.

Usage & Insights

Track adoption and oversee how your workspace is using GovAI.

 **Dashboard**



Usage trends, top users, and prompt activity.

 **Risk Center**



Review flagged prompts, alerts, and risk policies.

People & Access

Add and manage the people, groups, and identity providers in your workspace.

 **Users**



Invite, deactivate, and manage member roles.

 **Groups**



Organize members into groups for sharing and reporting.

 **SSO**



Configure single sign-on for your identity provider.

 **SCIM**



Provision and sync users automatically with SCIM.

Security & Compliance

Lock down access, govern data, and publish your acceptable use policy.

 **Security**



Authentication, MFA, and login policy controls.

 **Retention**



Define how long threads and content are retained.

 **Data Shield**



Detect and redact sensitive content in prompts.

 **Policy**



Publish your acceptable use policy and disclaimers.

Integrations

Connect external systems to bring content into your workspace.

 **Integrations**



Dashboard

Usage for Jan 1 - Jul 29, 2026

Prompts

6,133 prompts

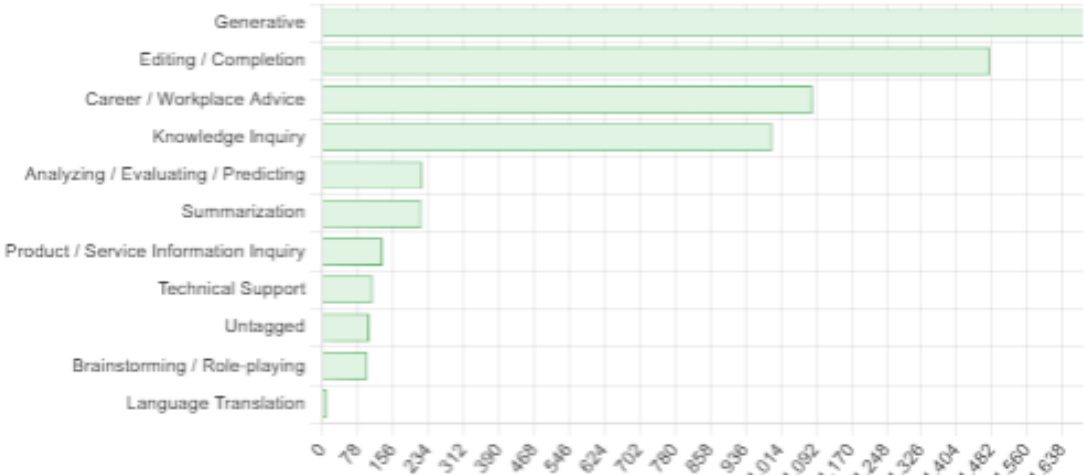
Active Users

61 users

Prompt Categories

Prompts are categorized based on their content after they are submitted.

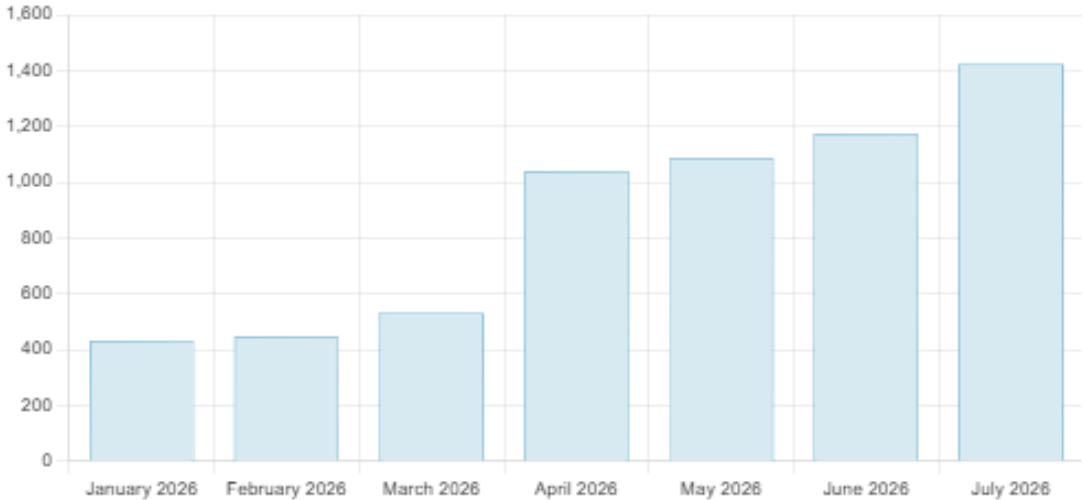
Chart Table



Prompt Volume

The number of prompts submitted by each user between 2026-01-01 and 2026-07-29.

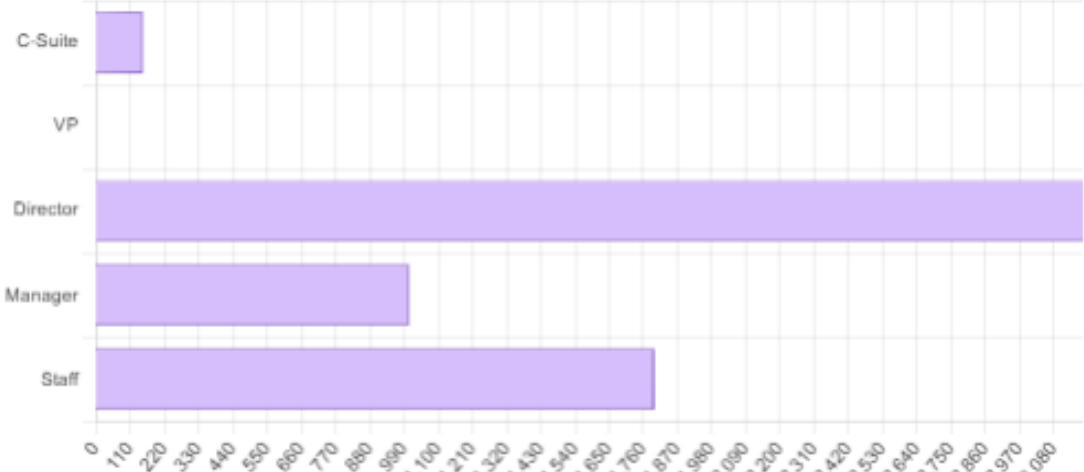
Chart Table



User Seniority

Volume of prompts created by user seniority.

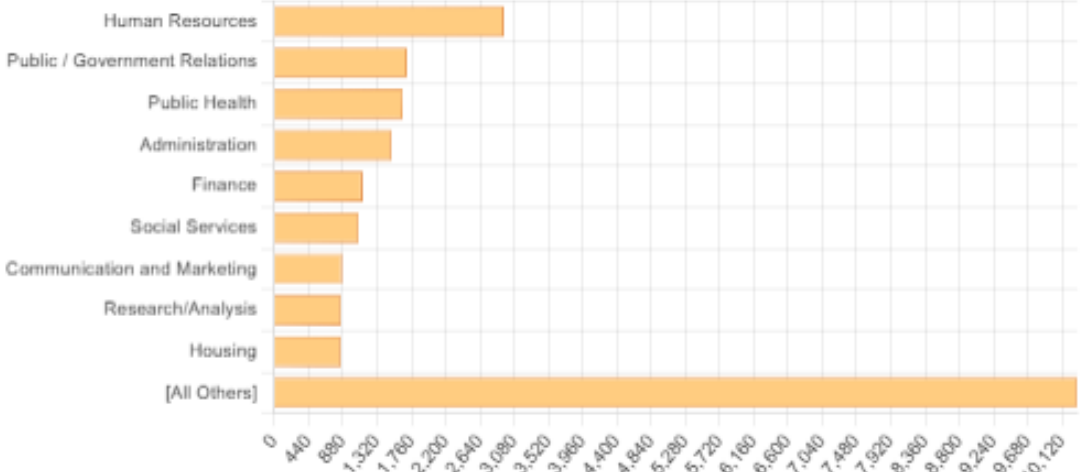
Chart Table



User Functional Area

Volume of prompts for each users functional areas

Chart Table



Data Shield

Configure your Data Shield settings and alerts.

Detect ^ 🟢 Enabled

Data Shield Detect is a tool that helps you to identify and classify personal data in your organization. It scans your organization's data sources and identifies personal data. It then classifies the data into categories such as personal data, sensitive personal data, and special categories of personal data.

Address 🟢 Enabled

Allow

Keep

Manage

A physical address, such as "100 Main Street, Anytown, USA" or "Suite #12, Building 123". An address can include information such as the street, building, location, city, state, country, county, zip code, precinct,...

Age 🟢 Enabled

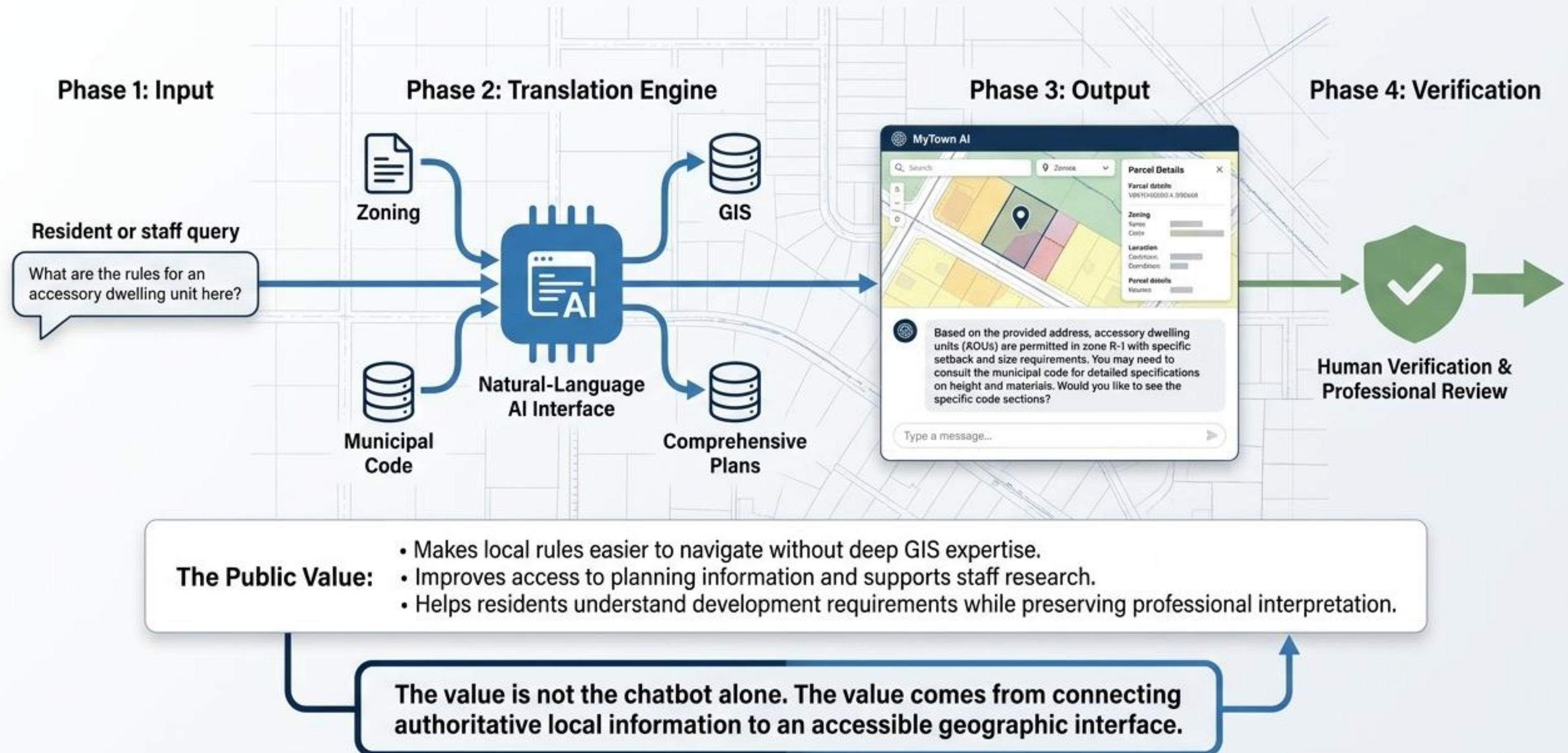
Allow

Keep

Manage

An individual's age, including the quantity and unit of time. Data Shield recognizes "40 years" as an age.

