

AI AND THE FUTURE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE

AI COLAB + FUTURES HUB WORKSHOP REPORT



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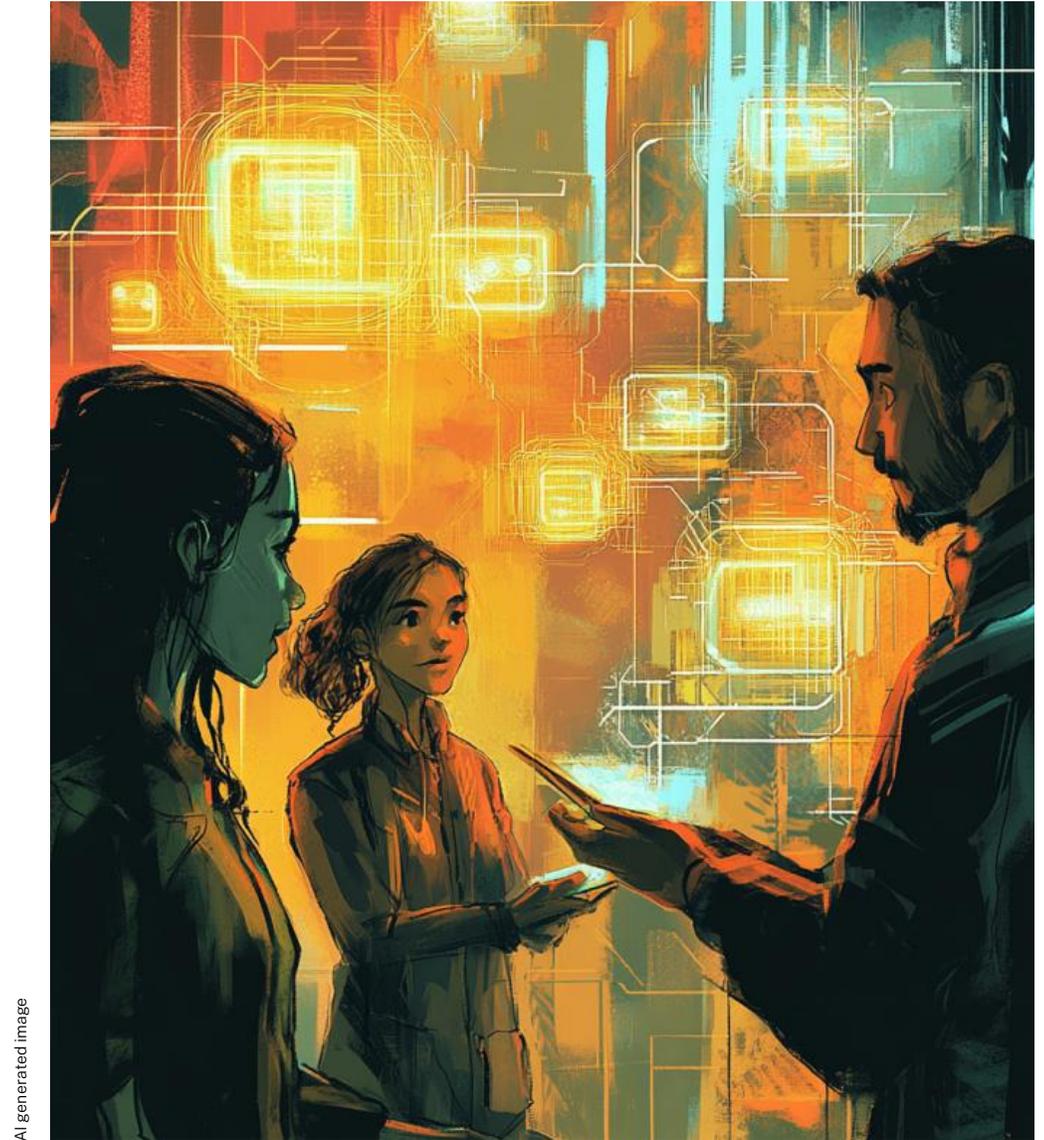
Workshop overview

In April 2025, the AI CoLab, together with the NSC Futures Hub, ANU, convened a workshop on *AI and the future of the public service*.

Participants were drawn from commonwealth, territory and overseas public services, academia, and businesses. Many were skilled users of AI, but others were novices, and some were self-described AI skeptics.

The workshop was an invitation for participants to consider the strengths and weaknesses of government today in relation to the potential advantages of artificial intelligence. The workshop explored opportunities and challenges for the incorporation of AI into government activities and services.

Participants developed conceptual 'prototypes' for AI-enabled government services and reflected on what it would take for government agencies to implement services like these. These 'prototypes' were ambitious, even utopian, but capture ideas about what could be done – they should not be viewed as recommendations.



