Artificial intelligence can help governments be more human

For all discussions of artificial intelligence (AI) and its use cases for local governments, the bottom line is has the power to deliver government-specific content to citizens in ways that impact their lives. While there is indeed anxiety about implementing AI solutions in the public sector, the immense benefits greatly outweigh the short-term growing pains.

> **"We want to help government organizations maintain that high-value relationship with citizens,"** said Luke Norris, vice president of platform strategy and digital transformation at Granicus. **"There is a level of trust between government and the public that cannot be shaken. That's why ensuring that any AI solutions understand not only the content they share, but the context of that information is so important."**

Norris recently shared these thoughts and more about the use of AI in state and local government organizations with Dustin Haisler, president of e.Republic and Government Technology during a webinar titled *AI That Works for Government: Smarter Tools, Better Experiences.*

Managing complexity

During the webinar, Norris mentioned the challenging role of government organizations. More than 20,000 communities in the United States serve more than 300 million people and work to solve thousands of problems. Even things that seem straightforward — such as obtaining a pool permit — differ from location to location, creating what Norris called a "Rubik's cube" of unimaginable scale.

Artificial intelligence holds great promise, but there has been some hesitation. Norris said 70% of state and local technology leaders feel anxiety about implementing AI. However, once they leap, Norris said it has been full speed ahead.

> "I've seen people highly skeptical of AI go from a pilot one day to looking at how to scale the next," Norris said. "Six months ago, there was so much hesitancy but that is starting to go away because of the transformative nature of AI."

Part of that is the timeline: What once happened over months and years in other eras (think Web 2.0) now occurs in days and weeks. In pockets across the countries, governments are already testing and iterating quickly, helping build momentum. For them, the path is the same: Start small, scale, and watch as things snowball.

> "People are understanding that AI is not a technology system," Norris said. "It is a tool that sits on the shoulders of this amazing data that our governments create. What we need is in place; we need to put that hesitation behind us."
>
> — Luke Norris, vice president of platform strategy and digital transformation at Granicus

Building trust through responsible AI

Norris emphasized that technology alone isn't what builds citizen trust — transparency and governance do. As governments adopt AI tools, establishing clear policies around how data is used and how content is generated becomes crucial. Citizens want to know the information they receive is both accurate and aligned with their community's values.

> "That's where content governance comes into play," Norris said. "AI needs to know not just the data it's referencing, but whether it's appropriate for the context — who's receiving it, what tone is used, and what the purpose is."

By embedding responsible-use guidelines, local governments can ensure AI becomes an extension of their mission to inform, serve, and protect, rather than an opaque black box of automation.

This balance between efficiency and accountability is where public-sector AI differs most from the private sector. Norris explained that while commercial platforms can experiment freely, governments must operate with public trust as their central metric. When AI tools help residents find accurate information faster — about permits, taxes, or safety alerts — that trust deepens and reinforces the citizen-government bond.

The human side of automation

For Norris, AI's potential lies not in replacing human work but in amplifying it. By automating repetitive administrative tasks and surfacing insights from massive datasets, government employees can focus on higher-value work that requires the human touch: empathy, creativity, and problem-solving.

In this sense, AI becomes a force multiplier, enabling faster responses, smarter communication, and a more consistent citizen experience across departments and agencies.

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Looking forward, Norris believes this next phase of digital transformation will redefine what "service" means in government. AI systems that learn from citizen interactions, maintain context across multiple touchpoints, and respond with clarity and compassion will create a more human experience than ever before, powered by data and guided by purpose.

The next era of citizen connection

As the public sector continues its digital evolution, AI offers more than just operational gains. It represents a new way for the government to listen, respond, and adapt. By combining powerful data tools with human-centered design, local agencies can meet rising expectations for personalized, real-time service while maintaining empathy and transparency that define public trust.

Norris said this shift is already underway. "We're seeing AI reshape how people experience government," he noted. "It's no longer about automating processes; it's about amplifying relationships."

For agencies ready to explore what comes next, the message is clear: start small, stay accountable, and build with purpose. The right AI tools — such as those in Granicus' Government Experience Cloud — are designed to help governments create meaningful, contextually aware connections at scale. When implemented thoughtfully, AI doesn't make government less human; it helps it become more so.

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The goal is to help public servants spend more time on the things humans do best,"

"AI can handle scale, but people deliver the connection."

– Luke Norris, vice president of platform strategy and digital transformation at Granicus

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