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# TRANSFORMING PUBLIC SERVICE: NEVADA'S HUMAN CENTERED AI FOR APPEALS

Nevada Department of  
Employment, Training and Rehabilitation

**AWARD CATEGORY:**  
Artificial Intelligence  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Nevada Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation (DETR) confronted a significant operational hurdle: ensuring the timely delivery of unemployment appeals decisions. This challenge was compounded by a highly regulated environment requiring meticulous adherence to legal standards and the constraints of limited staffing resources. The consequence was an increasing burden on both DETR personnel and the citizens of Nevada awaiting critical appeal outcomes. The very nature of appeals processing, often characterized by manual, repetitive tasks and the need to synthesize voluminous documentation, further exacerbated these difficulties.

Recognizing an opportunity for profound transformation, DETR Director Chris Sewell championed a forward-thinking vision: the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to redefine public service in the appeals process. This initiative was strategically aligned with the NASCIO 2025 State CIO Top Ten Priorities, particularly emphasizing digital government, modernization, and the responsible application of AI. This approach signaled a departure from incremental adjustments, aiming instead for a comprehensive re-imagining of how DETR serves Nevadans.

At the heart of this transformation is the AI Appeals Assistant, a state-of-the-art digital tool developed with a human-centered philosophy. This system is expressly designed to empower, not replace, Appeals Referees. By synthesizing complex case records, identifying crucial legal elements, and offering recommendations grounded in relevant statutes and precedents, the AI assistant augments the capabilities of human experts. Critically, Appeals Referees retain complete decision-making authority, ensuring that fairness and nuanced professional judgment remain central to the process. This human-in-the-loop (HITL) design is fundamental, addressing ethical considerations by ensuring technology enhances human expertise rather than supplanting it.

The early results of this initiative have been nothing short of transformational. Appeal decisions that previously consumed days or even weeks can now be prepared for final review in minutes, representing a reduction in response time of up to 75%. This acceleration not only restores timely benefits to eligible Nevadans but also fosters greater fairness and significantly enhances public trust in the system.

Through this pioneering project, Nevada is establishing itself as a leader in the ethical and effective adoption of AI within government. The AI Appeals Assistant sets a national precedent, demonstrating how emerging technologies can be responsibly deployed to elevate public service delivery. The model is inherently scalable, transparent in its operation, and firmly rooted in the public interest, offering a valuable blueprint for other agencies seeking similar transformative impact. The project underscores a commitment to innovation that directly benefits citizens, ensuring that the promise of efficient and equitable government services is realized.

## What problem or opportunity does the project address?

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The Nevada Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation (DETR) identified a critical bottleneck within its unemployment appeals system, an issue with far-reaching implications for both operational efficiency and citizen welfare. The core challenge stemmed from a confluence of factors inherent to this complex domain:

- **A Highly Regulated Environment:** The appeals process is governed by stringent legal standards and intricate statutory requirements, demanding exceptional precision and thoroughness in every case. This regulatory complexity necessitates meticulous review and documentation, placing a significant analytical burden on staff.
- **Limited Staffing Resources:** The volume and complexity of appeals cases often outpaced the capacity of available personnel to process them in a consistently timely manner, leading to potential backlogs and delays.
- **Consequent Delays and Burdens:** The interplay of regulatory demands and resource limitations resulted in protracted decision timelines. These delays imposed considerable hardship on citizens awaiting essential unemployment benefits and simultaneously increased the workload and pressure on DETR staff.

Faced with these persistent challenges, DETR leadership saw an opportunity for fundamental transformation—a chance to leverage the power of Artificial Intelligence not merely for incremental improvements but to engineer a paradigm shift in the delivery of public service. The vision was to create a system that was not only faster but also fairer and more responsive to the needs of Nevadans.

## Why does it matter?

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The timely and fair resolution of unemployment appeals is crucial. For individuals facing unemployment, appeal decisions are often a gateway to essential financial support. Delays exacerbate financial hardship, affecting their ability to meet basic needs. The AI Appeals Assistant is designed to promote equitable outcomes by improving consistency in the application of legal statutes across all cases. This commitment to fairness is fundamental to maintaining the integrity of the unemployment insurance system. The efficiency and fairness of the process also directly influence public trust in DETR and state government. By automating laborious aspects of case review, the AI assistant also empowers skilled Appeals Referees to dedicate their expertise to critical analysis, nuanced legal interpretation, and informed decision-making.

# IDEA (cont.)

## What makes it different?

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Nevada's AI Appeals Assistant distinguishes itself not merely through the adoption of advanced technology, but through its foundational philosophy and strategic implementation:

- **A Resolutely Human-Centered AI Philosophy:** The AI tool is explicitly designed to augment and amplify the skills of human Appeals Referees, not replace them. It serves as a powerful analytical assistant, empowering them with synthesized information.
- **Human-in-the-Loop (HITL) by Design:** A robust HITL mechanism is a cornerstone of the system's architecture. Appeals Referees retain full authority and accountability for the final decision in every case, mitigating risks associated with full automation in sensitive legal contexts and building trust among staff and the public.
- **Setting a National Precedent:** This project transcends being a mere internal improvement; it represents a forward-looking model for the responsible application of AI in the public sector, offering a re-applicable and adaptable blueprint for other states and public agencies.

