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The AI Revolution: Transforming Public Power and Utilities

Presentation made by Brannndon Kelley at the American Municipal Power conference on September 22, 2025. Reprinted with permission from Brannndon Kelley.



Brannndon Kelley

The Human Element and Overcoming Resistance

I began my keynote by sharing two stories that highlight how the human element and our willingness to embrace change shape the impact of technology. The first story goes back over 26 years, when I was just 20 years old and starting my IT career during the “Race to Fix the Y2K” problem. I landed a consulting job at a large Columbus, Ohio-based company, tasked with upgrading their point-of-sale and configurator systems to accept the four-digit year. Despite this being my first corporate role, I was surprised to discover that our workstations didn’t have internet access. When I asked why, I was told that leadership considered the internet a time waster and didn’t want employees to have access. I share this story to remind us that resistance is not the answer.

Today, it’s hard to imagine any job that isn’t at least somewhat dependent on the internet—if there are any, they’re few and far between.

The second story happened about 20 years ago, when I worked with the State of Idaho Secretary of State's CIO on a statewide voting registration project. The CIO was quite a character, with an impressive career before joining the Idaho Secretary of State's office. He once told me about his experience on a team developing a replacement for the 5.25-inch floppy disk. Their prototype was technologically superior to what would become the standard 3.5-inch disk. However, when they presented it to Steve Jobs at Apple, Jobs picked up their prototype and tried to slip it into his front shirt pocket—it didn't fit. That simple, human moment became the deciding factor in Apple's choice of disk format.

The lesson: no matter how good the technology, the human element will always play a decisive role.

Standing on the Shoulders of Past Transformations

Technological revolutions have always redefined how we live and work. The Industrial Revolution, powered by steam and coal, reshaped cities and took 80 years to reach widespread adoption. Electrification, sparked by Edison's lighting of Manhattan in 1882, required nearly 50 years and massive infrastructure buildout. The Digital Revolution, fueled by the internet and wireless networks, achieved ubiquity in just 25 years, again limited by infrastructure.

The AI Revolution: Faster, Deeper, and More Pervasive

Unlike its predecessors, the AI Revolution runs on existing infrastructure—electricity, broadband, smartphones, and cloud computing. There's no need for new wires or grids; AI tools have been adopted globally in under 24 months, engaging businesses, governments, and consumers simultaneously. The pace is unprecedented: while previous revolutions were slowed by the need to build physical networks, AI accelerates on what already exists.

However, this rapid adoption comes with challenges. AI technologies, especially generative models like ChatGPT, are driving a massive increase in electricity consumption. AI queries can consume ten times more electricity than traditional web searches, and data centers powering AI now rival small cities in energy demand. Projections suggest they may consume more electricity than entire countries by 2030, straining grid infrastructure and prompting utilities to rethink forecasting and capacity planning.

Expanded AI Use Cases in Electric Utilities

AI is already transforming utilities in multiple ways, with applications that touch nearly every aspect of operations:

1. Asset Inspection and Maintenance

- **Drones and AI-powered cameras** detect defects such as corrosion, pole damage, and equipment wear.
- **Vehicle-mounted cameras** enable real-time pole inspections, reducing manual labor and improving safety.
- **Automated visual analytics** lower operations and maintenance (O&M) costs by quickly identifying issues and prioritizing repairs.

2. Energy Demand Forecasting

- **AI models** predict energy usage based on weather, historical consumption, and behavioral patterns.

- Improved **grid planning** and **renewable integration** help utilities balance supply and demand, especially as distributed energy resources grow.
- Enhanced **load forecasting accuracy** supports better investment and operational decisions.

3. Customer Engagement and Personalization

- **AI-driven analytics** provide personalized energy-saving tips and recommendations.
- Usage pattern analysis improves customer satisfaction and helps utilities design targeted programs.
- **Intelligent chatbots** automate customer service, handling inquiries and troubleshooting 24/7.

