

Making AI Work for Workers:

The value of AI literacy training for workers of color

This work was conducted in partnership with The Leadership Conference's Center for Civil Rights and Technology, Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, Hispanic Federation, National Congress of American Indians, National Urban League, and UnidosUS.

Billions of dollars are flowing into AI tools that are reshaping how people find work, do their jobs, and grow their careers. Drawn by promises of efficiency and reduced labor costs, employers across sectors are racing to adopt these technologies to streamline processes, track worker performance and growth, automate certain practices, and more.

But just like any other technology, AI has the potential to accelerate the harms of disparities that already exist in our society. Ensuring that AI tools do not become the next mechanism of exclusion will require that workers, especially workers of color, are ready to understand them, to use them, and to question them. Civil rights organizations are stepping up to address this need with AI literacy training that equips communities with the tools to make AI work for them.

I. Concerns for workers.

The negative consequences of AI in the workplace are being felt hardest by workers who are already navigating an uneven playing field: workers of color who have long faced interconnected barriers to fair, high-quality jobs that pay a living wage. AI is already being used in ways that reshape workplace conditions, and this rapid adoption of largely untested and unregulated AI tools in the workplace risks further entrenching well-documented racial disparities.

Workers of color are positioned to be disproportionately exposed to the negative consequences of AI through multiple vectors:

- **AI screening resumes.** Many employers use AI tools to review job applications. These tools are often trained on historical hiring data—data that may reflect employment outcomes based on geographic, educational, linguistic, racial, and gendered biases—and may be designed to produce outputs that inadvertently replicate those patterns. These systems risk penalizing applicants that do not conform to a perceived norm, including applicants with non-traditional educational backgrounds or those from rural communities, that are disproportionately overrepresented in people of color. In fact, people of color who “whiten” their resumes by deleting references to their race [have greater success](#) in getting job interviews.

Another instance of discrimination may arise when AI resume screening tools are used to detect whether applicants used AI in resumes or cover letters. A recent study found that AI content-detectors—including detectors that would be used by employers to screen applicants’ cover letters and resumes—[inaccurately flag non-native English speakers’ writing as AI-generated](#) 61% of the time, even when the writing is original.

Compounding both of these issues is how many different companies are using the same limited set of AI tools to screen resumes. If one of these AI tools discriminates against applicants of color, it may shut those people out of job opportunities at every company that uses that same tool. A recent [Stanford study](#) recently revealed that situations like this resulted in 26% of Black applicants and 15% of Asian applicants discriminated against by AI hiring systems. When employers use these untested, unregulated tools, they can repeat and even expand historic patterns of exclusion.

- **AI conducting workplace surveillance.** Employers are increasingly using AI to monitor workers’ conduct and performance. These surveillance tools can be used to monitor employees’ screens, track their movements on cameras, record their conversations, study their behaviors, and make management decisions, including promotions and terminations. Workers in Amazon warehouses, for example, [reported](#) that their “productivity monitoring” apps were actually being used to identify and suppress union organizing before it could start. These tools represent violations of privacy and labor rights and they distort the power dynamics between employees and management. Workers of color experience these surveillance technologies at higher rates than white workers: in 2024, Black and Hispanic [workers](#) reported higher rates of experiencing automated management technologies (63% and 52%, respectively, versus 35% for white workers) and electronic monitoring at work (82% and 73%, respectively, versus 65% for white workers).

- **AI modeling behavior and setting wages.** Employers can use AI to shortchange employees in "captive" or underserved geographic markets, where there are fewer employment opportunities; they could offer them lower pay, worse benefits, and fewer opportunities. This is the labor version of dynamic pricing: instead of an algorithm being used to change prices, an algorithm could be used to change wages.

This is especially concerning in the gig economy, where digital platforms use AI to [analyze workers' personal data](#) in order to determine the lowest wage they are willing to accept for a job. A rideshare driver, delivery worker, or digital freelance contractor could be receiving less pay than another person for an identical job because of what the algorithm has inferred about their financial situation. With a [disproportionately high representation of workers of color in the gig economy](#), these companies' practices risk pitting workers against one another in a race to the bottom.

II. Advantages for workers.

While the potential negative outcomes of the AI boom are substantial, there are also opportunities for workers with AI skills to benefit.

Advantages for workers seeking employment. Though the U.S. job market has grown more competitive than ever, an increasing number of jobs require some degree of proficiency with AI—according to LinkedIn, the number of job listings on their site that require AI skills [has grown by 70%](#) in the last year alone. Jobs that require AI skills also pay more: according to PwC, jobs that require AI skills [carry up to a 25% wage premium](#) in some markets.

Advantages for workers already employed. Workers who are already employed may also benefit from having AI skills.

- **AI minimizing busywork.** With proper training, using AI can help individual workers minimize the time they spend on administrative tasks by automating workflows, allowing them to spend more time on the relationship-based aspects of their work.
- **AI increasing capacity.** Some AI tools can expand what non-experts are able to accomplish, enabling people without specialized technical backgrounds to take on work that previously required outside expertise.
- **AI supporting learning new skills.** AI can help workers learn new skills by customizing and improving trainings, tailoring general training curricula to specific audiences and use-cases.
- **AI closing language and accessibility gaps.** Translation and transcription tools can help non-native English speakers and workers with disabilities to comfortably and effectively engage with assignments, colleagues, and clients.

III. The case for AI literacy

As AI transforms workplaces across the economy, AI skills will become increasingly important for workers: **having AI skills will empower communities to spot its harms and take advantage of its benefits.** In industries highly exposed to AI, workers will need to learn how to use AI in order to stay relevant. In industries with less direct exposure to AI, workers will still need to understand how profoundly AI is affecting their applications, the paychecks, their benefits, their managers, and the resources available to them.

