Durable AI Readiness: How to Build and Sustain a Data Governance Program

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Agenda

01 Reframing the Conversation

02 The Evidence — AI Readiness Research

03 What a Data Governance Program Looks Like

04 A Real-World Build

05 Before You Begin

06 Making It Operational

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Nina Carter, President – The Information Professionals

- +30 yrs. Experience **Information Governance, Data Governance, AI Readiness**
- AIIM Board of Directors Member, Chair – Membership Committee
- First EDRM Solution Deployment – Foremost - (1993)
- 400+ clients – Subscription, Legislative Services
- Public and Private Sector Customers throughout North America

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THREE UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS

Let's Start Here

80%+

RAND Corp, 2024

of AI projects fail to reach production — twice the failure rate of traditional IT projects

73%

Industry benchmarks, 2024

of leading organizations have formal data governance programs with dedicated staff and funded roles

$0

The real question is the cost of waiting

is the cost of starting today — vs. audit exposure, legal risk, and reputational harm from ungoverned AI

The question is not whether to govern your data. The question is how long you can afford not to.

REFRAMING THE CONVERSATION

Data Governance Is Not What Most People Think

COMMON MYTH

"It's an IT project"

→ REALITY: Most data quality problems are because of a lack of defined processes.

COMMON MYTH

"Having a data governance program is a new trend"

→ REALITY: Formal data governance frameworks predate the internet era – 1980s.

COMMON MYTH

"We can clean our data after we launch AI"

→ REALITY: Poor data quality is a liability and security issue — an ungoverned model trained on bad data can make consequential decisions at scale.

Two Organizations. Same AI Ambition. Opposite Outcomes.

	⚠ WITHOUT DATA GOVERNANCE	✓ WITH DATA GOVERNANCE
DATA QUALITY	Inconsistent, siloed, untrusted. Nobody agrees on the same number.	Defined standards, assigned stewards, tracked quality scores.
AI TRAINING	Model trained on conflicting data. Outputs are unreliable.	AI Use Designation confirms which datasets are approved and audit-ready.
DEPLOYMENT	42% of AI projects abandoned at POC. Board loses confidence.	Production-grade AI with documented lineage, access controls, and oversight.
AUDIT & RISK	AI makes a wrong decision. Nobody knows who owns the data. Audit fails.	Named Trustee and Steward. Full lineage. Explainable, defensible outcomes.
OUTCOME	Expensive failure. Reputational risk. Regulatory exposure.	Trusted analytics. Faster decisions. Sustainable competitive advantage.

Governance is not a tax on AI. It is the reason AI delivers return on investment.

DEFINITION

Data Governance

Data governance is the formal system of decision rights, accountabilities, and processes that determines who can take what actions with what data, under what circumstances, and using what methods.

— Adapted from DAMA International / DMBOK

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

What to Do Before Defining a Data Governance Program

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01	**Clarify Why You Are Doing This** — Define the specific business driver — audit failure, AI readiness, merger, regulation. The driver sets scope, urgency, and your executive pitch. 'Better data' is not a reason.
02	**Secure Executive Sponsorship** — Not awareness — authority. Someone with budget and influence who will hold the line when governance meets resistance. Without this, stop and find them first.
03	**Take Stock of What Already Exists** — Map informal governance already happening — de facto owners, existing policies, working groups. Build on what works rather than replacing it unnecessarily.
04	**Understand Your Data Landscape** — Identify what data you have, where it lives, and which domains carry the highest risk. You don't need a full catalogue — enough to decide where to focus first.
05	**Assess Your Current Pain Points** — Talk to analysts, finance, operations, compliance. Where is trust in data lost? Where do decisions stall? These pain points are your governance roadmap in disguise.
06	**Know Your Regulatory Obligations** — Identify all applicable privacy law, sector regulation, retention requirements, and access obligations before defining any standard or policy.
07	**Assess Organizational Readiness** — Understand your culture. Is data shared or hoarded? Are business units territorial? Design your rollout to work with the culture, not against it.
08	**Define Scope Deliberately** — Decide explicitly what is in and out of scope before you start. Two domains governed well beats twenty governed in name only.
09	**Set Realistic Expectations** — Data governance is a program, not a project. It has no end date. Stakeholders expecting a finished product in six months need to be recalibrated before you begin.

