DEM–36

A CHARTER FOR DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

An Artificial Intelligence Strategy for the South Australian Government

A response to the South Australian Government Discussion Paper

democracy2036.org

February 2026

About Dem36

Democracy 2036 (Dem36) is an incorporated not-for-profit organisation that has embarked on a ten-year mission to renew democracy in South Australia. The foundation of this work is a draft Charter for Democratic Renewal. The draft Charter represents an agenda for consultation about how a new or revised State Constitution could promote sound democratic practices and culture.

Background to this submission

This submission is based on the issues raised and recommendations made in the Dem36 'Democracy and AI' discussion paper (available on Dem36's website and attached to this submission). The Dem36 discussion paper draws on research and reports from governments, academia, the OECD and other international organisations that address the risks and opportunities for governing that artificial intelligence presents.

Acknowledgement

Many of the practical examples referenced are drawn from the work of The GovLab, an action research centre founded at New York University and affiliated with The Burnes Center for Social Change at Northeastern University in Boston. The GovLab is led by Professor Beth Simone Noveck, recognised as one of the World's 100 Most Influential People in Digital Government[a] and the Chief AI Strategist for the State of New Jersey. Through the RebootDemocracy.ai blog, The GovLab maintains a repository of case examples and commentary from experts and practitioners in governing with AI. Matt Ryan, Executive Director, Democracy 2036, is an Adelaide-based Senior Fellow of The GovLab.

Response to: An Artificial Intelligence Strategy for the South Australian Government Discussion Paper

Structure of this submission

This submission is organised into three main parts:

Part 1 makes three key recommendations that are aimed at ensuring AI delivers measurable public benefit, builds lasting sovereign capability, and maintains community trust through genuine participation.

Part 2 provides detailed responses to each consultation question organised under the SA Government's discussion paper section headings: 'A Vision for AI Enabled Government in SA', 'Key Focus Areas for AI in Government in SA', and 'What Needs to be in Place'.

Attachment 1: 'Democracy and AI' is a discussion paper produced by Dem36. It makes policy recommendations and includes links to practical examples that could inform the South Australian Government's AI Strategy.

Part 1: Key Recommendations

1. Mandate Participatory AI Governance

The challenge: public trust in AI requires more than technical safeguards—it requires genuine community participation in how AI systems are designed, deployed, and overseen. Without this, AI risks embedding biases, creating barriers for vulnerable communities, or failing to serve genuine public needs.

The solution: make participatory AI governance mandatory, not optional:

- **Require community engagement:** agencies deploying AI systems must engage the not-for-profit sector and affected communities in ongoing oversight, particularly vulnerable population groups.
- **Conduct human rights impact assessments:** before deploying AI systems affecting vulnerable populations, conduct assessments with meaningful community participation. Make findings public and demonstrate how concerns have been addressed.
- **Create accessible participation channels:** make it easy for the public to provide input on AI applications that affect them, report concerns, and access information about how AI is being used in government services.
- **Establish AI sandboxes with community oversight:** create safe spaces for experimenting with AI to enhance participation and service delivery, with community participation and oversight from the outset.

The discussion paper emphasises that public trust is essential and AI use must be 'trusted, accountable and puts serving the South Australian public at its heart'. Participatory governance makes this concrete, ensuring communities have meaningful voice in shaping technologies that affect their lives.

Case study: Algorithmic decision-making – a new standard for democratic governance

The Supreme Court in Spain found the legitimacy of algorithmic decision-making depends on public participation - the ability of citizens to understand how algorithms work, scrutinise their operations, and meaningfully contest decisions that affect their lives.

https://rebootdemocracy.ai/blog/the-judicial-protection-of-algorithmic-transparency

2. Build Comprehensive Public Sector AI Capability

The challenge: successful AI adoption requires workforce capability at all levels—from foundational literacy to specialist expertise. Without this, AI risks being poorly deployed, inappropriately used, or failing to deliver its potential.