MyTown AI: Connecting Local Rules to Resident Needs



AskAshleigh Extends Caregiver Support Beyond Office Hours



The Service Challenge

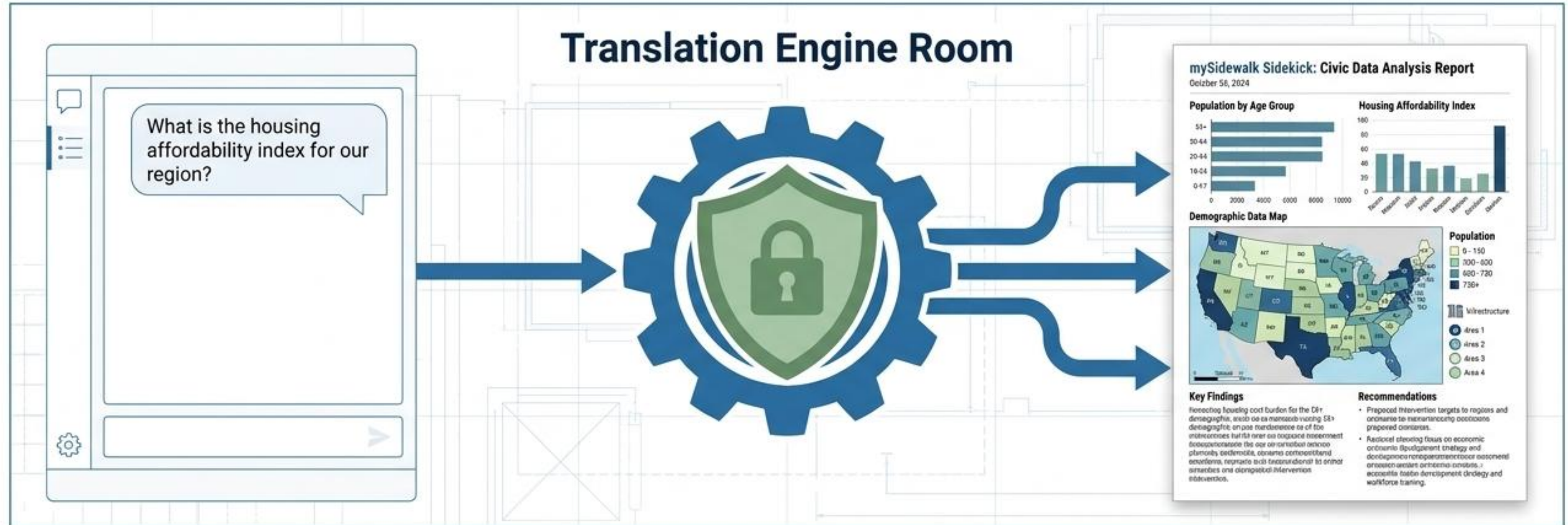
- Caregivers often need assistance outside normal office hours
- Many users do not know which program or resource applies
- Routine navigation questions consume staff time
- Complex situations still require human support

The AI-Supported Service & Operating Principle

- Around-the-clock caregiver guidance and practical suggestions
- A first point of navigation before human follow-up
- AI handles routine information and navigation
- Human staff retain responsibility for complex cases
- ***The tool does not make eligibility or benefit decisions***

AI can extend the reach of public services when it handles routine navigation and preserves human attention for complex needs.

Vetted Vendor Integration: mySidewalk Sidekick

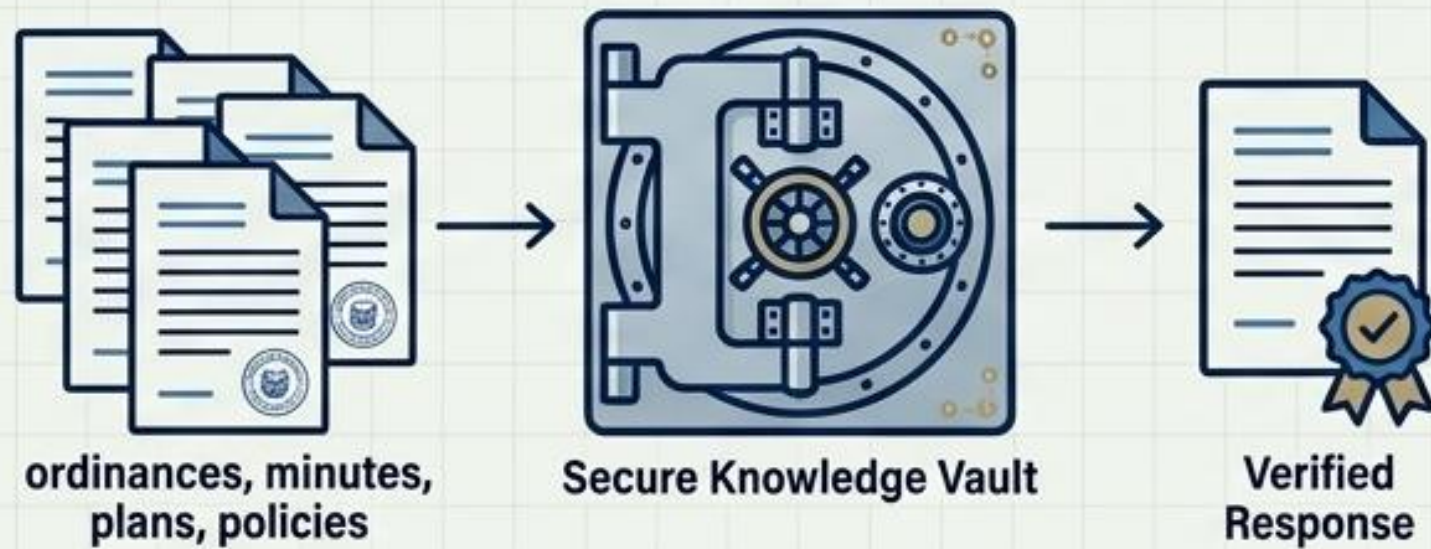


- Answers complex community data questions using plain-language queries
- Drafts structured deliverables including grant narratives and housing reports
- Functions strictly as a decision-support tool with clear operational guardrails
- Enhances regional planning, economic development, and community needs assessments

mySidewalk Sidekick translates civic data into actionable insights while operating **safely** within clear **operational guardrails** as a decision-support tool.

UCPCOG Is Applying AI to Documents, Data, and Regional Analysis

Document-Grounded Knowledge



- Converts ordinances, minutes, plans, and policies into curated knowledge collections
- Grounds responses in approved internal documents
- Helps staff locate relevant information quickly
- Supports grant, planning, and administrative work
- Preserves institutional knowledge

Civic Data Analysis



- Answers community-data questions through natural language
- Produces structured outputs and draft deliverables
- Supports housing, planning, economic development, and grant work
- Converts civic data into draft reports and analyses
- Operates as decision support rather than automated authority

Trusted sources + human review + practical deliverables

UCPCOG uses AI to accelerate research and analysis while keeping source authority and professional judgment in human hands.

Why AI Matters to COGs Now

AI is inside employee work, software, vendor products, and resident expectations.

- The issue is not whether staff will encounter AI.
- The issue is whether use becomes intentional, safe, and useful.
- COGs need shared interpretation before selecting tools, training, or policy.



38%

Employed U.S. adults
using chatbots for
work tasks



67%

Knowledge workers
using AI at least
weekly



69%

Workers reporting
organizational action
on AI agents



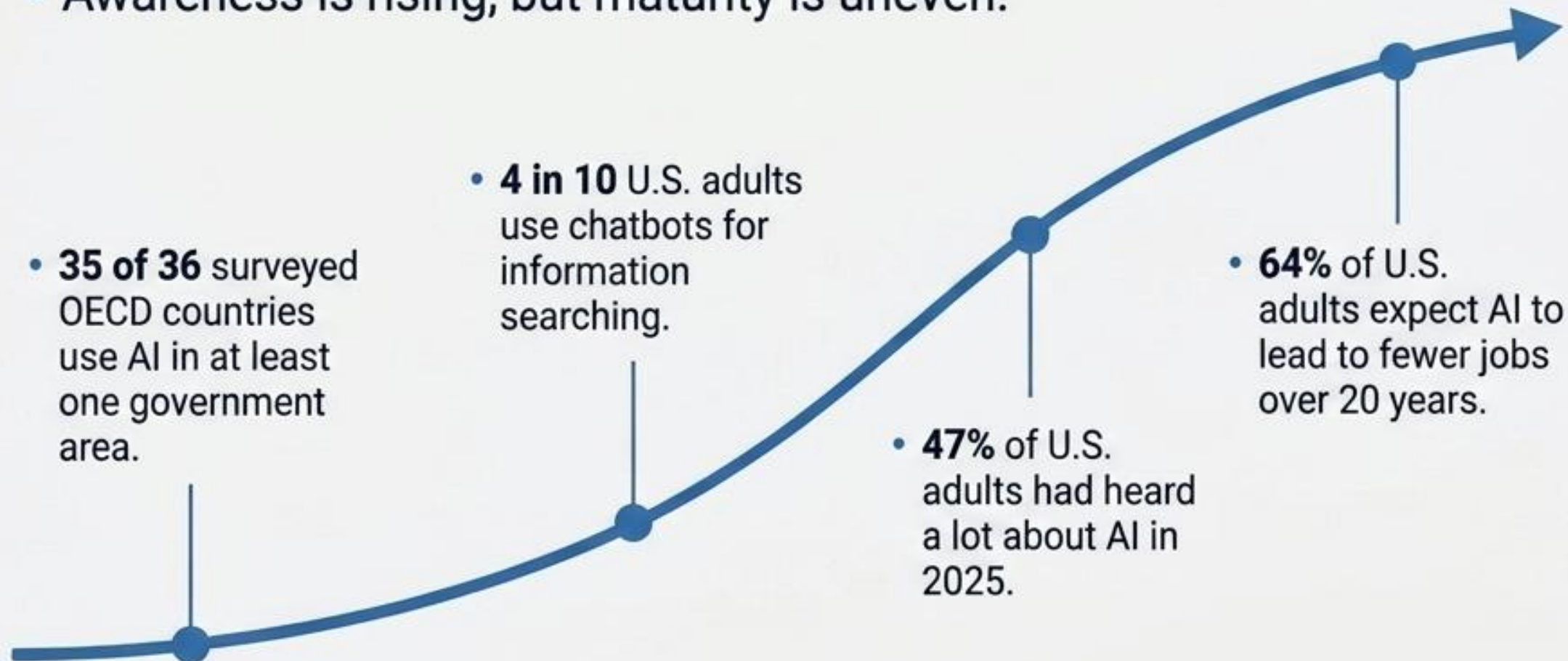
8+ Hours

Weekly time saved
by 42% of frontline
regular AI users

Adoption Is Accelerating, but Maturity Is Uneven

Use is spreading faster than public trust and institutional readiness.

- Adoption is not confined to technology teams or large governments.
- Awareness is rising, but maturity is uneven.



Readiness Gap



Policy



Training



Trust



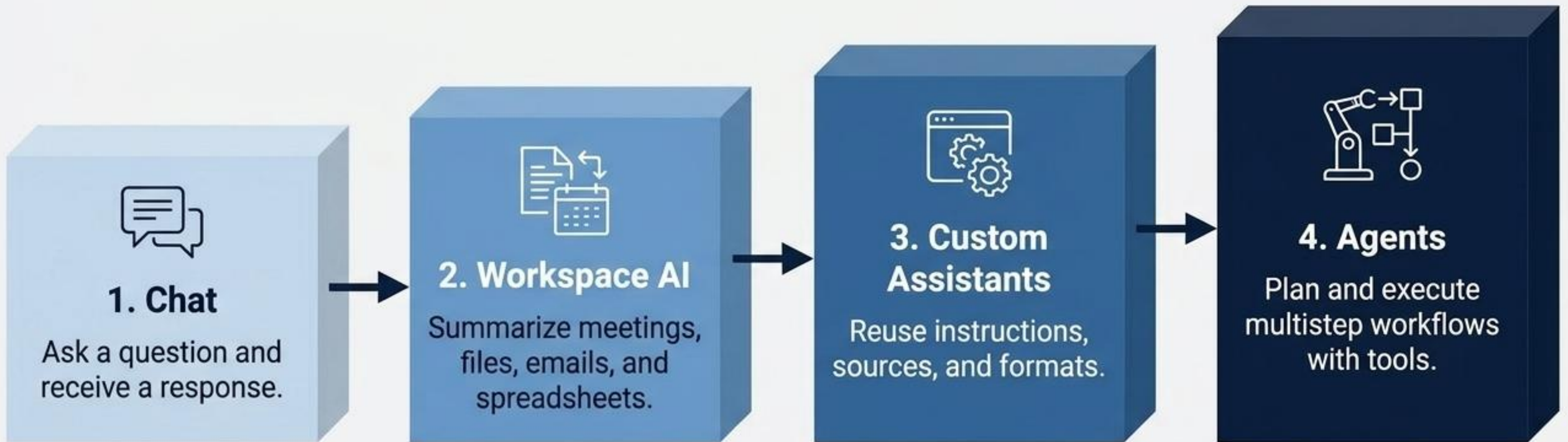
Cost

Expect immediate questions regarding:

- Tools & Costs
- Workforce Impacts
- Transparency & Service Quality

AI Is Shifting From Chat to Embedded Work

AI is moving from one-time chatbot answers into daily workplace systems.



COG Takeaway: Embedded AI can improve capacity, but it raises records, privacy, permission, and accountability questions.

Hype Is Not the Same as Operational Change

Tool access does not equal transformation.



Hype Signal

- ✗ Tool access is treated as transformation.
- ✗ Use is measured by logins or prompt counts.
- ✗ Staff experiment without workflow owners.
- ✗ Agents are discussed before basic controls exist.



