Should Cities Appoint an AI Point Person or an AI Team?

Here's a situation playing out in cities across Florida right now: the planning department is using ChatGPT to draft staff reports. Public works tested an AI tool for analyzing 311 data. The communications office started using Claude to translate public notices into Spanish and Creole.

None of them told the city attorney. Nobody checked whether the AI prompts or outputs count as public records under Florida law. And no one knows if the tools meet the city's cybersecurity standards.

Nothing went wrong. Yet. But without someone clearly responsible for AI, cities are counting on luck rather than governance.

Why This Matters Now

The issue isn't whether city employees will use AI. They already are. FLC survey data tells the story: roughly two-thirds of Florida city managers say their city has no AI lead or dedicated innovation team. And while 85% of elected officials say they're open to AI, only about 7% report that implementation is actually underway.

Risk lives in that gap between interest and action. Employees experiment on their own, departments adopt different tools with different privacy practices, and when a resident or reporter asks, "What's your AI policy?" the answer is an awkward silence.

Giving someone ownership of AI doesn't mean hiring a Chief AI Officer or building a new department. It's picking a person or a small group to answer three questions:

1. What AI tools are we using?

2. What rules apply?

3. Who's checking?

The AI Point Person

Some cities start by tapping a single individual. The title varies: AI lead, innovation director, or an addition to an existing role like assistant city manager or IT director. The job is the same regardless of the title: coordinate the city's AI activity so it doesn't happen in the dark.

The upside of a single-point person is speed. One person can greenlight a pilot without scheduling three committee meetings. One person can write a policy memo, roll out a training session, and track results without the overhead of cross-department coordination.

For small and mid-sized cities with limited staff, this is often the most realistic starting point.

The risk is just as obvious. If that person leaves, the city's AI knowledge walks out the door. If they lack authority across departments, other directors may ignore them. And if every AI decision funnels through one desk, that desk becomes a bottleneck fast.

This model works best when the point person reports to the city manager or sits close enough to leadership that other departments take the role seriously.

The Cross-Functional Working Group

Larger cities, or cities running several AI pilots at once, often form a small working group with representatives from key departments: IT, the city attorney's office, the clerk, communications, procurement, and one or two operational departments that actively use AI.

Miami-Dade County took this approach by creating an AI Advisory Council with multiple specialized workgroups. The council structure lets different departments bring their expertise to the table: Legal staff flag compliance issues. IT evaluates vendor security. The clerk's office addresses records retention. The strength is that these perspectives connect through a central body rather than staying scattered across the organization.

No single person understands procurement rules, public records law, cybersecurity, and community engagement equally well. A working group brings those perspectives together before a problem surfaces, not after.

The weakness is the usual one with committees: decisions slow down, accountability gets fuzzy, and without a clear charter, the group drifts into "meeting fatigue" and doesn't produce much. Any working group model needs a defined scope, a regular cadence (1-2x per month is usually enough), and a named chair who drives the agenda forward.

The Hybrid: What Most Cities Should Do

For most Florida cities, the strongest approach combines both models: name one AI point person AND create a small working group that meets regularly.

The point person handles day-to-day coordination. When a department wants to try a new tool, the point person runs through a basic intake:

- What does the tool do?

- What data does it touch?

- Does it meet the city's security and records requirements?

- Is there a cost?

The working group handles bigger decisions:

- Reviewing higher-risk uses

- Updating the city's AI policy

- Sharing lessons across departments

- Flagging issues that need the city manager's attention

Altamonte Springs landed on a version of this. City Manager Frank Martz built what he calls the Internal Innovation Group, a hand-selected team of employees from across departments who review AI proposals, evaluate new tools, and serve as peer ambassadors to the rest of the workforce.

Martz drives the overall direction, while the group extends his reach into every corner of the organization. "I can't be everywhere," Martz has said, "but this group can."

This hybrid model gives cities the speed of a single decision-maker and the breadth of a cross-functional group. It also builds institutional knowledge across the organization rather than concentrating it in one role.

Where AI Leadership Should Sit

Where the AI lead sits in the org chart matters more than the title on the door.

If the lead sits in **IT or an innovation office**, the work tends to focus on tool evaluation, procurement, and data security. That's a strong starting point for cities whose biggest concern is managing which tools enter the organization.

If the lead sits in the **city manager's or mayor's office**, the scope tends to be broader. The lead coordinates across departments, ties AI use to service delivery goals, and keeps elected officials informed. This works well when AI is part of a larger strategic direction, not just a technology project.

Most cities using the hybrid model assign the point person to one of these two roles and draw the working group from across the organization.

Getting Started

Cities that want to move on this don't need to build a formal program overnight. A practical starting sequence:

Pick someone. It can be an existing staff member, such as an assistant city manager, IT director, or anyone with cross-department credibility and a genuine interest in the technology. The right person cares about both the opportunity and the risk, and other department heads take their calls.

Give them a clear charge. At minimum, the AI point person should be responsible for inventorying what AI tools the city is already using, drafting a basic use policy (what's allowed, what needs approval, what's off-limits), coordinating training so staff understands the rules, and reporting to the city manager or commission on progress and issues.

Form the working group later. Once the point person has a handle on what's happening, pull together four to six people from key departments (legal, IT, clerk, communications, and one or two operational departments) to meet monthly and review policy questions.

Don't let perfection slow you down. The biggest risk isn't picking the wrong structure. It's having no structure at all, while employees are already using AI every day. Pick someone, give them a charge, and refine from there.