



Navigating AI with Confidence

A Decision Framework for CCDF Administrators



Why We're (Still) Talking About AI

- AI is making new ways of working possible while changing people's expectations for what *should* be possible.
- CCDF Administrators face complex challenges under pressure to adopt AI as a force multiplier for their work within a fast-moving policy environment.

*"A fundamental truth about innovation: It is expensive for organizations and companies but cheap for individuals doing their job ... **Workers who figure out how to make AI useful for their jobs will have a large impact.**"*

*—Ethan Mollick, *Co-Intelligence: Living and Working with AI**



Navigating AI Doesn't Have to Be Difficult

What You'll Learn

- How to assess your AI readiness across levels of effort and impact
- How to identify the policies that affect you most
- Why you don't have to wait to make valuable improvements

What You'll Leave With

- A simple decision-making framework
- A map for designing successful AI pilot initiatives
- Hands-on practice with navigating complex decisions

Anchoring Principle

"AI should bring humans back to the work they do best."

—Jane Yang, Chief AI Officer,
Administration for Children
and Families (ACF)



Who We Are

- Technologists and subject matter experts who strive to help make the day-to-day work of CCDF Administrators and Lead Agencies more effective
- Early AI adopters who have gone “nerd deep” on learning how AI actually works to help teams more effectively adopt and implement these tools
- Not policy experts or advisors, but humans with experience navigating the competing forces of innovation and policy across state and federal organizations

Child Care State Capacity Building Center



Dave Cameron
Web & AI Strategist



Mike Smith
Product Manager

National Center on Subsidy Innovation and Accountability



Ann Renaud-Avila
Subject Matter Expert Manager



Joshua Clement
Subject Matter Expert



How Do *You* Use AI?



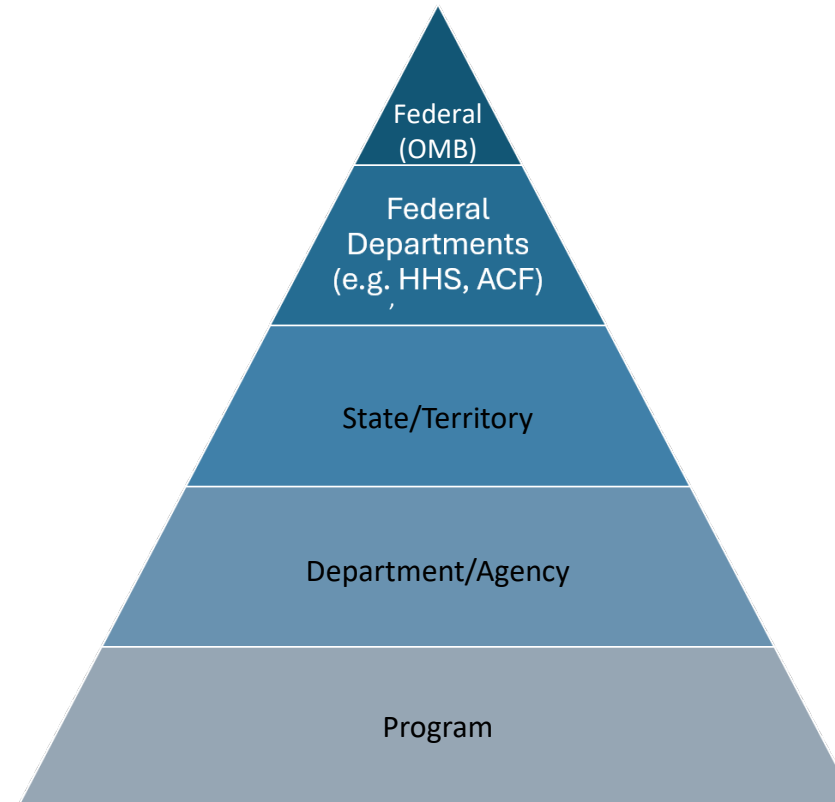
[Navigating AI with Confidence](#)



What We Are Navigating



AI Guidance and Policies That May Affect Your CCDF Program



Note: OMB stands for Office of Management and Budget, and HHS stands for U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



Example State Policies

Connecticut

- The state developed a robust policy on AI responsible use, including a comprehensive framework for ethical use for Connecticut state government employees.
- It created initiatives to “upskill” employees so they can navigate AI use with confidence.

Georgia

State employees must do the following:

- Receive prior authorization for generative AI tools used for regular organizational tasks.
- Document AI tool use in a state information technology inventory.
- Conduct periodic analysis of generative AI and automated decision systems.