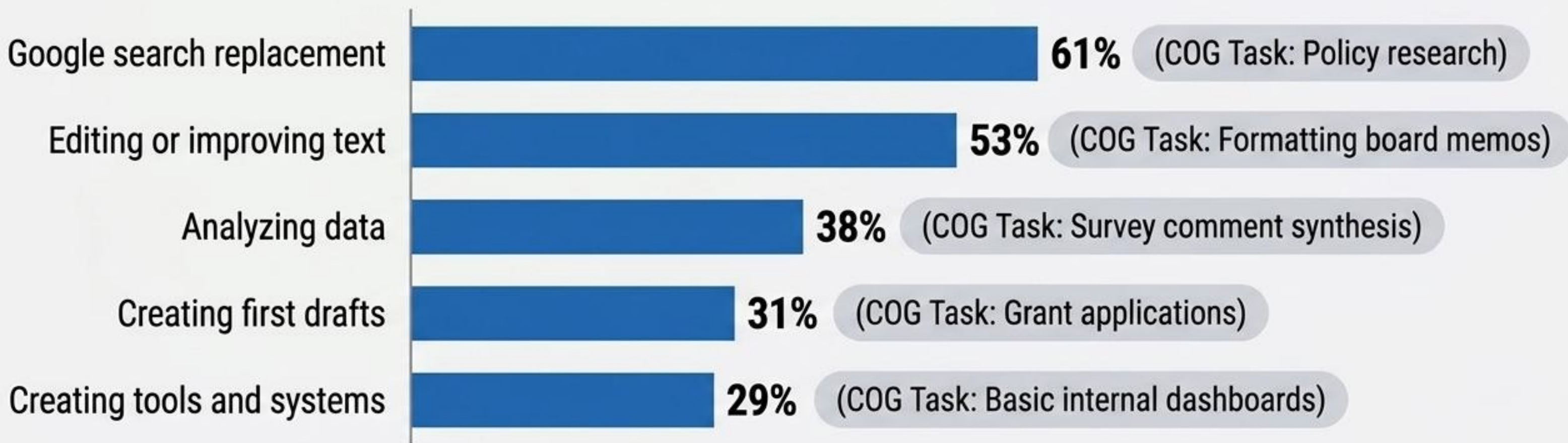
Operational Signal

- ✓ A specific workflow is selected and redesigned.
- ✓ Human review, data rules, and source checks are explicit.
- ✓ Managers can demonstrate safe AI use.
- ✓ Value is measured by time, quality, risk, and public-service outcomes.

Most Common Workplace Uses Are Practical, Not Exotic

The most common uses map directly to routine knowledge work.

- Immediate value lies in search, drafting, editing, and analysis.
- The risk is informal use occurring before the organization provides rules and examples.



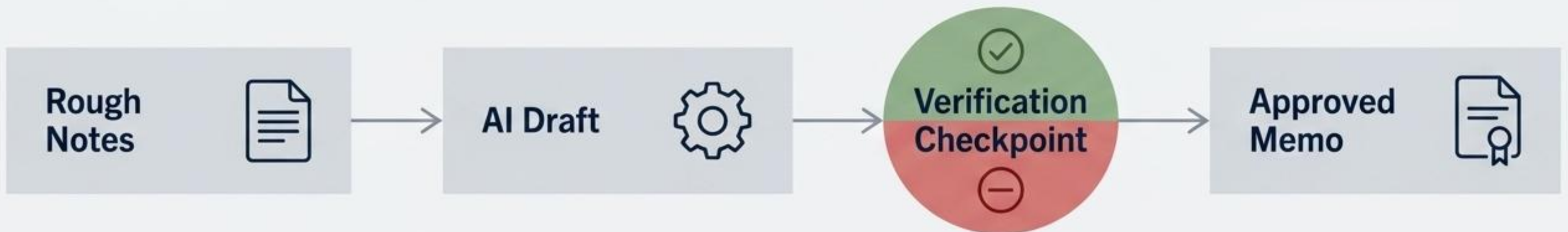
Writing, Research, and Information Work Dominate Current Use

Writing and information work are the entry point for many employees.

- 3 out of 4 ChatGPT conversations cluster around practical guidance, information seeking, and writing.
- **Writing** is the most common work task category in ChatGPT usage research.
- 38% of employed adults report using chatbots for work tasks.

COG Examples:

- Board memos
- Grant drafts
- Policy comparisons
- Meeting summaries



Data Analysis and Document Workflows Are the Next Frontier

AI creates greater value when it supports repeatable document and data workflows.

Grants



NOFO Review

- Check eligibility
- Track deadlines
- Assess scoring criteria
- Flag reporting obligations

Planning



Comment Synthesis

- Identify themes
- Map geographic concerns
- Categorize requested actions

Finance



Variance Explanation

- Identify budget changes
- Flag anomalies
- Draft explanations

Administration

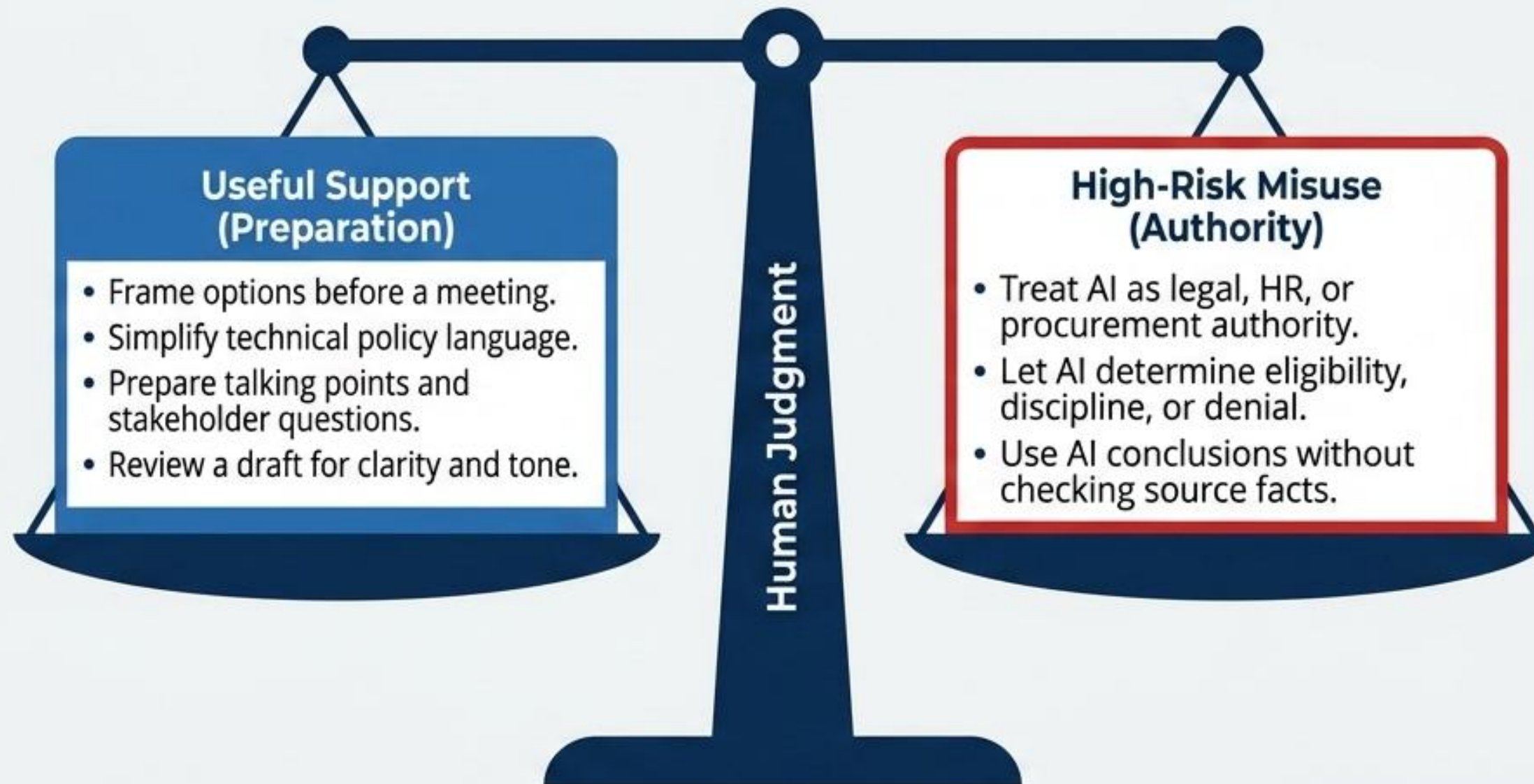


Contract Comparison

- Compare versions
- Verify deliverables
- Track renewals
- Flag reporting issues

Personal and Judgment-Adjacent Uses Are Rising

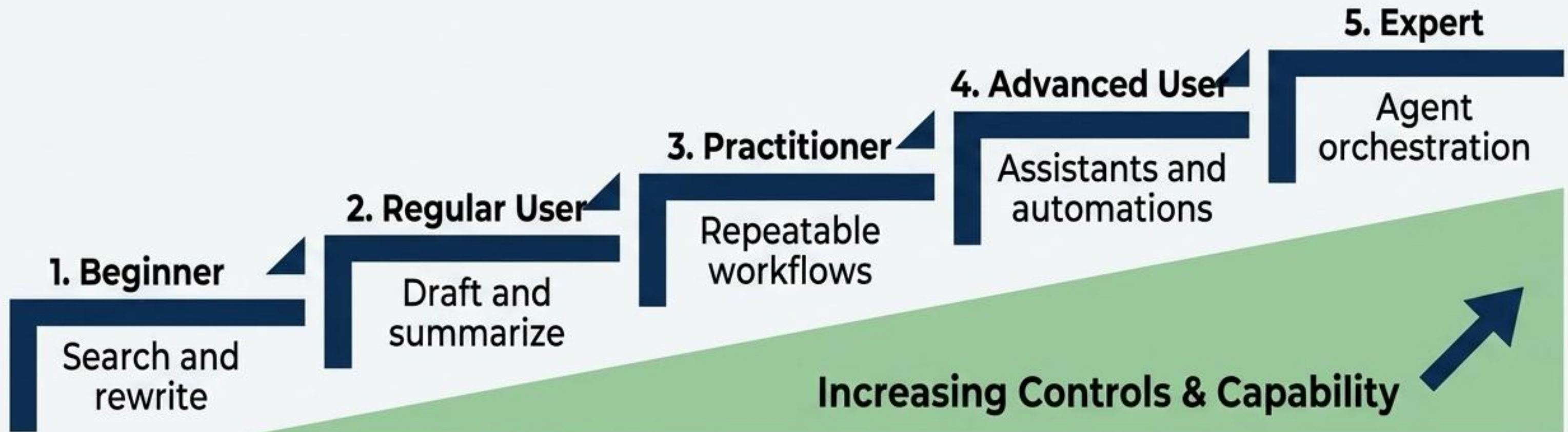
AI is increasingly used to prepare thinking, but it must not own the government decision.



Use Changes as Experience Grows

AI proficiency is a progression, not a single training event.

- Training should move staff toward safe, repeatable workflows.
- Experience changes how work is structured, reviewed, documented, and improved.
- COGs need a practical proficiency pathway, not only prompt-writing classes.



What Public Employees Are Likely Already Doing

AI use is probably already occurring, even without a formal rollout.

Faster First Drafts

Emails, grant sections, job descriptions, public notices.

Quick Synthesis

Documents, spreadsheets, comments, reports, policies.

Small Automations

Formulas, scripts, checklists, dashboards, HTML tools.



Unclear Boundaries

Personal accounts, unapproved tools, sensitive data, weak source checking.

Management Question:
What should be encouraged, reviewed, or stopped?

General Assistants Are Becoming the Default AI Entry Point

General assistants are widely used, but they should not become the entire AI strategy.

- Product capabilities change rapidly.
- The durable decision is which category fits the task and risk.
- COGs should define approved categories, data rules, and review expectations.

ChatGPT

General-purpose assistant and workplace platform.

Claude

Writing, coding, artifacts, and long-context workflows.

