



How can government move from AI experimentation to AI at scale?

■ ■ ■
The better the question. The better the answer.
The better the world works.



Shape the future
with confidence



Governments have proved that artificial intelligence (AI) can work, but many still struggle to translate isolated pilots into production-ready tools that can support end-to-end transformation

Across governments and the wider public sector, AI pilots, proofs of concept and localised initiatives are already improving productivity. The more important question is whether AI can be scaled safely, economically and sustainably across complex public services so that the technology's full potential can be realised. This key challenge is reflected in **EY research**, which found that 58% of government organisations believe AI adoption needs to accelerate and scale to deliver the expected return on investment.

However, many government organisations struggle to move beyond isolated AI pilots because they lack the mechanisms and conditions needed to scale AI use cases. The result is growing AI activity, but limited enterprise-wide transformation and benefits that remain confined to individual use cases rather than being realised across end-to-end operations.

An AI centre of excellence (CoE) establishes the capabilities to coordinate and scale AI delivery

While many organisations have established teams or functions to develop AI solutions, successful pilots often struggle to scale beyond individual business areas. Common barriers include fragmented governance, data challenges, unclear ownership, limited workforce adoption and difficulties measuring and sustaining benefits.

The objective of an AI CoE is not just to deliver more AI use cases; it is to establish the organisational capabilities required to scale AI across a government organisation. In practice, a CoE creates a consistent approach to identifying opportunities, delivering rapid solutions, managing risk and realising benefits across the value chain.

The CoE typically adopts a federated hub-and-spoke model, combining central expertise (e.g., prioritisation, technical expertise, change management) with operational insight and sponsorship from business units and functions. The model is structured around three lifecycle stages: demand management, execution and sustain, supported by the cross-cutting enablers of AI-ready data and responsible AI governance. Together, these capabilities help organisations move beyond isolated AI pilots by providing repeatable mechanisms to identify AI opportunities, deliver solutions and realise value.

