



THE 30 PERCENT GOVERNMENT: UNLOCKING DATA'S FULL VALUE THROUGH TRUST, TOOLS AND TRANSFORMATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | VOL.27 | QUEENSLAND



IN BRIEF

In a wide-ranging roundtable hosted under Chatham House Rules, participants from Queensland Government agencies, academia, and industry convened to dissect the complex interplay of artificial intelligence (AI), data capability, governance, and decision-making within the public sector. The session illuminated the tension between innovation potential and institutional constraints—technical, cultural, and legislative—that continue to limit cross-agency collaboration and effective use of data.

A dominant theme was the urgent need for shared digital infrastructure and cohesive leadership across government to unlock the benefits of AI-enabled public services. Participants stressed that siloed systems, unclear identity frameworks, and outdated governance models are hampering predictive service delivery, operational efficiency, and ethical AI adoption. While Queensland's QChat initiative and early AI experimentation signal momentum, others noted that federal policy vacuums and fragmented agency approaches still pose significant roadblocks.

Attendees also highlighted that data maturity is uneven across departments, with many stuck in foundational stages—unable to scale pilots or harmonise systems. Despite these barriers, examples of inter-agency cooperation, investment in AI literacy, and adaptive governance models offered compelling blueprints for scalable progress.

The session concluded with a strong call for bolder leadership, cultural alignment, and unified data-sharing protocols to make AI readiness and data-enabled decision-making both viable and sustainable for the Australian public sector.

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KEY THEMES AND INSIGHTS

THE 30 PERCENT GOVERNMENT: HIDDEN VALUE BEHIND THE SILO WALL

Participants repeatedly returned to the idea that government agencies are only realising a fraction—estimated informally at “30 percent”—of the true value of their data. The root cause? A persistent culture of ownership and fragmentation. For example, Queensland Health’s long-standing inability to proactively identify renal patients—despite holding the necessary biomarkers across separate organ-based silos—underscored how rigid custodianship can render life-saving insight invisible.

The insight: data maturity is not just about systems or standards but about mindsets. Breaking the silo is not just a structural challenge—it’s a cultural one. Leadership must establish that data is an enterprise asset, not a departmental possession.

DECISION-MAKING AS A LOST DISCIPLINE

One of the most provocative insights came from the discussion around public sector decision-making. Despite the proliferation of dashboards and analytics platforms, participants argued that agencies have underinvested in teaching staff how to think with data. A former CIO noted that among thousands of IT students he lectured, not one could articulate that IT exists to support better decisions. Agencies tend to rely on data presentation—not decision transformation.

The roundtable called for integrating decision theory and structured judgement frameworks into capability uplift programs, ensuring data doesn’t just inform but improves the way decisions are made.

WHEN EVERYONE WANTS AI—BUT NOBODY OWNS IT

AI was framed less as a single tool and more as a pressure test for institutional readiness. One academic noted the rise of “jagged frontiers,” where AI performs exceptionally in some areas and fails in others. Yet, in most agencies, AI remains stuck in pilot mode due to the absence of shared governance, inter-agency protocols, and clear accountability structures.

Queensland’s QChat and community of practice were cited as rare public sector examples of distributed experimentation, but even those have limits. In federal settings, AI work is often frozen until legal or policy clarity is achieved—leaving agencies unwilling to adopt even when capacity exists.

The key insight: Without coordinated national leadership, AI will remain a series of disconnected tests rather than a scalable solution.

IDENTITY CRISIS: WITHOUT A UNIQUE ANCHOR, INSIGHT SCATTERS

Participants shared multiple examples—ranging from procurement audits to landholder compliance—where data linkage was impossible due to inconsistent identifiers. One agency noted that citizens listed jointly on property titles appear as “two owners” rather than one record, breaking analytics models.

