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The Municipal AI Framework: Your First Step Towards Responsible Innovation

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become a hot topic, so naturally many municipal managers are intrigued. They wonder what it can do to improve the municipality's services, administration, and operations. They are bombarded with warnings about the need for caution while using it, but also with claims that it has become a must. It's natural to want to jump on the innovation bandwagon... but where do you start?

The first step should be to develop an AI framework for the municipality. This will allow you to decide on the direction you want to take before embarking on this technological adventure.

What is a municipal AI framework?

There is no doubt that AI can transform day-to-day life by automating repetitive tasks, making services more efficient, and even helping with decision-making. But without a framework, how can you make sure it aligns with your values and protects citizens' data? Or that your employees are using it correctly? Or that you are aware of its limitations and potential faults?

"An AI framework lets you spring into action while establishing how your municipality will use the technologies ethically and effectively," explains Geneviève Parent, Strategic Consultant at Activis.

Why does your municipality need a framework?

It ensures ethical use. A framework establishes core principles (transparency, fairness, data protection) and implements guardrails.

It strengthens public trust. By documenting your practices, you can show citizens that you are innovating without compromising safety or respect.

It can streamline operations. AI can automate request management, accelerate permit processing, and improve efficiency. A framework ensures this is done consistently.

It reduces risk. A well-crafted framework incorporates assessment mechanisms and ensures compliance with Law 25.

It lets you prepare for the future. It lays the groundwork for implementing future innovations.

Core components of your framework

1. **Objectives and scope:** Indicate why you intend to use AI and in which areas (e.g., public services, internal administration, public works).
2. **Guiding principles:** Establish the non-negotiable values that will inform all of your decisions.
3. **Governance:** Identify who will make decisions and oversee AI projects.
4. **Management process:** Develop a clear procedure for evaluating, approving, and monitoring initiatives.
5. **Data protection:** Decide which information and data will be accessible and which must be protected under Law 25.
6. **Choice of tools:** List the criteria for choosing technologies and suppliers.
7. **Training:** Determine how your team will develop digital literacy and learn to use AI responsibly.
8. **Oversight and improvement:** Indicate how you will assess effectiveness and adjust the framework and tools as technology evolves.
9. **Accessibility:** Ensure that AI is used as a complement to make services more accessible to all citizens, rather than a replacement for conventional channels.

A profitable investment

Developing an AI framework may seem time-consuming, but it's an investment that quickly pays dividends. By clarifying your orientations from the start, you can prevent costly mistakes and win the trust of citizens and elected officials alike.

What's more, for directors general who already wear many hats, well-managed AI frees up time to support the community.

Ultimately, an AI framework is not a roadblock to innovation: it's the foundation of sustainable implementation. By using it, municipalities benefit from greater efficiency, transparency, and legitimacy.