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Key findings and insights

Across the workshop, a common thread emerged: AI should provide an **opportunity to better connect policy and services to human needs**. Participants highlighted that the real benefits lie in improving responsiveness and outcomes for people, not just in deploying new technology for its own sake. While technical solutions are advancing rapidly, many of the underlying problems and opportunities identified are not new — they are consistent with challenges recognised five or even ten years ago.

A key insight was that the **fundamental barriers to progress likely do not lie with technology itself, but at the organisational level**. Without meaningful changes to structures, incentives, and culture, there is a real risk that governments will be writing similar reports five years from now, with little practical change achieved.

Participants also reflected on how innovation happens across many different settings — inside and outside government — and stressed the importance of partnerships to avoid duplicating existing solutions. They pointed to the need for **better mechanisms to fund, adapt, and bring proven innovations** to scale within government systems.

Participants also emphasised the **critical importance of governance** when applying generative AI in government services. They noted concerns about transparency, accountability, and the risks of relying on ‘black box’ systems — particularly the need for clear pathways for reporting and addressing failures when they occur. A risk-based approach was seen as essential to managing these challenges responsibly.



Our predictive disaster payment system represents a significant advance in how the Australian government delivers support during crises. It proactively identifies citizens eligible for disaster payments, often notifying them or processing payments before the application process has begun.

Leveraging integrated population data and individuals' anonymised interaction histories with government services, the system's algorithms identify citizens impacted by a declared disaster who meet the eligibility criteria.

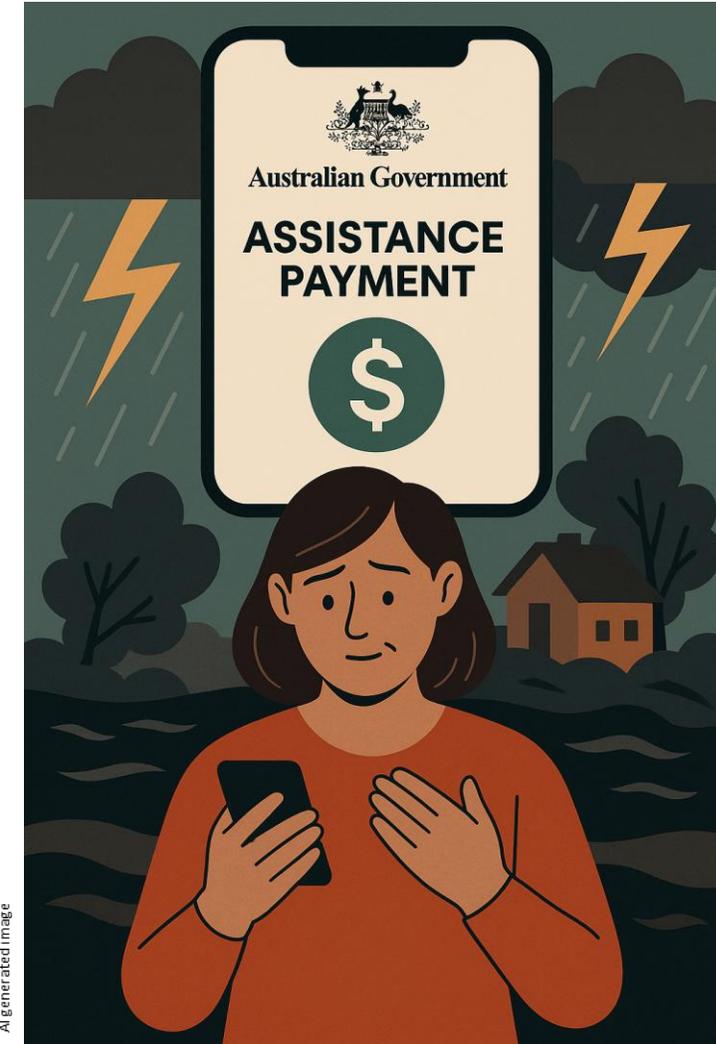
In straightforward cases, the system automatically issues the payment to the individual's registered bank account, providing funds when needed most. For more complex situations, the system sends a notification to the eligible person. This prompt typically requires just a single button press, as necessary details have been pre-filled using information the government already holds.

This efficient process relies on a comprehensive, machine-readable service catalogue defining eligibility rules the system can understand, and common technology platforms across government agencies. Robust data privacy and security protocols were co-designed into the system to prevent misuse and ensure public trust, avoiding 'data honeypots'.

Beyond the benefit to citizens, the system provides valuable, real-time aggregate data for policymakers, allowing a clearer understanding of disaster impacts and support distribution.

We overcame significant hurdles – including establishing new intergovernmental agreements, navigating automation of decisions based on complex legislation (often involving AI assisting human decision-makers), and fostering cross-agency collaboration – the result is a faster, more citizen-centric approach to disaster support.

