



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS: AI CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

Preparing the Commonwealth for an AI-Enabled World

NASCIO State IT Recognition Awards Submission

Massachusetts Executive Office of Technology Services and Security

Award Category: **Artificial Intelligence: harness AI to reinvent the delivery of government services**

Project Dates: **April 2024 – June 2025 (Ongoing program)**

Contact: **William Cole, Chief Technology Officer, william.cole@mass.gov**



Executive Summary

The rapid advancement of AI presents a transformative opportunity for government, but without a coordinated strategy, states risk fragmented efforts, duplicated work, inconsistent standards, and missed chances to scale impact. The absence of clear governance also increases exposure to ethical, privacy, and security risks. Recognizing these challenges, the Executive Office of Technology Services and Security (TSS), the lead enterprise technology organization for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, launched the AI Center of Excellence (COE) to unify and accelerate AI adoption across government, with the goal of improving the quality of life of our constituents.

In January of 2024, Governor Healey recognized that Massachusetts, which has long been a center for innovation and technological leadership, should harness the knowledge and skills of our robust higher education and innovation-driven economy to widen our lead in the responsible development and use of AI technology in state government. Early on, the Governor filed an IT bond bill, signed into law in July 2024, that included \$25 million to support AI projects aimed at improving state operations and the digital experience for residents. Around the same time, she established the AI Strategic Task Force to recommend how Massachusetts could help businesses in key industries adopt AI. One of its central recommendations was to create the Massachusetts AI Hub to drive collaboration between government, industry, startups, and academia.

Additionally, the Healey-Driscoll Administration launched a new higher education partnership to bring student talent into government through hands-on data and AI projects. The Commonwealth partnered with Northeastern University, University of Massachusetts Amherst, and the Worcester Polytechnic Institute to place students directly inside agencies, where they worked side by side with agency staff on real challenges and helped agencies test new tools, prototype ideas, and build practical solutions that improve services, while giving students valuable experience in public interest technology.

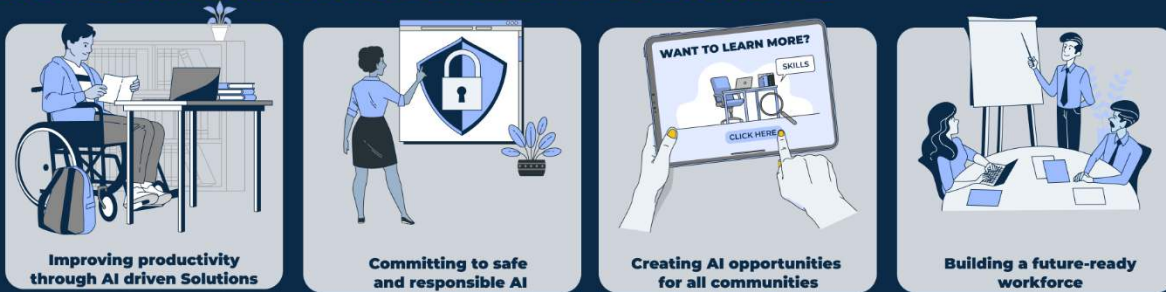
While these statewide efforts were underway, TSS recognized the need for a coordinated approach to help agencies adopt AI in a safe and effective way. To meet that need, TSS launched the AI Center of Excellence to serve as a central resource for strategy, support, and shared tools. The AI COE helps agencies evaluate use cases, access guidance, and build solutions that align with state standards. It also creates space for agencies to collaborate, share lessons, and accelerate projects that improve services for residents.

Idea

A shared vision for AI, powered by collaboration

This strategic initiative addresses critical needs: modernizing service delivery, ensuring responsible use of AI, and preparing a future-ready workforce. With applications across agencies, ranging from Health and Human Services to Energy and Environment programs, the AI COE positions the state to harness AI's potential while maintaining the public's trust.

Preparing the Commonwealth for an AI-Enabled World...



...to transform public service delivery and achieve better resident outcomes.

The AI COE is built around four integrated focus areas:



This comprehensive approach improves core business processes, drives efficiency, and expands access to AI across diverse user groups. Aligned with strategic priorities, this model offers a scalable framework that not only benefits constituents statewide, but also serves as a blueprint for responsible, inclusive AI leadership nationwide.

Implementation

How? Leveraging existing talent and focusing on strategic partnerships.

To bring the Governor’s vision of becoming a national leader in Artificial Intelligence to life, TSS launched the AI Center of Excellence using an enterprise-wide approach rooted in collaboration and strategic alignment.



