

HOW YORK COUNTY IS
WORKING TO BECOME
'AI-FIRST' BY 2030

The human side of AI

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ork County's Information Technology team has spent the past decade redefining what local government tech can and should be. From pioneering community cybersecurity workshops to forging statewide collaboration through ValGITE, the county has systematically brought innovation into its operations. This broad portfolio of initiatives not only strengthened infrastructure and elevated service delivery but also earned York County the number one spot in the Digital Counties Survey for jurisdictions under 150,000 population.

"Since I became deputy director eight years ago, this has been one of my goals," reflects Tim Wyatt, director of information technology at York County. "And over the last eight years, we've been in the top 10, but we finally landed that number one place. I think it's a great reflection for my team, the county, and all the dedication to try to do what's right by the citizens. It's just something I'm incredibly proud of. I think it accurately reflects the hard work of my team."

Building on the recognition of its work, York County is already looking ahead. It's doubling down on artificial intelligence (AI) education, deepening vendor partnerships, and shaping what an 'AI-first' local government will look like by 2030.



CONTINUING THE SUCCESS

York County's journey into public tech education began with cybersecurity. "Years ago, we realised hackers were attacking and targeting citizens who didn't have the information to protect themselves," says Wyatt. Realising residents lacked fundamental awareness of online threats, the IT team launched in-person workshops, online videos, and resource libraries. "We felt like we were in a unique position to educate. We recorded everything and posted it online."

With everyone talking about artificial intelligence, Wyatt and his team knew education was going to be hugely important to ensure the safe and responsible use of the technology. Following on from the success of York

County's cybersecurity outreach, Wyatt began to look at extending this to cover AI.

"This year, the big buzzword is artificial intelligence," explains Wyatt. "At York County, we have a unique perspective on how we reach out to both our workforce and the citizens themselves. As a government entity, we directly interface with the local people. So we're in a unique place to work with them, educate them, make them aware of different things."

It's these community outreach programmes, alongside other pilot projects, that helped York County win the Digital Counties Survey award. However, compiling all the evidence of this work was no small feat. The biggest hurdle is the time it takes to collect all the information and review it,"

says Wyatt. "But it's also a good point of reflection to, once a year, sit back, review everything that we've done throughout the past year and realise what a difference we've made."

That time to pause and reflect not only energised the team but also reinforced a core belief: technology's true measure is the difference it makes in people's lives.

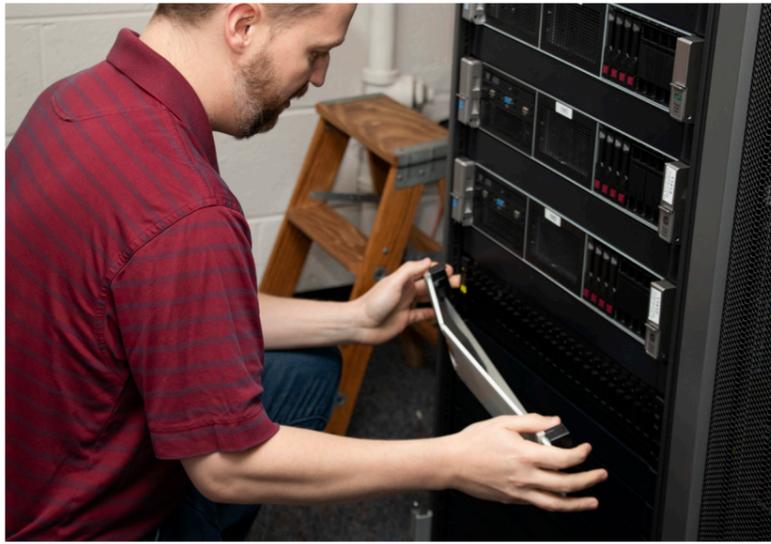
ROLLING OUT AI WORKSHOPS

Under the guidance of Deputy Director Paula Kohrt, York County hosted its first AI 101 session at the public library for a two-plus-hour primer on AI fundamentals. This covered the basics of AI with real-world examples, protecting your data, and everyday use cases.

"The session ran well over two hours," explains Wyatt. "It went over practical things about what artificial intelligence is and how you can utilise it in terms everyone could understand."

While education for citizens is important, Wyatt recognised the need to also train York County staff. Integrating AI into government workflows isn't just about the technology it's also about the people.

"Technology changes fast, but human beings need time to adjust and adapt," explains Wyatt. "We had decades to adapt to computers; AI is advancing so quickly, it's measured in years. We start by making people aware of risks, but also advantages, so they're not resistant and gain the most benefit."



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To encourage buy-in, the workforce sessions emphasise open dialogue over heavy-handed policy. “If it comes out and says you have to abide by draconian policies, there’s going to be conflict,” says Wyatt. “There has to be communication about why those policies are in place. By working with people, you can find a much better solution that addresses security concerns, ethical controls, as well as getting the mission done.”

When measuring the impact of these sessions, initial feedback and engagement rates are important, but that’s not the only thing Wyatt and his team are looking for. He says: “The more telling feedback comes weeks to months afterwards, when the same people who attended come back

and brag about how they’re utilising AI.”

BEYOND EDUCATION

York County is also looking for further ways to use AI to improve the way it operates. To capture timely public sentiment, York County uses FlashVote, an AI-driven polling platform.