2028 Prototype 1: Predictive disaster payment



2028 Prototype 2: Policy Objective Dashboard



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Our Policy Objective Dashboard is now a central tool in how the Australian government monitors and steers progress towards key national goals. It provides ministers, agency heads, and policy teams with a dynamic, data-driven view of progress towards specific policy objectives in the real world.

Here's how it operates: The system integrates data from various sources, effectively linking documented community needs, targets outlined in government policy, and operational metrics from the service delivery organisations. Using data analysis and pattern recognition algorithms, the dashboard visualises progress against defined criteria.

The AI component actively identifies areas where progress may be stalling, where service delivery isn't aligning with policy intent, or where emerging trends might impact the objective, enabling early intervention.

Policymakers and public servants use the dashboard's insights as a powerful decision-support mechanism, guiding their attention and interventions, but the ultimate control over setting government priorities remains firmly with people.

Implementing this required striking a balance between leveraging whole-of-government data for comprehensive insights and respecting individual agency responsibilities. Furthermore, embedding this technology successfully involved a significant focus on evolving skillsets within the public service.



By 2028, it was clear that our old divisions of state and federal governments were holding us back. Today, our system is structured around a continuous, adaptive cycle focused directly on identifying and addressing societal needs. The process begins with defining needs, leveraging sophisticated digital platforms and collective intelligence methods – sometimes referred to as 'human swarm intelligence' – to gather and synthesise input directly from the population and diverse data sources. This ensures our understanding of community requirements is dynamic and grounded in real-time realities.

Then, dedicated cross-functional teams operate across traditional administrative boundaries, entering a rapid development pipeline to establish potential solutions or 'prototypes'. These prototypes are then implemented, often initially on a limited scale, allowing us to gather immediate feedback through integrated digital democratic structures.

The performance of these implemented solutions is rigorously assessed, evaluating their direct impact on the initially identified need.

Making this adaptive policy delivery cycle function required establishing fundamentally new mechanisms, including clear pathways for cross-domain authority, empowering teams to deliver holistic solutions. Critically, we also instituted a dedicated funding pipeline that ensures successful prototypes don't just remain experiments but have the resources to transition smoothly into full-scale, sustained implementation across the nation.

2028 prototype 3: State and federal governments abolished



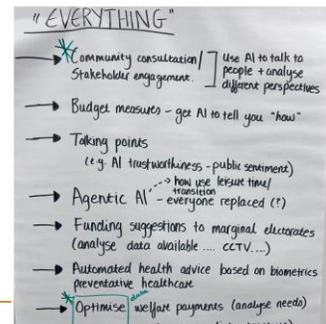
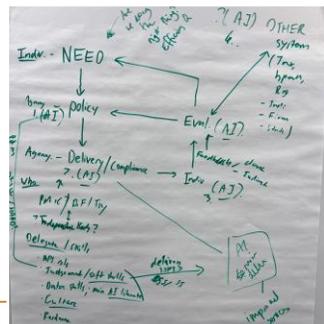
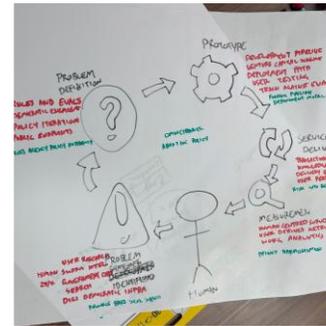
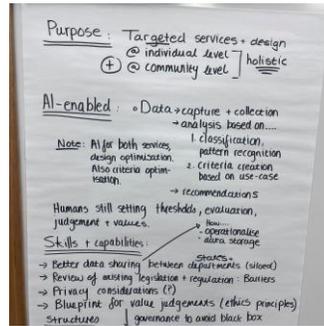
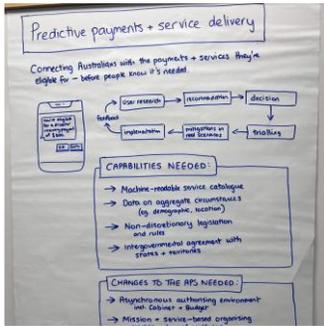
Workshop method

This workshop asked participants to imagine a world a few years in the future, where a series of scandals has shattered confidence in public services, and our most successful digital businesspeople were asked to lead a major rewiring of government processes in 24 months, built around the rapid roll-out of generative AI.

Participants were asked to identify the types of tasks public services routinely deliver, and then to identify ways AI could be used for each of those tasks.

Participants selected the two or three applications they thought could be most transformational, if implemented. They then selected one of these to prototype, identifying how gen AI would be used to achieve the purpose; capabilities and skills required; and any changes to APS structures or ways of working needed to ensure success or maximise benefit.

Participants finished by considering how external stakeholders might respond to their proposed solution, and then presented their prototype to other teams.



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