Gemini

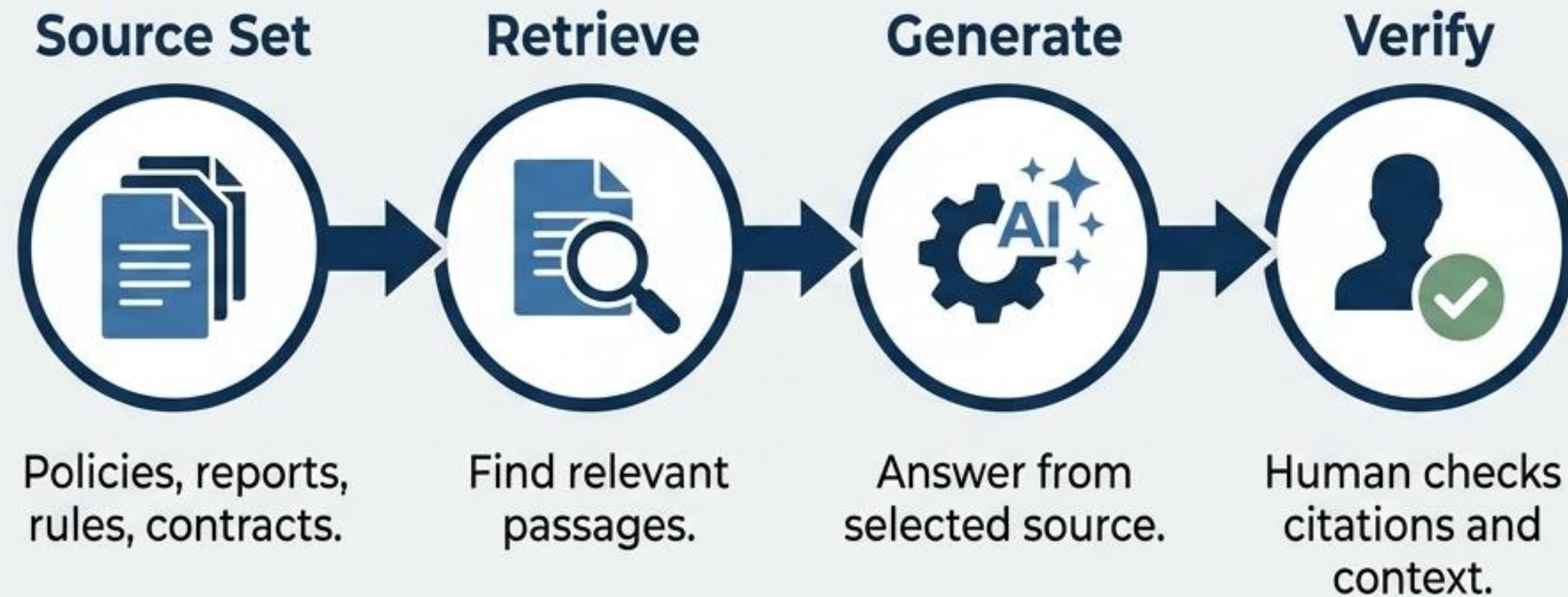
Multimodal, search, and workspace integration.

Copilot

Microsoft Office, Teams, and enterprise controls.

Research and Source-Grounded Tools Matter for Public Work

Source-grounded AI is useful only when the source library is authoritative and well-controlled.



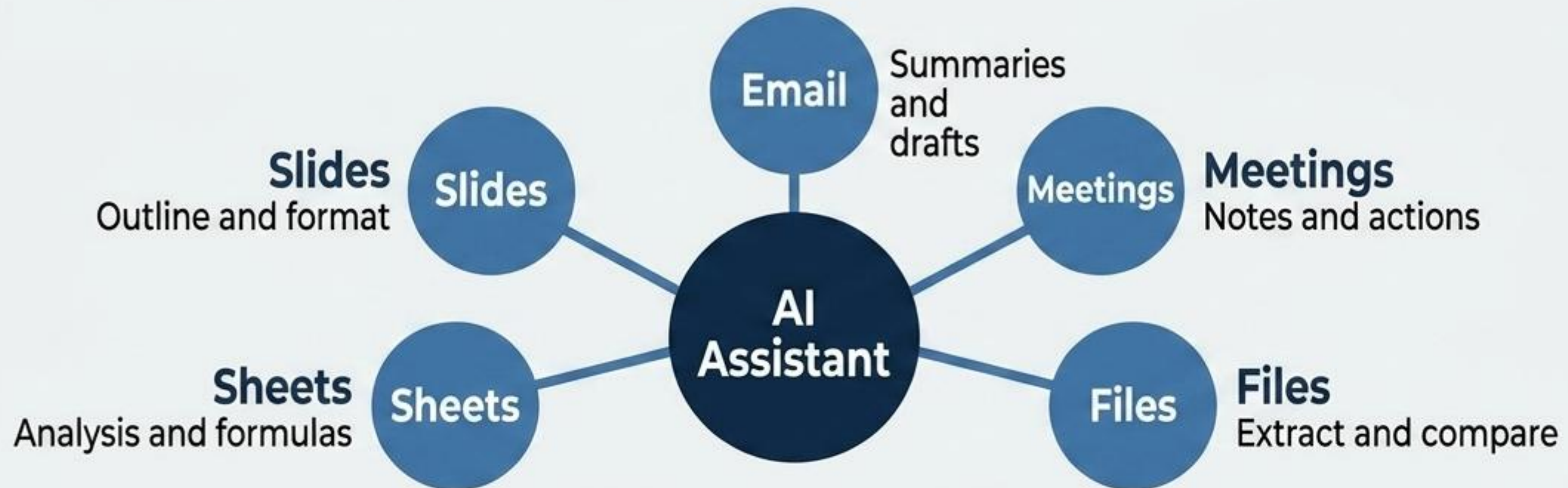
COG Examples for Source Libraries:

- Policy libraries
- Grant guidance
- Regional resource directories
- Board archives
- Training repositories

Office and Data Tools Are Turning AI Into Workplace Infrastructure

Staff may encounter AI inside existing software before leadership calls it an AI rollout.

- Connected AI raises access, retention, and action questions.
- Managers need rules for internal, public, confidential, and regulated data.
- AI in office tools is an operational issue, not only an IT feature.



Creative and Coding Tools Are Becoming Operational Tools

AI can now create communications assets and functioning prototypes.

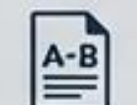
Creative & Media Tools



- Training graphics and infographics



- Public information visuals



- Plain-language explainers



- Video scripts and narration support



- Course and social content development



Coding & Tool-Building



- Internal forms and dashboards



- Spreadsheet automation



- Simple data extractors



- Web-based training activities



- Prototype applications and calculators

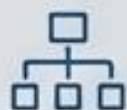
COG Caution: A useful prototype is not automatically secure, accessible, maintainable, or records-compliant. Operational use requires review.

AGENTS, AUTOMATION, AND HYBRID ARCHITECTURES ARE CHANGING THE CONTROL QUESTION

Agent Readiness Dashboard. 4-metric executive read-out

69%

Workers reporting organizational action on AI agents



16%

Actually use an agentic tool at work



13%

Set up an automated workflow as most advanced use



<10%

Can define an AI agent correctly



Agent Control Checklist. Modern public-sector compliance blueprint



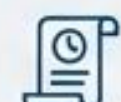
Role: What specific task does the agent own?



Data: Are inputs limited to approved sources?



Authority: What actions can it take without human input?



Logs: Is every step and decision auditable?



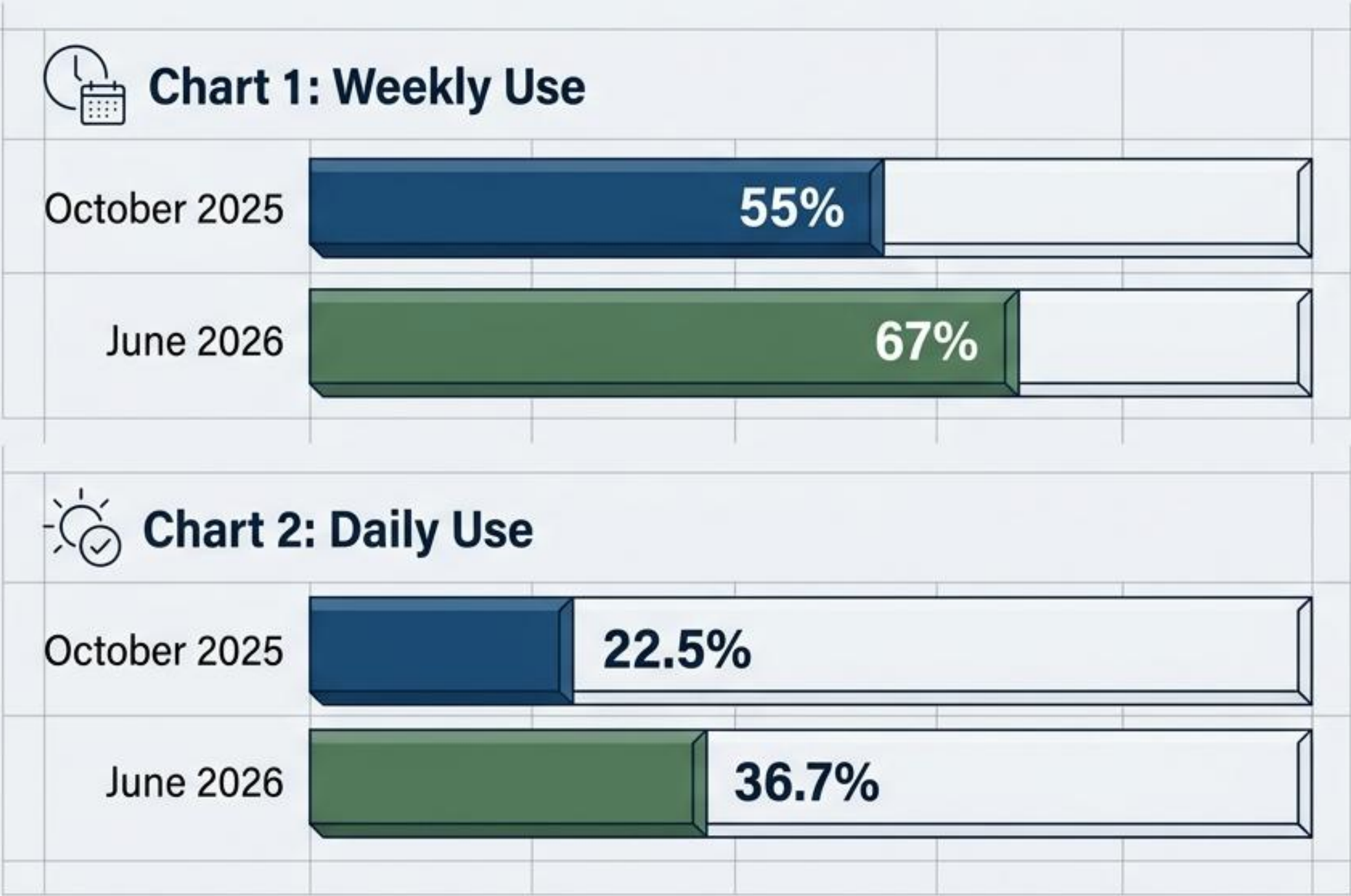
Exit: Is there a clear protocol to revoke access?

COG Takeaway Box

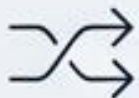


COG Interpretation: Agents move AI from answer generation to task execution. Treat them as higher-risk workflows until controls are defined. Hybrid local-cloud systems may protect data but require more governance capacity.

Usage Is Rising Faster Than Skill



The Shift



Move from assessing “who has access?” to “which workflows have changed?”

The Metric



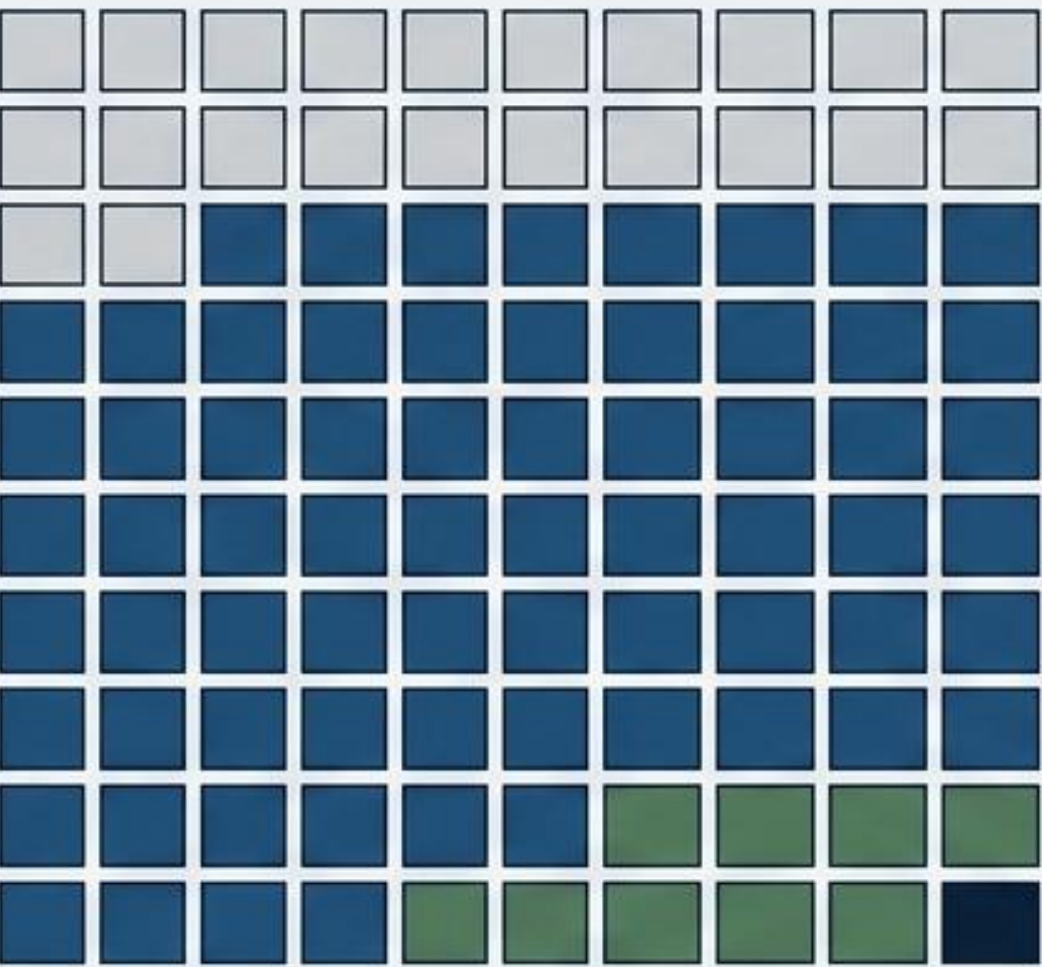
Readiness assessments should evaluate specific tasks, not software seat counts.