Quality Control

What are some ways you perform quality control when using AI with CCDF?

- Always keep humans in the loop for review purposes.
- Do not enter personally identifiable information (PII) or sensitive data into AI models.
- Check sources to ensure reliability and accuracy.
- Identify and address biases or hallucinations (i.e., incorrect information).
- Verify math for accuracy.
- Disclose AI use when appropriate (e.g., when publishing a forward-facing document).

Sources: MIT Sloan Teaching & Learning Technologies. (n.d.). *When AI gets it wrong: Addressing AI hallucinations and bias.*

<https://mitsloanedtech.mit.edu/ai/basics/addressing-ai-hallucinations-and-bias/>

Stanford University Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence. (2022). *AI in the loop: Humans must remain in charge.* <https://hai.stanford.edu/news/ai-loop-humans-must-remain-charge>

Stanford University Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence. (2024). *Rethinking privacy in the AI era: Policy provocations for a data-centric world.* <https://hai.stanford.edu/policy/white-paper-rethinking-privacy-ai-era-policy-provocations-data-centric-world>



Activity



Practicing the Basics: Small Group Activity

Analyze the CCDF subsidy scenarios at your table.
Discuss how you as a CCDF Administrator or staff member will ensure accuracy and exercise quality control over the AI outputs.



The Three-Tier Decision Framework



How to Start Your AI Project

Map the problem:

- What is the process you are trying to improve or create?
- Who is this for? Are the users who will benefit mostly internal, external, or both?
- What does a successful outcome look like? What changes? How will you measure the difference?

Map the resources:

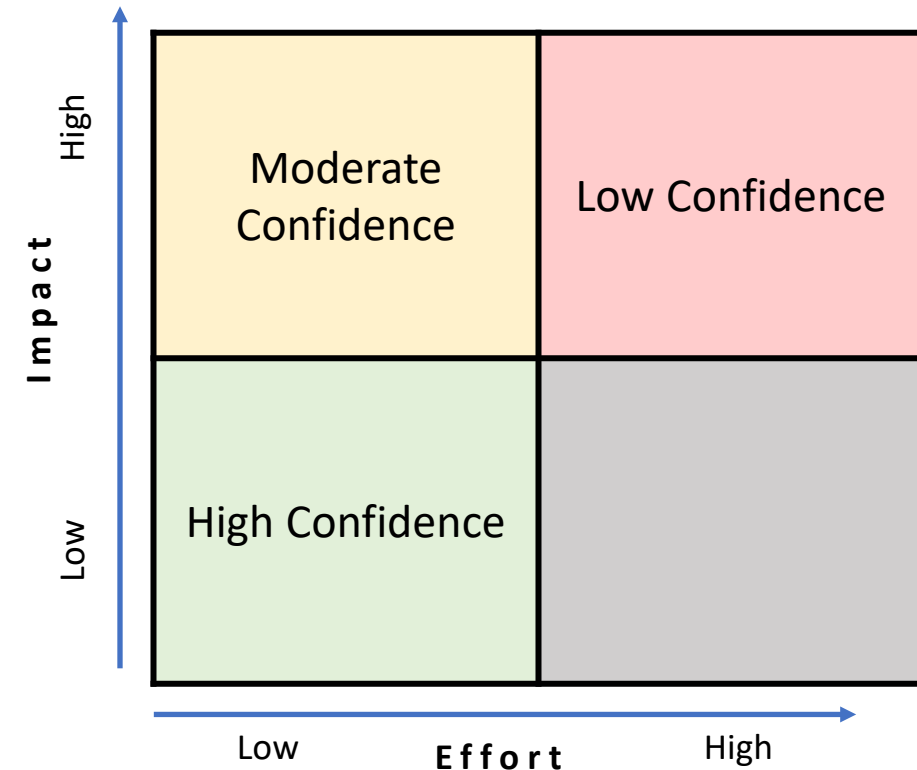
- What key data and content sources are required for success?
- Who owns or manages the data and content you need?
- Who else uses these data? Could they benefit from collaboration?
- Which technology platforms do you already have access to that you could leverage?



