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Jobs for the Future

AI Transformation Action Guide

For Colleges and Training Providers

AT A GLANCE

AI is transforming education and the workforce. Drawing on lessons from JFF's AI Pioneers Lab, this action guide offers practical strategies for helping education and training providers lead AI-driven change, strengthen employer partnerships, and prepare learners for an AI-enabled future.

AUTHORS

Max Milder
Director, Insights, JFF

Ben Sommer
Director, JFF

Quinton Stroud
Senior Manager, JFF

Erin Bowes
Coordinator, JFF

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About Jobs for the Future

Jobs for the Future (JFF) transforms U.S. education and workforce systems to drive economic success for people, businesses, and communities. www.jff.org

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Salesforce for its generous support of the AI Pioneers Lab and communities of practice, which made it possible for JFF to convene leading education and workforce organizations for structured peer learning, collaboration, and shared problem-solving around AI integration. Salesforce's investment helped create the conditions for participants to test ideas, exchange practical lessons, and contribute insights that informed this action guide and can benefit the broader field. Their support has been essential to advancing a collaborative effort to help education and training providers adapt curriculum, programming, and operations for an AI-enabled future.

"AI is reshaping every job and every learning pathway. Salesforce is investing in partners like JFF to ensure education and training providers are leading that change—embedding real AI fluency into curricula so learners everywhere have a shot at the jobs of tomorrow."
Ron Smith, Vice President Education and Workforce Philanthropy, Salesforce

Introduction

The Urgent Need for Change Management in AI Integration

The artificial intelligence (AI) transformation isn't coming to American workplaces; it has already arrived. But unlike previous technological shifts that began with institutional adoption and formal training, this change started in the gaps. Employees experiment with ChatGPT without official guidance, managers apply AI tools to speed up tasks without a clear strategy, and organizations race to adopt technology before defining what problems they're trying to solve, to name a few examples. Education and training providers face an organizational readiness problem, often lacking the infrastructure, communication strategies, and feedback loops to support and sustain AI integration.

For education and training providers, this creates an unprecedented opportunity. Rather than playing catch-up to workplace demands, you can step into a leadership role by helping employers implement AI strategically. You can prepare learners to use, evaluate, and adapt tools and ensure that this technological shift serves human development rather than simply replacing it. But doing so will take more than launching a new credential or buying new software. The organizations best positioned to navigate this rapid transformation—for themselves, their teams, and the learners and workers they serve—are taking a truly holistic approach to AI. They are comprehensively evaluating how it's reshaping the future of learning and work and shepherding their institutions through a change management strategy that's as much cultural as it is technological.

Since before the generative AI explosion in fall 2022, Jobs for the Future (JFF) has been exploring the implications of artificial intelligence for economic opportunity and the work and learning ecosystem. JFF's Center for Artificial Intelligence & the Future of Work has conducted in-depth research examining how innovative community colleges and training providers across the United States are responding to AI. It has identified barriers and opportunities for integrating AI literacy and durable skills training into existing pathways, mapping AI adoption capacity and maturity in local adult learning ecosystems, and collaborating with a state community college network to catalyze change at the system level.

In 2025, this research transitioned into applied learning. This JFF action guide emerges from the experiences of institutions and organizations that made the deliberate choice to lead in AI integration. Miami Dade College, Ivy Tech Community College, Charter Oak State College, Laney College, and Georgia Technical College System, along with workforce training providers Per Scholas, Merit America, Climb Hire, The Los Angeles Economic Equity Accelerator & Fellowship (LEAFF), and Year Up United, joined JFF's AI Pioneers Lab to tackle a defining question: How are education and training organizations on the leading edge of AI transformation infusing the skills needed for an AI-integrated world into their curriculum, programming, and operations? What have they tested, learned, and integrated into their strategies going forward—and where is the rubber of best practice meeting the road of day-in, day-out technological and institutional change? During more than six months of intensive collaboration, these early movers shared what they learned about leading their organizations through AI-driven disruption.