4. Grid Operations and Optimization

- **Fault detection algorithms** identify and isolate problems before they escalate.
- AI helps **balance loads**, predict outages, and optimize grid performance.
- **Autonomous grid workflows** enable real-time adjustments and self-healing capabilities.

5. Vegetation Management

- AI schedules **tree trimming** and maintenance to reduce outage risks.
- **Satellite and drone imagery** analyzed by AI identifies vegetation threats and optimizes cycles.
- **Predictive analytics** ensure resources are allocated efficiently.

6. Energy Theft and Fraud Detection

- AI identifies **anomalies in consumption patterns** that may indicate theft or fraud.
- **Meter tampering** and unauthorized usage are detected early, protecting revenue.
- AI models improve overall **revenue protection** strategies.

7. Safety and Reliability Enhancements

- **Image analytics** pinpoint high-priority defects and track inspection accuracy.
- AI improves **safety protocols** with predictive tools and reliability metrics.
- Utilities can proactively address risks and ensure compliance.

8. Generative AI for Internal Efficiency

- GenAI **summarizes documents**, generates synthetic data, and supports staff with AI-powered chatbots.
- Decision-making is improved with tools that synthesize large volumes of data into actionable insights.
- GenAI accelerates innovation, content creation, and scenario modeling for strategic planning.

Ethical Considerations in AI Adoption

As utilities embrace AI, ethical considerations must be front and center:

Security and Privacy

- AI systems can introduce **security vulnerabilities** and raise concerns about data privacy and intellectual property.
- Utilities must safeguard sensitive customer and operational data, ensuring compliance with regulations.

Bias and Fairness

- AI models may inadvertently **amplify bias or discrimination** if not carefully designed and monitored.
- Ensuring fairness in automated decisions—such as billing, outage response, or customer service—is critical.

Human Oversight and Governance

- **Human-in-the-loop oversight** is essential to validate AI outputs and minimize risks.
- Establishing **governance frameworks** promotes responsible and ethical use of AI within organizations.

Transparency and Accountability

- Utilities should maintain transparency in how AI systems operate and make decisions.
- Clear accountability structures help address errors, unintended consequences, and stakeholder concerns.

Workforce Impact

- AI adoption may lead to **job displacement** and workforce anxiety.
- Investing in **training and upskilling** helps employees adapt and thrive alongside new technologies.

Continuous Monitoring and Adaptation

- Ongoing monitoring and adaptive policies are needed to manage evolving risks and ensure ethical standards are maintained.

Future AI Trends in Utilities

Looking ahead, several trends are poised to further transform the utility sector:

1. Predictive and Autonomous Grid Management

- AI will enable **fully autonomous grid operations**, with real-time self-healing and optimization.
- Predictive analytics will anticipate outages, equipment failures, and demand spikes before they occur.

2. Integration of Distributed Energy Resources (DERs)

- AI will facilitate seamless integration of solar, wind, battery storage, and electric vehicles into the grid.
- Real-time optimization will balance supply and demand across decentralized assets.

3. Advanced Customer Experience

- Hyper-personalized energy services, powered by AI, will offer tailored recommendations, dynamic pricing, and proactive support.
- Virtual assistants and conversational AI will become the norm for customer engagement.

4. AI-Driven Sustainability and Decarbonization

- AI will optimize renewable energy generation, storage, and consumption to accelerate decarbonization goals.

- Utilities will use AI to track and report sustainability metrics, supporting regulatory compliance and public trust.

5. Enhanced Cybersecurity

- AI-powered threat detection and response will protect critical infrastructure from evolving cyber risks.
- Continuous learning systems will adapt to new threats in real time.

6. Workforce Transformation

- AI will augment human workers, automating routine tasks and enabling staff to focus on strategic, high-value activities.
- Ongoing reskilling and upskilling will be essential as roles evolve.

GenAI ROI: From Expense to Strategic Investment

Organizations often view new technology spending as a cost burden. GenAI should be recognized as a strategic investment, unlocking productivity, innovation, and competitive advantage. For example, a monthly GenAI cost of \$30 per employee can yield a 2x ROI, saving time and creating significant value. Beyond efficiency, GenAI boosts innovation, customer experience, and reduces burnout.

