



Australian Government

AIDE

Chief AI Officers

Information pack for agencies on the new Chief AI Officer role

Chief AI Officers: At a glance



Under the **'People'** pillar of the AI Plan for the Australian Public Service (APS AI Plan), all agencies are expected to appoint a very senior leader as their **Chief AI Officer (CAIO)** in recognition of the fundamental shift that generative AI is bringing to government operations.



These senior leaders will accelerate **consistent** and **collaborative** AI capability development across the APS, identifying where AI can **meaningfully improve Australians'** lives through faster service delivery, better-targeted policy interventions, and more efficient allocation of resources.



Agencies are to appoint a CAIO by **July 2026** to drive adoption, champion strategic change and work alongside existing AI Accountable Officials (required under the Policy for the Responsible use of AI in government). **The CAIO** and the **Accountable Official** should be different people, where possible.



CAIOs are to be supported by **early adopters** and **experts** within their agencies who have hands-on experience applying AI in their work, whether for personal efficiency, specific job-related functions, or workflow integration.



CAIOs will work with each other and with the **AI Delivery and Enablement (AIDE)** function being established by the Department of Finance to help fast-track uptake, deal with shared problems, monitor for implications, and deliver the **APS AI Plan**.

Appointing a CAIO

Desirable attributes for a Chief AI Officer



Curious:

Continually interested in the new possibilities of generative AI



Driven:

Passionate about realising value for Australians from transformation



Collaborative:

Eager to work across silos and actively involve stakeholders



Strategic:

Able to engage with risk and uncertainty maturely and adeptly



Capable:

Willing and able to lead and persist with change management



Influential:

Have the seniority and ability to drive change across the agency

Accountable Officials (AOs)	Chief AI Officers (CAIOs)
Accountable for implementation of the AI policy within their agencies	Accountable for driving adoption and engagement with AI
Responsible for high-risk use cases and working with DTA and AI Review Committee	Championing strategic change
Responsibilities may be vested in an individual or in the chair of a body	Responsibilities fulfilled by a single SES official
Focus on governance and risk	Focus on opportunity and transformation

Appointing a CAIO

Strategic Considerations

- The CAIO is **not the sole leader 'for' AI** – the expectation is that all senior leaders become AI literate and help drive uptake across their teams.
- The CAIO **does not need to be a technical expert**, but they will need to be(come) comfortable with engaging with, for example, CIOs and CISOs and learning about generative AI, its applications, and the associated technical concerns that might arise.
- CAIOs need to be able to act as a **port of call** when the innovative implementation of generative AI hits fear, uncertainty and doubt. It is not about ignoring concerns, rather balancing them with the potential upsides and **recognising safe and responsible adoption** involves learning, experimentation and strategic nous.
- CAIOs might lean in on both **working level** and **specialist deployments**, depending on their agency's AI journey.
- Agencies may wish to take the opportunity provided by the APS AI Plan to consider strategic positioning of AI leadership responsibilities, including existing AO arrangements.
- Once selected, CAIO's should be identified to AIDE (aide@finance.gov.au).

Appointing a CAIO

Strategic Considerations

CAIO overlap	Potential advantages	Potential trade-offs
Chief Information Officer (CIO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Strategic alignment of AI with IT infrastructure- Deep understanding of technology and digital transformation- Focus on operational efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Risk of tech-first mentality, potentially overlooking human, cultural, or policy dimensions of AI adoption- Possible over-focus on internal tech systems vs external AI benefits
Chief Data Officer (CDO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Strong understanding of data governance, quality, and privacy- Ability to leverage data as a key asset in AI implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Possible over-emphasis on data quality and management, potentially overlooking broader AI governance issues- May focus more on data pipelines than full service transformation
AI Accountable Official (AO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Strong governance and accountability in AI adoption- Clear responsibility for outcomes and compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Could become overly focused on risk aversion and compliance, stifling innovation- Potentially limited hands-on role in AI's strategic potential
Business area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Better alignment between AI strategies and business goals- Improved focus on outcomes and real-world application of AI	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Risk of losing broader organisational and governance perspective- AI initiatives might become too narrowly business-focused, potentially overlooking policy implications
Policy area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ability to embed AI in the service delivery and policy context- Improved alignment with public sector mission and values	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- May focus too heavily on public sector implications without enough emphasis on the technical details or data execution- Risk of policy constraints limiting the pace of AI adoption



Detailed Information

On the role, responsibilities and support

Chief AI Officers (CAIOs)

- Under the APS AI Plan, every agency is to appoint a senior leader as the Chief AI Officer (CAIO). This is in addition to the need for an Accountable Official under the Policy for the responsible use of AI in government.
- These senior leaders will drive adoption and advocate for strategic change within their agencies.
- They will accelerate consistent and collaborative AI capability development.
- Agencies will have flexibility to determine who best in their structure meets the needs of the CAIO role. (Some agencies, such as smaller organisations, may opt to have both the CAIO and Accountable Official (AO) roles fulfilled by the same leader.)

Why CAIOs?