“We send out half-a-dozen timely questions and get statistically valid responses back within 48 hours,” explains Wyatt. “The citizens love it because it’s not just asking when there’s a problem; we get proactive, broad input so we can make data-driven decisions.”

Alongside this, York County is also rolling out PipeAid, an AI-powered tool that automates the inspection of pipes, which

previously forced staff to spend hours doing this manually. “We have to inspect 20% of all our sewer lines every year. That’s a massive amount of footage,” says Wyatt.

“Traditionally, a human watches days of video for cracks and defects. Humans aren’t wired for that. You feed the footage to AI, and in a fraction of the time, you get key points on a map: here’s a low-severity crack, here’s a high-severity rupture risk, and so on. All for a fraction of the cost and with higher accuracy.”

Though still in early rollout, PipeAid hints at how AI can free staff from repetitive tasks. This allows them to get back to the things that require a human touch, such as performing maintenance and repair activities or speaking to citizens.

AMPLIFYING IMPACT THROUGH VALGITE

For years, local IT leaders seeking collaboration had to forge one-on-one relationships with neighbouring counties. York County has supercharged that model by tapping into ValGITE, the Virginia Local Government IT Executives network.

“Historically, you would form a relationship with one or two other localities, and call them up on the phone for a conversation. But the ValGITE organisation lets us pose that question more quickly, with up to 40 different localities responding. You’re getting all of their perspectives, all of their experiences, with the same amount of effort.”

ValGITE’s crowd-sourced approach



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accelerates peer review of vendor claims, security practices, and innovative pilots – saving weeks of research for individual counties.

“The biggest thing is probably overall collaboration,” continues Wyatt. “We now work with the General Assembly’s delegates and senators working on bills. We are engaging with them early on, and they’re very receptive. They’ve always wanted our perspective on how this impacts the locality. So now we’re partnering with them. We’re working on contracts, getting the best rates, leveraging those strengths, and everyone is open to collaboration. It’s mutually beneficial.”



VENDOR PARTNERSHIPS

This sense of collaboration is continued throughout everything York County does, even down to its relationships with vendors, most notably Tyler Technologies. “We meet with their tech support people monthly,” explains Wyatt. “We meet with the president of the organisation quarterly, and they’ve partnered to make sure that we communicate the customer needs at the locality with them and get the feedback and the communication back and forth.”

Because Tyler can engage dozens of ValGITE jurisdictions in a single conversation, the vendor obtains richer product insights. Meanwhile, York County benefits from direct access to Tyler’s leadership, ensuring the county’s priorities inform the software roadmap.

AN AI-FIRST COUNTY

York County’s long-term vision is nothing less than an ‘AI-first’ government, where every new project begins with a collaboration between staff and AI. Focusing on education now will help build the foundations for the future, where AI and other technologies benefit York County staff and citizens alike.

“By 2030, I hope people have integrated and embraced AI,” says Wyatt. “It will do most of the mundane work, but staff think at the high-level scope: ‘What did AI miss? What other perspectives could it bring?’”

“I don’t believe AI will take anyone’s job. It requires people to work smarter, takes away the mundane tasks we’d rather not do, and lets us focus on impact.”

Beyond algorithms, Wyatt is eyeing home and workplace robots that promise to fold laundry, wash dishes, and more – all at consumer-friendly price points. “That’s very enticing,” he admits, but he stresses the county’s role in educating residents about benefits and risks before these machines arrive in every living room.

TIME TO DIVE IN

Reflecting on peer practices across Virginia and beyond, Wyatt warns against half-measures when it comes to technology, saying: “Most haven’t jumped in so strongly on workforce development. They know it’s key, but they’re just putting their toes in the water. AI is coming fast. You can’t put it off to next month or next year.

TIM WYATT,
DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION
TECHNOLOGY,
YORK COUNTY



Tim Wyatt is responsible for the oversight and direction of the activities of the IT department at York County. These activities include IT infrastructure, PC support, Geographic Information Systems, the County’s Financial and Development/Utility systems. Wyatt received his Bachelor of Science in Computer Science from Old Dominion University in 2004.

He is a Certified Government Chief Information Officer through CompTIA and has a graduate certificate in local government management from Virginia Tech. Additionally, Wyatt is also President of ValGITE, which promotes and represents local government IT leaders in Virginia.

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If you haven’t started, you’ve got to jump in fully. It’s here to stay. We can either get on board or be left behind.”

He reminds fellow leaders that AI isn’t a fad, it’s an accelerant for everything from public engagement to infrastructure management, as shown by York County’s polling and PipeAid projects. Local government’s unique position as a trusted, non-commercial educator makes it the ideal guide for citizens navigating this fast-moving frontier.

York County’s approach is straightforward: a relentless focus on community impact with bold collaboration and cutting-edge pilots. Whether it’s weekly ValGITE brainstorms, quarterly Tyler roundtables, cybersecurity workshops,

or AI-driven sewer inspections, every initiative converges on the same mission: serving people.

As York County looks to 2030 and beyond, its IT department also reflects a broader truth: when governments lead with transparency, partnership, and a willingness to learn, they turn technology from a back-of-fice utility into a daily catalyst for brighter, safer, smarter communities. ■