Conclusion

The AI Revolution is not just another technological shift—it’s a cognitive transformation that will redefine how utilities operate, engage customers, and manage infrastructure. By embracing innovation, fostering collaboration, investing strategically, and upholding ethical standards, AMP and its members are poised to shape the future of public power.



Learn more about HCI’s approach to strategic planning

“From start to finish, my experience with Mark McCain and Hometown Connections was outstanding. Their structured process, inclusive engagement, and collaborative style built consensus and delivered a strategic plan that adds real value to the future of our Electric Utility. Their partnership—with staff and our Advisory Board—was thoughtful, hands-on, and highly effective.”

Jamie England, Director



Learn more about Hometown Connections STRATEGIC PLANNING efforts visit our blog at: <https://blog.hometownconnections.com/why-most-utility-strategic-plans-fail-and-what-actually-works/>

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APPA Customer Connections Conference 2025



Scott Corwin, CEO of APPA.

Customer Connections Conference: The Future of Public Power Service is Here!

The American Public Power Association (APPA) Customer Connections Conference was a massive success this year, bringing almost 450 industry leaders together in dynamic Salt Lake City, Utah, from November 2-5, 2025! This is an annual event for public power professionals provided cutting-edge AI insights to essential strategies for influence and resilience. This year's conference armed attendees with the tools needed to supercharge customer service and operational excellence.

Celebrating Excellence and the AI Advantage

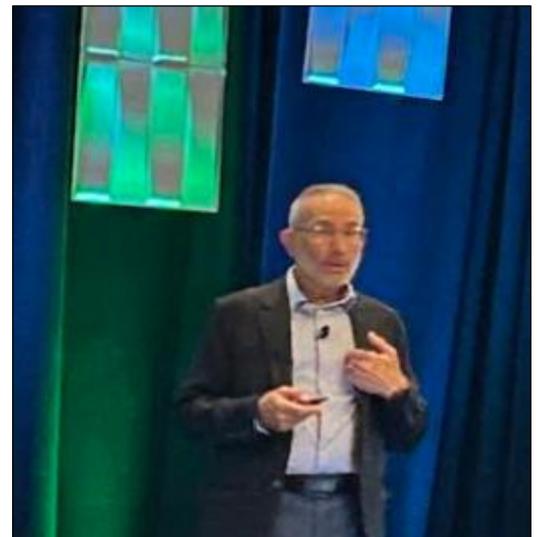
Scott Corwin, APPA President and CEO, kicked off the conference by celebrating the true stars of public power. He applauded the 2025 Smart Energy Provider designees for their commitment to energy efficiency and sustainability and recognized winners of the Public Power Customer Satisfaction Awards for exceptional service.

The program immediately delivered high-value insights, headlined by **Jennifer Goldbeck, Ph.D.**, an expert in Artificial Intelligence. Her captivating discussion on "Build Trust Between Humans and AI to Supercharge Your Business" gave utilities a roadmap for ethically and effectively integrating AI into their operations.

Mastering Influence and Resilience

The momentum continued with sessions focused on leadership and growth:

- **Become a Powerful Influencer:** On November 4th, **Barry Moline**, President of BJM Solutions, shared proven strategies to become more influential and effectively bring people to your side—a crucial skill for driving change and consensus.
- **Unshakeable Resilience:** The conference concluded with an inspiring and unforgettable headliner on November 5th. **Tom Turcich's** discussion on "Thriving Without Limits: Unshakeable Resilience One Step at a Time" provided a powerful message on overcoming obstacles and achieving long-term success.



Barry Moline, President of BJM Solutions.

HCI Partners At Work

HCI Partners set up display booths at the APPA Customer Connections Conference held in Salt Lake City, Utah, from November 2-5, 2025.



Mark Ennis with Jerry Rahon and Jim Walters from SpryPoint.