Who This Guide Is For

- Community colleges, workforce development programs, training providers, and educational institutions seeking to respond strategically to AI disruption
- Senior leaders such as presidents, provosts, deans, and directors who must build coalitions and sustain momentum for AI initiatives

How to Use This Guide

This guide is organized around two interconnected themes that form key elements of a comprehensive approach to AI transformation and change management. While institutional strategy should also touch on student supports, administrative use cases, and more, AI pioneers focused their efforts on:

1. **Employer engagement and market listening**
2. **Curriculum and learning transformation**

Throughout each section, you'll learn lessons from participating institutions and organizations and find practical action steps sequenced for immediate, medium-term, and long-term implementation. They include:

1. **Navigating the early process of AI-driven change**
2. **Building adaptive capacity for the future**
3. **Sustaining momentum through uncertainty**

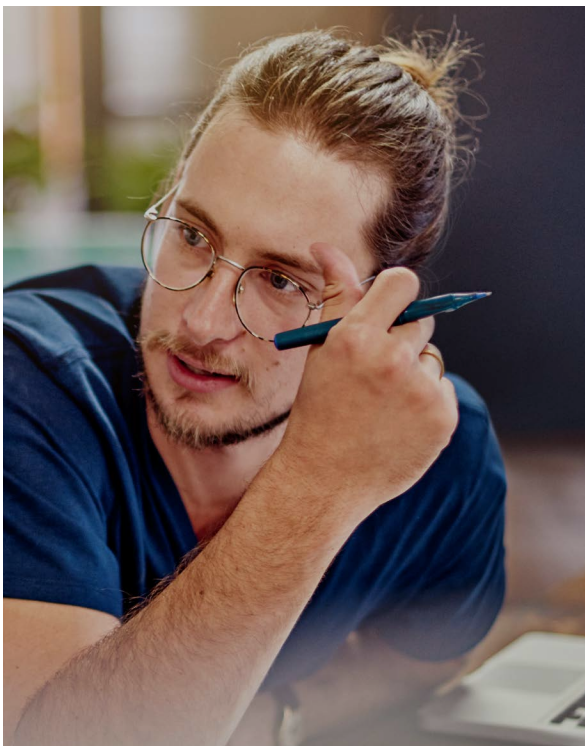
The timing is informed by input from Pioneer Lab participants navigating complex environments and rapidly changing dynamics in real time in the early years of generative AI adoption. If your institution can move faster to test and build some or all of these approaches, we encourage you to do so.

Whether you choose to work through the guide sequentially or jump to the pathway most relevant to your current priorities, you'll find concrete examples and tools drawn from the real learned experiences of early movers navigating AI transformation alongside you.

Key Themes and Tensions From the AI Pioneer Cohort

The following themes emerged as ongoing points of tension in AI Pioneer organizations' change management efforts.

The Reality of Employer AI Adoption and Workforce Planning



Pioneer Lab participants found that employers across sectors are adopting AI tools at a rapid pace, yet most lack clear workforce planning strategies to guide the resulting shifts in needed skills or job design. Organizations remain focused on efficiency, applying AI to speed up existing processes and achieve incremental gains rather than unlocking its transformative potential.[1] Meanwhile, a significant gap has emerged between how employees use AI and what their organizations officially support, even as enterprise-level strategies grow. Workers experiment widely with consumer AI platforms, often without approval, guidance, or connection to broader organizational goals, creating both risks and missed opportunities for strategic integration. Workforce planning also hasn't caught pace with AI adoption, meaning employers are sometimes slow to reshape roles holistically, even as entry-level hiring has slowed. The growing utilization and sophistication of agentic AI magnifies these trends.