Data Governance Program - The 7 Elements

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01	**Governance Structure (Councils, Committees, Working Groups)** — Without formal authority and escalation paths, every cross-functional data decision becomes a political standoff. Committees with real mandates resolve disputes and make AI deployment decisions that stick.
02	**Formal Roles & Accountability (Trustees, Stewards, Custodians, Users)** — Named accountability transforms governance from a concept into a contract. When a Trustee signs off on a domain, quality problems get fixed — because someone's reputation is on the line.
03	**Policies & Procedures** — Consistent rules eliminate the 'it depends who you ask' problem. Every analyst, system, and AI model works from the same definitions, classifications, and access rules.
04	**Data Catalogue (Data Lineage, Business Capability)** — You cannot govern what you cannot find. The catalogue is your single inventory of what data exists, what it means, who owns it, and whether it has been approved for AI use.
05	**Data Quality Resolution Working Group and Process** — Poor quality data is the #1 cause of AI project failure. A formal quality program identifies, investigates, and fixes issues — turning one-time fixes into permanent controls.
06	**Formal Plan to Operationalize**— Governance without process is just documentation. Repeatable workflows — for data products, access requests, and issue resolution — turn policy into practice.
07	**Training & Culture** — Every framework fails without people who understand it. Data literacy and governance awareness transform compliance from enforcement into habit — the only sustainable model.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Three Tiers. One Direction. Real Authority.

Executive Information Governance Council

Sets organization-wide information governance direction. Approves mandatory data standards. Champions AI governance alignment. Receives semi-annual program health reports.

STRATEGIC

Data Governance Committee (DGC)

Maintains Domain Registry and Data Catalogue. Reviews and recommends AI Use Designations. Owns policies and procedures. Coordinates across business units and functions.

OPERATIONAL

Data Quality Working Group (DQWG)

Triages and tracks all quality issues. Performs root cause analysis. Recommends preventive controls. Reports quarterly to DGC on resolution status and trends.

EXECUTION

Each committee has a formal Terms of Reference — membership, quorum, voting, and reporting obligations are all defined.

FORMAL ROLES & ACCOUNTABILITY

If Everyone Owns It, Nobody Owns It.

Data Trustee

VP / C-Suite / Director

- Ultimate accountability for a data domain
- Approves access and data usage decisions
- Designates Data Stewards
- Signs off on data quality standards

Data Steward

Business subject-matter expert

- Day-to-day quality monitoring & triage
- Maintains definitions and metadata
- Coordinates issue resolution across units
- Primary point of contact for the domain

Data Custodian

IT / Systems team

- Technical storage, security, and access controls
- Implements Trustee-approved access decisions
- Manages platform configuration
- Executes classification requirements

Data User

Any staff using organizational data

- Uses data within authorized entitlements
- Reports quality issues to the Steward
- Completes mandatory DG training
- Does NOT modify data without authorization

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Define the rules once. Apply them everywhere. Enforce them always

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Data Governance Policy
The master policy — defines scope, principles, authority structure, and accountability. Everything else sits under it.

Data Classification Policy
How data is categorized by sensitivity (Public / Internal / Confidential / Restricted) and what protections apply to each tier.

Data Quality Policy
The organization's quality standards, how quality is measured, who is responsible, and how failures are reported and resolved.

Data Access & Security Policy
Who can access what data, under what conditions, how access is requested and approved, and how access is reviewed and revoked.

Retention & Disposal Policy
How long each type of data is kept, when it must be destroyed, and how destruction is documented to satisfy legal obligations.

Privacy Policy
How personal information is collected, used, shared, and protected — aligned to applicable privacy legislation (PIPEDA, GDPR, etc.).

Metadata Management Policy
Standards for documenting data assets — definitions, lineage, ownership, and classification — so the catalogue stays accurate and useful.

Master & Reference Data Policy
Defines authoritative sources for shared data (client lists, product codes, org hierarchies) and prohibits unauthorized creation of duplicates.

Data Product Development Procedure
The mandatory process any dashboard, report, or analytical tool must pass through — including Trustee sign-off — before going to production.

Data Issue Resolution Procedure
The step-by-step process for logging, investigating, correcting, and preventing recurrence of data quality issues. Owned by the DQWG.

DATA CATALOGUE

Your Data Catalogue Is the AI Trust Layer

Asset Discoverability
AI teams find and understand data before they use it

Data Lineage
Trace from source system to model input — audit-ready

AI Use Designation
Each asset tagged: Approved / Restricted / Prohibited for AI

Quality Status
Validation history visible before training begins

Access Governance
Who can use what, for what purpose — documented

Classification Tier
Public / Internal / Confidential — drives model risk controls

AI READINESS MATURITY

LEVEL 4	AI-Ready — Governed, catalogued, quality-validated, AI Use Designated
LEVEL 3	Governed — Policies enforced, stewards active, quality log live
LEVEL 2	Structured — Framework published, roles named, catalogue started
LEVEL 1	Ad Hoc — No program, fragmented ownership, no quality process

DATA QUALITY RESOLUTION PROCESS

Bad Data Does Not Fix Itself

The Data Quality Issue Resolution Process turns incidents into organizational improvement.