The Reality



High volume of usage alone does not demonstrate public value or safe practice.

Most Workers Remain Experimenters



Novice (20.9%)

Experimenter (73.5%) –
Uses AI for one-off tasks.

Practitioner (5.3%) –
Uses AI for reliable workflows.

Expert (0.2%)

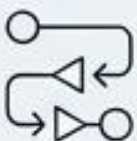
Key Insight Box

Only 5.5% of the workforce meets the proficiency threshold.

The goal is not to make every employee an expert.



The objective is moving staff from isolated use to repeatable, reviewed workflows.



Departmental champions and shared regional examples are required to scale learning.



Confidence and Proficiency Are Different Things

81%

Reported prior AI use in aggregated public-sector readiness cohort.

4%

Rules, Examples, and Training

Described themselves as highly confident in professional AI use.

Employees are curious but remain uncertain about professional boundaries.

Low confidence is an implementation signal, not a cultural failure.

Role-specific examples, approved tool categories, and explicit review rules are what unlock safer use.

Training Is Increasing, but Assistant-Building Remains Rare

Callout Box

88% of workers believe major upskilling is needed within five years.

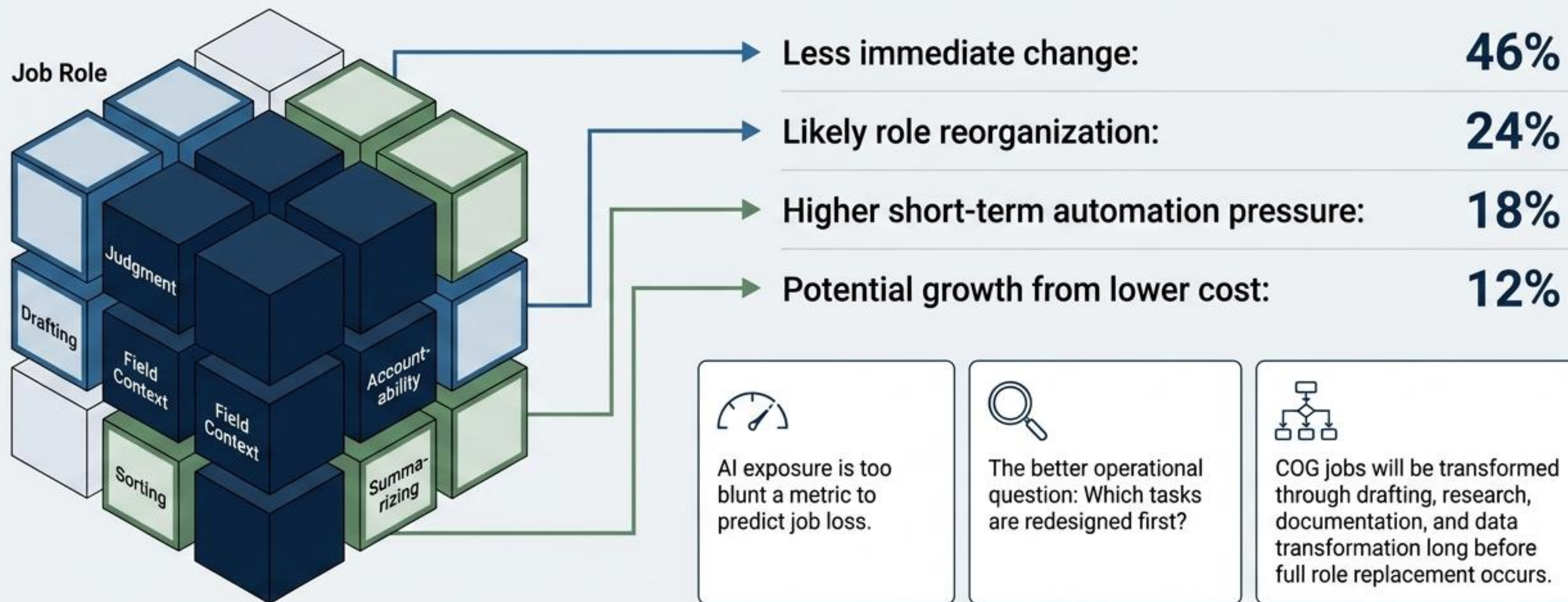


Assistant-building is a higher-skill activity than basic prompting.

Training must pivot to focus on context, source control, reusable workflow patterns, and risk boundaries.

Managers need review and workflow coaching skills, not just tool demonstrations.

AI Is Changing Tasks Before It Changes Job Titles

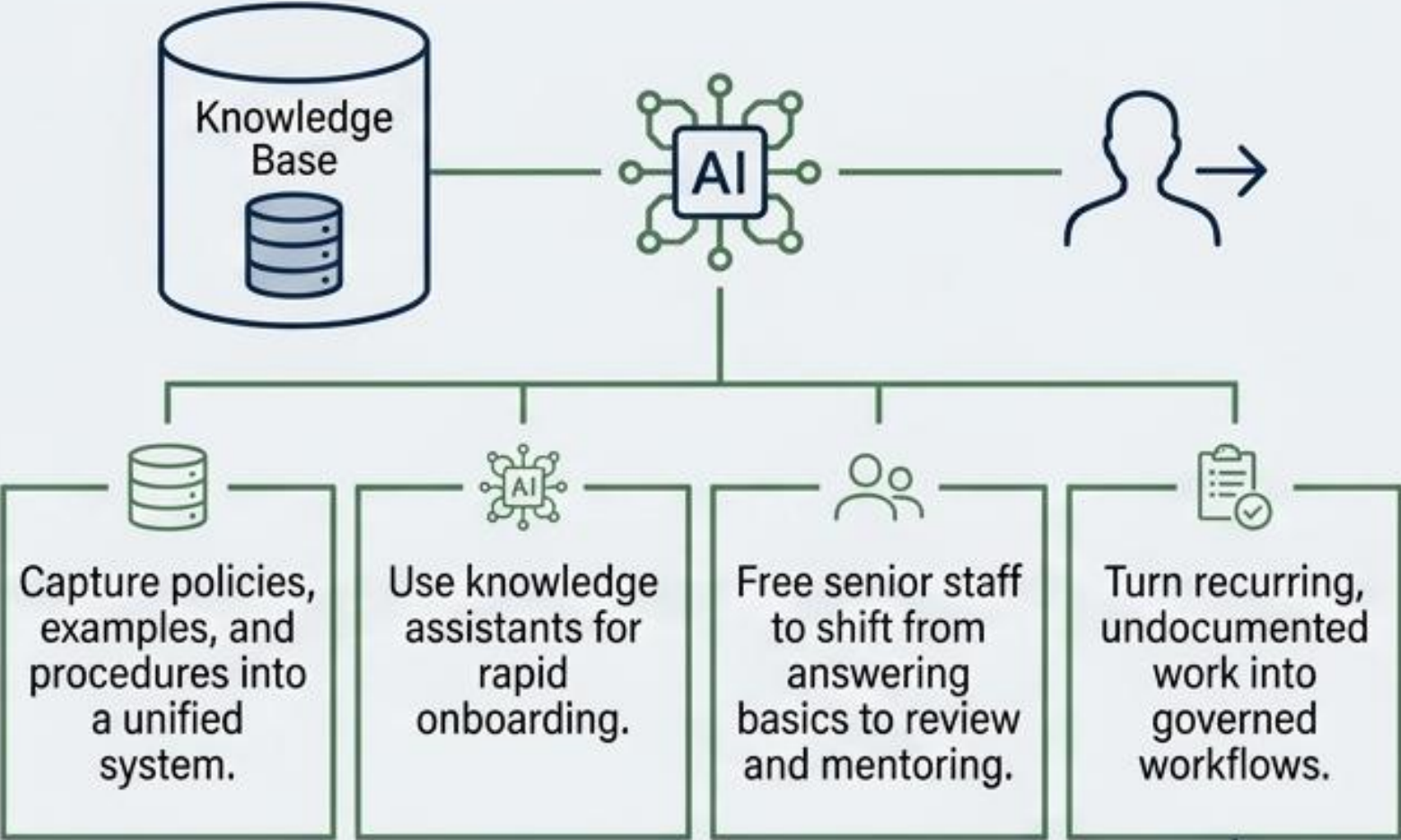


Institutional Knowledge Becomes a Capacity Strategy

Risk Without Structure



AI-Supported Capacity Strategy



COG Interpretation: AI can help preserve regional knowledge before it is falsely framed as labor replacement.

Managers Are the AI Implementation Bottleneck



The Manager Impact

1.5x higher proficiency when managers require/incentivize AI use.



2.7x more likely to be excited when manager action is strong.



33% of managers use AI daily.



21.3% demonstrated AI use to their team in the prior 30 days.



Managers cannot effectively guide tools they do not understand or use.

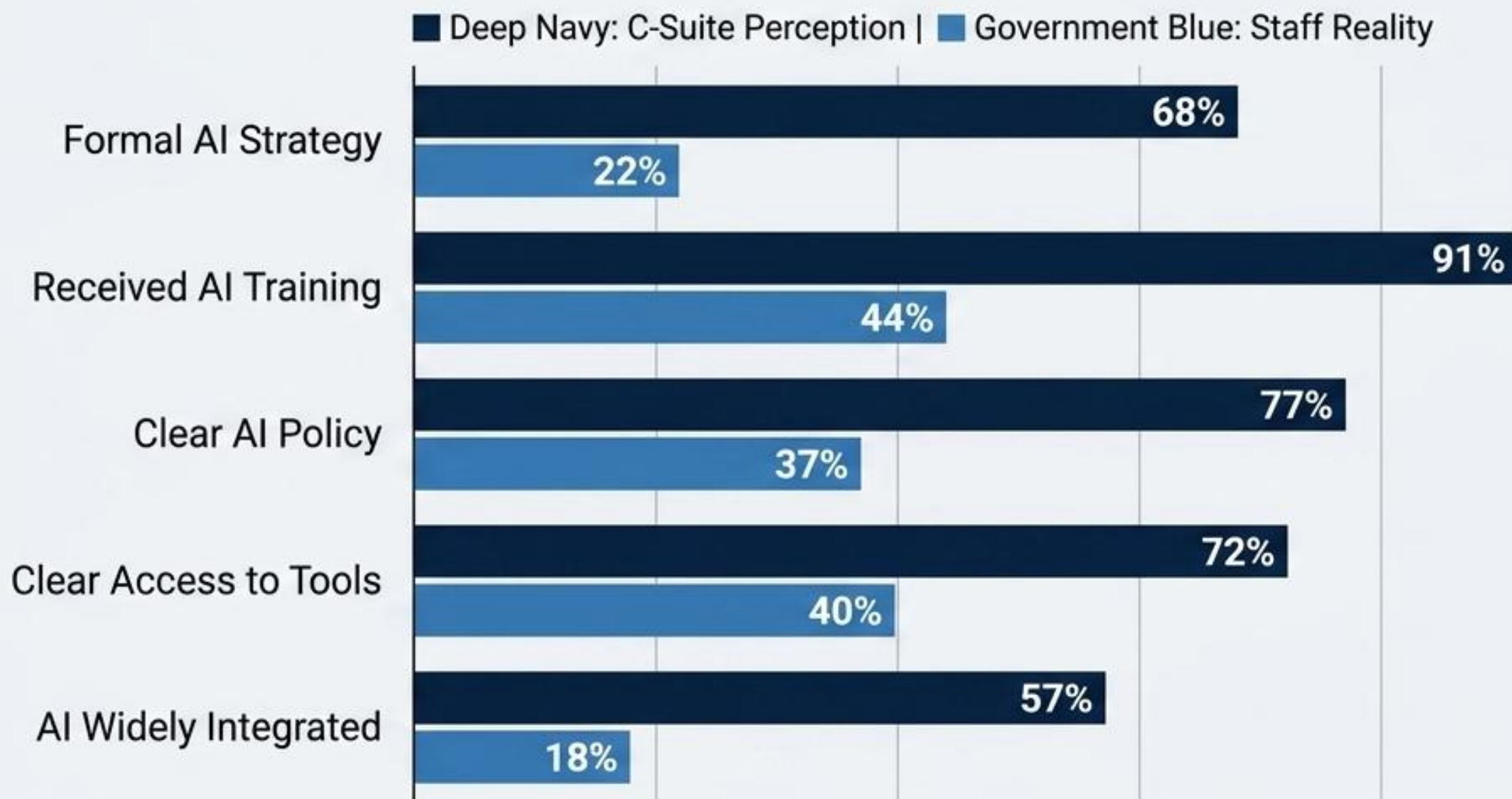


They require real-world examples, clear review standards, time, and authority.

