Transforming Parliaments webinar series: Building AI literacy in parliaments

1 April 2026

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Key takeaways

On 1 April 2026, the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) Centre for Innovation in Parliament (CIP) hosted a *Transforming Parliaments* webinar entitled "Building AI literacy in parliaments". Moderated by Ms. Natalie Foster, Clerk Assistant at the House of Commons of Canada, the session brought together representatives of three parliaments and chambers at different stages of their artificial intelligence (AI) literacy journeys: the Parliament of Austria, the National Assembly of Zambia and the National Assembly of France. Their experiences differ in context, scale and approach, but their challenges and lessons learned are strikingly similar.

Resources:

- Video of the webinar
- *Guidelines for AI in parliaments*
- *Maturity Framework for AI in Parliaments*
- *Transforming Parliaments* webinar series

Parliament of Austria: A holistic, institution-wide approach

When the Austrian parliamentary administration launched its digital literacy programme, staff were already using AI tools without institutional guidance. Mr. Christoph Konrath, Head of Department, Research and Support in Parliamentary Matters, explained the three principles that underpinned the approach to building AI literacy within the Parliament of Austria:

- First, training connects to parliamentary work itself. Sessions use visual anchors within the building, real examples from practice, and take-home materials staff can apply immediately, thus increasing retention and relevance.
- Second, the digital literacy team spans all sections of the administration, not just IT. This cross-functional approach, which reflects a core conviction that technology is not just for technologists, has surfaced unexpected expertise, including a stenographer fluent in Python who contributed to the Parliament's speech-to-text system.
- Third, participation in AI literacy training is formally recognized as professional development, signalling institutional commitment and removing barriers to participation.

The programme covers three areas: technical understanding (what AI can and cannot do); the legal and regulatory environment (the European Union AI Act, data protection, internal guidelines); and responsibility and agency (ethics in practice, reflective habits).

More than two thirds of staff have completed basic training. Communities of practice engage around 15% of staff in peer learning. An interdisciplinary digital governance board ensures that AI adoption decisions are made collectively.

Key learning: Connect AI literacy to the bigger picture by helping staff understand what it means to preserve parliamentarism in the digital age and what their role is in that mission.

National Assembly of Zambia: Starting with evidence

At the National Assembly of Zambia, the AI literacy journey began with a formal mandate: the Parliamentary Reforms and Modernisation Committee adopted a report recommending that the National Assembly mainstream AI, tasking the ICT department with implementation.

According to Mr. Mwaula Solopi, ICT Director, the first step was to conduct a training needs assessment. A survey of all MPs and staff revealed uneven levels of knowledge and significant gaps in AI governance awareness. Some 59% of respondents indicated an understanding of ethical considerations and 47% of privacy concerns. Yet 92% called for continuous training, signalling strong demand and an acknowledged need.

The assessment also uncovered widespread misconceptions about AI. This established a baseline that the training programme would need to address directly.

Rather than rolling out one programme for all, the National Assembly designed role-differentiated training. MPs, administrative staff and IT professionals received tailored content matching their needs and responsibilities. A two-day parliamentary workshop, opened by the Speaker, was delivered in conjunction with the University of Pretoria and the National Institute of Public Administration.

To accelerate adoption beyond formal sessions, the National Assembly identified enthusiastic staff and MPs as digital champions. These advocates piloted new tools and became credible peer advocates, proving to be more convincing than messages from IT staff alone.

Key learning: Begin with a training needs assessment. Without knowing where people are starting from, you cannot design effective training or measure progress.

National Assembly of France: From pilot projects to institution-wide culture

Ms. Aurélie Zoude-Le Berre, Head of the General Secretariat Division at the National Assembly of France, described how the chamber had begun its AI journey in 2022 with a survey of departmental needs and existing usage. Two priority projects were selected: AI-assisted transcription of committee debates (reducing external costs and accelerating the production of verbatim records) and AI-based classification of amendments (processing similar amendments efficiently).

A follow-up survey in 2025 found that 41% of administrative staff were using AI tools, with most accessing ChatGPT weekly. Crucially, many colleagues wanted guidance on permitted uses – and in particular on the distinction between public and non-public data.