The solution: a comprehensive capability-building program with three elements:

- **Foundational AI literacy for all public servants:** build on TAFE SA's introductory course that supports staff to understand what AI is, what it can and cannot do, with ongoing practice-oriented workshops that provide for learning first-hand from those working with AI.
- **Role-specific training and support:** different roles require different AI capabilities. Frontline staff need practical skills in working with AI tools; managers need to understand deployment and oversight; policy staff need to grasp governance implications. Have tailored training for these needs and support it with clear guidelines and decision frameworks.
- **Skills transfer through public-private partnerships:** use government's procurement leverage to require tech/AI vendors to contribute to capability building—not just training, but embedding their staff in public sector projects for hands-on expertise and skills transfer.

As the discussion paper notes, upskilling the workforce is a key enabler for the strategy. This recommendation makes that concrete, linking capability building to procurement settings and ensuring skills development and transfer become standard practice.

Case study: Civic Bridge, City of San Francisco

By working with private sector technologists and designers, the City of San Francisco taps pro bono talent worth millions, and companies improve staff retention and job satisfaction.

https://collective-intelligence.thegovlab.org/case/civic-bridge

3. Establish a Public Sector Innovation Fund

The challenge: efficiency gains without explicit mechanisms to redirect them toward service improvements risk being absorbed into general operations or 'efficiency dividend' savings.

The solution: build on the government's Proof of Value grants program for government agencies by establishing a Public Sector Innovation Fund that:

- **Captures agency efficiency gains:** requires agencies to quantify AI efficiency gains (FTE hours, cost savings, processing time reductions) and contribute a portion to the fund.
- **Captures private sector contributions:** leverages the government's procurement settings to require financial and/or in-kind contributions to the fund.
- **Funds projects with sector-wide potential:** supports projects with potential to be adopted beyond a single agency, leading to sector-wide improvements in human contact services, accessibility, and community engagement.
- **Enables innovation and scaling:** provides resources for agencies to experiment with AI applications that strengthen democratic participation and service delivery.
- **Creates accountability:** requires public reporting on efficiency gains, fund contributions, and service improvements, making visible the connection between AI adoption and enhanced public services.

This approach ensures efficiency gains and government procurements are not an end in themselves, but a means to deliver the Minister's vision of AI enabling 'world-class, people-focused services'.

Case study: NHS Productivity Plan

Through the NHS Productivity Plan the UK government is boosting investment in digital tech and transformation by almost 50%, reinvesting efficiency savings in its 10-year health plan. Among the tech applications being explored is 'Dora', an AI assistant that phones patients after cataract surgery to help identify who needs to see a clinician.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/departmental-efficiency-delivery-plans/departmental-efficiency-plans

How these recommendations connect

These three key recommendations are mutually reinforcing. Participatory governance keeps AI aligned with public needs, builds trust, and surfaces issues early. Comprehensive capability building ensures effective deployment and strengthens sovereign AI capacity. The Public Innovation Fund captures agency AI efficiency gains and private sector contributions and redirects them to service improvements. Together, they create a system where AI strengthens democratic governance and delivers services that are genuinely 'smarter, faster, easier and safer'—not just more efficient. This integrated approach ensures the SA Government's AI strategy delivers measurable public benefit while maintaining the trust essential for democratic governance.

Detailed responses to consultation questions follow in Part 2

Part 2: Responses to Discussion Questions

A Vision for AI Enabled Government in SA

Discussion question: What aspirations or outcomes do you think should be part of the South Australian Government's AI vision?