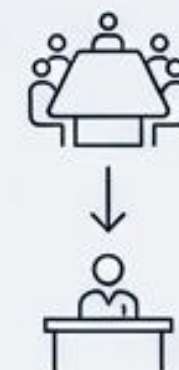


COGs must train managers as workflow coaches, not simply as compliance reviewers.

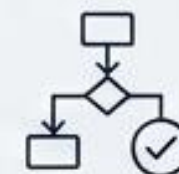
Executives and Staff Often See Different AI Realities



Do not assume boardroom strategy has reached the front line.



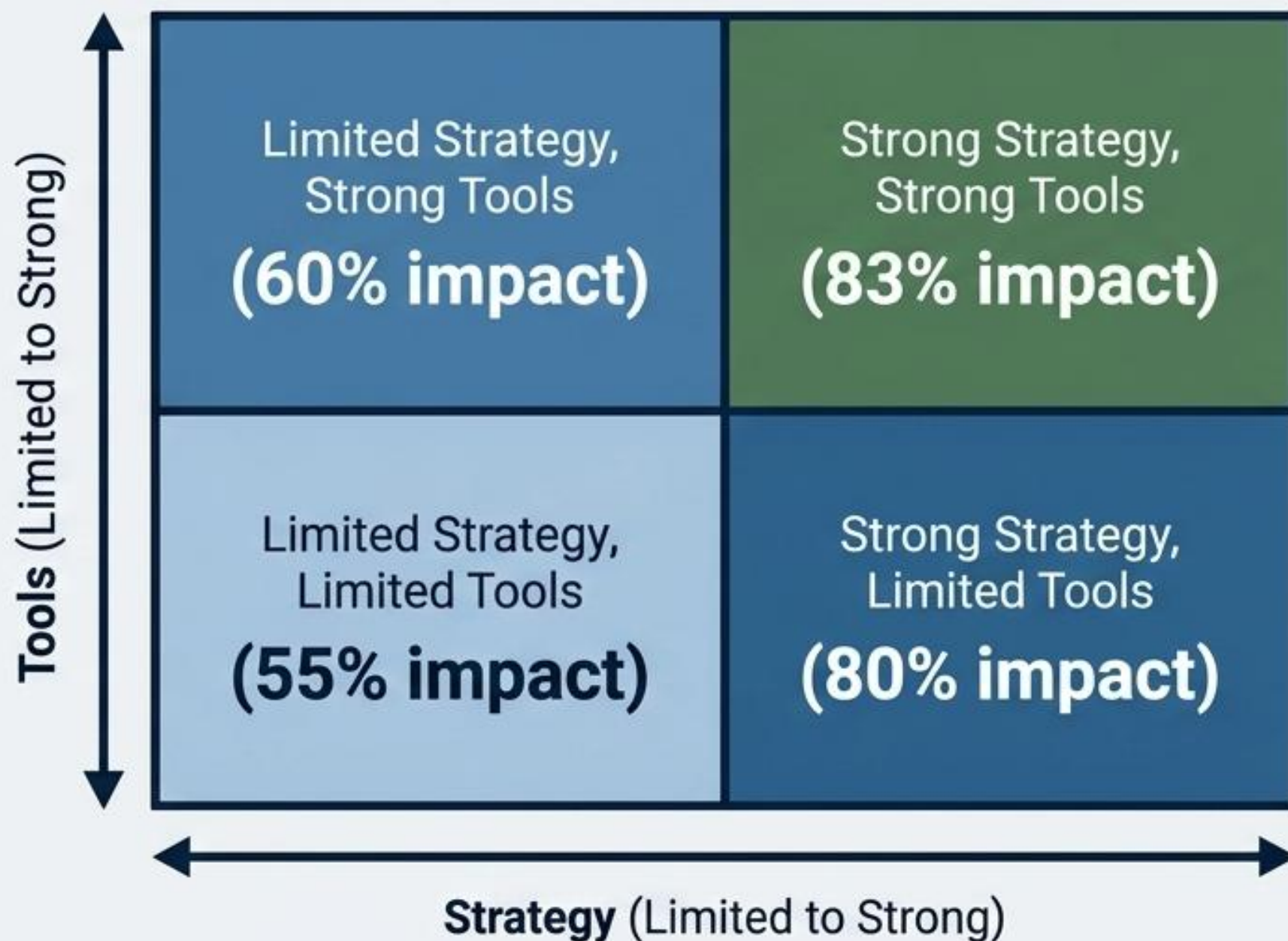
Validate organizational readiness strictly at the department level.



AI maturity must be measured through actual work examples, not leadership sentiment.



Strategy Beats Scattered AI Activity



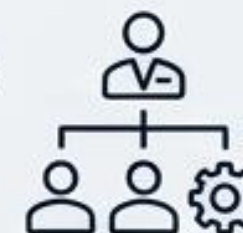
Strong strategy improves impact far more than tool access alone.



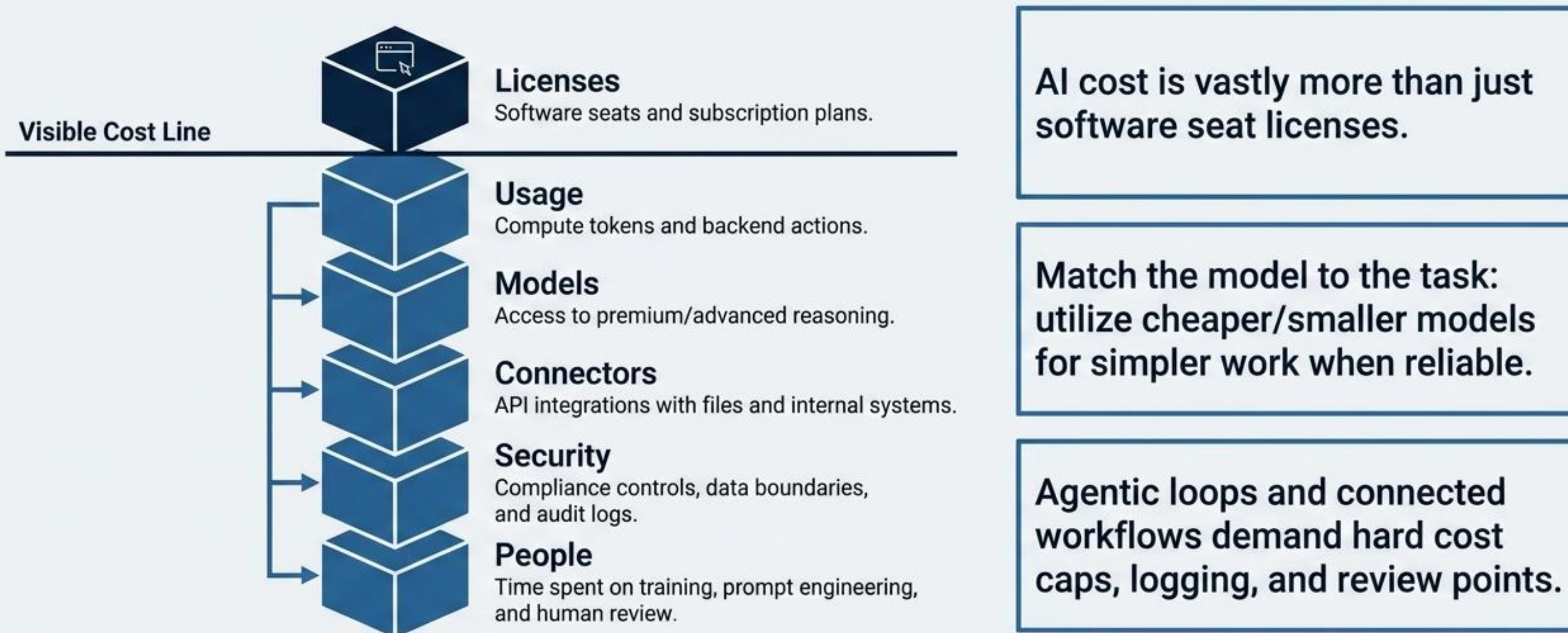
Clear guidelines and defined use cases outperform raw software access.



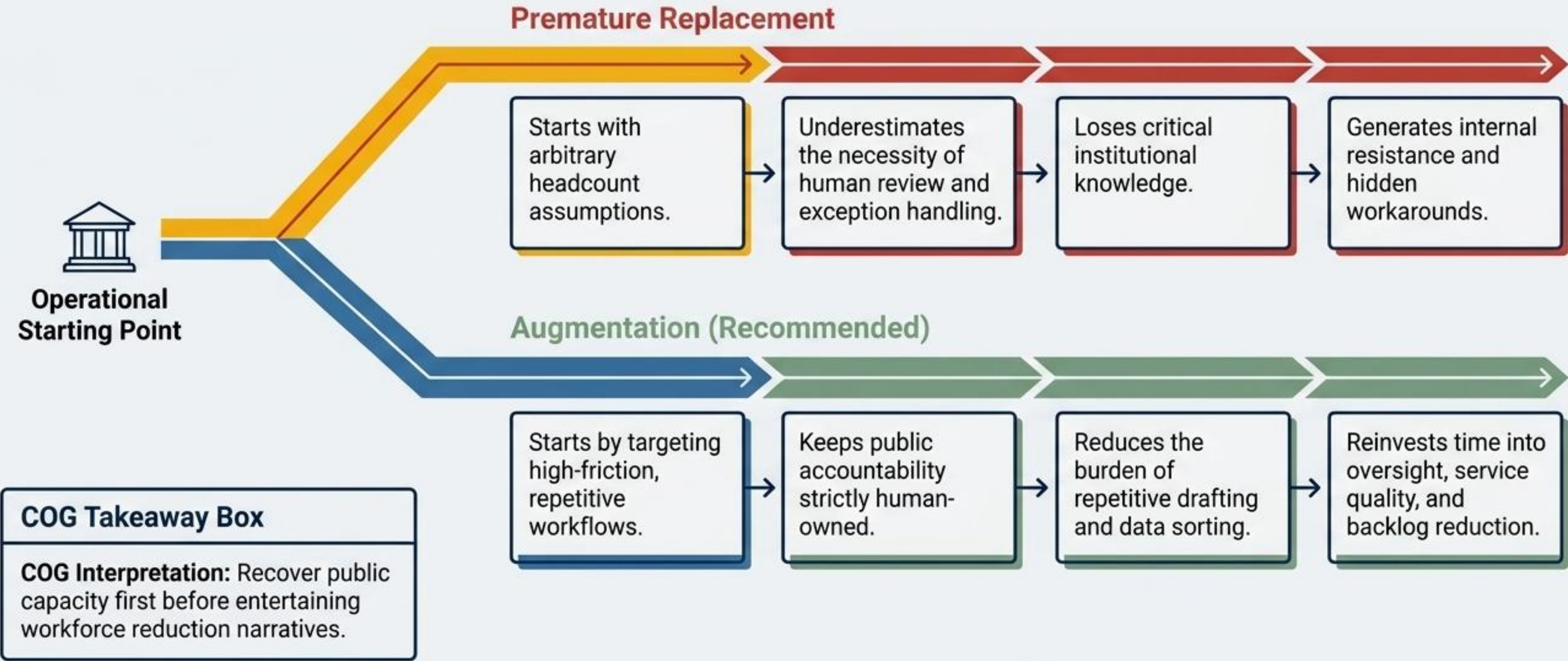
COGs must name the purpose, owner, review rule, and value metric for all AI work.