In response, the National Assembly developed an AI usage charter, approved by its Bureau and President. The charter establishes clear rules: cloud-based AI tools may only process publicly available information; internal or confidential data requires secure, on-premise systems; all AI-assisted work must include systematic human verification before use; and the use of AI must be disclosed to members.

The charter has driven cultural change. Training sessions – combining broad introductory modules and targeted use-case workshops – ground abstract principles in concrete, institution-specific guidance.

The National Assembly has extended AI literacy work to parliamentarians themselves through a parliamentary working group on digital affairs, with rapporteur MPs gathering input to shape future AI training priorities.

Key learning: Secure buy-in from senior leadership, then invest in a charter and training as complementary tools. Concrete examples of what AI can and cannot do are far more persuasive than abstract principles.

Key principles for building AI literacy

- **Start with a training needs assessment.** Understanding what people know, fear, are already doing and want to learn establishes a baseline, surfaces misconceptions, and provides evidence to design relevant programmes and measure progress.
- **Tailor training to roles.** Members, administrative staff and IT professionals have differing needs. Role-based training acknowledges that AI literacy means different things in different jobs.
- **Address the full spectrum of attitudes.** Every parliament has enthusiastic adopters, curious colleagues and cynics. Effective programmes cater to all three: taking concerns seriously, creating safe spaces for doubt and offering diverse formats.
- **Use digital champions for peer-to-peer adoption.** Messages from trusted colleagues – such as an MP who used a tool successfully or a staff member who piloted a system – carry a lot of credibility. Champions accelerate cultural change in ways formal training alone cannot.
- **Embed security and data literacy into every module.** Abstract sessions on data protection do not stick. Embedding these principles into practical, hands-on AI training – where people encounter issues in context – is far more effective. As noted during the webinar, the problem is often "in the chair, not in the computer".
- **Develop clear governance alongside training.** A charter or policy setting out what staff and members may and may not do with AI provides a concrete anchor point for training. Governance and literacy reinforce each other: people follow rules they understand.
- **Make AI literacy a cross-institutional effort.** Programmes succeed when they involve legal experts, HR teams, communicators and subject-matter specialists – not just IT professionals. Hidden expertise exists in every parliament; surfacing it makes programmes richer, more credible and more sustainable.
- **Connect literacy to democratic purpose, not just efficiency.** The most resonant framing is what it means to serve democratic institutions well in the digital age – to legislate on AI thoughtfully, scrutinize its use by governments critically, and use it within parliament to support parliamentary values. This larger mission gives training meaning that purely technical instruction cannot.

Learn more

To learn more about AI literacy resources and other digital transformation support for parliaments, go to ipu.org/ai or contact the IPU's Centre for Innovation in Parliament at innovation@ipu.org.

This document was prepared on the basis of the IPU Transforming Parliaments *webinar Building AI literacy in parliaments, held on 1 April 2026. The webinar was moderated by Ms. Natalie Foster, Clerk Assistant, House of Commons of Canada, and featured presentations by Mr. Christoph Konrath, Head of Department, Research and Support in Parliamentary Matters, Parliament of Austria; Mr. Mwaula Solopi, ICT Director, National Assembly of Zambia; and Ms. Aurélie Zoude-Le Berre, Head of the General Secretariat Division, National Assembly of France.*

More information about the Transforming Parliaments *webinar series can be found on the IPU website.*

Q&A

This section provides a summary of the questions asked and answers given during the webinar itself, as well as written replies from the moderator and panellists to questions that could not be answered during the session owing to a lack of time.

Question 1: How did you conduct the training needs assessment?

A participant from the Parliament of South Africa asked how the panellists went about conducting their training needs assessments in practical terms, noting that this had been a common theme across all three presentations.

Mr. Solopi (National Assembly of Zambia) explained that the needs assessment had served as the starting point and had been conducted in partnership with the same external team that had subsequently delivered the training. A questionnaire and survey had been sent to all MPs and staff. The results had been compiled into a report that identified knowledge gaps and formed the evidence base for the design of the training programme.

Mr. Konrath (Parliament of Austria) highlighted the importance of the interdisciplinary digital governance board that had been created for the Parliament of Austria. For a long time, discussions about AI and digitalization had remained in the expert domain, dominated by legal and technical specialists. This board had helped bring a wider range of staff into the conversation. He emphasized that a needs assessment should look not only at what people want to know, but also at what they already know. He gave the example of a stenographic recorder at the Parliament who had turned out to be fluent in Python, and whose skills had contributed directly to the implementation of the speech-to-text system. Another colleague had informally shared his encounters with chatbots with peers, generating both learning and enjoyment. The hidden capacities already present in an institution were as important as the gaps.