Mark Bierkle, Strategic Account Executive at DivDat.



Great Blue Research Team, Kevin Battista and Chris Biggs.



Mary Malone and Ann Brey from Questline Digital.

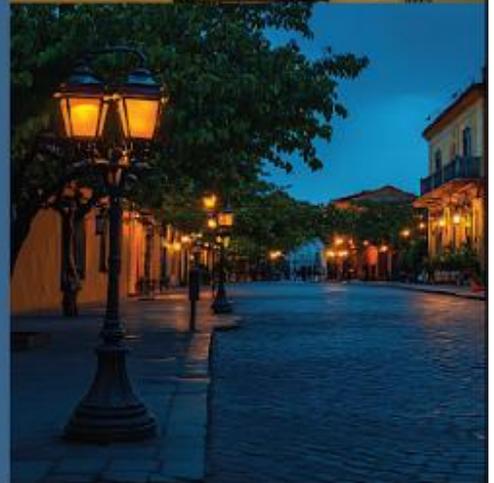
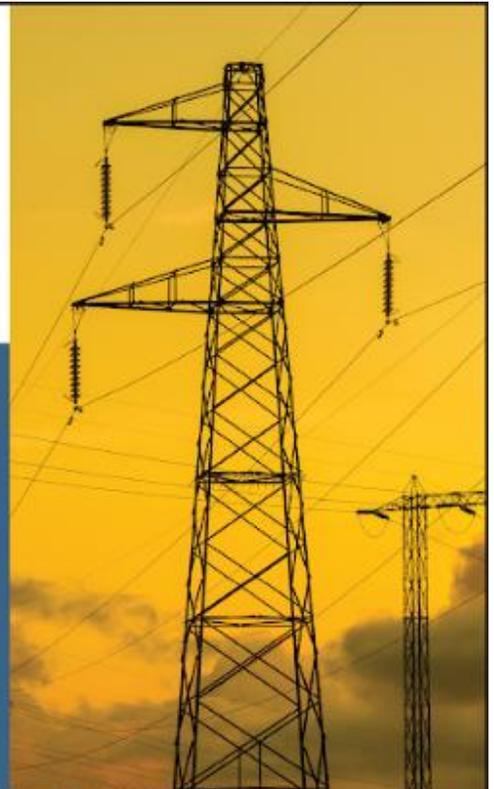


Annette Dupont-Ewing with Elizabeth Massey from Energy Authority.

KTI: THE POWER OF SOLUTIONS

Katama Technologies, Inc. (KTI) specializes in technology planning, implementation and support to Public Power Utilities nationwide.

- Technology Investment & Strategy Planning
- Selection, Implementation & System Verification - AMI, Enterprise, SCADA and More
- Business Process Alignment
- Leverage Valuable AMI Data



KTI

www.katamatech.com | info@katamatech.com
704.225.7864



HCI Partner

**ROBERT "ROBBIE" TUGWELL**

Robert "Robbie" Tugwell, Vice President of Public Utilities at PowerSecure, is a trusted leader in distributed energy solutions. Robbie brings more than 40 years of experience working with community-owned electric utilities, driving energy innovation, resilience, and sustainability in the public power sector.

PowerSecure

Founded in 2000, PowerSecure is a leading provider of integrated distributed energy solutions, including:

- Microgrids
- Backup and standby generation
- Renewable energy integration
- Energy storage
- Smart grid monitoring and controls

Headquartered in Durham, North Carolina, PowerSecure serves utilities, municipalities, data centers, hospitals, and other critical infrastructure clients nationwide. As a subsidiary of Southern Company, PowerSecure combines deep industry expertise with world-class engineering and operational capabilities. To date, they have deployed and managed over 2 gigawatts of distributed energy capacity across the U.S.

Since 2013, PowerSecure has proudly partnered with Hometown Connections, Inc. (HCI) to help public power utilities strengthen grid resilience and meet their evolving energy needs.