The development of the AI COE was spearheaded by the State CTO and built on the foundation of a successful Cloud transformation, using the Technology Office’s expertise and existing partnerships to accelerate AI readiness. Rather than starting from scratch, the state leveraged in-house talent and long-standing vendor relationships to fast-track deployment and adoption. The Technology Office also tapped into the state’s academic ecosystem, bringing in students with AI expertise to support early pilot development while fostering a long-term talent pipeline. Success relied not only on external partners but on deep internal commitment: TSS teams were asked to go “all in”, taking on new responsibilities, attending regular working sessions, and collaborating across silos at an unprecedented scale. This level of coordination and shared ownership across public, private, and academic sectors became the foundation that made the AI Center of Excellence possible, and sustainable.

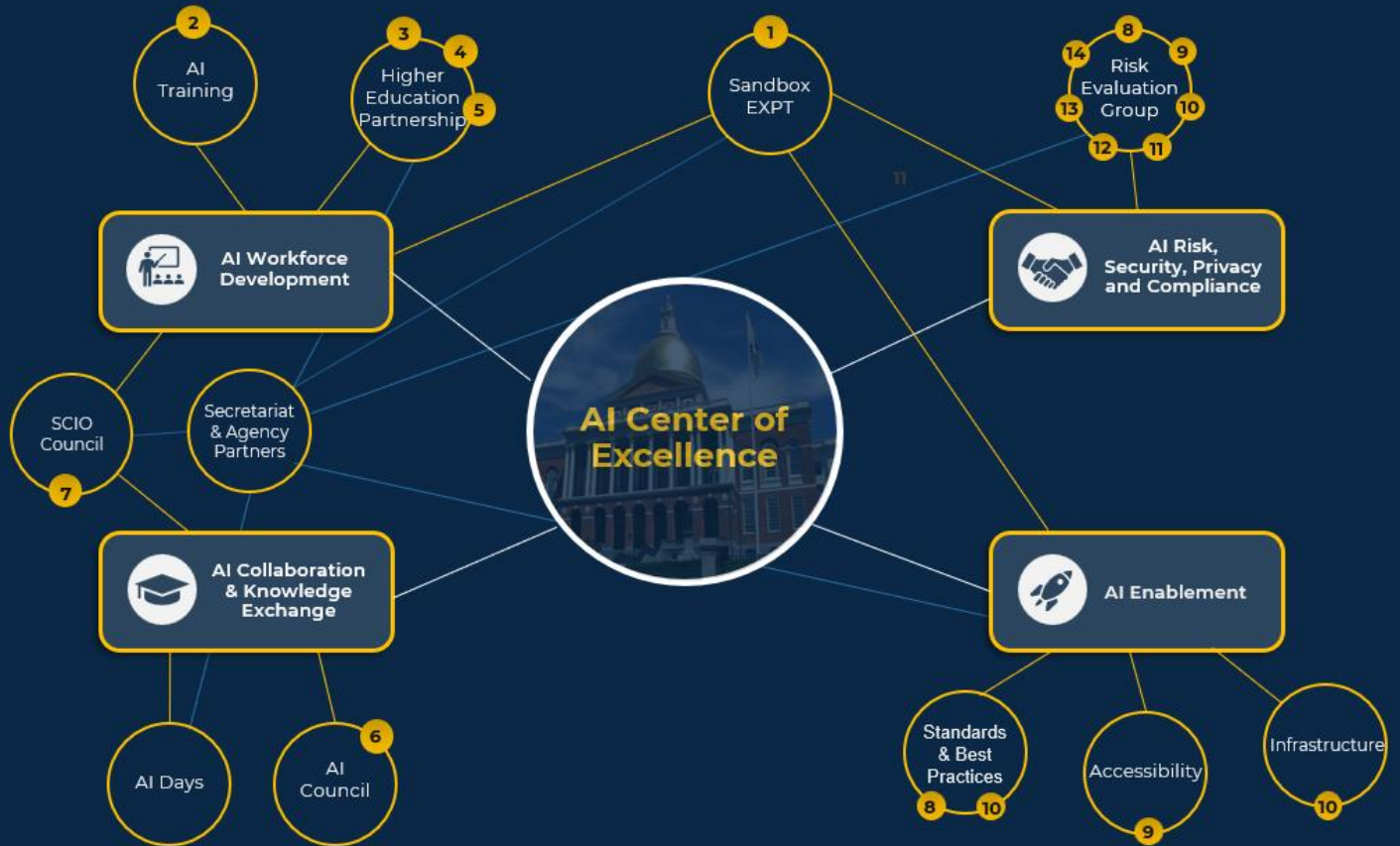
The Commonwealth fuels discovery and drives real-world impact. Even state government is leading by example – actively deploying AI to improve the delivery of government services and modernize systems. In Massachusetts, innovation isn’t just an idea; it’s an engine that has been solving our country’s biggest challenges for over 250 years – and we’re just getting started.

