COMMENTARIES

LEVERAGING FREE AI TOOLS TO TRANSFORM GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION: AN IN-DEPTH ACCOUNT OF CAPACITY-BUILDING SEMINARS IN ASTANA, QAZAQSTAN

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ABSTRACT

These commentaries are a detailed description of a three-day seminar, funded by the ACSH in collaboration with the DGTL Agency of Georgia, targeting press secretaries and social media managers in Qazaqstan, on how AI tools can be utilised to transform government communication, in order to provide near-instantaneous updates on policy developments, emergency alets and public service announcements.

Keywords: *Government Communications, AI for Government, AI Tools for Government, Kazakhstan Government Digital Development, AI Seminars, Astana Civil Service Hub.*

INTRODUCTION

In today's information ecosystem, government communications operate under unprecedented pressure. Citizens expect near-instantaneous updates on policy developments, emergency alerts, and public-service announcements, while social media can amplify both accurate information and disinformation within minutes. In Qazaqstan, press secretaries and social-media managers – often working within small team – must juggle monitoring dozens of news sources, drafting bilingual content in Russian and Qazaq, and engaging citizens across multiple platforms. At the same time, Qazaqstan's National Digital Qazaqstan strategy mandates the digital upskilling of civil servants to achieve greater transparency, efficiency, and public trust in government operations.

Recognising these imperatives, the Astana Civil Service Hub partnered with DGTL Agency Georgia to deliver a three-day, hands-on seminar on 14–16 May 2025. This seminar – our fifth activity in a series on digital marketing and social-media management – introduced sixty communications professionals from national ministries and regional akimat offices to a curated suite of eleven free or freemium artificial-intelligence (AI) tools. These tools spanned real-time media monitoring (Google Alerts, Inoreader, Feedly + Leo AI), content automation (Zapier, Make.com), text drafting and translation (ChatGPT), image and video generation (Midjourney, Reve.Art, Heygen, SieveData), and voice production (Speechma, ElevenLabs, Artlist).

The purpose of this article is to provide a detailed narrative of how the seminar was conceived, the pedagogical choices and materials developed, the implementation and participant engagement, and the key lessons learned.

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DESIGNING THE TRAINING PROGRAMME AND MATERIALS

Needs Assessment and Tool Selection

Our first step was a comprehensive needs assessment. We analysed job descriptions and standard operating procedures for press offices across Qazaq ministries, identifying recurrent challenges: labour-intensive manual media scans, repetitive tasks such as copy-pasting alerts into reports, and limited capacity for rapid bilingual content production. To validate these findings, we conducted informal interviews with communications officers in several regional akimat offices in April 2025, confirming their eagerness for real-time keyword alerts, template-based drafting assistance, and scalable multimedia solutions.

Guided by this assessment, we established three criteria for tool selection: zero- or low-cost licensing; support for both Russian and Qazaq outputs; and seamless integration with existing platforms (Gmail, Google Sheets, Telegram). Eleven tools emerged as ideal candidates:

- – Media Monitoring: Google Alerts, Inoreader, Feedly + Leo AI
- – Text Drafting & Translation: ChatGPT
- – Workflow Automation: Zapier, Make.com
- – Multimedia Production: Midjourney, Reve.Art
- – Voice & Video Generation: Heygen, SieveData, Speechma, ElevenLabs, Artlist

Each tool was vetted for ease of onboarding and the availability of user interfaces or outputs in Russian or Qazaq.

Development of Materials

To ensure immediate applicability, we developed concise, bilingual (Russian/Qazaq) quick start guides for each tool. These one-page handouts distilled the five essential steps – such as configuring keyword alerts, building an automation workflow, or generating an AI avatar video – into clear visual diagrams and minimal text. Simultaneously, we prepared speaker notes for live demonstrations, embedding common troubleshooting tips and localised examples (e.g., monitoring mentions of "Ситуация на дорогах Алматы" or "Министерство здравоохранения Казахстана").

Rather than rely on lengthy slide decks, we organised the programme around hands-on exercises with pre-configured templates: shared Google Sheets with column headers for Zapier logs, cloned ChatGPT prompt libraries tailored to press-release formats, and sample prompts for Midjourney image creation. This "bootstrap" approach minimised setup time and allowed participants to focus on experimentation and customisation.

SEMINAR IMPLEMENTATION

Day 1: Real-Time Monitoring and Text Drafting

The first day commenced with an interactive demonstration of Google Alerts. Participants configured alerts for key terms and refined delivery options to their official Gmail accounts. Next, we introduced Inoreader's rule engine, guiding attendees through the creation of filters that auto-tagged incoming RSS-feed items based on language, region, and severity keywords.

We explored Feedly's AI assistant Leo, demonstrating how to train a "priority topic" for energy-policy developments, and contrasting it with manually curated feeds. The final module of Day 1 focused on ChatGPT: participants drafted press-release first drafts, instructed the

model to translate and localise content into formal Qazaq, and examined strategies for ensuring factual accuracy.

Day 2: Automating Routine Workflows

On the second day, we introduced no-code automation platforms. Beginning with Zapier, attendees created their first "Zap" – triggering on new Gmail messages from Google Alerts and logging subject lines and snippets into a shared Google Sheet. We emphasised best practices for search-string filters and field mapping. Later, we transitioned to Make.com, where small groups built multi-step scenarios combining Gmail, Google Sheets, and Telegram modules, then inserted conditional routers to separate "urgent" and "routine" alerts. This hands-on experimentation revealed both the power and complexity of branching logic, prompting real-time adjustments to pacing and additional support.