Ms. Zoude-Le Berre (National Assembly of France) noted that training sessions themselves had served as an important source of ongoing feedback, helping the National Assembly understand how staff were using AI and what further guidance they needed. This feedback loop was one of the factors that had led to the decision to develop the AI usage charter. Projects were prioritized based on both subject-matter relevance and available resources, and tools had been developed internally, drawing on the competencies of IT staff, including those with expertise in Python and other programming languages.

Question 2: How do you approach the different attitudes to AI among staff and members?

A participant from the UK Parliament shared an observation that staff and members tended to fall into three groups: approximately one third who were enthusiastic adopters and actively experimenting with AI; one third who were curious but uncertain about how AI applied to their work and how to use it; and one third who were cynical and regarded AI as hype. She asked whether the panellists recognized this pattern in their own institutions and, if so, how it had influenced the design of their AI literacy programmes.

Mr. Konrath confirmed that the Parliament of Austria had encountered a similar pattern, but noted that, in his experience, the group of cynics appeared to be somewhat smaller. He stressed that it was essential to cater to all three groups by avoiding attempts to create a single programme that worked for everyone, and instead offering a broad range of formats and entry points. Some staff needed space to discuss their fears about AI, while others were primarily interested in the technology itself. Technology enthusiasts also needed to develop an understanding of why others had concerns, and of the broader societal impacts of AI. He described a series of discussions with scientists and academics that had brought together very different perspectives, including a young enthusiast and an 88-year-old science and technology researcher whose experience and credibility had proved particularly effective at

drawing in more reluctant participants. He concluded that it was crucial to take cynicism and fear seriously, and to create opportunities for colleagues who felt that way to engage rather than simply pushing them towards adoption.

Ms. Zoude-Le Berre said that training sessions had been the primary tool for identifying which staff were using AI and how. The introduction of the AI usage charter had made a significant difference: staff who had been uncertain or hesitant felt more at ease once clear guidance existed on what was and was not permitted, and some had become more willing to engage with training as a result. In developing the charter, the National Assembly had drawn on the experience of colleagues in Italy and the United Kingdom, as well as in the Senate of France.

Mr. Solopi acknowledged that the three-group pattern was recognizable and existed across parliaments. He described the model that the National Assembly of Zambia had developed in response: enthusiastic early adopters, whether MPs or staff, were identified and formally appointed as digital champions. They were used to pilot new AI tools and, having done so, became trusted advocates within their peer groups. He explained that this approach was more effective than relying solely on IT staff to promote adoption, because people were more receptive to messages from colleagues who worked in similar roles and contexts. A fellow MP or staff member who had used a tool successfully and could speak to its practical value was more credible than a technical specialist making the case from the outside.

Question 3: How do you approach cybersecurity and risk within your AI training programmes?

A participant from Benin asked how the National Assembly of France handled the cybersecurity dimension specifically within its AI approach and, more generally, how risk and cybersecurity were being incorporated into training programmes.

Ms. Zoude-Le Berre explained that the National Assembly ran its own dedicated cybersecurity training, which also addressed AI-related risks directly. The core principle governing AI use at the National Assembly was a strict distinction based on data classification: cloud-based AI tools could only be used to process publicly available information and could never be used with internal, confidential or personal data. When AI tools were used with non-public information, such as for transcription of non-public committee hearings, they were installed and run on the National Assembly's own secure servers, not on external cloud infrastructure. This approach removed the risk of exposure to external attacks. Both the charter and training sessions made this distinction explicit and reinforced it through concrete examples.

Mr. Konrath offered two additional points. First, past training on data protection and information security had tended to be abstract and insufficiently connected to practice, whereas the current approach at the Parliament of Austria integrated security principles directly into every training module, giving participants a hands-on understanding of why data protection mattered rather than presenting it as a standalone compliance exercise. Second, when internal on-premise systems differed from the commercial tools that staff were already using in their private lives, this created a significant expectation management challenge: people needed to understand why an institutional system behaved differently than ChatGPT or similar tools, and what that meant for how they used it. Communities of practice had been helpful in this regard, bringing together legal experts, information security specialists, and colleagues who could act as translators between the two domains. Integrating data protection, information security and AI training into a single, coherent programme had led to more questions being raised by staff, which he took as a positive sign of deeper engagement.