Secretary Jason Snyder, Executive Office of Technology Services & Security and State CIO

Who? Our coalition.

From the start, we engaged a broad and diverse group of stakeholders to gather input, build alignment, and ensure shared ownership of the AI Center of Excellence. Through close collaboration with departments within TSS, Executive Branch Secretariats and agencies, strategic partners, and leaders from academia, the private sector, and non-profits, we laid a strong foundation for achieving our strategic goals.

Stakeholder Collaboration



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|--|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Technology Partners (AWS, Microsoft) | 6. Secretariat AI Leads | 12. Data |
| 2. Human Resources | 7. Secretariat CIOs | 13. Contracting |
| 3. UMass Amherst - AI for the Commonwealth | 8. Digital Team | 14. Legal & Privacy |
| 4. Northeastern University - InnovateMA | 9. Accessibility Team | |
| 5. WPI Data Driven Cohort | 10. Chief Technology Office | |
| | 11. Enterprise Risk Management | |

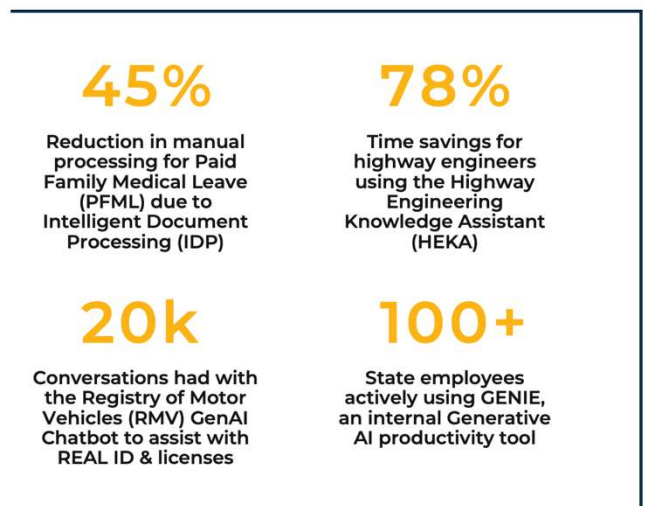
To foster buy-in and support, we hosted workshops and design sessions with our state agency partners, shared updates in executive forums, and created opportunities for learning and collaboration, ranging from AI Days and training sessions with our technology partners, to a statewide AI Showcase that recognized early successes and celebrated innovation across government.

Impact

To establish Massachusetts as a national leader in AI, TSS launched a bold and comprehensive strategy through its AI Center of Excellence. This transformative initiative is driving applied use of AI across the enterprise by laying the foundation for secure, responsible AI adoption while fostering cross-sector collaboration and statewide alignment. At the heart of this effort was a clear and compelling vision – ensuring that we are taking full advantage of AI for the benefit of our constituents and employees. Guided by four strategic focus areas, the AI Center of Excellence has catalyzed innovation, built statewide capacity, and created the conditions for long-term, scalable impact. The visuals below highlight key outcomes and metrics that reflect the power of this initiative to improve accessibility, accelerate adoption, and unlock new opportunities for public state employees and constituents alike through education, experimentation, and collaboration.

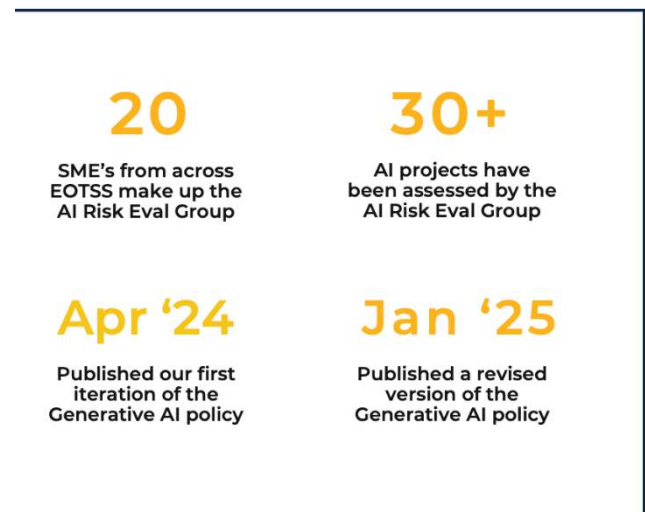
AI Enablement & Research

We are committed to driving AI impact where it matters most, accelerating projects from development to production, fostering innovation through the TSS AI Sandbox, and enriching digital tools with advanced AI capabilities. These innovations will significantly enhance the accessibility of vital information for both our state employees and constituents and enable our teams to shift from repetitive tasks to high-value work, maximizing our overall impact.



