

The Art of the Possible: AI to unlock productivity and growth

The public service is already seeing value from AI. As the technology evolves, so do the opportunities to rethink how work is done and how services are delivered. Exploring these opportunities can help ensure AI is used in ways that are practical and focused on public good.

AI can help the public service in three broad ways.

1. **Streamlining everyday tasks** by making routine or time-consuming work faster, easier, and more accurate for public servants.
2. **Supporting better decision-making** by helping uncover patterns and insights from complex data.
3. **Improving public-facing services** by making them easier to access, more consistent, and able to scale without extra staffing.

Streamlining everyday tasks (internal)

What This Category Means

AI helps public servants complete routine or time-consuming tasks more efficiently

Example

- An AI tool that checks benefit applications for missing or inconsistent information
- A tool that creates first drafts of reports by summarising structured case data
- An automation that pre-fills standard fields in internal templates used by public servants
- Automated transcription of meetings, calls, hearings, and notes

Supporting better decision-making (internal or external)

What This Category Means

AI provides insights that support professional judgement and evidence-informed decisions

Example

- A system that flags high-risk individuals based on early signs in service data
- An AI model that predicts flood risk using satellite images and climate data
- Insights on emotions and sentiment in staff engagement surveys and public submissions
- Medical insights provided to staff related to patient data, such as retinal scanning, cancer detection, and diagnosis

- A dashboard that helps policy advisors compare regional population trends

Improving public-facing services (external)

What This Category Means

AI makes services more accessible, personalised, or available at scale

Example

- A chatbot that helps users find the right government form in their preferred language
- A virtual contact centre that provides the public with 24/7 support with real-time knowledge assistance, and the ability to independently resolve issues through automation
- A virtual assistant that guides people through a step-by-step benefit eligibility check

For more information on AI in the public service see the [2024 cross agency AI survey](#).

Measuring the benefits of our AI efforts

We just explored what broad benefits are possible with AI. That does not tell us what matters most in each agency or project. That is where value comes in.

To make responsible decisions about AI, it helps to move from general impact to local context. What kind of value could AI create in your setting? For your team, your service, or the people you serve?

Focus on Value First

AI can improve a task or streamline a process, but that does not necessarily mean it will create significant benefit. The greatest impact tends to come when AI contributes to outcomes that are meaningful for an agency and the communities it serves.

Whether developing an AI use case or reviewing a proposal from another team, it can be useful to consider the kind of value the proposed solution aims to create, and for whom.

Value may take many forms. For some agencies, it may relate to how AI supports better customer experience and economic growth, or to timeliness and consistency. For others, it may involve greater access to services, better use of staff time, or alignment with Te Tiriti o Waitangi. There is no single definition of value. What matters is clarity about what success looks like in a particular context.

The following questions may help support early thinking or structured analysis:

- What issue is this intended to address?
- Who may benefit, and in what way?
- What would success look like?
- How might we know if it is working?

Considering How to Measure Impact

Some agencies begin with small-scale pilots or proofs of concept to explore whether a proposed AI use delivers value in practice. These early stages can support learning, adaptation, and informed decision-making.

The information below outlines a set of dimensions that are commonly used to consider the potential impacts of AI in government settings. It is intended as a resource to support reflection, help clarify objectives, or inform an assessment of a proposed initiative. Not every area will be relevant to every context.

1. Impact Area: Operational Efficiency

What to Look For:

Reduced time on tasks, fewer manual steps, fewer errors

Possible Ways to Assess Impact

- Compare time or effort before and after.
- Conduct simple time studies or workflow reviews.

2. Impact Area: Financial Impact

What to Look For:

Reduced operating costs, avoided costs, improved use of resources

Possible Ways to Assess Impact

- Consider resource use over time.
- Compare budgets or projected savings, if available.

3. Impact Area: Service Quality & Customer Experience

What to Look For

More consistent delivery, quicker responses, fewer complaints

Possible Ways to Assess Impact

- Track resolution times, service levels, or available feedback on quality of service.

4. Impact Area: Employee Experience

What to Look For

Reduced repetitive work, more time for meaningful tasks

Possible Ways to Assess Impact

- Use staff feedback or informal observation to explore changes in work experience.

5. Impact Area: Public Experience

What to Look For

Easier access to services, faster resolution, improved satisfaction

Possible Ways to Assess Impact

- Use public feedback or digital analytics, where appropriate.

6. Impact Area: Adoption and Usage

What to Look For

Engagement with AI tools by staff or the public, integration into existing processes

Possible Ways to Assess Impact

- Monitor uptake, usage levels, or interest in further use.

7. Impact Area: Trust and Ethics

What to Look For

Transparency, consistency, cultural alignment, and public confidence

Possible Ways to Assess Impact

- Consider whether decisions are explainable.
- Record oversight activity and public feedback.

8. Impact Area: Economic Growth Enablement

What to Look For

Improved regulatory efficiency or service processes that support business and innovation

Possible Ways to Assess Impact

- Track time or cost savings for businesses interacting with government
- Monitor service turnaround times, or business satisfaction with public services

Each agency will bring its own goals, risks, and responsibilities to this work. Identifying what matters, and how it might be assessed, is a helpful step toward enabling safe, responsible, value-driven use of AI.

Measuring the impact of a public chatbot

Imagine this... Imagine that your organisation wanted to trial an AI-powered chatbot on one page of the website to help people access information about specific public services online.

If you were involved with this project for your agency, what would you measure to understand its value and impact?

Here are some ideas to consider

1. Operational Efficiency

Why it matters

A chatbot should ease staff pressure by handling what does not need a human.

How to measure

- Track changes in inbound emails and calls.

2. Public Experience

Why it matters

If it does not work for users, it fails.

How to measure

- User feedback surveys
- Chatbot usage

3. Service Quality

Why it matters

Bad advice can cause confusion or harm.

How to measure

- Test for errors
- Track complaints

4. Trust and Ethics

Why it matters

Trust underpins public confidence and safe AI use.

How to measure

- Test for bias in chatbot responses
- Collect public feedback.

Conclusion: What is next for AI in the public service?

These use cases and value considerations are just the beginning for AI in the public service. The AI you use today will be the worst it will ever be – as the technology changes, AI technology will become more versatile and beneficial to the user. Internal improvements that are unimaginable today may turn into the day-to-day operations and strategic initiatives we employ tomorrow.

There are so many opportunities to leverage AI to better support Aotearoa New Zealand and our people, but there needs to be considerations around the pitfalls that AI can have and the realities that need to be faced when exploring innovative AI solutions. We will look to explore these realities, risks, and threats further in Module two on Safe and Responsible AI.