Evaluating Effort and Impact

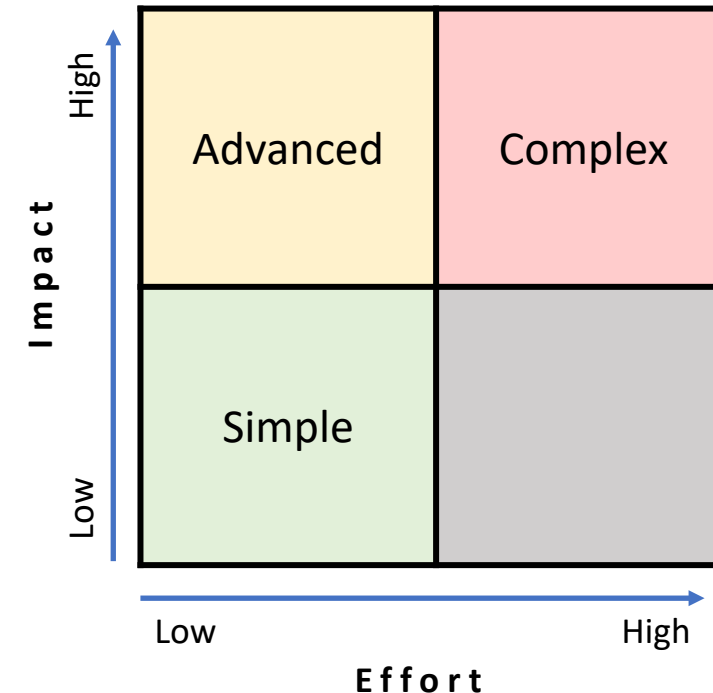
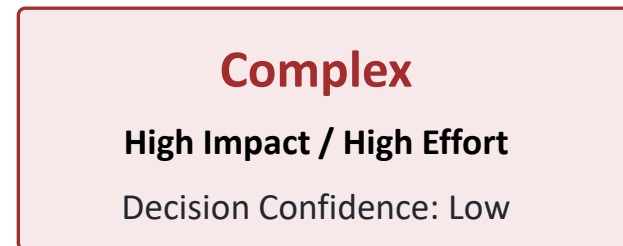
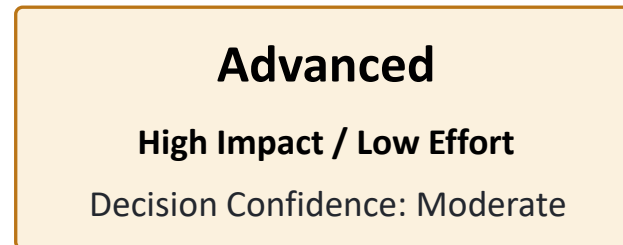
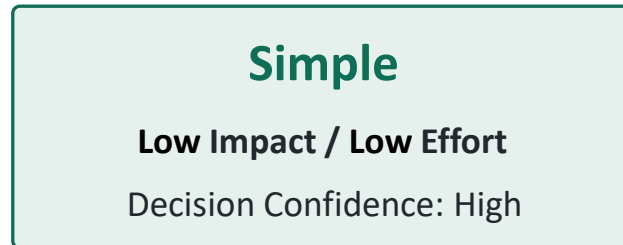
Four Key Questions

1. Will this product interact with private data or PII?
2. Could it influence a determination about a family?
3. Is a human accountable for the output?
4. Is the product covered by existing approved guidance?





The Three-Tier Decision Framework





The Three-Tier Decision Framework

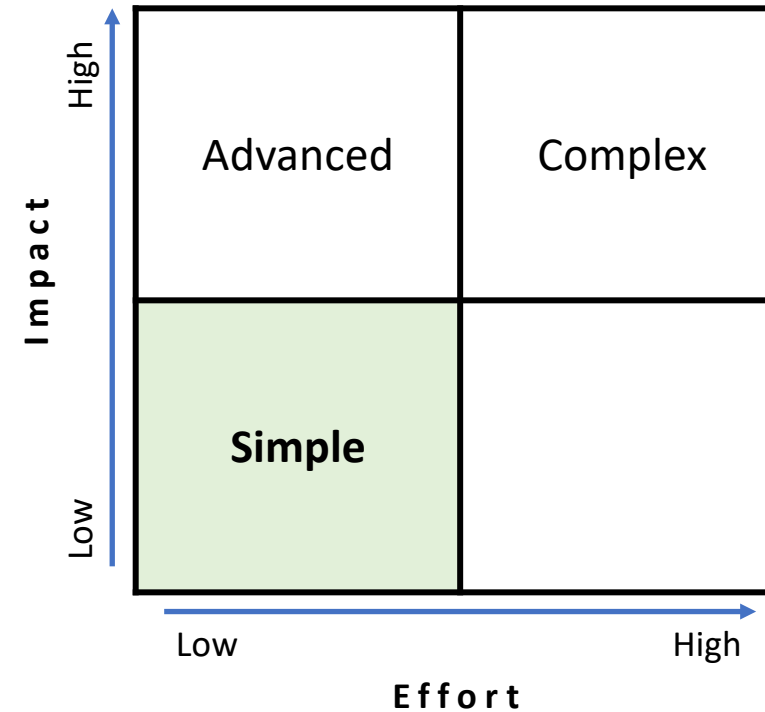
Simple

Low Impact / Low Effort

Decision Confidence: High

May include ...