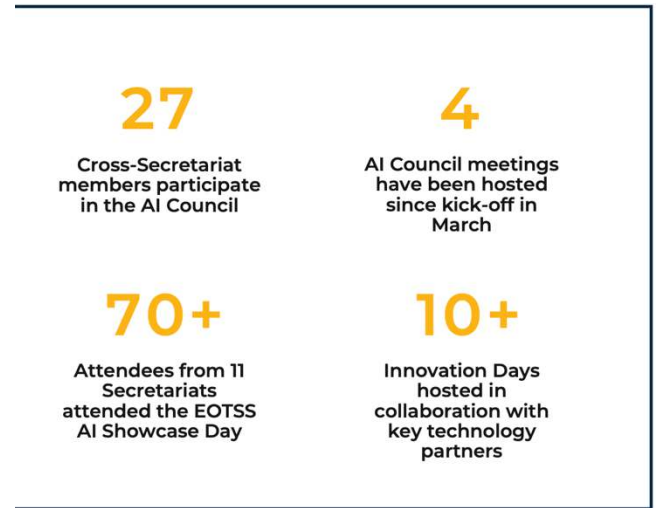
AI Risk, Security, Privacy & Compliance

Committing to safe and responsible AI, our AI Risk Evaluation Group proactively assesses AI use cases and guides teams adopting or implementing AI tools by providing tailored feedback and considerations to mitigate risks and promote ethical use. We also published standardized guidance and minimum requirements for the development and use of AI across the state through a state-wide Generative AI policy and enterprise-wide contracting and procurement guidelines.



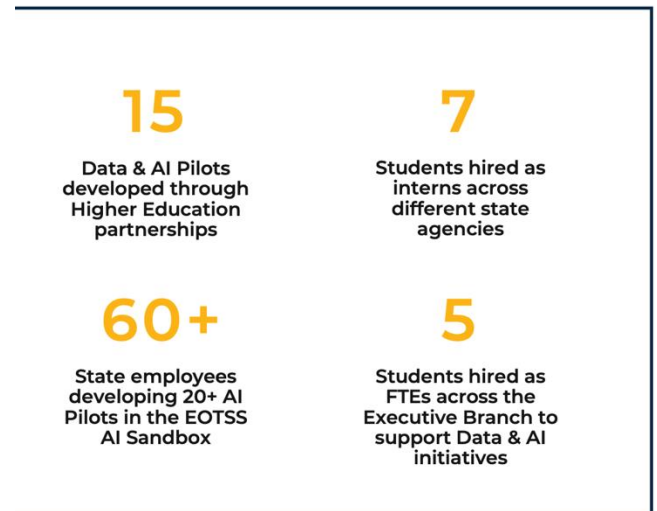
AI Collaboration & Knowledge Exchange

To cultivate collaboration and shared learning, the AI COE established the AI Council, bringing together representatives from all 11 Secretariats to exchange insights and solve common challenges, while AI Showcase & Innovation Days further reinforced this collaborative spirit and the state's dedication to innovation. Additionally, the AI COE aims to partner with non-governmental organizations statewide through the newly announced AI Hub, an initiative designed to unite key assets.



AI Workforce Development

Recognizing workforce readiness as essential, the AI COE prioritized education and upskilling through strategic initiatives: hiring specialized AI talent, piloting productivity-enhancing tools like Microsoft Copilot, rolling out comprehensive AI training for all 40,000+ State employees, and launching an AI Sandbox for experimentation and innovation. Additionally, key higher education partnerships, including collaborations with Northeastern, UMass Amherst, and WPI, embedded student teams directly into state agencies to develop real-world AI applications. These partnerships have cultivated a robust pipeline of talent inspired to pursue public service careers.



Ongoing innovation and governance will shape our AI future.

The AI Center of Excellence is just the beginning. As we look ahead, we are committed to evolving alongside emerging technologies and the changing needs of government. Our focus remains on delivering safe, responsible, and innovative AI solutions that improve services for constituents. In the year ahead, we will build on this foundation, expanding our statewide AI strategy, growing partnerships across Secretariats, academia, and industry, and enabling teams through tools like the AI Sandbox and workforce training. We will continue embedding AI in ways that make a tangible difference, from internal operations to public-facing services. This is a long-term investment, and its success will be sustained through collaboration, continuous learning, and a shared commitment to shaping the future of AI in public service.