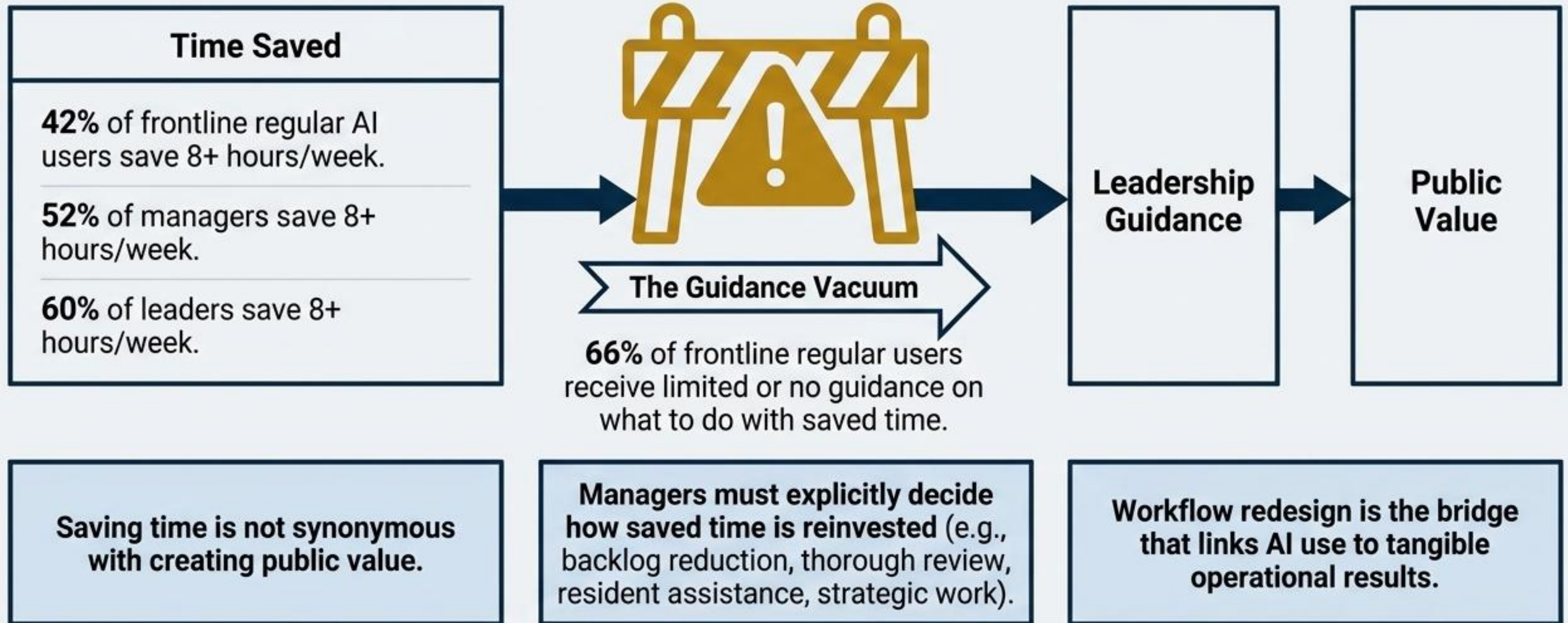
AI Costs Require Active Management



Augmentation Is the Safer First Move



Workflow Redesign Is the Main Value Lever



Agentic AI Creates New Opportunities and New Authority Questions



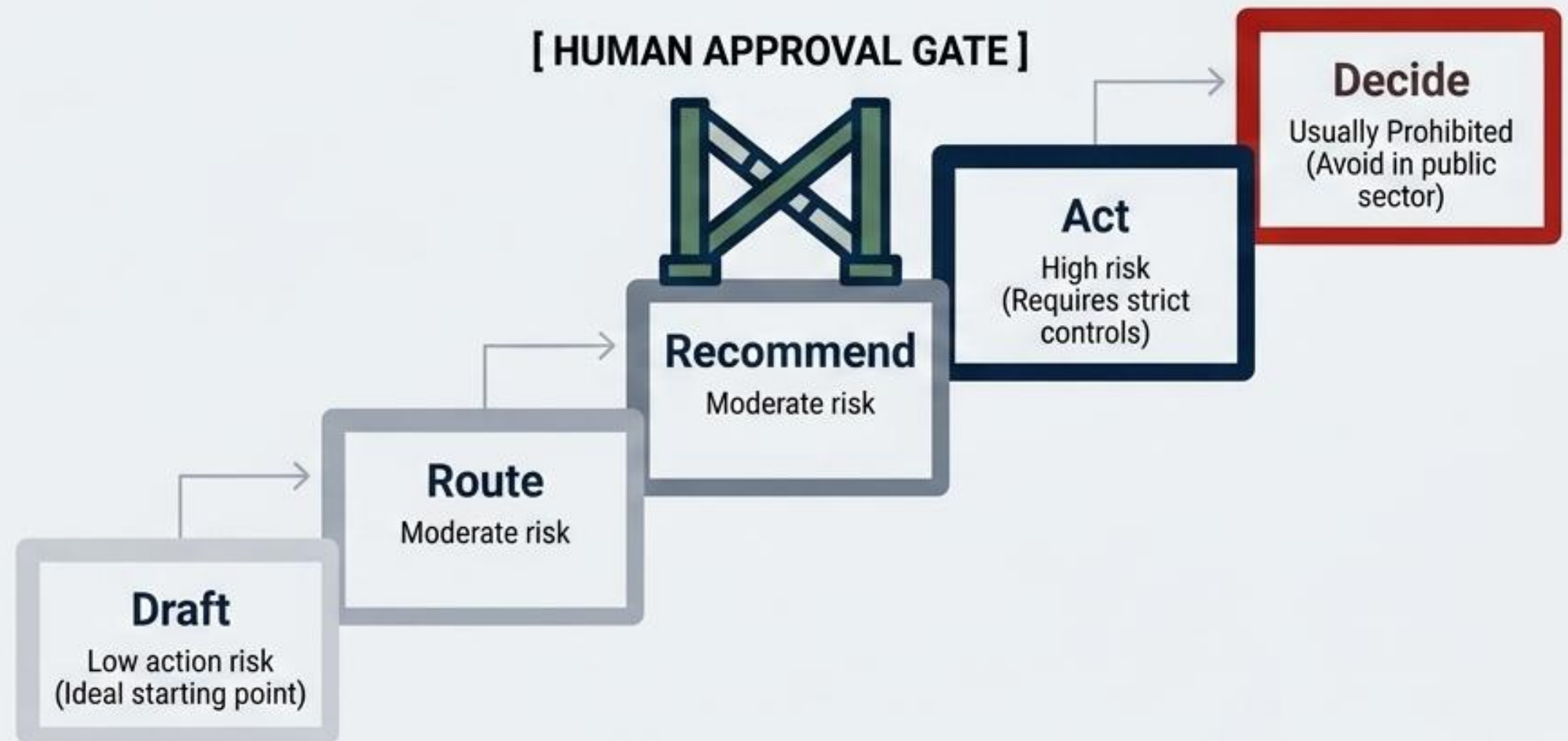
Agent use should **increase structural controls** exactly as authority increases.



Target agents for **summarizing, drafting, routing, and status tracking** first.



Never approve an agent until its role, data access, records impact, review process, and shutdown procedures are explicitly documented.

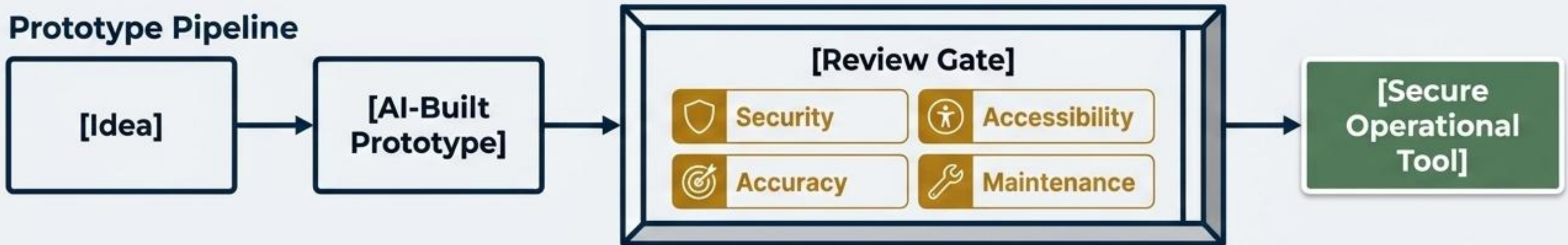


Vibe Coding Turns Staff Into Tool Builders

The Opportunity

- ⚙️ **Rapid prototyping:** Staff can rapidly generate functional forms, calculators, dashboards, and training activities.
- 🧠 **Process knowledge:** Program staff deeply understand the nuances of workflows that external developers often miss.

Prototype Pipeline



The Risk

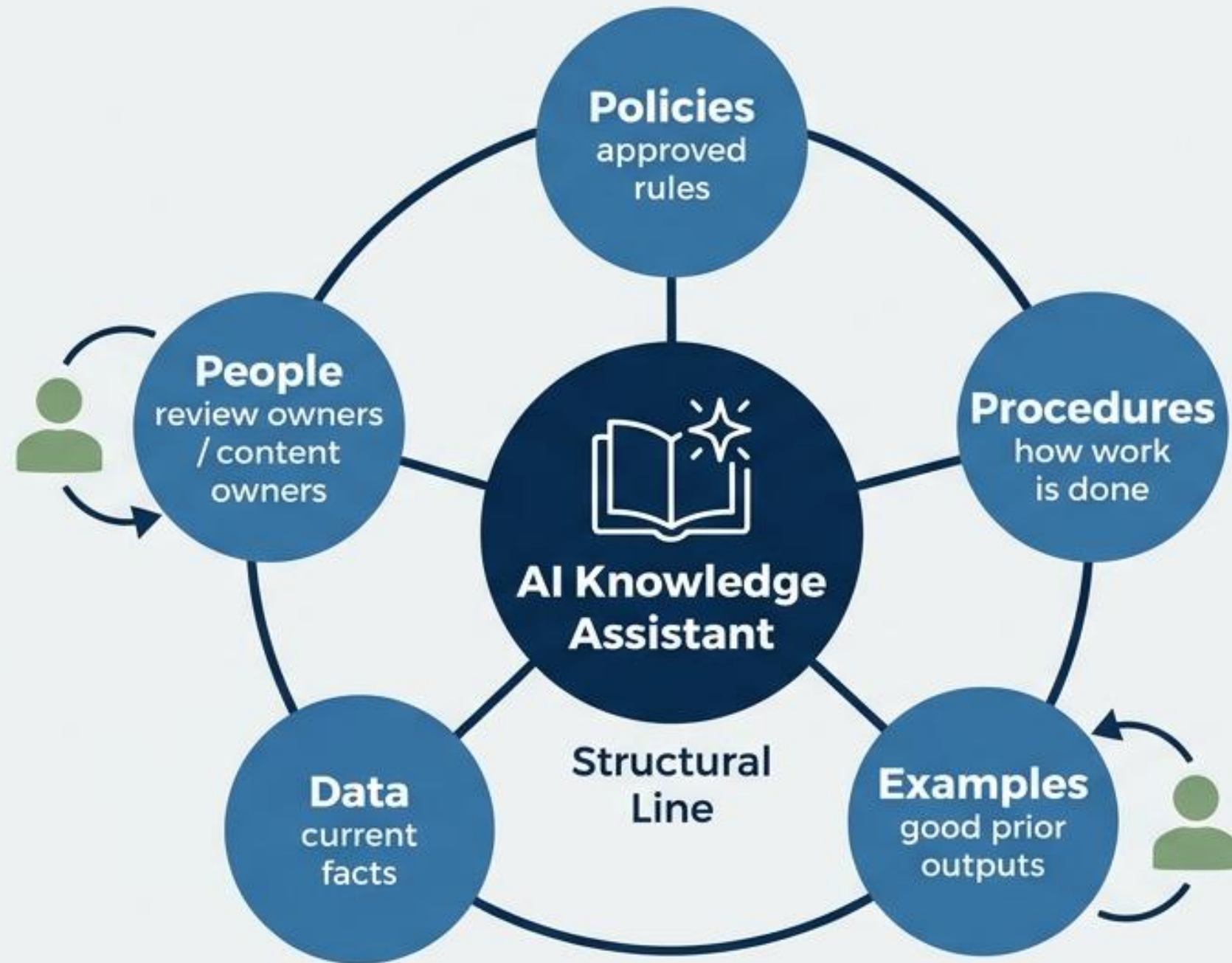
- ⚠️ **Unreviewed software:** Can introduce severe security, accessibility, or accuracy problems.
- 🔧 **Maintenance gap:** Informal tools can quietly become unsupported, critical IT infrastructure.

COG Takeaway Box

COG Principle: Staff-built prototypes are valuable, but they must enter a lightweight review path before being used as operational tools.

Regional Capacity

AI-Assisted Knowledge Systems Can Preserve Institutional Memory



Key Insights

- Assistants help new staff navigate policy, procedure, examples, and official sources.
- Systems require authoritative document locations, version control, permissions, and content owners.
- **COG Examples:** Grant policy assistants, regional resource directories, planning reference assistants, board archive search.