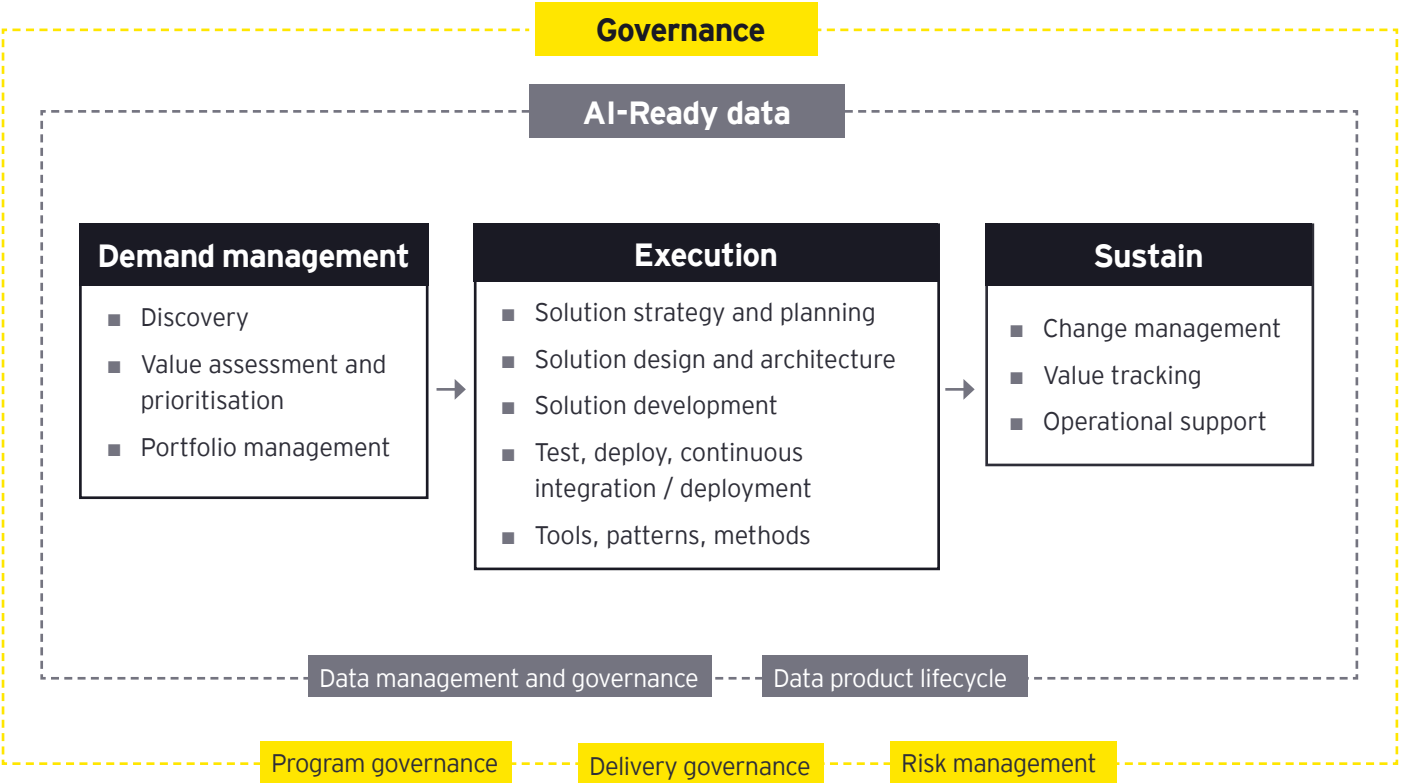


Fig 1. Key capabilities of a standard AI Centre of Excellence and the activities undertaken to manage demand, deliver solutions, support adoption, and enable AI through data and governance.

Demand management: choosing what opportunities are worth pursuing



The first role of the CoE is to create a consistent way to identify, assess and prioritise opportunities. Rather than allowing use cases to emerge through disconnected routes, it introduces a common intake process and a single view of the pipeline, creating greater transparency over AI demand across the organisation.

Effective demand management is critical because most government organisations now generate more AI ideas than they can realistically fund, govern, develop or sustain. Without a structured approach, resources can become stretched across competing initiatives, while higher-value opportunities struggle to gain traction.

Prioritisation is central to good demand management. The objective is to determine which opportunities have the greatest potential to create value and be successfully adopted and scaled. Therefore, use cases are assessed for both value and complexity. Value considers not only local benefits, such as efficiency gains and cost avoidance, but also the potential to create repeatable value across the enterprise. Complexity considers factors such as data readiness, implementation risks and adoption challenges.

Introduction to the prioritisation framework

The framework considers the lenses of ‘potential value’ that AI can unlock and the ‘complexity’ of implementation. Each criteria is weighted and then scored to generate a total score out of five for each lens.

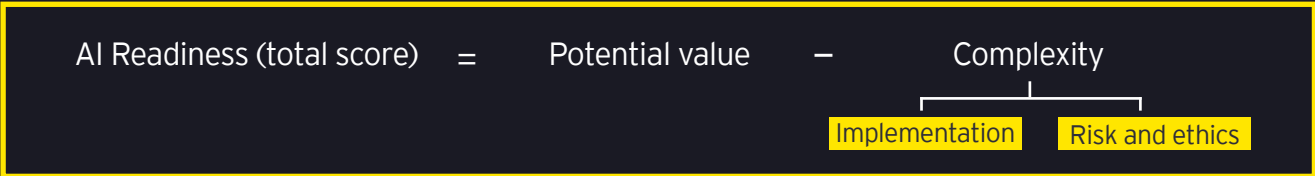


Fig 2. AI use case prioritisation framework to assess opportunities based on potential value and implementation complexity, helping organisations identify the most scalable and impactful AI investments.

Execution: turning high-priority opportunities into scalable solutions

The CoE supports rapid development of AI solutions based on a repeatable lifecycle – all prioritised use cases progress through multiple stages (e.g., design, build, proof of value and deployment), supported by cross-functional teams, reusable frameworks and common technology patterns. This reduces delivery effort, improves consistency and accelerates the path from idea to implementation.