Because AI adoption is not a technology problem

AI (particularly generative AI) as a general-purpose technology impacts across all domains - it's not (just) a tech issue

- **The challenge with AI** is that it moves faster than our usual ICT adoption cycles – monthly evolution, not annual, with rapid capability growth – and impacts all aspects of public service work.
- There is a need for a **systemic view of AI adoption**, to understand the intersection of this technology with data, workforce capability, risk, human resources, stakeholder relations, information management, privacy, cybersecurity, and all other domains.
- Concerted leadership, a **transformation mindset**, and a systemic view to driving AI adoption is crucial to realising value for the public.
- Without **dedicated leadership** to capture the potential of this technology, the APS is at risk of lagging the private sector and international peers, succumbing to bureaucratic inertia, and becoming exposed to harms arising out of uncontrolled AI use.



CAIOs will provide the requisite leadership for transformation

“It’s always around leadership... Tech’s never the challenge” – Victor Dominello, Former NSW Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government.

“Boldness is a lower risk strategy than incrementally improving the status quo” – Tom Loosemore, Co-founder, UK Government Digital Services

- Real change comes from reimagining how we work, not just adding technology.
- A focus on outcomes, flexibility, and experimentation are key.
- CAIOs will embody a transformation mindset to challenge risk aversion, identify opportunities, provide fresh perspective, and lead change – not provide technical expertise.
- Existing roles and authorities and officials provide domain expertise – CAIOs will draw on expertise across domains to lead change, navigate cross-cutting impacts, and to contest default assumptions.

CAIOs and AOs: the vision and vigilance for AI adoption

Progress on responsible and effective AI adoption requires both brake and accelerator – the integration of caution and ambition produces better decisions.

Governance and accountability (AOs)

- Accountability structures - clear lines of responsibility emerging
- Risk management approaches - learning what works for AI-specific risks
- Governance frameworks - developing appropriate oversight mechanisms and associated administration
- These give us confidence to move forward and mitigate risks

Transformation and change management (CAIOs)

- Strategic focus – dedicated to matching the pace this technology requires
- Active identification of transformation opportunities
- Building momentum when the path forward isn't clear yet and helping overcome obstacles
- People whose primary job is pushing opportunity, working alongside those with more cautionary approaches and concerns
- Cross-sector engagement to build trust given – “transformation happens at the speed of trust”

CAIOs and AOs: How do these roles work together?

A balanced approach to support transformation, capturing benefits while mitigating risks



Accountable Officials: Continue managing risk, compliance, and standards (existing)



CAIOs: Strategic role focused on opportunity identification and accelerating adoption (new)

Why this works:

- Pure acceleration without risk management is reckless
- Pure risk management without acceleration means we stagnate
- The integration of these approaches produces better decisions
- CAIOs work with the risk boundaries set by AOs
- CAIOs' job is to push; AOs' job is to ensure we push safely

What happens if the AO and the CAIO is the same person?

- Some agencies, such as smaller organisations, may opt to have both the **CAIO** and **Accountable Official (AO)** roles fulfilled by the same leader, but the preference otherwise is for these to be separate.
- CAIOs will need to be willing and able to contest default **processes** and **assumptions**.
- Any leaders fulfilling both responsibilities will need to manage any tensions arising from being both **advocate** and **guardian**.
- Where agencies choose to appoint a **single** leader for both, it is recommended that the expectations and strategies for how the potential tensions will be managed are made **explicitly clear**.

How will CAIOs be supported?

AIDE



CAIOs will be supported by the new **AI Delivery and Enablement (AIDE)** function within the Department of Finance.

AIDE will **convene** and **work** with the CAIOs to support them in **driving adoption** within their agencies and across the APS.



CAIOs will be supported **by early adopters** and **experts** within and across agencies who have **hands-on experience** applying AI in their work, whether for personal efficiency, specific job-related functions, or workflow integration.



A **peer working group** will develop shared training materials for distribution via platforms such as **GovAI**, **APS Professions** and the **APS Academy**.

How will CAIOs help deliver the APS AI Plan?

Collaboration between CAIOs and AIDE will drive whole-of-government AI adoption and ensure a concerted change management effort

How CAIOs will support the work of AIDE	How AIDE will support the work of CAIOs
Identifying priority use cases and high value applications of AI to be fast-tracked and spread by AIDE	Working with AIDE to support adoption of high value AI use cases within their agencies, varying solutions for their context and harmonising where appropriate
Navigate and escalate adoption barriers to AIDE, providing contextual insight to AIDE to support authoritative APS-wide resolution	Leverage insights, approaches, and solutions to barriers endorsed by AIDE to accelerate internal adoption efforts safely, responsibly, and with confidence
Inform AIDEs monitoring and tracking efforts through providing qualitative and quantitative insight on AI use and benefits	Share insights with CAIOs on AI impacts to inform internal adoption efforts and approaches, helping to ensure efforts are targeted and effective
Close collaboration to implement the APS AI Plan with a coherent, consistent, and adaptive approach informed by on-the-ground insight, ensuring AI adoption is responsible, effective, and meets community expectations	
Demonstrating return on investment and helping to displace old ways of working with new	



Additional information to come

This is an initial information pack to help agencies in selecting their Chief AI Officer.

Further information and supporting materials will be developed by AIDE (Finance) as it commences formal operations in the beginning of 2026.