Latest Successes

1. AMP Behind-The-Meter Peaking Project (BTM Peaking Project)

In 2018, [American Municipal Power, Inc. \(AMP\)](#) looked closely at industry changes impacting the joint action agency and its members. The forecasted increase of capacity and transmission charges by PJM Interconnection were of chief concern. To help members offset PJM's peak period price increases, AMP developed a behind the meter peaking project. The first phase of the project distributed PowerSecure Tier IV Final PowerBlock generators to 14 member utilities in Ohio and Pennsylvania, providing benefits to a total of 27 communities. AMP is currently reviewing a BTM II Peaking Project program.

2. Powering Digital Infrastructure – Edged Data Centers

By mid-2025, PowerSecure delivered 152 MW of microgrid-ready generation to Edged data center campuses across the U.S., including sites in Chicago, Columbus, Dallas, Des Moines, Kansas City, Phoenix, and Atlanta. These installations support Tier 4 emissions compliance and mission-critical energy resilience.

3. 100% Renewable Fuel Microgrid – Durham Campus

In August 2024, PowerSecure transitioned its Durham campus Tier IV Final certified diesel generator microgrid to run on hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) - a renewable fuel that reduces emissions while maintaining reliability. This project is a model for carbon-conscious backup generation and part of PowerSecure’s commitment to sustainable innovation.

Robbie Tugwell on HCI and Public Power

“Hometown Connections has played a critical role in helping us build meaningful relationships with public power systems,” says Robbie. *“The trust and visibility that come from being an HCI partner have opened the door to opportunities we might not have had otherwise.”*

“Resilience is not just a buzzword—it’s essential to the future of public power,” he adds. *“At PowerSecure, we view resilience as a core component of energy independence, security, and long-term affordability. Our mission is to help communities stay powered through any challenge.”*



Known for Collaboration & Kindness

Beyond his technical knowledge and leadership, Robbie is widely known for his friendly, cheerful disposition and a genuine willingness to support others, while still being a go-getter, who gets the job done with excellence! Whether he’s offering a strategic introduction, sharing leads, or giving practical advice, Robbie consistently looks for ways to help other HCI partners succeed. His collaborative spirit has earned him the respect and appreciation of peers across the public power community. We’re proud to spotlight Robbie Tugwell as a valued Hometown Connections partner. His leadership, warmth, and commitment to collaboration exemplify what makes the public power community strong.

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Upcoming 2026 Conferences

- Jan 11-13** **APPA Joint Action Conference, Destin, FL**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/joint-action-conference>
- Jan 20-22** **2026 POWERGEN International, San Antonio, TX**
<https://www.powergen.com/>
- Feb 8-11** **2026 NARUC Winter Policy Summit, Washington, D.C.**
<https://www.naruc.org/events/all-events/2026-naruc-winter-policy-summit/>
- Feb 23-25** **APPA Legislative Rally, Washington, D.C.**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/legislative-rally>
- Mar 13-14** **FMEA 25th Annual Florida Lineman Competition, Tallahassee, FL**
<https://www.flpublicpower.com/events/fmea-2026-florida-lineman-competition>
- Mar 24-27** **2026 WEF/AWWA Utility Management Conference, Charlotte, NC**
<https://www.awwa.org/event/awwa-wef-utility-management-conference/>
- Mar 27-28** **APPA Lineworkers Rodeo, Huntsville, AL**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/lineworkers-rodeo>
- Mar 29-Apr 1** **APPA Engineering & Operations Conference, Huntsville, AL**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/engineering-operations-conference>
- Mar 29-Apr 1** **APPA Safety Summit, Huntsville, AL**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/safety-summit>
- Apr 12-14** **APPA CEO & Utility Managers Roundtable, Terranea Resort, CA**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/ceo-roundtable>
- Apr 21-22** **APPA Accounting & Financial Virtual Summit (*virtual event*)**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/accounting-finance-summit>
- May 4-May 8** **APPA Spring Education Institute, San Antonio, TX**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/education-institute>

To have your conference listed, please send information to acdupont-ewing@hometownconnections.com