Importantly, the CoE's role often extends beyond developing and deploying individual AI point solutions and into facilitating process reimagination – particularly when AI is used as a catalyst to fundamentally redesign operating models, roles and ways of working. Consistent with principles underpinning the [EY Value Blueprints approach](#), this helps ensure AI is not layered onto existing processes and ways of working but instead used to drive broader operational transformation and unlock greater long-term value.

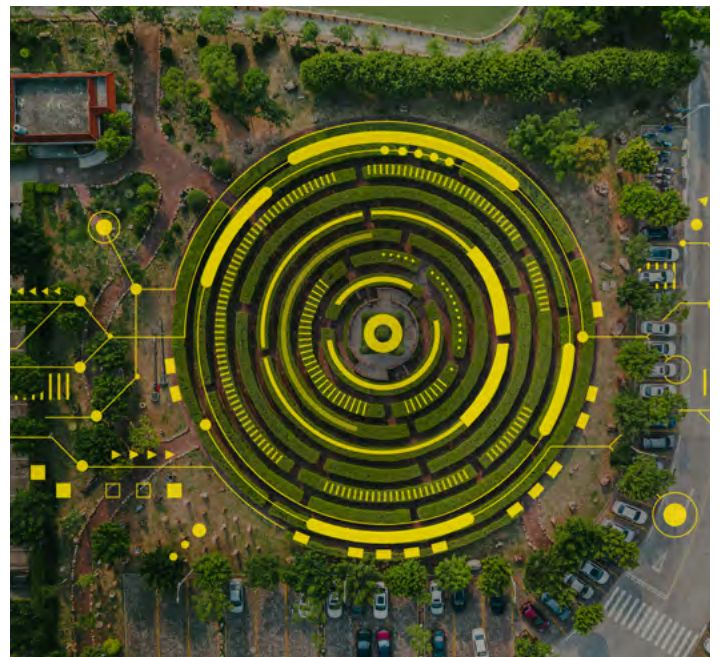


Sustain: from deployment to value realisation

The CoE is designed to support AI solutions long after deployment. This includes change management, value measurement, performance monitoring and continuous improvement, ensuring solutions continue to deliver value rather than being treated as one-off projects.

To help realise the benefits, the CoE establishes a consistent value framework that tracks outcomes across the following areas, recognising that successful AI transformation is about delivering broader value rather than efficiency alone:

- **Strategic outcomes:** assessing the extent to which AI contributes to organisational goals and priorities, such as improving public service outcomes or increasing revenue.
- **Productivity:** capturing operational improvements such as time savings, increased output and reduced effort.
- **Quality:** focusing on the accuracy, consistency and effectiveness of outcomes.
- **User experience:** monitoring adoption, confidence and satisfaction.
- **Risk:** considering factors such as compliance, bias, transparency and responsible use of AI.



By combining these measures, organisations gain greater visibility of realised value and can make evidence-based decisions about which solutions should be scaled, enhanced or retired.

AI-ready data: creating the trusted core

Data remains one of the biggest barriers to scaling AI across government, with [EY research](#) finding that 45% of organisations cite inadequate digital and data systems as a barrier to implementation. However, many government organisations struggle to identify which data sets are most critical to their highest-value AI deployments, often launching broad data transformation programmes that take years to deliver benefits.

How do we get AI-ready data for every use case?

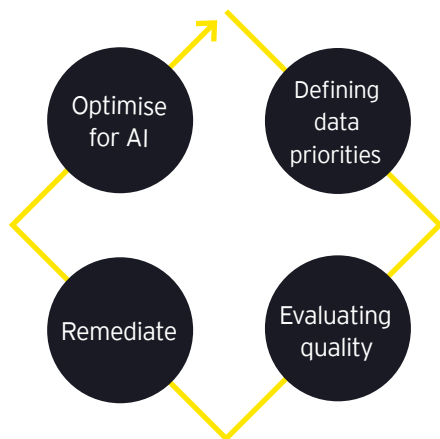


Fig 3. AI-ready data framework, illustrating how a Centre of Excellence helps organisations make data AI-ready through a step-by-step process.

The CoE plays a critical role in ensuring data investment is aligned to AI priorities. Rather than pursuing broad remediation programmes, it helps organisations focus effort on the data that underpins their highest-value AI use cases and workflows. The objective is to create trusted, contextualised data foundations that can support AI to scale while avoiding the cost and complexity of attempting to fix everything at once.