- Internal drafting
- Research synthesis
- Document review
- Summarization
- **Human-in-the-loop**
- **No PII**



The framework is a thinking tool you apply with your own facts—not a compliance ruling.



The Three-Tier Decision Framework

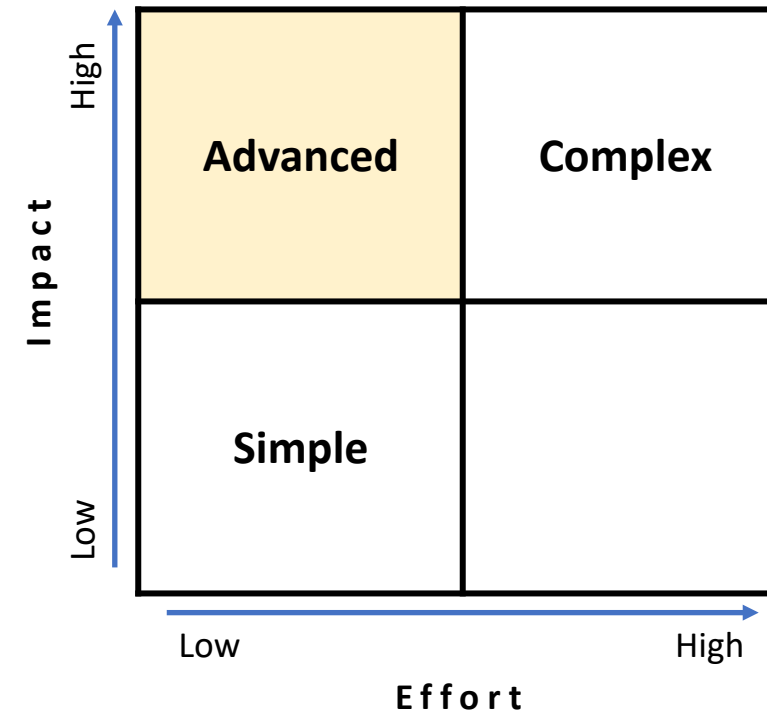
Advanced

High Impact / Low Effort

Decision Confidence: Moderate

May include ...

- Program data
- Vendor tools
- Workflow integration
- Impact assessment and documented controls



The framework is a thinking tool you apply with your own facts—not a compliance ruling.



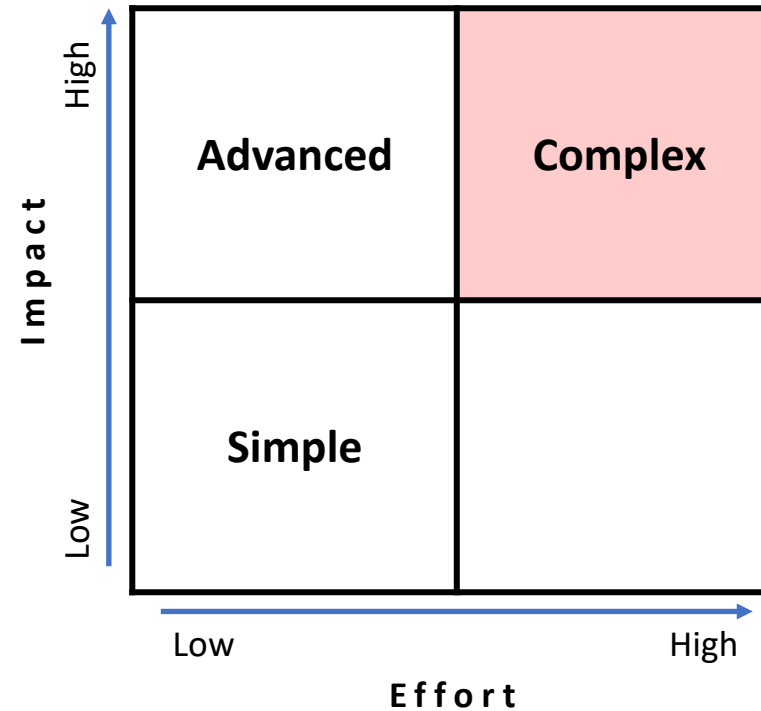
The Three-Tier Decision Framework

Complex

High Impact / High Effort
Decision Confidence: Low

May include ...