Despite the importance of these skills, not enough workers have them: a [survey](#) by Salesforce found that 62% of workers say they lack the skills to use AI effectively and safely. People of color are also more likely to report that they are in need of AI skills: a [survey](#) by Jobs for the Future found that 71% of Black workers and learners felt they needed to gain new skills (versus 53% overall), and that that need was more urgent.

Workers' perceived access to training on AI skills is actually decreasing, not increasing. In 2026, only 36% of workers [reported](#) they had access to the training they needed, down from 45% in 2025, and workers without four-year degrees—a demographic overrepresented in people of color—are less likely to have received training at work than those with four-year degrees.

Workers can learn AI skills by participating in **AI literacy training**, which teaches four key skills:

- 1 Understanding AI.** Workers should learn that AI is not magic, not conscious, and not capable of comprehension. They should also learn about what AI is, and what it isn't.
- 2 Using AI.** Workers should know how to use AI broadly, and specifically how to use AI as a tool, rather than as a replacement for their individual work, analysis, or creativity.
- 3 Questioning AI.** Workers should learn about AI's potential for inaccuracy and bias. They should be trained on how to fact-check AI-generated content, and they should be taught about how AI isn't neutral because it is trained on data that reflects human choices and societal disparities.
- 4 Responsibly engaging with AI.** Workers should know how to recognize appropriate circumstances for using AI and when it should be avoided. They should be taught about its environmental costs and how it can affect the rights and opportunities of others. They should also learn about the risks AI presents to privacy, accountability, equity, and inclusivity.

Partner Organizations

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC

AAJC partners with community-based organizations across the country to provide community-led, culturally competent, in-language AI literacy and digital skills training. Recognizing that AANHPI communities span over 70 countries of origin and even more languages spoken, AAJC empowers these trusted community organizations to design and deliver courses tailored to their specific populations, ensuring relevance, accessibility, and cultural resonance that no standardized curriculum could achieve. Over the past year, this work has demonstrated tangible impact for over 1,800 individuals: job-seekers advanced their career readiness, individuals built resistance to misinformation and scams, and language-isolated seniors gained greater independence and digital confidence.



Hispanic Federation

Hispanic Federation has built a network of 52 technology centers hosted by community-based organizations in 21 states, DC, and Puerto Rico that now train over 10,000 people annually—moving them from basic digital literacy to advanced tech skills that are essential to the new jobs that the AI transition is creating. The impact speaks for itself: participants have achieved over 3,000 annual job placements and an average salary increase of \$13,500. Furthermore, 1,600 individuals have already completed Google's AI Essentials course, a credential that will be scaled to all 10,000 participants this year.



National Congress of American Indians (NCAI)

For Indian Country, AI literacy must begin with sovereignty. As AI rapidly scales, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) ensures that the 575 federally recognized Tribal Nations have the comprehensive education, resources, and tools required to make informed decisions about how this technology impacts their communities. Their national capacity-building initiative, Tech Sovereignty: A Tribal Leader's Guide to the AI Era, provides Tribal governments with a clear-eyed assessment of both the risks and opportunities of the AI transition. NCAI educates decision-makers on the physical footprint AI data centers place on Tribal water and energy grids, the urgent need to protect Indigenous genomic and cultural data from corporate scraping, and the mechanisms for building Native AI workforce pipelines. NCAI recognizes and supports each Tribal Nation's sovereign authority to decide for themselves if and how to regulate and engage with AI.



National Urban League

The National Urban League advances AI literacy as part of its broader commitment to digital equity, workforce development, and economic empowerment. Building on the Lewis Latimer Plan for Digital Equity and Inclusion, the National Urban League works to ensure that Black communities and other historically underserved populations have the access, skills, and protections needed to participate fully in an AI-driven economy. AI literacy is integrated into the Urban Tech Jobs Program, which prepares job seekers for technology careers through industry-informed training, credentialing, and career support. Across our network of 94 affiliates, the National Urban League connects practical AI education with digital skills development, workforce preparation, responsible technology use, and inclusive technology policy.



**National
Urban League**

UnidosUS

UnidosUS's Digital Skills for Life program is a bilingual, culturally tailored 20-hour curriculum that introduces fundamental digital skills, and tailored credentialed certificates in high demand industries. Over 5,500 participants have been trained, and the program has a 78% retention rate and an 87% satisfaction rate, and 70% of participants report a real increase in digital skills knowledge after completion. UnidosUS also offers AI en Acción, a free training delivered through affiliate organizations across 13 states; it has reached 1,700 participants (804 completions), with 95% reporting a confidence gain and 80% improving their AI literacy and prompting skills. Latinx in Business is a digital-upskilling program for Latino entrepreneurs that has enrolled more than 4,500 participants and helped launch more than 400 businesses, directly addressing a documented gap in which Latino entrepreneurs are 1.5 times more likely to struggle accessing capital and pay 2.9% more in interest than equally qualified white peers.



The Leadership Conference's Center for Civil Rights and Technology

The Center for Civil Rights and Technology is a one-of-its-kind hub for advocacy, education, and research at the intersection of civil rights and technology policy. Access to technology and a meaningful understanding of how it works is essential to attaining good-paying jobs, quality health care, education opportunities, and so many more critical goods and services. The Center convenes this working group to pursue solutions for ensuring that every community has opportunities to access and benefit from safe, equitable technologies.