Beyond efficiency, the vision should explicitly commit to:

- **Democratic participation and public sector capability:** strengthening democratic participation through improved access to information and enhanced civic engagement, while upskilling the public sector workforce so staff have confidence and capability to work effectively with AI tools and deploy them appropriately.
- **Human-centred service delivery:** using efficiency gains to expand human contact services, not replace them. AI should free up public servants to focus on work requiring judgement, empathy, and creativity—ensuring efficiency serves social inclusion and cohesion goals.
- **Sovereign capability and global partnerships:** building sovereign AI capability through strategic use of government open data, partnerships with leading universities and research institutions in Australia and abroad, and procurement settings that develop lasting local expertise.
- **Trusted, safe and ethical use of AI:** tools and technologies that work for the good of citizens and communities, which include sufficient security and transparency to protect citizens from risks of government overreach.

Discussion question: How would you define a successful AI-enabled public sector for the community?

Success means AI demonstrably strengthens public service delivery:

- **Public sector staff spend more time on judgement, empathy and creativity**, with measurable increases in public-facing interaction time and service quality metrics.
- **Services become more accessible and effective**. AI handles routine queries and transactions, while complex cases receive enhanced human attention.

- **Effective and transparent safety protocols** that protect citizens' privacy and build trust
- **Efficiency savings are transparently tracked and reinvested** in community-facing services, with regular public reporting on hours saved and their redeployment.

Discussion question: *What does trust look like for government in its use of AI in work and services?*

Trust requires transparency, accountability, and demonstrable public benefit through:

- **Participatory governance structures** that involve the not-for-profit sector and citizens in meaningful participation in how AI systems are designed and deployed. This involves ongoing oversight, not just one-off consultations.
- **Clear reporting mechanisms** that show how efficiency gains translate to service improvements—not just cost savings, but actual redeployment of resources to public-facing roles and work. There should be clear evidence that AI investments deliver better outcomes through improved response times, more effective services, reduced administrative burden, or enhanced accessibility.
- **Human rights impact assessments and algorithmic auditing**. Assessments for AI systems affecting vulnerable populations should be conducted with meaningful community participation before deployment, regular auditing of AI systems for discriminatory outcomes, and transparent reporting of findings and remediation.
- **Explainability of AI-assisted decisions** should be a focus, particularly those decisions affecting individuals' rights, entitlements, or access to services. People should understand how decisions were reached and have clear pathways to challenge them.
- **Being responsive** to unintended consequences.
- **Minimising the potential for bad actors** to misuse data or AI capabilities against citizens.

Key Focus Areas for AI in Government in SA

Discussion question: *Which areas of government service or operation do you believe would benefit most from AI, and why?*

The discussion paper's focus areas (service delivery, efficiency and productivity, smarter decisions, and community engagement) are well-chosen, but **precise areas could be further**

informed by input from both public sector staff and citizens. The South Australian Government has a strong track record to build on, with previous world-leading efforts in public sector and citizen-led red tape reduction and innovation through programs such as Simplify, 90-day projects, and innovation challenges[b].

Existing efforts to engage public sector staff could be further informed by the cutting-edge work undertaken by the State of New Jersey that engaged thousands of its workers in addressing the impact of AI on work[c].

Discussion question: *How could AI improve your experience with public services? services (for example in health, education, transport, etc.)?*

All government **agencies should be required to have a published plan** that outlines how they are exploring the use of AI to improve the public services they offer. Globally, there are numerous and diverse examples available of how public services are being improved through the use of AI. The Democracy 2036 discussion paper (Attachment 1) makes recommendations that reference some of the examples that could inform South Australian government agencies AI planning. Further examples are available on The GovLab blog RebootDemocracy.ai.

Discussion question: *Are there specific risks or challenges you think the government should focus on when adopting AI?*

Key risks requiring attention:

- **Efficiency gains without service improvements:** efficiency gains are absorbed rather than redirected to public benefit and only contribute to agencies' efficiency savings targets. Clear reporting of how savings are redeployed should be required to be published as part of agencies' AI planning and annual reporting processes.
- **Algorithmic bias and discrimination:** The Robodebt example demonstrates how tech-driven processes without appropriate human oversight can lead to discriminatory outcomes. Concerns have also been raised about algorithmic decision-making for aged care support. Human rights impact assessments and ongoing auditing are essential.