- Automated eligibility or subsidy decisions
- Family-facing tools
- Anything where applicable guidance is unsettled for your agency



The framework is a thinking tool you apply with your own facts—not a compliance ruling.



How to Go from Basic to Advanced AI Implementation



Pilot Programs: Proving Value Before Scaling

A pilot program is a small, time-boxed test of one AI use case, with real users, real data, and a defined finish line.

Organizations across government and the private sector use pilots to demonstrate value before committing to full implementation. Successful pilots share a consistent set of design elements.



Designing a Responsible AI Pilot

Strong pilots are defined before you select a tool. They contain five elements (in order):

1. **A written problem statement**—the problem and the goal, stated separately—because starting from a tool produces a solution in search of a problem
2. A specific user audience
3. An existing process that requires significant time, effort, or money
4. Data the team owns or can already access
5. **A defined minimum – Minimum Viable Product (MVP)**—the smallest version that proves value, given the four elements above

The examples that follow show these elements in practice—and one case where they break down.



Example: State Licensing Modernization Assistant

1. Problem: Licensing staff answer provider questions by manually searching pages of regulations, policies, and requirements across formats. Comparing with other states is time consuming.

Goal: Cut research time for provider questions and support plain-language licensing modernization.

Note that a human reviewer is always required. There are some use cases within this example where AI could be helpful to answer questions, and other use cases where human research is a better fit.

2. Audience:

- Licensing leadership, policy staff, and legal and policy analysts

3. Existing Process:

- Manual policy lookup and cross-state comparison—hours of staff time per request

4. Data the State Owns or Can Access:

- The state's licensing policies and manuals
- Other states' publicly posted licensing regulations, policies, and requirements
- *National Database of Child Care Licensing Regulations*
- Federal CCDF health and safety requirements

5. MVP, or the Smallest Version That Proves Value:

- Plain-language answers from the state's own regulations, policies, and requirements, with citations
- One topic first—health and safety
- Expand once proven—comparison across states, crosswalks, and drafting



Example: State Provider Support Knowledge Assistant

1. Problem: Provider questions about payments, reporting, and renewals require hunting through policies, portals, and guides. Answers vary by staff, with newer staff requiring longer for research.

Goal: Achieve consistent, faster provider-facing answers from any staff member.

Note that a human reviewer is always required. There are some use cases within this example where AI could be helpful to answer questions, and other use cases where human research is a better fit.

2. Audience:

- Provider help desk staff, subsidy payment staff, and licensing support teams

3. Existing Process:

- Each question researched by hand across policies, portals, and frequently asked questions—answers vary by person

4. Data the State Owns or Can Access:

- Provider payment policies
- Attendance reporting instructions
- Licensing and subsidy participation requirements
- Portal guides, public frequently asked questions, and training materials

5. MVP, or the Smallest Version That Proves Value:

- Draft answers to common provider questions, with links to the source policy
- One category first—payment questions
- Expand once proven—escalation flags and plain-language templates



Designing a Responsible AI Pilot

Why a Pilot Is the Responsible Entry Point

- Contained scope, reversible, and generates the documentation trail that supports later scaling
- Local first—allows you to deploy and evaluate in a controlled setting before any broader rollout
- Lower-risk starting place—public data, no PII, built for internal team use

Pilot-Design Template

1. Write the problem statement—problem, goal, and how to measure success.
2. Define the MVP—the smallest version that proves value.
3. Identify the tier.
4. Name the human owner.
5. Set documentation and review checkpoints.
6. Define exit criteria—scale, adjust, or stop.



Activity



Apply the Framework: Small-Group Activity

- Work in small groups on a scenario—one you bring or one we provide.
- Provided scenarios span the tiers—drafting a plan narrative, summarizing provider survey data, and a vendor pitching an eligibility-screening tool.
- Run it through the framework—place it in a tier, identify documentation needed and the human owner, and note what to confirm with your agency or ACF.
- Know that the worksheet mirrors the leave-behind framework.



Takeaways and Insights



Takeaways, Resources, and Questions and Answers

- Download link for one-sheet framework reference (TBA)
- ACF AI Hub (<https://acf.gov/ai-data-research/artificial-intelligence-acf>)

Thank You!

2026 State and Territory CCDF
Administrators Meeting
STAM **July 21-23**
Hyatt Regency Reston
in Reston, Virginia



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES
Office of Child Care
An Office of the Administration for Children & Families

