

# Transforming Parliaments: AI-powered transcription for small parliaments



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## Key takeaways

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Capturing parliamentary proceedings can be a challenge, particularly for smaller parliaments with limited resources. An IPU webinar featuring the parliaments of Barbados and Fiji and the Chamber of Deputies of Chile brought together 41 parliaments from the Pacific, the Caribbean and beyond to explore how AI is transforming parliamentary transcription and helping small parliaments overcome decades-old bottlenecks.

Resources:

- Video of the webinar: [AI-powered transcription in small parliaments](#)
- IPU's [Quick Guide: AI transcription in parliament](#)
- [Transforming Parliaments webinar series](#)

## The challenge: When manual processes reach their limits

In Barbados, parliamentary staff found themselves drowning in backlogs of official parliamentary records (Hansard). Mr. Nitesh Pucchadya, technology provider for the Barbados Parliament, and Mr. Errol Walcott, Parliament of Barbados IT Manager, painted a picture that many smaller parliaments would recognize: manual transcription processes stretched thin by limited human resources, difficulties training new editors and outdated workflows.

“Even one missing staff member could block the entire process,” explained Walcott, highlighting how traditional sequential transcription methods created dangerous single points of failure. The increasing number of committee meetings only made matters worse, turning manageable backlogs into insurmountable mountains of unprocessed debates.

Meanwhile in Fiji, Parliament IT Manager Mr. Maika Lakeba was grappling with similar challenges. Reporting staff were working extended hours to meet tight deadlines, with other parliamentary units being pulled in to help with transcription during particularly long sittings. The impact went beyond mere delays – staff well-being was suffering under the weight of an increasingly unsustainable system.

# Innovation in action: Two paths to transformation

## Barbados: The partnership approach

Recognizing that their traditional methods had reached breaking point, the Parliament of Barbados took a bold step forward. In partnership with their technical provider, they implemented a remote AI-powered transcription system that transformed how they approached parliamentary records.

Instead of starting from blank pages, editors now work with AI-generated draft transcripts, focusing their expertise on proofreading and verification rather than manual transcription. The system allows sentence-by-sentence editing with instant updates, while automated grammar improvement handles routine corrections. In addition, AI-generated session summaries provide the public with accessible overviews of parliamentary meetings.

The system's role-based access feature allows the Parliament to distribute proofreading workloads internationally, dramatically accelerating delivery times. Live streaming capabilities are seamlessly integrated with real-time transcript generation on the Parliament's website and recordings are automatically archived.

The result is that almost all historic backlogs were cleared within ten months and the retirement or absence of key staff members, once a source of major disruption, no longer threatens the timely production of official records.

## Fiji: The pragmatic evolution

Fiji's Parliament took a different but also effective approach, building their AI integration around existing infrastructure and available tools. Rather than implementing a single comprehensive solution, they deployed multiple AI tools strategically across their workflow.

Q – Live ASR (Automatic Speech Recognition) provides real-time captioning for Parliament TV broadcasts and live events, ensuring immediate accessibility for viewers. Sonix ASR helps reporters transcribe uploaded recordings more efficiently, while Microsoft 365 Dictate – already available through Parliament's existing Office Suite licenses – enables committees to transcribe recordings at minimal additional cost.

This pragmatic solution has delivered impressive results: faster report generation, reduced staffing requirements for committee work and significant cost savings, including reduced travel expenses. Staff well-being improved markedly as the manual workload decreased, while the quality and timeliness of reports has increased. Additional benefits include automated speaker identification and precise time-stamping.

## Chile: Experience from a seven-year journey

Mr. Esteban Sanchez Rivera, Informatics Department, Chile's Chamber of Deputies, provided a valuable perspective, drawing from Chile's seven-year journey from analogue cassette-based systems to fully digital, AI-assisted transcription. He highlighted crucial considerations for parliaments to take into account when implementing new transcription processes.

The transition from transcribers to editors, Mr. Sanchez emphasized, required careful change management. In Chile, staff concerns about job security were addressed by highlighting the enhanced value and intellectual challenge of editorial and metadata roles. Technical implementation proved equally important; OpenAI's Whisper, while powerful, only produces high-quality results when silences are pre-processed, and the model is tailored to local workflows and speech patterns.

Mr. Sanchez's key insight resonated throughout the webinar: no single tool is perfect. Parliaments have to embrace ongoing experimentation and continuous improvement. Even with sophisticated AI systems, human intervention remains essential, particularly for speaker identification during fast-paced, overlapping debates that characterize many parliamentary discussions.

## The IPU *Quick Guide* on AI transcription

Acknowledging the need for practical guidance tailored to smaller parliaments, Mr. Avinash Bikha from the IPU [Centre for Innovation in Parliament](#) (CIP) unveiled a new [Quick Guide on AI-powered transcription](#). Designed specifically for parliaments with minimal IT staff, limited resources and aging infrastructure, the guide provides a step-by-step road map complete with practical examples.

The guide is "not prescriptive but indicative," Mr. Bikha explained, emphasizing its flexibility in accommodating each parliament's unique situation. The CIP stands ready to provide follow-up assistance through one-on-one consultations or "peer assists", where parliaments can learn directly from the experience of other parliaments.

## Key principles for success

The collective wisdom from these implementations reveals several critical principles for small parliaments considering AI-powered transcription:

- **Start where you are, use what you have:** Fiji's success with Microsoft Dictate demonstrates that transformation doesn't always require expensive specialized software. Often, the tools you need are already in your technology stack.

- **Humans remain central:** Both successful implementations emphasized that AI enhances rather than replaces human expertise. Editors and reporters remain critical for final review, error correction and ensuring compliance with parliamentary standards.
- **Embrace gradual evolution:** Rather than attempting wholesale transformation overnight, successful parliaments started with pilot projects, gathered feedback and refined their approaches iteratively.
- **Prioritize workflow over technology:** The most significant gains came from rethinking processes, not just implementing new tools. Business transformation proved as important as technological adoption.
- **Plan for growth:** Barbados's current work on multilingual processing and automatic speaker identification illustrates the importance of building systems that can evolve with changing needs.
- **Security through cloud:** Contrary to traditional concerns, both Fiji and Barbados found cloud-based solutions enhanced rather than compromised security, while improving accessibility, particularly valuable during remote work periods.

## A democratic dividend

The transformation of parliamentary transcription through AI represents more than mere efficiency gains. By clearing backlogs and accelerating the production of official records, these innovations enhance public access to timely, accurate records of parliamentary proceedings, and strengthen democratic accountability.

As smaller parliaments worldwide grapple with resource constraints and aging infrastructure, the experiences of Barbados and Fiji, and of larger parliaments such as Chile, offer both inspiration and practical road maps. With thoughtful implementation, appropriate partnerships and a commitment to human-centered design, AI can support parliamentary operations while preserving the essential human judgment that lies at the heart of democratic governance.

The future of parliamentary transcription is not about replacing human expertise with artificial intelligence; it's about amplifying human capabilities to better serve democratic institutions and the citizens they represent.

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This document was prepared by the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) [Centre for Innovation in Parliament](#). For more information about IPU's work on AI, please visit [www.ipu.org/AI](http://www.ipu.org/AI).