## What makes it universal?

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The challenges of managing complex, regulated, and document-heavy processes like unemployment appeals are universal to state governments. All states grapple with ensuring due process under resource constraints. This project directly addresses several of the **State CIO Top Ten Priorities**, including Digital Government Services, Legacy Modernization, and importantly, Artificial Intelligence. The human-centered, HITL model provides a widely applicable framework for deploying AI ethically and effectively in sensitive public-facing roles, making Nevada's solution a valuable case study for any state looking to innovate responsibly.

# IMPLEMENTATION

*"This is more than a technological improvement—it is a re-imagining of how public service can be delivered with speed, fairness, and accountability."*

— Chris Sewell, DETR Director

## What was the roadmap?

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The journey was guided by a clear vision and a strategic, phased approach:

- **Visionary Leadership:**

The initiative was propelled by the proactive leadership of DETR Director Chris Sewell, who championed AI as a genuinely transformative tool.

- **Strategic Alignment:**

From its inception, the project was carefully aligned with overarching state priorities, including the NASCIO 2025 State CIO Top Ten, ensuring a supportive policy environment and contribution to broader state objectives.

- **Focused Research and Development:**

The initial phase was characterized by dedicated research into a bespoke AI assistant tailored to the specific nuances and regulatory complexities of Nevada's unemployment appeals process, ensuring the tool would be fit-for-purpose.

## How did you do it?

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A sophisticated, cloud-based AI solution forms the backbone of the assistant, providing scalability and resilience. The AI meticulously reviews and synthesizes voluminous appeal documents and hearing transcripts, extracting key information and identifying relevant legal elements. Based on its analysis, the system produces comprehensive summaries and carefully considered recommendations. However, Appeals Referees retain full decision-making authority, using the AI's output as a support tool. This seamless Human-in-the-Loop (HITL) integration is a fundamental design element, ensuring that fairness, ethical considerations, and professional judgment remain central to every outcome.

## What did the project make better?

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The implementation of the AI Appeals Assistant has yielded substantial and multifaceted benefits, creating a cascade of positive outcomes that extend beyond simple efficiency gains.

- **For Nevada's Citizens:** The most profound impact is the drastic reduction in decision turnaround times, translating into quicker access to essential unemployment benefits. The AI also promotes more equitable outcomes by ensuring greater consistency in the application of legal principles.
- **For DETR Staff:** It empowers Appeals Referees by freeing them to concentrate on high-value analytical work—nuanced legal interpretation, witness credibility assessment, and ultimate decision-making. The system also serves as an invaluable onboarding and reference tool for staff.
- **For the Agency:** The project has led to significant operational efficiency, improved credibility by exceeding federal timeliness benchmarks, and created a rich data repository for future insights and continuous improvement. By centralizing appeals data, the system enables a culture of data-driven governance.

## How do you know?

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The positive impact is substantiated by compelling early results and clear indicators of improved performance. The headline achievement is the reduction in case preparation time, but external validation from the Department of Justice provides objective proof of improved performance. There has been a noticeable enhancement in the consistency of applying legal principles across cases, and the centralization of appeals data has created a valuable asset for future analytical work, policy review, and system refinement.

# WHAT NOW?

Metric	Impact
Decision Turnaround Time	Reduced by up to 75%
DOJ Timeliness Benchmarks	Consistently Exceeded
Case Consistency & Equity	Significantly Improved
Data Centralization for Insights	Achieved for Training & Policy

## Nevada's Leadership in Ethical Government AI

The successful implementation of the AI Appeals Assistant has firmly positioned Nevada DETR as a national leader in the ethical, human-centered, and remarkably effective application of AI within public service.

## A Blueprint for Broader Impact

The achievements of this project offer more than just internal benefits. The AI Appeals Assistant, with its scalable architecture and transparent operational principles, provides a robust model that can serve as an invaluable blueprint for other state agencies across the nation.

## Commitment to Continuous Improvement

DETR's journey is not a static achievement but the beginning of an ongoing commitment to excellence. The agency is dedicated to the continuous monitoring, refinement, and strategic expansion of the AI's capabilities. This creates a virtuous cycle: the AI assists referees, whose expert decisions and feedback then refine the AI, leading to progressively better support and insights over time.

## Conclusion: Re-imagining Public Service

By strategically and ethically harnessing the power of Artificial Intelligence, Nevada DETR is not just modernizing an essential government function; it is actively building a more responsive, equitable, and efficient future for all Nevadans. This pioneering effort demonstrates a profound understanding that true innovation in public service lies in empowering human expertise, upholding the principles of justice, and delivering tangible benefits to the citizens it serves.