- **Digital exclusion:** AI-enabled services must not create barriers for those without access to digital platforms or for those who are less digitally capable. Alternative access pathways and enhanced human services for those who need them remain critical.
- **Vendor dependence:** strategic procurement settings are needed to build sovereign capability rather than create dependence on external vendors.

Discussion question: *What considerations arise for government in its use of AI in services for Aboriginal South Australians, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and people with disability?*

Critical considerations include:

- **Co-design and participatory governance**: meaningful community participation in identifying needs, designing solutions, and ongoing oversight.
- **Cultural appropriateness and representative data:** AI systems must be trained on data reflecting community diversity and be sensitive to cultural contexts.
- **Accessibility by design:** compatibility with assistive technologies, features such as text simplification and translation as core features.
- **Human rights impact assessments:** conducting these before AI deployment is essential, with particular attention to avoiding discrimination and ensuring equitable access.
- **Alternative human service pathways:** non-AI options for those who prefer or require them.

What needs to be in place?

Discussion question: *What do you think the public sector workforce needs in order to confidently use AI in their jobs (e.g. training, guidelines, cultural change)?*

Building workforce capability requires:

- **Foundational AI literacy:** all public servants should understand what AI is, what it can and cannot do, and when it's appropriate to use, with mandatory training to build broad capability that reduces long-term dependence on external expertise.

- **Role-specific training and clear guidelines:** different roles require different AI capabilities, supported by practical guidance on when to use AI, when human judgement is required, and how to escalate concerns.
- **Strengthening public governance skills and ethical knowledge:** technical skills need to be complemented by a sound understanding of responsible governing and human ethics, and design thinking skills.
- **Cultural change and communities of practice:** position AI as a tool that augments staff capability, not a replacement for it. This requires leadership commitment, mechanisms for staff to share experiences, and partnerships with leading research institutions, the not-for-profit sector, and global networks.

Discussion question: *What considerations should guide the government's choice of AI technologies or platforms (for example, privacy features, local expertise, open-source vs proprietary tools)?*

Government's procurement decisions should advance public purposes:

- **Open data access and public benefit requirements:** provide appropriate access to government data to train models toward public purposes relevant to SA context, with strong privacy safeguards. Use procurement leverage to require vendors to contribute financially to a Public Sector Innovation Fund and/or dedicate staff time to public sector projects for skills transfer.
- **Local capability and interoperability:** require AI vendors to have local partnerships with commercial, not-for-profit and community organisations. Prefer solutions that avoid vendor lock-in that constrains future choices.
- **Vendor values and history:** the values and policies of technology companies, and their track record, need to be weighed as part assessing suitability for engagement by government.

Discussion question: *In your view, what safeguards are most important to ensure AI is used ethically and safely in government?*

Essential safeguards include:

- **Human in the loop and explainability:** for decisions significantly affecting individuals—particularly in justice, health, and social services—maintain human oversight and decision-making authority. People affected by AI-assisted decisions should understand how decisions were reached and have clear pathways to challenge them.
- **Data governance and right to review:** robust protections for personal data, clear purposes for data use, limitations on data retention and sharing, and individuals' right to request human review of AI-assisted decisions affecting them.
- **Broad consideration of democratic impact:** explicit consideration of potential risks to democratic and government public engagement processes, and introduction of additional protections where necessary.

Discussion question: *How should the government involve the community, industry, and experts in governing AI and keeping its use accountable?*

Participatory governance should be mandated, not optional:

- **Require community engagement and establish advisory mechanisms:** agencies deploying AI systems must engage citizens and not-for-profit organisations in ongoing oversight, not just one-off consultations. Create structures bringing together community representatives, public sector staff, and technical experts to create transparency and build a strong sense of co-ownership of AI-supported public services.
- **Partner with universities for evaluation and public reporting:** leverage SA's research institutions for ongoing evaluation, auditing, and capability building. Provide regular, accessible reports on AI deployment, impacts, efficiency gains and their redeployment, and challenges encountered.
- **Industry partnerships with public benefit requirements:** use procurement leverage to ensure industry partnerships contribute to public sector innovation, capability building, and service improvement.