The absence of a unified digital identity framework, and low public trust around it, remains a systemic weakness preventing joined-up government services.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

CULTURE OF CONTROL: WHEN DATA GOVERNANCE BECOMES DATA PARALYSIS

Across agencies, participants detailed how legacy mindsets, rigid risk appetites, and local KPIs undermine data sharing. One agency explained that even within the same department, internal divisions treat data as proprietary, slowing approvals and diminishing utility. In other instances, agencies imposed chargebacks for API access, creating artificial cost barriers to collaboration.

Even where data was available, participants warned of semantic mismatches—citizen names spelled differently, data structures optimised for regulatory compliance rather than insight generation. These mismatches increase friction and dilute the trustworthiness of insights.

AI GOVERNANCE: THE POLICY VACUUM

A consistent refrain was that public sector leaders remain paralysed in the absence of centralised AI policy. Several departments reported banning tools like ChatGPT due to data residency or privacy concerns but noted this often led to staff bypassing restrictions with personal devices.

The real problem? There are no consistent boundaries between internal optimisation (efficiency) and external decision automation (impact). AI is being introduced in service design without clear policies on transparency, liability, or human-in-the-loop verification.

FUTURE FOCUS AREAS

DECISION-READY PUBLIC SERVANTS

Agencies must go beyond tool training and embed decision-making frameworks. This includes how to interpret data, weigh evidence, and identify when human judgement must override algorithmic recommendations:

- Cross-departmental secondments focused on decision labs or simulated case work
- Frameworks that match data literacy with domain judgement
- Executive-level refreshers in decision theory, tailored to the AI era

PROACTIVE GOVERNANCE FOR AI

With AI adoption moving faster than legislation, government needs not just policy, but sandbox governance. Shared ethical review boards or cross-agency governance pilots were proposed that allow for safe testing of AI systems in controlled environments:

- AI assurance frameworks modelled on QChat experiments
- Distinction protocols between internal AI use and external decision automation
- Scenario-based training for leaders on AI-induced risk

COMMON LANGUAGE, NOT JUST COMMON PLATFORMS

Beyond APIs and metadata, the roundtable emphasised the need for semantic and structural alignment. This includes:

- Shared taxonomies and definitions for key citizen attributes
- A pan-government entity registry to unify supplier insights
- National identity frameworks that balance opt-in choice with data integrity

INNOVATIVE IDEAS AND CASE STUDIES

1. QCHAT: THE QUIET ACHIEVER IN AI ENABLEMENT

Queensland Government's internal AI tool, QChat, emerged as a standout example of safe, localised AI use in government. Designed as an alternative to externally hosted tools, it supports internal use cases ranging from document summarisation to proposal drafting. Participants noted that QChat's pre-loaded government data made it a powerful augmentation tool for departments—particularly for drafting, research, and internal process automation.

However, several noted its limits in scalability and AI maturity. Without federated coordination, its uptake remains patchy across departments, and its use is largely constrained to “efficiency” rather than frontline or citizen-facing innovation.

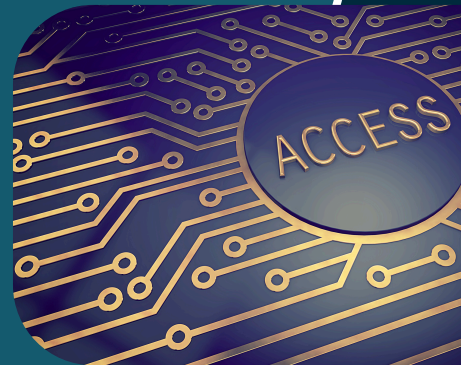
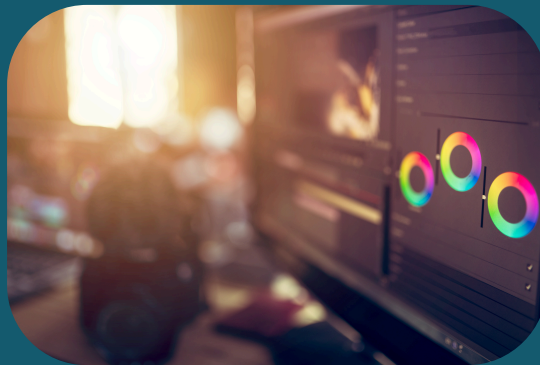
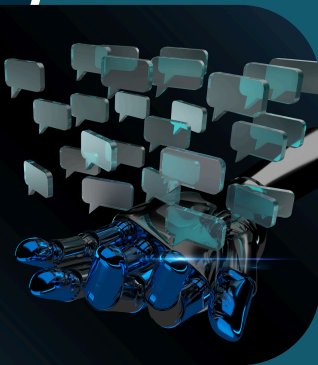
2. REAL-TIME MONITORING IN VEGETATION COMPLIANCE