Regional Capacity

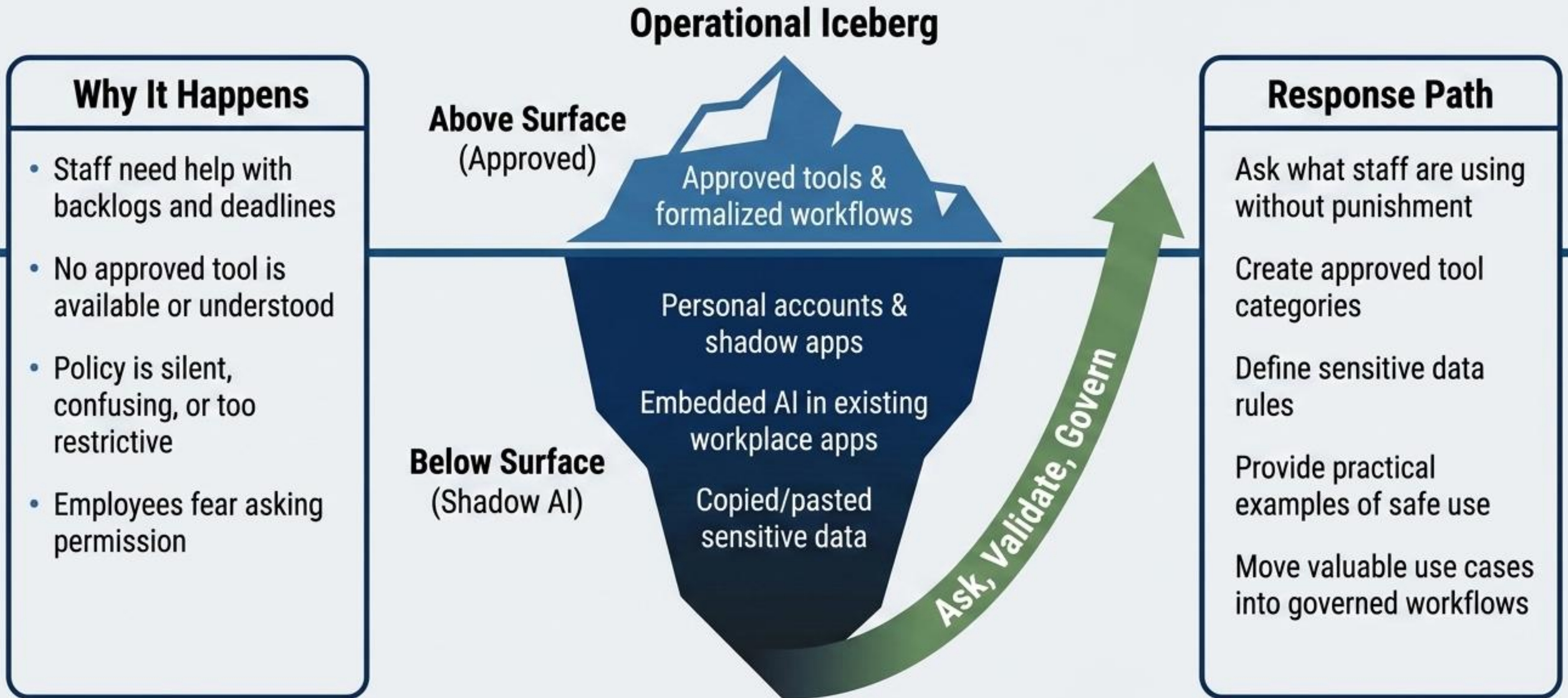
COGs Can Turn Isolated Experiments Into Shared Regional Capacity



Regional advantage: Every small jurisdiction should not have to solve AI policy, training, procurement, and governance alone. COGs can reduce duplication and help smaller jurisdictions adopt AI safely.

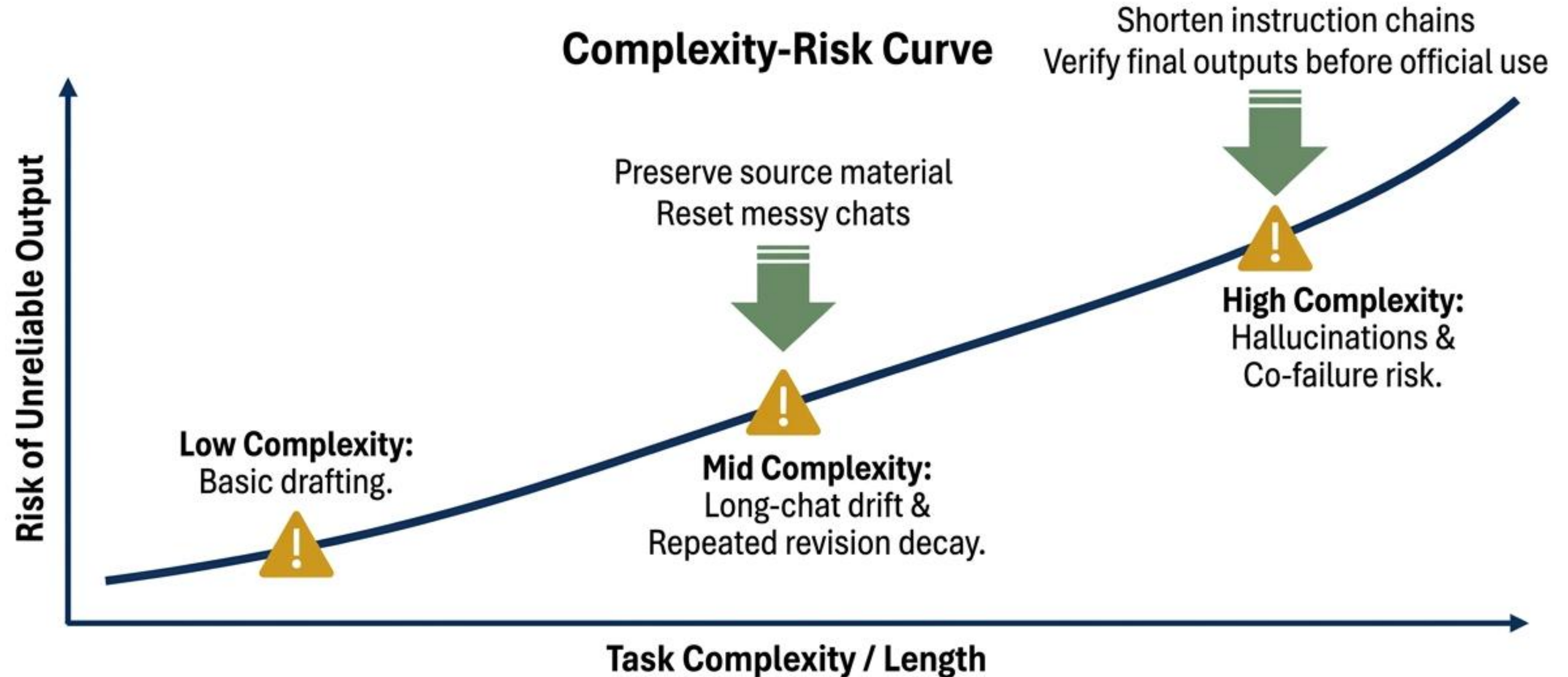
Risk and Reliability

Shadow AI Is a Signal, Not Just a Violation



Risk and Reliability

Reliability Limits Increase With Complexity

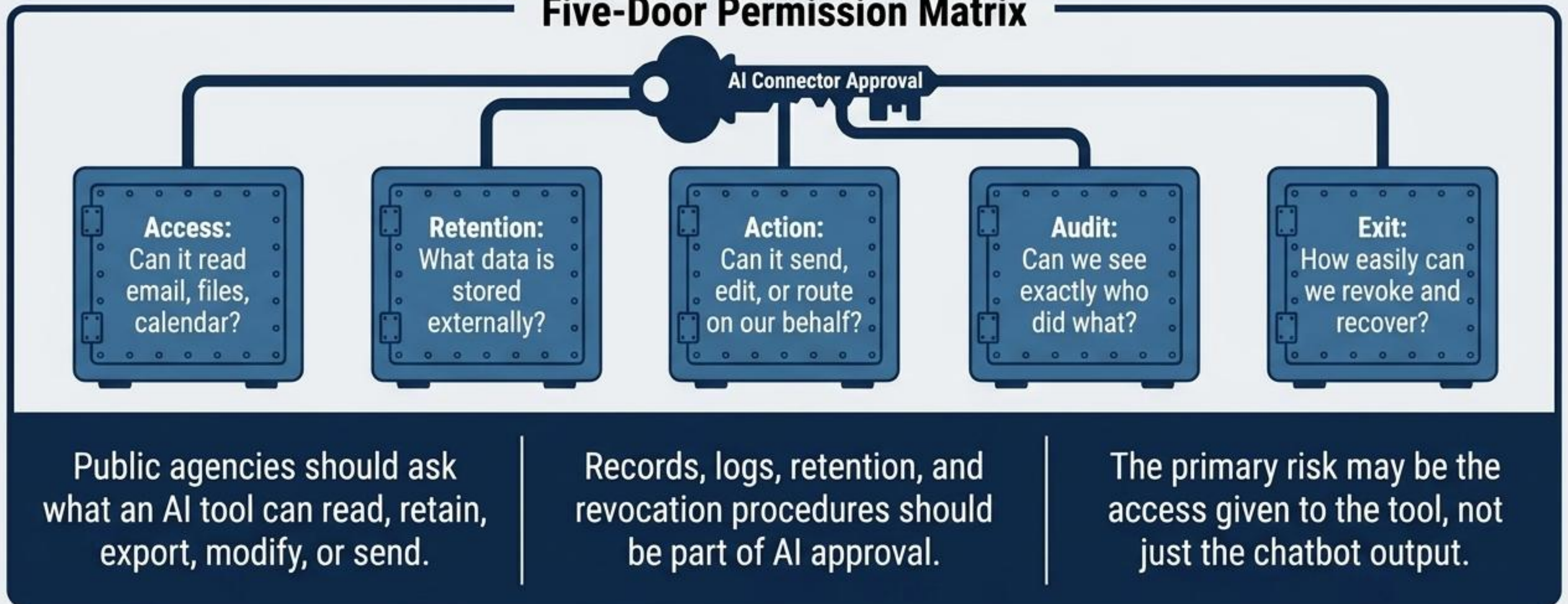


Sources: Stanford AI Index 2026, Microsoft Research, UCPCOG project research.

Risk and Reliability

Connected AI Creates Data, Security, and Records Exposure

Five-Door Permission Matrix



Governance and Operational Control

Bias, Records, and Consequential Decisions Require Stronger Controls

Higher-Risk Areas (Impact)

Eligibility or benefits decisions

Hiring, discipline, or personnel actions

Procurement scoring or vendor selection

Legal interpretation or compliance certification

Public safety, health, security, or
investigative uses



High-Control Zone

Required Control Posture



Use-case intake and risk classification



Source and data restrictions



Documented human review



Bias and impact assessment where warranted



Vendor transparency, audit logs, and escalation path

Governance and Operational Control

Governance Is Moving From Policy Statements to Operational Controls



Key Principles

Low-risk learning should not be blocked by excessive procedure.

High-risk work should not proceed invisibly.

Governance should be understandable to staff and usable by managers.

Regional Implementation

Start With Lighthouse Projects, Not Platform Sprawl

Lighthouse Project Pipeline



Select: One specific high-friction, text/data-intensive workflow. Apply three selection tests.

Baseline: Set a baseline for time, quality, backlog, and risk.

Pilot: 30 to 90 day window. Require a human review phase before official use.

Measure: Scale, revise, or stop based on evidence.

COG Takeaway

Begin with one high-value workflow, not a scattered tool rollout. **Prove** the value and safety before buying expensive enterprise licenses for everyone.

Regional Implementation

Build Role-Specific Capability

Role Capability Pyramid

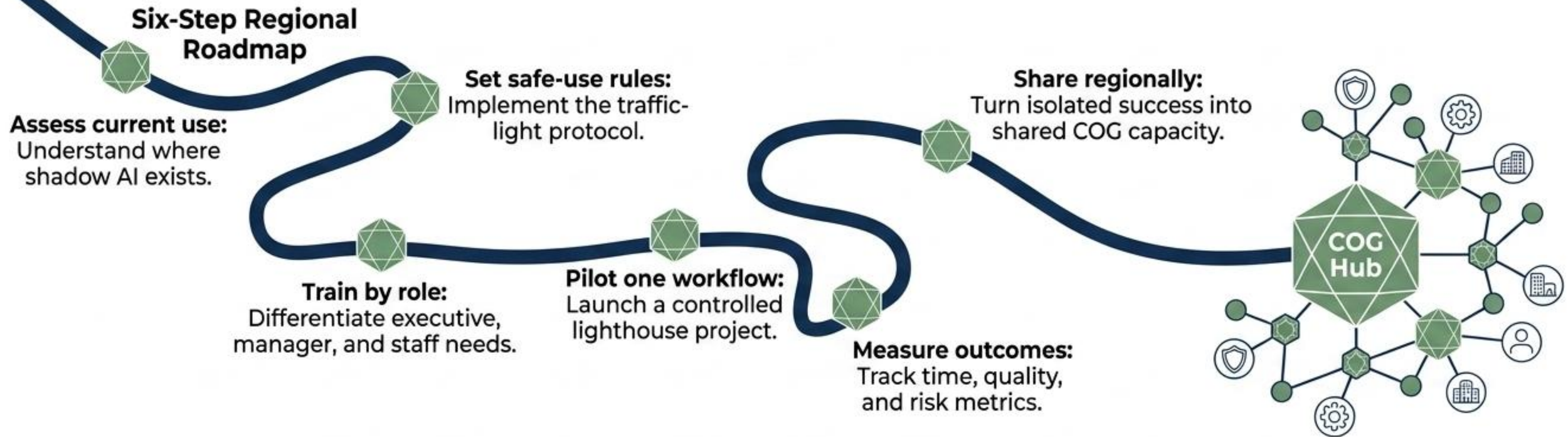


Implementation Note

- Each role has different decisions to make.
- Training should match responsibility.
- Capability must be reinforced through examples, not only policy language.

Regional Implementation

A Regional AI Action Agenda for COGs



Sources: UCPCOG regional implementation framework and project research synthesis.

AI should help public employees use judgment where it matters most, not remove accountability from public service.



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The UCPCOG AI Network provides a clear, affordable path for local governments to use artificial intelligence without needing a large budget or IT department. This network delivers secure, shared AI tools and practical public sector training to meet you where you are.

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