Mr. Solopi introduced the concept of "problem in chair, not in computer" (PICNIC) to describe what he saw as an underappreciated risk. Technical security measures could be robust and data could be carefully localized, but users could still take information and upload it to public platforms, rendering those protections ineffective. The human factor was

therefore critical: technical controls alone were insufficient without awareness and behavioural change. This was why the National Assembly of Zambia had chosen to integrate conversations about data security, data privacy and cybersecurity into every element of its training programme, rather than treating them as separate topics.

Closing remarks from panellists

The moderator invited each panellist to offer one minute of closing advice for other parliaments building AI literacy programmes.

Mr. Konrath offered several pieces of advice. First: bring a lot of people in, look for the capabilities and talents that already exist in the institution, and create conditions in which those can be shared and built upon. Second: make it fun. And third, and perhaps most importantly: help colleagues connect AI literacy to the broader purpose of their work. He emphasized that building AI literacy was not about getting faster or more efficient; rather, it was about understanding what it meant to serve parliament well in the digital age, to preserve parliamentary practice and to shape a democratic approach to technology. Connecting training to that mission could make a real difference.

Ms. Zoude-Le Berre gave two pieces of advice. First: secure the support of senior leadership from the outset, including the Secretary General, the Speaker and the relevant parliamentary committees, to give the AI programme institutional weight and legitimacy. Second: develop an AI usage charter and invest in training that uses concrete, practical examples to explain what staff and members may and may not do. She stressed that abstract principles were less persuasive than specific scenarios that demonstrated the value of AI and the importance of using it responsibly.

Mr. Solopi advised parliaments to begin with a comprehensive training needs assessment, emphasizing that knowing where the institution was starting from provided the foundation for everything that followed: it allowed training to be targeted at the right gaps, created a measurable baseline against which progress could be tracked, and helped build the structured, evidence-led approach needed to sustain an AI literacy programme over time.

Post-event answers to selected questions

Owing to time constraints, not all questions could be answered during the 60-minute webinar. Below are written responses from the moderator and panellists to three selected questions.

Question 1 (Parliament of Norway): “How should parliaments design AI literacy programmes that not only build baseline understanding among members of parliament, but also address the growing asymmetry whereby politically affiliated advisers may have significantly higher technical competence, particularly in the use of agentic AI systems that can act, analyse and influence at scale?”

Ms. Foster:

At the House of Commons, a consultation of our parties has confirmed that there is a variety of different use cases and technical expertise or competence within every party. The same is true of staff. One of the primary requests from our members has been to provide some basic training that is specific to our context, with a focus on risk and protection.

We are currently planning specialized training, to be delivered to members and political staff, that focuses on the risks associated with using AI, and on how to protect parliamentary information and infrastructure. The training will also offer a general introduction to AI tools and best practices. In the future, we will integrate this training into our members’ onboarding programme.

In addition, the links we have established by discussing AI with members and their staff have led to the House Administration being invited to party discussions that focus on innovation as well, so we can hear first-hand what they are interested in and provide advice related to cybersecurity and the safety of AI tools.

Mr. Konrath:

There should be three design principles:

1. Pursue an institutionally based approach that considers the specific environment, practices, passions and emotions that make up parliament. This is something that cannot be provided by "outsiders" and this is where frustration happens (as practices are not understood or are lost in translation).
2. Address core questions of (parliamentary) democracy and the statutory roles and responsibilities of parliament, and connect these considerations to the possibilities, risks and shortcomings of agentic AI systems.
3. Create an environment in which doubts can be raised, and in which a sober approach is possible (I would like to mention "digital humanism" as a method and perspective). Recently, a member said at a public event: "The parliamentary administration makes available information and reflection that I never get on 'my channels'".

Mr. Solopi:

From the perspective of the National Assembly of Zambia, we consider that the appropriate entry point for designing effective AI literacy programmes is to undertake a comprehensive training needs assessment (TNA). This process must deliberately target the two principal user groups – MPs and staff (advisers) – to establish a clear baseline of competencies, awareness levels and existing gaps.

