

St. Joseph County Digital Innovation Task Force Meeting

June 11, 2025 - Summary Report

Meeting Overview:

Occasion: 1-Year Anniversary of the AI Task Force

Tone: Reflective, technical, strategic

Focus: From conceptual AI discussion to system implementation and capacity scaling

Format: Open discussion, live demonstrations, future planning

Topics & Discussions:

1. Task Force Retrospective & Progress

- Reflections on the first year highlighted achievements in education, policy creation, AI awareness, and inter-county collaboration.
- General frustration with the lack of implementation capacity, but acknowledgment that knowledge and AI comfort levels among the group have grown significantly.
- Recognized the group as ahead of peer counties in conceptual understanding and initial deployments.

2. Van Buren-St. Joseph AI Partnership & Intergovernmental Agreement

- Legal review of the intergovernmental agreement is delaying full deployment.
- Target date for agreement execution: July 2025.

3. Address Change Workflow Demo

- Reviewed the tax address change automation tool.
- Discussed benefits like reducing staff email workload and increasing public self-service.

4. Website Modernization Discussion

- Strong preference for internal WordPress development over Granicus or CivicPlus.
- Key benefits: cost savings, local ownership, easier vendor transitions.
- Plan to hire a Digital Communications staffer to support content updates.

5. Staff AI Training System

- Required training before AI access.
- Includes podcast, document review, and quiz.
- Proposal: pilot this system in St. Joseph.

6. AI Usage Monitoring & Dashboards

- Weekly report in Van Buren: 88 users, 2,153 interactions, 15 tools.
- Claude used to generate interactive usage dashboard.
- Raised questions on FOIA exposure and usage tracking policies.

7. AI Micro-Apps & Interface Prototypes

- Demo of zoning assistant app built by AI.
- Broader concept: replace legacy SaaS platforms with AI-built, county-owned microtools.

8. The DICE Initiative

- DICE: Digital Innovation Collaborative Exchange.
- Long-term: regional AI cooperative with shared development, regional staffing, and multi-county governance.

9. Strategic Communications Efforts

- First department spotlight: Veterans Affairs.
- 4,000 digital and 1,200 printed newsletters distributed.
- AI-generated and AI-criticized strategic communications plan from Gemini and custom audit tool.

Closing Reflections:

- Noted attention from Kalamazoo County, SWMPC, Upjohn Institute.
- Plan to showcase progress via a public write-up.
- Next meeting: deep dive on training rollout and testing.

Key Takeaways:

- AI is moving from exploration to implementation.
- Strategic lead needs DICE to scale.
- Local ownership of digital assets and open platforms are foundational principles.
- AI is now seen as assistant, builder, strategist, and auditor.