

# ChatGPT: What You Need to Know

Harnessing the potential and mitigating the risks of this powerful new tool. | BY MARK L. RYCKMAN, ICMA-CM

**By now, you may have heard** about one of the latest advancements in artificial intelligence, ChatGPT (chat.openai.com). It is a large language model created by OpenAI, an artificial intelligence company. The software can answer questions, write text, and create content in an interactive fashion similar to having a conversation. It pulls information from across the internet and repackages it for your use.

You can use it to assist you in writing press releases, drafting procedures, or even putting together a request for proposals. Although the program is powerful, the user interface is simple. You interact with ChatGPT through a chatbot in a conversational manner, giving it instructions and waiting for an answer. As an example, when instructed, “Explain the council-manager form of government. The answer should not exceed five sentences,” ChatGPT quickly generated the following response:

The council-manager form of government is a system in which a governing body, known as the council or board, is responsible for making policy decisions and setting goals for a municipality or organization. The council appoints a professional manager to oversee the day-to-day operations and implement the council’s directives. The manager is hired based on qualifications and experience, rather than through political appointment. This model aims to separate political decision-making from administrative functions and ensure professional expertise in managing public affairs. The council retains ultimate authority, while the manager provides administrative leadership and expertise.

## Uses in Local Government

ChatGPT offers enormous benefits for local government operations, but poses some risks. There are a variety of potential ways to integrate ChatGPT into your organization. It is most suitable for routine or automated processes, such as responding to resident inquiries. It can be used for more complex tasks such as conducting research and drafting reports. However, the more subjective or complex the issue, the more the author will need to evaluate ChatGPT responses carefully and edit them thoroughly to ensure the

final product is accurate. It is important to remember that ChatGPT is not a substitute for experience and human judgement, but can be a useful aid to assist in processing work more quickly. It is best used to write first drafts. Here are some examples of how ChatGPT can be used on the job.

### **Writing Correspondence:**

This is one of the most basic uses of ChatGPT. You can ask it to draft correspondence for you such as emails, memos, and letters. You simply instruct ChatGPT in the prompt to write the desired correspondence and tell it to include any additional information such as the subject, recipient, and any other details you want added. You can refine the text yourself or continue to have a conversation with ChatGPT to clarify specific areas of its response.

**Drafting Requests for Proposals and Reviewing Responses:** ChatGPT can quickly provide you with the framework for issuing a request for proposals (RFP). You can instruct ChatGPT to provide an outline of the RFP and then continue making requests to build upon each section, such as the project description, scope of work, instructions for submitting proposals, and evaluation guidelines. ChatGPT won’t write an RFP that is ready to issue, but it will accelerate the process to produce your documents.

Using the subscription version of ChatGPT, you can upload documents for review, such as the proposals submitted in response to your RFP. This can be done by subscribing to the more advanced version of ChatGPT using the upgrade link. Once you subscribe to this service, you can use various plug-ins, which are enhanced features. There are a few plug-ins that will allow you to upload documents to ChatGPT. Once uploaded, ChatGPT can rapidly conduct an initial review and identify main points such as key personnel, project approach, proposed timeline, deliverables, and cost.

**Analyzing Financial Documents:** Using the upgraded version of ChatGPT and a plug-in to upload documents, you can conduct initial analysis of financial documents such as budgets and financial statements. This is an easy way to quickly summarize information from various pages

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Command Prompt :

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in the documents, conduct basic financial analysis, and write a summary report or prepare a PowerPoint presentation. Because ChatGPT is still in its early stages, make sure to review its calculations carefully for accuracy.

#### Writing Styles

Not all writing styles are appropriate for each situation you are addressing. ChatGPT was developed in a manner to provide responses in a variety of different styles depending upon the user's request. If you are writing a formal communication, you can ask ChatGPT to use a professional tone. The response you will receive will be more authoritative and convey a sense of expertise. If you

are responding to a resident complaint, you can instruct ChatGPT to use an empathetic style, which will impart a tone of understanding and empathy toward the reader. ChatGPT can write in many other styles as well, such as casual, persuasive, and critical. More advanced users are teaching ChatGPT to learn their personal writing styles.

#### Ethical Issues

The introduction of this powerful new technology does raise ethical concerns. First, and one of the most important, is privacy protections. The security of ChatGPT's site is unknown. It is important that you never enter personal data such as names, social security numbers, home addresses, medical information, or any other confidential matters.

Second, if you are using ChatGPT to write policies, contract language or the like, make sure to have your legal counsel review the final draft. ChatGPT is not a substitute for legal review. Because it pulls information from across the internet and repackages it, the text it is creating for you may contain biases and inaccuracies.



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Third, ChatGPT is not a substitute for employees doing their own work with the usual expectation that they are applying their expertise and judgment for which they are being paid. Its use within the organization should be transparent and fully disclosed. Because ChatGPT is drawing upon existing information and reformatting it, the use of its output may in some circumstances be considered

plagiarism. Establishing a well-defined policy on this subject will be essential to ensure its appropriate use.

#### **Conclusion**

ChatGPT has its advantages and disadvantages. Like any other skill, the more you practice using ChatGPT, the more proficient you will become in its use. At this point, it is apparent that this type of AI

technology is going to become increasingly prevalent in society. It would behoove us as local government managers to educate ourselves on the uses of this technology and provide guidelines for its application within our organizations. If we can harness its potential, while mitigating its risks, ChatGPT may prove to be a significant tool for the improvement of organizational efficiency and effectiveness. **PM**