AI Disclosure Statement

This disclosure follows guidance from the OECD's AI Principles that promote innovative, trustworthy AI that respects human rights and democratic values (https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/ai-principles.html).

AI tools were used to assist in drafting and structuring this submission. The substantive policy positions, recommendations, and examples are drawn from Democracy 2036's 'Democracy and AI' discussion paper and The GovLab's research and practice. AI assistance was used for: (1) organising consultation responses under the discussion paper's section headings, (2) ensuring consistency of language and structure, and (3) synthesising key recommendations across multiple discussion questions. All AI-generated content was reviewed, edited, and approved by human authors with expertise in democratic governance and public administration.

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References

[a] https://apolitical.co/list/en/digital-government-world100

[b] See open access article: Ryan, Matt D., "Debate and Decide: Innovative Participatory Governance in South Australia 2010–2018", *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 2023, esp. pp676-678; Simplify Day 2017 - https://yoursay.sa.gov.au/simplify-day-2017-red-tape-reduction-and-regulatory-reform ; Change@SA - https://www.publicsector.sa.gov.au/about/Resources-and-Publications/innovation-lab/the-lab/change@southaustralia

[c] https://rebootdemocracy.ai/blog/new-jersey-ai-task-force-policy-recommendations

Attachment 1 [Democracy and AI Discussion Paper] follows

Attachment 1

DEM–36

A CHARTER FOR DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Discussion Paper

Democracy and AI

Democracy and AI

Background

This Discussion Paper references and expands upon the ideas for reform contained within Dem36's draft Charter for Democratic Renewal in South Australia. Specifically, the following within section 3.4 'Our Democratic Culture':

- World-leading safeguards to protect against cyber threats, including misinformation and disinformation.
- Exploration of the use of AI and digital technologies to strengthen individuals' agency, inclusion and wellbeing while protecting their rights and preventing undemocratic use of citizens' personal data.

Vision

We will create a future where artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies strengthen our democratic processes while safeguarding institutional integrity. We are committed to harnessing AI to amplify citizen voices, foster inclusive participation, enhance government services, and ensure elections and public debate remain free, fair, and informed. AI and digital technologies will contribute to a resilient democracy that empowers citizens and strengthens social cohesion.

Democracy's adaptive challenge

Democracy has proven resilient through adapting to transformative technologies—from the printing press to radio, television, and the internet. AI may represent the next chapter in this ongoing story of democratic adaptation, or it may constitute something more fundamentally transformative in its capacity to reshape how we create, share, and process information. Whether an evolution or a revolution in democratic practice, the challenge remains the same: how we can embed democratic values, accountabilities, and public benefit into AI's development and deployment to strengthen rather than undermine democratic institutions.

AI presents both opportunities and risks. Without proper safeguards, AI-generated content can spread misinformation, while algorithmic biases and tech-driven processes without appropriate human oversight can lead to discriminatory outcomes in public administration —as Australia's

Robodebt program demonstrated. Similar concerns are now emerging about algorithmic decision-making for determining aged care support. Concentrated corporate control of AI technologies and the rapid pace of advancement challenge government capacity to regulate effectively. Citizens face growing difficulty distinguishing fact from fiction in increasingly complex and fragmented information environments and some are concerned about misuse of personal data and government overreach.

Yet these challenges are matched by significant opportunities. AI can strengthen democratic participation through improved access to information, more efficient and responsive government services, and help to manage the time, cost and complexity of civic engagement. When designed with democratic principles at their core, AI systems can help bridge divides, amplify underrepresented voices, and make governance more transparent and accountable. The key is ensuring that AI development serves the public interest, with appropriate oversight and meaningful public participation in shaping how these technologies are developed and deployed.

