

# Operating at the Intersection of AI and Policy

As artificial intelligence (AI) pervades more of society, agencies grapple with setting policy for a technology that seems to change in shape every day. Ironically, the best way to stay ahead of AI may be by taking advantage of its flexibility.

“Data and AI will both be areas for dynamic rulemaking,” said Matthew Rose, Head of Government Affairs at Snowflake. “At the same time, this technology will fundamentally change the process by which rules are made.”

At a recent event hosted by Snowflake, which provides government customers with platform and cloud services, technology and rulemaking experts discussed how AI will change policy — and vice versa.

## Speakers:

- › **Erica Reuter**, Director, Public Sector Solution Engineers, Snowflake
- › **Matthew Rose**, Head of Government Affairs, Snowflake
- › **Marci Harris**, Founder and Executive Director, Popvox Foundation
- › **Brandon Pugh**, Director, R Street Institute



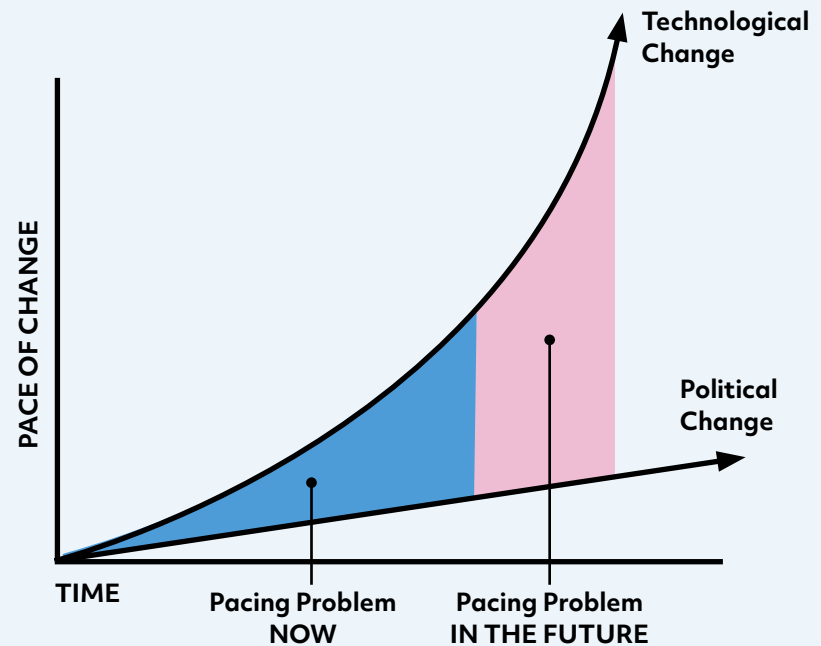
# Addressing the Pacing Problem

Agencies tasked with setting guidelines for use of AI face the reality that they can't keep up with the speed of innovation. "I'm obsessed with the pacing problem," said Marci Harris, of Popvox. "That gap between how quickly technology advances and the pace at which policy advances, which is quite a bit slower."

The gap can seem insurmountable, she said. "When we talk about AI and new technologies, it can feel like we're talking about boiling the ocean. It is such a big topic, and there are so many ways that it intersects with the policymaker's world."

Her solution is to break it down into more manageable bites — understanding the new technologies; considering how to govern, regulate or interact with them; and evaluating the pressure on legislatures to provide guidance. There are also often gaps between branches of government in what resources they have available.

"But the speed at which technology changes also means policymakers can't wait for the technology to be perfect before they try to understand it and incorporate it into their work," Harris said.



## THE EXTERNAL

Legislatures lack pace with innovations that change industries and society

## THE INTER-BRANCH

Legislatures lack pace with agencies, risking its ability to cooperate and partner with government

## THE INTERNAL

Legislatures have slower adoption of innovations to improve their own operations

*Source: Marci Harris, Popvox Foundation*



## How AI Is Changing Policy

For years, government agencies have discussed the value of using data to shape policy, but they have often struggled to make the connection. Generative AI (GenAI) could change that. AI applications can search through multiple databases to extract relevant information and summarize complex regulations to ensure that proposals meet legal requirements. “AI is reducing the burden of creating policy,” said Snowflake’s Erica Reuter. “We’re seeing this with numerous early adopters already.”

