

North Carolina Artificial Intelligence Leadership Council

Co-Chairs:

Teena Piccione, Secretary of N.C. Department of Information Technology and State CIO

Lee Lilley, Secretary of North Carolina Department of Commerce

Meeting Minutes

January 21st, 2026, 2:00-5:00pm

Virtual

AI Leadership Council Members Present

Sen. DeAndrea Salvador

Rep. Zack Hawkins

Dr. David Yokum

Wesley Davis (*representing Mary Penny Kelley*)

Kunal Choksi

Vera Cubero

Todd Olson

Phaedra Boinodiris

Marina Carreker

Igor Jablov

Sushma Masemore

The Hon. Tommy Sowers

Dr. Andrea Crowley

Dr. Stan Ahalt

Dr. Siobahn Day Grady

Markell Storay

The Hon. Shinica Thomas

Jennie Bowen

Dr. Angel Hsu

Leslie Boney

Rick Knafelz

Hannah Drummond

Sarah Bacha

AI Leadership Council Members Absent

Sen. Todd Johnson

Dr. Thomas Reardon

Rep. Jake Johnson

Bryan Harris

Facilitators

I-Sah Hsieh, Deputy Secretary for AI and Policy, NCDIT

Abhiram Gunturi, Deputy Chief Operating Officer, Office of the Governor

Dr. Margaret Brunson, Organizational Health Advisor, NC Office of State Human Resources

Sofya Diktas, Manager for AI Products and Governance, NCDIT

Agenda

- I. Opening Remarks – Co-Chairs
- II. Discussion of Federal Executive Order on AI – Co-Chairs
- III. Review Roadmap for Leadership Council
- IV. Vote to Approve Minutes
- V. Discuss Leadership Council Guiding Principles
- VI. Subcommittee Breakout Sessions
- VII. Closing Remarks

Meeting called to session at 2:06 p.m. by Sec. Piccione.

Welcome

Chris Brittingham opened the meeting with a disclosure to identify conflicts of interest and a reminder to all members to disclose any existing or potential conflicts as they arise. The public was told that they could listen, but that only members of the Council could participate in the discussions.

Federal Executive Order Discussion

Secretary Piccione explained that the Federal Executive Order on AI, issued December 25th, is intended to provide a consistent national framework and create uniformity across state-level approaches. The order includes protections for both older and younger populations and ties compliance to funding mechanisms such as BEAD. If a state adopts policies inconsistent with the federal framework, the federal government may audit and potentially withdraw funding. Currently, there is no conflict between the Executive Order and the work of the North Carolina AI Leadership Council.

Roadmap for the AI Leadership Council

Sofya Diktas provided an overview of the projected work plan for the next several months. She noted that the January 21st all-council meeting will focus on subcommittee work, including aligning on each subcommittee's objectives, determining shared goals, and brainstorming areas of focus. The next sets of meetings will be subcommittee meetings. These meetings will refine and prioritize the January goals and begin shaping early recommendations.

During March, the council will continue to refine recommendations, ensuring that each includes the necessary details such as responsible owners and timelines. Council members will also be expected to develop and refine recommendations between meetings. As March concludes, recommendations will be stress-tested and further refined. Sofya noted that by April, all recommendations should be fully formed and ready for an all-council readout. That session will allow subcommittees to gather feedback, understand cross-committee dependencies, and align on a cohesive direction. May will be dedicated to iterating on the recommendations based on feedback, with the draft report expected to be completed by the end of the month. June will provide time for final review and confirmation of the three-year roadmap.

Vote to Approve Meeting Minutes

The council reviewed the previous meeting minutes. No questions or concerns were raised and were unanimously approved.

Guiding Principles

The guiding principles were discussed and read out to all Council members. Members were instructed to vote in a Menti poll to provide feedback on the guiding principles. All members agreed with the direction of the principles, but wanted them to be more action oriented.

Subcommittee Breakouts

Talent & Workforce

The Talent and Workforce subcommittee focused on defining a future-ready talent strategy for North Carolina that builds a continuum of durable skills, digital fluency, and lifelong learning across education, workforce systems, and communities. Members emphasized the need to harness emerging technologies to redesign instruction, assess workforce impacts, especially in state government, and develop recognized digital credentials and micro-badges. Discussions highlighted the importance of user-centered learning pathways, better alignment of tools across agencies, and clear connections to guiding principles. The group also explored how to support career pivots, address automation risks, strengthen knowledge exchange between business and education, and ensure all North Carolinians benefit equitably from AI. Key themes included adaptability, integrated systems, resource mapping, collaboration, and competition, with a shared vision for universal AI fluency grounded in continuous skill development.

Transformation & Innovation

The Transformation & Innovation subcommittee examined how North Carolina can model a modern, responsible approach to AI by focusing on government effectiveness, constituent experience, and a clear, actionable remit for innovation. Members emphasized refining the objective to encompass all levels of government, prioritize efficiency and customer-centered service delivery, and balance speedy implementation with responsible change management. The group explored how AI can streamline operations, reduce administrative burdens, and modernize resident interactions while also supporting economic competitiveness and positioning North Carolina as a desirable hub for AI-driven businesses. Discussion highlighted the need to define what “impactful” innovation means for communities, state workers, and residents; identify high-value use cases through user research; leverage solutions from other states; and build a sustainable, well-resourced AI capability. Themes included ensuring benefits and burdens are distributed equitably, strengthening local government participation, creating a playbook for replicable outcomes, and developing practical roadmaps that prioritize pain points, feasibility, and resident experience.

Governance & Safety

The Governance & Safety subcommittee focused on the need to provide transparency and accountability to AI systems used by the state, while focusing on resident safety assurances. The subcommittee spent time discussing how to fit the recommendations that come out of this group within the Federal Executive Order. The group also

discussed what constituted “vulnerable groups” to best address who needs protections and safety assurances from AI systems. The group then focused on revising the objective to focus on directing the efforts at fostering public trust in AI and ensuring the responsible use of AI within state government.

Tech, Data, & Infrastructure

The Tech, Data, & Infrastructure subcommittee centered its discussion on balancing AI advancement with responsible stewardship of North Carolina’s resources, emphasizing the environmental impacts of data centers, such as air quality, water consumption, and strain on the power grid, and the need for transparency to better plan and allocate critical infrastructure. Members highlighted priorities including developing state-owned or state-controlled AI capabilities to reduce reliance on external vendors, providing accessible AI tools for public and student training, and identifying proactive zones where infrastructure capacity can support growth. Feedback on the objective underscored the need to broaden the definition of “technology” to include environmental and economic impacts, clarify regulatory constraints, and refine the scope to avoid overbreadth. The group also recommended mapping what the state can influence, expanding goals to address infrastructure access and contingency planning, including emergency resource allocation, and considering financing and indemnification requirements for future partnerships.

Closing Remarks

Sofya concluded the meeting by summarizing the main themes and highlighting upcoming tasks. She reiterated that the next scheduled meetings will occur within the individual subcommittees.

Adjournment

Meeting concluded at 4:41 pm.