The Erosion of Traditional Entry Points

The traditional concept of entry-level work is undergoing fundamental disruption, with career starting points that existed for decades now being reimagined or eliminated in real time. Colleges and training organizations in the Pioneer Lab and across the United States face an emerging tension between responding to immediate upskilling needs and planning for longer-term role transformation. They know the in-demand skills of today may become irrelevant tomorrow as AI capabilities rapidly evolve. This dynamic creates a growing misalignment between established workforce pipelines and actual market realities, leaving education providers and employers uncertain about how to prepare workers for still-evolving roles.

> *We just went through some pretty significant budget challenges last year and ended up eliminating an entire academic division. We're down to only two departments because the faculty, even working really closely with our advisory committees, couldn't determine how to write new curricula and programs that would give students skills in two years that would make them employable. And we are a technical college, and people need to get a job when they finish a degree at our college, and they just couldn't find a path to that. So, we closed those programs. It was really painful.*
>
> **Pioneer Lab participant**

Efficiency vs. Essential Learning

AI's efficiency creates a paradox for educators as it can eliminate the productive friction essential to deep learning and skill development. When students can generate answers or complete tasks instantly, they risk developing tool dependency without building the foundational domain knowledge needed to support long-term career success. As a result, the central challenge Pioneer Lab educators face is preserving academic rigor and meaningful learning experiences while still leveraging AI's powerful capabilities to enhance education rather than undermine it.

Speed vs. Quality in Curriculum Development

AI tools have demonstrated the ability to accelerate program development dramatically, compressing timelines for creating new courses and modules that once took months into just days or weeks. Yet human oversight remains critical throughout this process to ensure pedagogical alignment, verify accuracy, and refine content to meet educational standards. For Pioneer Lab participants, this shift is fundamentally redefining the role of faculty members, moving them from primary content creators to expert curators and quality controllers who apply their teaching skills to guide, evaluate, and enhance AI-generated materials.

Reactive vs. Strategic Implementation

Pioneer Lab institutions feel intense pressure to adopt AI tools without first defining which specific educational problems need AI assistance. This creates a challenging balancing act between responding to future-focused narratives about AI transformation and addressing the immediate, practical needs of students and faculty on the ground today. The path forward requires moving beyond AI for AI's sake and toward purposeful integration where clear educational goals, rather than the fear of being left behind, drive technology adoption.

A Strategic Framework for AI Change Management

Employer Engagement and Market Listening

Start With Labor Market Realities to Align Programming

Effective AI integration begins with grounding program design in local job disruption and creation patterns and sectoral change data that reflect your labor market context. Rather than simply responding to employer requests for AI training embedded in curricula, Pioneer Lab colleges and providers offer strategic value by helping employers clarify their core business needs and pinpoint where AI adoption is beginning to shift job descriptions across sectors. Throughout this process, you should connect AI integration efforts back to your institution's core educational mission to ensure that technology adoption serves your fundamental purpose of preparing learners for successful careers and post-graduation lives.

Action Steps

IMMEDIATE: NAVIGATING CHANGE

- Identify existing forms of labor market data and employer feedback, such as public reports from industry groups and advisory councils, and how frequently this input is collected and measured.
- Socialize existing data with faculty and staff to ensure that all departments and levels of seniority understand labor-market realities.

THREE TO SIX MONTHS: BUILDING CAPACITY

- Validate profiles of key job roles or occupations to identify needed skills, key organizations hiring, and qualitative feedback from employers.

ONE TO THREE YEARS: SUSTAINING MOMENTUM

- Build feedback loops that continuously inform program evolution by engaging with key employers at least quarterly, surveying program alums, and revising labor market data.

Build Durable Skills and AI Fluency for Learners

Tool-specific training is insufficient in a rapidly evolving technological landscape where today's AI platforms may become obsolete within months. Late 2025 and 2026, for instance, saw the rapid growth of agentic AI tools and platforms—and increasingly, entire orchestrated groups of agents—that enable users to set up multiple workflows running autonomously, even when the user isn't at a keyboard. Instead, many Pioneer Lab colleges and training providers are working toward embedding AI fluency and critical thinking capabilities across all programs, equipping learners with the foundational understanding to adapt as tools change, with the opportunity for continual, relevant, domain-embedded practice.