GenAI’s analytic capabilities mean it can even suggest new ways to think about issues. “The computer can tell us about things that we never even considered,” Reuter said. “New theories or potential consequences we never even thought about.”

AI also has a place in assessing policy’s impact on communities, she added. But while AI can improve the policymaking process, it also requires the development of guidelines to govern its own use, both inside and outside government. “We need to make sure the majority of society can benefit and engage in the opportunities of AI,” she said.

Setting AI policy can force agencies to reevaluate existing measures concerning data and privacy as new technology changes the risks. “We don’t have a comprehensive law on artificial intelligence, but we do have sector-specific guidance, and we also have existing agency authority that can govern aspects of AI,” said Brandon Pugh, of R Street.

Sometimes it’s a matter of reconciling competing values: “Do we pass a privacy law that protects privacy across multiple technologies and include AI in that?” Pugh asked. “Or do we address AI and have an aspect of that be privacy?”

# 4 Tips for Effective AI

The better policymakers understand AI, the more effectively they can set guidelines. The best way to get to know AI is to use it, but getting started can seem overwhelming, especially for small agencies and organizations with small budgets. Here are some expert tips for crossing the threshold.

## 1 Start with off-the-shelf options.

“Step 1 for anyone who’s just beginning their journey is to get a pro account on an existing product,” said Harris. “But treat it like a very eager intern who doesn’t know everything.” For example, don’t rely on AI as an information source, and don’t upload confidential information to commercial, open model tools. Understand how your agency might use AI before committing to a customized, closed model.

## 2 Stay tuned for advances.

One of the most exciting features we’ll see in the coming year is an expanded use of “agents” — small, autonomous AI applications that perform specific tasks, Reuter advised. “Consider end-to-end systems, such as Snowflake, that simplify the process and improve data observability, to improve automating operations,” she said.

## 3 Don’t forget data governance.

Good data policy is integral to good AI policy, according to Rose. “You can’t have an AI strategy without a data strategy,” he said. “There’s this thought that the data has to be pristine to use these technologies. But where’s the line? How should we think about this?”

For Pugh, the trick is proceeding with caution — but proceeding. “It’s important to experiment with the technology, even if the data is not perfect,” he said. “Do it in a responsible way; consider privacy and have guardrails in place. But if you wait for 100% perfect data, you may be waiting for a long time.”

## 4 Keep the human in the loop.

Although AI can assist with many functions, “there will always be a role for human oversight, and for human responsibility,” Harris said. The technology doesn’t have judgment and doesn’t always understand context. “Cybersecurity is a good example,” said Pugh. “AI in the security space is a huge adjunct. It can act autonomously to take initial actions [in case of a breach]. But it can sometimes miss threats that a human analyst may catch.”

## Embracing the Future

As Snowflake's experts predict, "where 2023 was the year of panic and wonder, and 2024 was the year of experimentation, 2025 is when enterprises start to get real about what AI can specifically do for their organizations." That's equally true in the public and private sectors. "The real risk lies in not experimenting and not adopting these tools," Harris said.

So how to begin? "Start speaking with your peers," said Reuter. "Start going to conferences and reading use cases. Reach out to vendors and ask what they're seeing. The investment doesn't have to be huge up front. Starting small, experimenting, you can do it for less than \$5,000. There's definitely room to jump in."

It's also time to develop realistic guidelines for both agency and public AI use. "There's still a lot of unknowns," said Pugh. "But I think the consistent thing is that there's immense interest in AI policy and making sure we get it right."

"These technologies will begin to revolutionize the manner in which knowledge work is done, and it will change the way in which we go about our day-to-day work," Rose said. "It will free up humans to do what humans do well."

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