What are we already doing about the challenge?

At the national level, Australia is implementing a multi-faceted approach to harness AI's potential while managing risks. The Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce advises on potential threats. The Department of Industry, Science and Resources has established Australia's AI Ethics Framework and published a National AI Plan. The Digital Transformation Agency has conducted AI trials and developed training for public servants. The Data and Digital Ministers' Meeting works towards maintaining a nationally consistent approach.

At the state level, the South Australian Government has established a $200m Digital Investment Fund, with modernisation of the parliamentary election system identified as a priority. The government has introduced legislation to ban deepfake election advertising, led work on AI use in schools, and invested in civics education. Strategic policies, oversight mechanisms and guidelines for AI use focus on privacy and information security. In late January 2026, the government opened consultation on a South Australian AI strategy.

Government efforts are reinforced by civil society organisations supporting the development of tools to respond to misinformation and assess human rights impacts of AI-driven systems.

Initiatives in public interest journalism, media literacy, and fact-checking tools support civic education and critical thinking by citizens.

What more could we do about the challenge?

To realise AI's democratic potential in South Australia, we propose:

- **Create an integrated State AI Plan**: engage the South Australian public in the development of a clear public purpose for AI development and adoption, with specific objectives in areas that include job augmentation and job creation, security, health, education, social justice and social cohesion.

  Examples: Taiwan's citizen-led approach to AI, 'Wicked Decluttering' of permitting processes, ALERTCalifornia for faster wildfire detection, individualised education plans, transport planning, Citizen Lab's Go Vocal platform for analysing public consultation data.

- **Mandate participatory AI governance:** require both business and government to engage the not-for-profit sector and citizens in AI oversight to foster public trust, align AI development with societal values and human rights, and uncover potential issues early.

  Examples: Spanish Supreme Court ruling on legitimacy of algorithmic decision-making, human rights impact assessment tool for AI in banking, Amsterdam's participatory AI development.

- **Invest in AI's potential for democratic good:** highlight, develop and scale successful uses of AI in strengthening elections, public service delivery and civic engagement. Use procurement levers to require private sector AI vendors to support public projects through financial and in-kind contributions, such as establishment of a public sector innovation fund and releasing staff for work on public sector service delivery projects.

  Examples: AI procurement checklists and private-public + academic sector partnerships, City of San Francisco's Civic Bridge program for private-public partnering, civic chatbots that share reliable election information, AI-enabled text simplification to help people with limited language skills, UNDP/ ITU's AI for Good initiative.

- **Strengthen information-sharing:** create engaging ways to share information across sectors and with the public, to support informed public debate and policy responses.

  Examples: WIRED's global effort to track the use of AI in elections, frameworks and institutions for electoral integrity, Brazil's Experiment in AI-Powered Participation, and legislative transparency in California.

Further reading / resources

- Australian Government: Strengthening Australian Democracy
- Australian Government: National AI Plan
- Australian Human Rights Commission: Final Report: Human Rights and Technology
- Australian Resilient Democracy Network: Artificial Intelligence, False Information, and Electoral Integrity Perceptions
- South Australia: Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence (report tabled 14 Nov 2023)
- South Australian Government: Office for AI
- South Australian Government: An artificial intelligence strategy for the South Australian Government - Discussion Paper
- The Govlab & The Burnes Center for Social Change: Rebooting Democracy in the Age of AI (case studies and articles)
- Artificial intelligence (AI) in action: A preliminary review of AI use for democracy support - Policy paper, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, Sep 2024.
- OECD, 2025: Tackling civic participation challenges with emerging technologies - Beyond the hype
- OECD, 2025: Governing with Artificial Intelligence - The State of Play and Way Forward in Core Government Functions