HCI Blog

HCI Blog: A Platform for Collaboration and Innovation

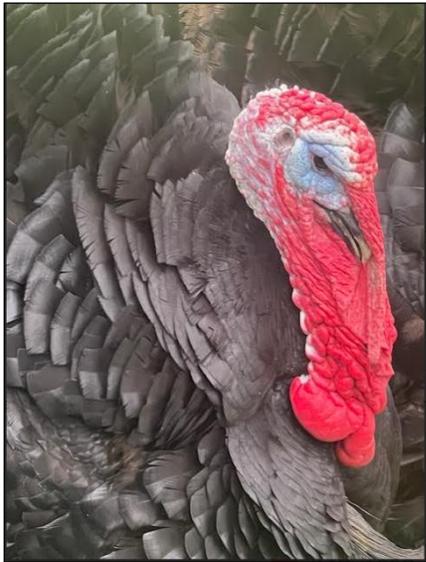
<https://blog.hometownconnections.com/>

HCI warmly invites all its Partners and Affiliates to actively contribute to the blog. Whether it's sharing a recent project, providing commentary on industry trends, or offering advice based on your experiences, your input is highly valued. This collaborative effort will not only highlight the incredible work being done across the network but also provide a valuable resource for continuous learning and development.

How to Contribute

Contributing to the HCI blog is straightforward. Interested Partners and Affiliates need to follow these simple steps:

- **Write your article:** Focus on topics that you are enthusiastic about and that would benefit the HCI community or public power in general.
- **Submit your article:** Send your completed article to acdupont-ewing@hometownconnections.com.



Want to
STAND OUT
in a Crowd?

Advertise on the HCI Blog and/or in the HCI Newsletter!

Reach a targeted and engaged audience by advertising in our professionally rebranded newsletter, distributed by HCI Affiliate members (Joint Action Agencies) to their utility customers. This is a great opportunity to promote your company and services directly to decision-makers and create business opportunities across multiple communities.

Space is limited, so reserve your spot today and get your business in front of the right audience.

The Hometown Connections Advantage
25 Years of Empowering and Educating Public Power Utilities



We're a nonprofit services organization specializing in the unique challenges of community-owned utilities.

Solutions for Public Power

- Advanced Metering Infrastructure
- Business Strategy
- Customer Care
- Cybersecurity
- Finance
- Operations
- Strategic Planning
- Technology
- Workforce

Learn more at www.hometownconnections.com.




Owners

- American Municipal Power, Inc.
- Energy Southeast
- Missouri Public Utility Alliance
- Northern California Power Agency
- Vermont Public Power Supply Authority

Marketing Affiliates

- Energy Northwest
- Florida Municipal Electric Association
- Illinois Municipal Electric Agency
- Indiana Municipal Utilities Agency
- Michigan Municipal Electric Association
- Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association
- Missouri River Energy Services
- Municipal Electric Systems of Oklahoma
- Nebraska Municipal Power Pool
- Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency
- Tennessee Municipal Electric Power Association
- Texas Public Power Association

Sales Affiliates

- American Municipal Power, Inc.
- ElectriCities of North Carolina
- Energy Southeast
- Indiana Municipal Power Agency
- Missouri Public Utility Alliance
- Oklahoma Municipal Power Authority
- Piedmont Municipal Power Agency

Partners

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- DivDat
- Energy Southeast, A Cooperative District
- Exacter
- Great Blue
- Hometown Connections
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- Leverage Leadership
- Marsh USA
- MFP Connect
- PowerSecure
- Questline Digital
- SpryPoint
- Stem
- The Energy Authority
- Utility Financial Solutions

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- Nilaksh Kothari, P.E., Executive Consultant
- Mark McCain, Exec. Consultant for Strategic Planning
- Annette DuPont-Ewing, Director of Marketing
- Mike Mazingo, Director of Affiliate Relationships

Happy Holidays



One of the real joys of Thanksgiving is the opportunity to thank you for your business.

Your Hometown Connections Team