Day 3: Multimedia and Voice-Video Production

The final day showcased AI-driven multimedia. In the morning session, participants explored Midjourney and Reve.Art, crafting campaign-style images by iterating on prompts such as "official government infographic on public health, flat design, Qazaq color palette". Then we turned to voice and video: attendees used Heygen to generate AI-avatar videos, SieveData to dub sample clips into Qazaq, and Speechma/ElevenLabs to produce scripted audio messages.

METHODOLOGY

Our evaluation strategy combined quantitative and qualitative measures:

- Pre- and Post-Seminar Surveys: Administered electronically to all 60 participants, capturing self-assessed proficiency with each tool, estimates of weekly hours spent on routine tasks, and intentions to adopt AI solutions.
- Facilitator Observations: Using a structured rubric, facilitators recorded time-to-completion for each exercise, the number and type of technical support incidents, and qualitative engagement metrics (e.g., number of questions asked).
- Open-Ended Feedback: Collected immediately after each module via anonymous response cards, providing insights into participants' perceived value, clarity of instructions, and suggestions for improvement.

Survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics, highlighting changes in confidence levels and projected time savings. Qualitative comments were coded thematically to surface common praise, concerns, and improvement ideas.

FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Projected Efficiency Gains

Participants' survey responses revealed strong projected benefits across all tool categories. 92% expected to reduce manual news-scanning time by 40-60% through Google Alerts and Inoreader rules, while one hundred percent planned to employ ChatGPT for rapid drafting – estimating a 60-70% decrease in first-draft composition time. Two-thirds of attendees signalled intent to automate at least one workflow with Zapier or Make.com, projecting weekly savings of three to five hours. Moreover, all participants committed to leveraging AI-avatar and voice-generation platforms to expand bilingual outreach without additional filming resources.

Participant Feedback and Engagement

Facilitators noted exceptionally high engagement during the AI-avatar and voice modules, with small groups comparing avatar styles, voice timbres, and backdrop images. Unplanned breakout sessions emerged around initial authentication challenges in Zapier, fostering peer-to-peer learning and highlighting the value of collaborative troubleshooting. Feedback cards praised the concise quick-start guides and the practice-first, slide-second pedagogical approach. However, approximately 25% of participants expressed concern about uploading sensitive government content to external AI services, underscoring the need for formal data-privacy guidelines.

Key Success Factors

Several factors contributed to the seminar's success:

- Practice-Oriented Design: Prioritising hands-on exercises over long lectures ensured knowledge was immediately applied and retained.
- Bilingual Materials: Providing parallel Russian and Qazaq guides eliminated language barriers and increased accessibility.
- Rapid Iteration: Daily facilitator debriefs enabled real-time refinements to pacing and content based on participant feedback.
- Peer Support Structures: Encouraging small-group collaboration fostered a supportive environment where participants learned from each other.

DISCUSSION

Our experience in Astana mirrors broader trends in digital transformation within public administration. While large-scale e-government platforms require significant investment, our seminar demonstrated that low-cost AI solutions can deliver outsized efficiency gains at the unit level. By equipping press secretaries with tools for automated media monitoring, rapid content generation, and multilingual multimedia production, we addressed both operational challenges and citizens' rising expectations for timely, accurate, and accessible information.

Nevertheless, effective adoption hinges on addressing three critical areas: data governance to safeguard sensitive content; ongoing support to navigate technical complexity; and institutional incentives to sustain peer-learning networks. Embedding AI champions within each agency and documenting standard operating procedures are essential next steps to transition from pilot workshops to routine practice.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Astana seminar series has demonstrated, beyond doubt, that accessible AI tools are not merely "nice-to-haves," but powerful enablers of smarter, faster, and more inclusive government communication. By embracing no-cost and freemium platforms – from automated news alerts and chatbot-driven drafting to AI-generated visuals and bilingual video messaging – press secretaries and social-media managers can reclaim precious hours previously lost to manual, repetitive tasks.

Imagine a future in which every ministry's social feed updates itself in real time, urgent policy changes are flagged automatically to senior decision-makers, and polished, multilingual multimedia is produced on demand – without waiting weeks for a production crew. That future can begin today. What started as a three-day workshop in Astana can become a nationwide movement: one that empowers civil servants to engage citizens more dynamically, respond more swiftly, and forge deeper trust through transparency and creativity.

To transform this vision into reality, we offer the following actionable recommendations:

- **Cultivate AI Champions**
  Identify enthusiastic users within each agency to serve as peer mentors. Schedule regular "AI Office Hours" where colleagues can troubleshoot together and share best practices.

- **Document Clear SOPs**
  Produce concise, bilingual operating procedures that outline step-by-step workflows for each tool, including data-privacy checklists to ensure sensitive content remains protected.

- **Implement Simple Metrics**
  Track tangible wins – hours saved, automations deployed, bilingual outputs produced – and share these success stories in internal newsletters or meetings to build momentum.

- **Institutionalise Ongoing Support**
  Plan quarterly advanced sessions on topics like API integration, open-source AI alternatives, and custom prompt engineering, ensuring skills deepen and evolve.

- **Celebrate and Share Success**
  Publicly recognise teams that achieve notable efficiency or engagement gains and circulate case studies to inspire other departments.

The journey toward a fully AI-enabled government communication ecosystem begins with a single step: pilot, learn, and iterate. Let this seminar series be the launchpad. Together, we can build a civil service that is more efficient, more engaging, and more in sync with the needs of every Qazaq citizen.