One department shared its proactive approach to environmental compliance: by integrating near real-time satellite data with machine learning, they can detect unlawful vegetation clearance almost immediately. While reactive enforcement remains the norm in many jurisdictions, this use of predictive modelling to intervene early is already altering how compliance resources are allocated.

The model highlights the power of AI to support regulatory agility and environmental stewardship—if data sharing, legal, and procedural guardrails are in place.

3. THE SOCIAL ANALYTICS LAB (SAL): GOVERNANCE-BY-DESIGN

Griffith University's SAL presents a model for data access that balances utility and privacy. With a single data custodian conducting all extractions and researchers receiving only aggregated results, the lab secures access to rich police and corrections datasets without compromising ethics. This “data in, results out” model was cited as a replicable template for public sector-university collaboration.



STRATEGIC OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

- **Mandate cross-agency data mapping:** Each department to identify siloed datasets that could contribute to shared use cases (e.g. health risk prediction, disaster recovery).
- **Standardise ethical AI protocols:** Introduce interim frameworks that allow low-risk AI trials under controlled supervision (e.g. pilot reviews, co-design with ethics advisors).
- **Launch decision capability pilots:** Target one major regulatory team to pair AI tools with structured decision training over a 6-month cycle.

MEDIUM-TERM GOALS

- **Reinstate or establish state-level Chief Digital Officers:** Empower these roles with cross-agency coordination mandates.
- **Formalise AI use categories:** Distinguish AI use for internal efficiency vs public-facing automation, each with specific approval thresholds.
- **Digitally unify workforce identity:** Ensure public servants' data access and credentials follow them across roles and departments.

LONG-TERM VISION

- **Establish a national federated digital identity framework:** Allow secure, opt-in citizen data linkage with granular controls and auditability.
- **Evolve data custodianship into service stewardship:** Redefine roles and KPIs to incentivise data sharing as a service, not a liability.
- **Build a proactive service model:** Reframe service delivery from reactive to predictive—where agencies anticipate needs, coordinate responses, and validate decisions using AI-enhanced human judgement.



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We've been able to engineer a new program antithetical to the classical red tape, administration, and risk-aversion that impedes innovation.

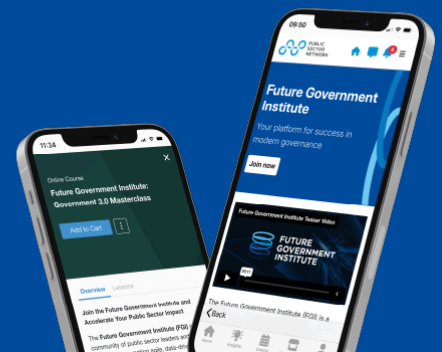
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Our mission is to empower government professionals with the tools, insights, and networks needed to drive meaningful transformation - <https://publicsectornetwork.com/future-government-institute/>

Leveraging our extensive connections, we are uniting the sharpest minds from government, academia, and industry via monthly research-driven roundtables, hosted at esteemed national centres of research, courtesy of university partners across Australia and New Zealand.



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PSN's growing community spans across federal, state, and local government departments, healthcare, and education, allowing members to share information, access the latest in government innovation, and engage with other like-minded individuals on a secure and closed-door network.

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