Importantly, such an assessment does more than identify training needs; it also brings into focus the emerging asymmetries in technical capability.

In responding to this, the approach is to design differentiated yet complementary training programmes. For MPs, the emphasis is on building sufficient understanding to enable informed oversight, critical interrogation of AI-generated outputs, and appreciation of the broader governance, ethical and democratic implications of AI use. For parliamentary staff and advisers, training is more technically oriented, focusing on the responsible, transparent and accountable application of AI in supporting legislative and policy processes.

At the same time, we recognize that separation alone is not sufficient. It is equally important to create structured points of convergence, including joint learning platforms and practical exercises, to foster a shared institutional understanding.

In this way, a TNA-driven approach enables parliaments not only to build foundational AI literacy, but also to proactively manage capability imbalances, thereby ensuring that elected representatives remain fully empowered and decision-dominant within an increasingly AI-mediated governance environment.

Question 2 (Hellenic Parliament, Greece): "Could you elaborate a bit more on the engagement of the libraries, research services and/or information–documentation services of your parliaments in the integration of AI into parliamentary work? Have the staff of these services received different training, given that they manage information on a daily basis?"

Ms. Foster:

At the federal level in Canada, our Library of Parliament is a separate institution, as it serves both the House of Commons and the Senate. The Library of Parliament has established its

own acceptable use guidelines and applies them in its work, including research support to MPs and staff. Representatives from the House of Commons, the Senate and the Library of Parliament meet at regular intervals to exchange information on the state of AI within each institution.

Mr. Konrath:

Two points:

1. We pursue an interdisciplinary approach that integrates people and knowledge from all departments. Libraries, research and documentation are core as they will use the technology and will be able to provide knowledge and insights that others do not have. This interdisciplinary approach also means that they are never considered “outsiders” or “wise guys”, but rather colleagues who are part of a common knowledge journey.
2. We organize regular “on-the-job training” and systematic testing of various tools. Insights are shared in digital literacy activities and used to explain why a lot of tools should only be used when a high level of personal expertise is guaranteed.

Mr. Solopi:

From the perspective of the National Assembly of Zambia, it is important to note that we have not yet advanced to a mature level of adoption in the use of most AI tools within our parliamentary knowledge and research services.

Question 3: “You have developed a policy for AI literacy, but how have you gone about ensuring that all parts of parliament are aware of and understand it?”

Ms. Foster:

At the House of Commons, we are about to launch our AI Learning Framework, as well as a new AI Learning Hub on our intranet to promote all of the material available to staff. The launch of this hub will be promoted through communication to all staff, and reinforced within teams through members of our AI Working Group.

We are providing information to members through on their own internal website, and we are continuing to work with party leadership to set up training programmes that meet the needs of their members and staff.

Mr. Konrath:

This is a matter of constant practice, training provision, information and personal exchanges. For us, it is of particular importance that every offer integrates all elements of the policy, i.e. it connects to the legal, technological, ethical and organizational aspects of digitalization. In our experience, that is the most effective way to overcome compartmentalization and to move beyond the routine acknowledgement of “yes, there is a policy”.

Mr. Solopi:

From our experience at the National Assembly of Zambia, ensuring awareness and understanding of AI literacy policies begins with strong institutional endorsement at the highest level. In our case, this role is fulfilled through our designated digital champion, who is the Speaker of the National Assembly. This high-level sponsorship is critical to signalling the strategic importance of the policy and driving attention across the institution.

Equally important is the early engagement of key parliamentary structures, particularly relevant committees. For example, such policies should be formally presented to bodies such as the Parliamentary Reforms and Modernisation Committee. This process is not merely procedural; it provides an opportunity to explain, contextualize and interrogate the

policy, ensuring not only that members are aware of it, but also that they understand its implications. These members then go ahead and convince other MPs.

We have found that this inclusive and consultative approach to policy development is essential, and that it fosters a sense of ownership among stakeholders.

Importantly, collaborative development also helps to address concerns, mistrust or misinformation that may arise around AI. By creating space for dialogue early in the process, you will be able to clarify intentions, manage expectations, and build confidence in both the policy and the technologies it seeks to govern.

In essence, our approach is that awareness and understanding are achieved not after policy development, but rather through the process of policy development itself, anchored in leadership, consultation and transparency.