1

Identify & Log

Capture issue, affected dataset, reporter, and date in the tracking log.

2

Assess & Classify

Data Steward determines severity (Low/Medium/High) and scope of business impact.

3

Root Cause Analysis

Investigate with system owners. Manual error? Integration gap? Definitional mismatch?

4

Correct the Data

Fix affected records, re-run reports, validate with system owner before closing.

5

Preventive Controls

Mandatory fields, drop-downs, format validation, staff training. Stop recurrence.

6

Document & Close

Update log, notify stakeholders. Formal sign-off by both Steward and Trustee.

MAKING IT REAL

How to Operationalize and Sustain a Data Governance Program

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01	**Secure Executive Sponsorship** — Like information management, data governance does not sustain without authority behind it. An executive sponsor with real accountability — not just awareness — is what turns a program into a mandate.
02	**Make Training Mandatory, Not Optional** — Voluntary training produces voluntary compliance. Role-based training must be a condition of access, part of onboarding, and tracked to completion. If it is optional, it will not happen.
03	**Define Training Requirements by Role** — Data Trustees, Stewards, Custodians, and Users each have different accountabilities. Training must be specific to what each role is expected to do — not a single generic module applied to everyone.
04	**Establish Repeatable Operational Processes** — Governance becomes operational through process — data product development gates, quality issue resolution, access request workflows. If there is no defined process, there is no governance; there is only intention.
05	**Embed Governance Into Day-to-Day Work** — Governance that only happens at committee meetings is not operational. Standards, definitions, and quality checks must be woven into the tools, systems, and workflows people already use every day.
06	**Measure and Document Improvement** — Track what changes: quality issue resolution rates, data catalogue completeness, policy compliance, time-to-access. Documented improvement is what justifies continued investment and demonstrates the program is working.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Five Things Nobody Puts in the Case Studies

01 **Operationalization is key**. A Data Governance Framework on a SharePoint nobody reads is wallpaper. Budget for change management, training, and repeated communication — not just deliverables.

02 The **Data Quality Working Group** is where governance becomes real. Standing up a committee to actively investigate and resolve issues is the single highest-leverage operational move you can make.

03 **Trustees are the linchpin**. When a named executive owns a data domain, decisions get made. When ownership is vague, every issue becomes a political negotiation.

04 **Scope creep kills pilots**. Govern two domains well before you govern twenty poorly. Completing something end-to-end — even small — builds more credibility than a perfect framework nobody uses.

05 **AI questions make governance urgent**. 'Can we use this data to train a model?' is the forcing function that gets executives to take data ownership seriously. Use it.

WHERE TO START

The 90-Day Data Governance On-Ramp

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Day 0 — Day 30 — Day 60 — Day 90

Assess & Align

- Audit your data landscape: what exists, who owns it, how it's used
- Map your riskiest domains (customer data? HR? Finance? IP?) — start there
- Benchmark: what are your sector peers doing that you are not?
- Secure a named executive champion — without this, stop here

Build the Structure

- Draft your Data Governance Framework (principles, scope, definitions)
- Draft and approve Terms of Reference for your DGC
- Name Data Trustees for 2–3 priority domains — in writing
- Launch a basic data inventory (a governed spreadsheet is fine to start)

Pilot and Prove

- Apply the 3-step Data Product Process to ONE new analytical tool
- Log your first data quality issues formally through the DQWG
- Run your first DGC meeting — with an agenda, minutes, and action log
- Report to leadership: here's what we found. Here's what it was costing us.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Governance is not competing with AI.
It is what makes AI safe to deploy.

The organizations winning this race are not the ones with the most data. They are the ones who know what their data means, who owns it, and whether it can be trusted.

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QUESTIONS?

Let's connect.

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Information & Data Governance Strategist | AI Readiness Advisor ...

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OPERATIONAL PROCESS #1

Every Data Product Earns Its Right to Exist

Every dashboard, analytical tool, or report built on organizational data must pass three mandatory gates. No exceptions.

GATE: FRAMEWORK REVIEW

01

Review the DG Framework

- Confirm data domain ownership and assigned Trustee & Steward
- Identify applicable privacy, security and legislative requirements
- Understand classification and permissible use for source datasets

GATE: CHARTER APPROVAL

02

Complete a Project Charter

- Define business purpose, key questions, and decision-support objectives
- Name the business owner and target audience for the product
- Obtain Data Trustee confirmation for all source data domains

GATE: CHECKLIST SIGN-OFF

03

Complete the Data Product Checklist

- Document data lineage, sources, and transformation logic
- Define all metrics with agreed, published business definitions
- Validate quality rules, access controls, and sensitivity classification