The CoE initially helps organisations identify data sets that are most critical for priority AI use cases and understand whether these data assets can be reused across multiple services and functions.

Once priority datasets have been identified, the CoE helps evaluate their quality, assessing whether they are complete, accurate, consistent and timely enough to support reliable AI-driven decision-making. However, data quality alone is insufficient. The CoE also supports continuous data improvement and optimisation for AI by establishing clear ownership, standards, ontologies and governance so data can be maintained over time and interpreted more accurately and consistently by AI.

Responsible AI governance: building trust and confidence to scale

As AI becomes increasingly embedded in public services, government organisations, employees and citizens need confidence that risks are understood and managed, accountability is clear, and AI is being deployed responsibly –EY research found that ethical considerations and the lack of appropriate accountability continue to constrain government organisations from moving AI beyond experimentation.

The CoE plays a critical role in building trust and confidence in AI. Rather than treating governance as a separate approval process, the CoE helps embed responsible AI throughout the entire AI lifecycle, ensuring governance evolves alongside delivery and innovation. The objective is not to create additional layers of control, but to enable organisations to scale AI safely and confidently.

A practical approach to AI governance operates across four interconnected layers:

1. The CoE helps leaders establish a clear AI vision, risk appetite, accountability model and decision-making framework, including guardrails that define which AI-related decisions can be made at an individual, departmental and enterprise level, and when escalation or additional oversight is required.
2. It coordinates the organisation's responsible AI framework, including standards, risk assessments and governance processes.
3. It helps AI development teams embed testing, assurance and appropriate human oversight.
4. Finally, it works with specialist functions such as cyber, legal and internal audit to assess AI solutions against regulatory, security and ethical requirements.

Together, this holistic approach to governance helps organisations understand where AI is being used, how risks are being managed and who is accountable for outcomes.

The capabilities needed to scale AI today will shape the transformations of tomorrow



Experience across government AI transformations shows that scaling AI successfully requires more than technology. It depends on a mature set of enterprise-level capabilities, established and coordinated through an AI CoE that provides a consistent and repeatable mechanism for scaling AI across the organisation. While these capabilities are critical for scaling AI today, they also create the foundations for the next generation of AI transformations.

As AI continues to advance, governments will need to respond to a range of possible futures, from increasingly autonomous AI agents embedded across public services to more profound shifts in how services are designed, delivered and governed.

Regardless of which AI future emerges, the organisations that invest now in the capabilities required to identify AI opportunities, prioritise investment, deliver rapid solutions, manage risk and continuously realise value will be better positioned to realise the full potential of AI in the years ahead.

To discuss how your organisation can build the capabilities required to scale AI, contact our Government and Public Sector AI Leads: sheena.thompson@studio.ey.com and affaf.queshi@uk.ey.com

EY | Building a better working world

EY is building a better working world by creating new value for clients, people, society and the planet, while building trust in capital markets.

Enabled by data, AI and advanced technology, EY teams help clients shape the future with confidence and develop answers for the most pressing issues of today and tomorrow.

EY teams work across a full spectrum of services in assurance, consulting, tax, strategy and transactions. Fueled by sector insights, a globally connected, multidisciplinary network and diverse ecosystem partners, EY teams can provide services in more than 150 countries and territories.

All in to shape the future with confidence.

EY refers to the global organization, and may refer to one or more, of the member firms of Ernst & Young Global Limited, each of which is a separate legal entity. Ernst & Young Global Limited, a UK company limited by guarantee, does not provide services to clients. Information about how EY collects and uses personal data and a description of the rights individuals have under data protection legislation are available via ey.com/privacy. EY member firms do not practice law where prohibited by local laws. For more information about our organization, please ey.com.

© 2026 EYGM Limited.

All Rights Reserved.

BMC Agency

GA 191530885

EYG no. 114712-26 Gbl

ED None

This material has been prepared for general informational purposes only and is not intended to be relied upon as accounting, tax, legal or other professional advice. Please refer to your advisors for specific advice.

ey.com