Effective preparation also requires combining technical competencies with durable human skills across all sectors, moving beyond the traditional divides between technical and non-technical roles that no longer reflect workplace realities. Ultimately, Pioneer Lab institutions are defining what AI fluency means for their varied learner populations in close collaboration with industry partners. They recognize that a health care worker, a manufacturing technician, and a business analyst need different levels and types of AI competency to succeed in their fields.

Action Steps

IMMEDIATE: NAVIGATING CHANGE

- Create an internal community for instructors to share examples of embedding durable skills like communication and critical thinking into varied courses and disciplines.
- Explore the possibility of building or adopting an "Intro to AI" course or module that could count toward multiple majors or pathways.

THREE TO SIX MONTHS: BUILDING CAPACITY

- Leverage AI fluency resources such as the Business-Higher Education Forum's AI-Enabled Professional Framework to develop your institution's AI competency framework, defining principles for how AI can and should be used to enhance learning and future employability.[2]
- Use durable skills frameworks, such as the Carnegie Foundation and Educational Testing Service's Skills for the Future initiative, or the America Succeeds Durable Skills Framework, to develop your institution's approach to infusing durable skills across the curriculum.[3]

ONE TO THREE YEARS: SUSTAINING MOMENTUM

- Build scaffolded AI fluency progression across all programs.

Transforming Curriculum and Pedagogy

Leveraging AI for Speed Without Sacrificing Quality

Accelerating curriculum creation while maintaining educational rigor requires robust feedback loops and validation processes that catch issues before they reach students. Some AI Pioneer cohort participants have found success with an 80/20 approach to new curriculum development: AI tools generate curricular ideas and concepts to jumpstart the development process, followed by intensive application of human expertise for critical refinement, accuracy verification, and pedagogical alignment that only experienced educators can provide. This division of labor allows institutions and training providers to gain speed advantages without sacrificing the quality standards that ensure programs prepare students for success.

Managing Resistance and Acknowledging Uncertainty

Effective change management requires honest acknowledgment that AI integration will generate resistance, not just enthusiasm. Educators may worry about job security or feel underprepared for a future that looks far different from their own educational experiences. Institutional cultures built around consensus decision-making and faculty deference may struggle with the pace of change that AI adoption may seem to drive.

At Pioneer Lab colleges and training providers, the integration of AI into curriculum development is fundamentally reshaping faculty work and shifting educators from primary content creators to skilled overseers and mentors who guide learning experiences. This transition requires faculty to develop new competencies to evaluate AI tools and verify their outputs, and learn to assess when AI-generated content meets educational standards and when human intervention is needed. Perhaps most importantly, this redistribution of labor is creating more time for the high-value student interactions that have always been at the heart of effective teaching but are often crowded out by administrative and content development tasks.

> *In our faculty shared governance space, folks are focused on policing AI rather than actually using it creatively. And so that's one thing that I came away with is I need to understand better where we actually are because I think the people that are moving fast, at least at my institution, are not telling anybody about it because they think that they're doing something wrong, and they also don't want to conflict with the faculty union. So, I only hear the people that are really telling us to put the brakes on.*
>
> **Pioneer Lab participant**

Preserving Learning Rigor While Integrating AI

Use of AI in education requires carefully distinguishing between learning struggles essential for skill development and those that represent mere administrative burden or busywork. The goal is to use AI to eliminate repetitive tasks that consume time while deliberately maintaining the core challenges that actually develop learners' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. This approach must ensure students build sufficient foundational knowledge to evaluate AI outputs critically, recognize errors, and understand when to trust or question AI-generated work.

AI Pioneer cohort participants adopted a particularly effective framework for this balance, creating immersive, hands-on experiences in which students use AI as a tool within their learning rather than as a replacement for it. Through staged integration, educators can provide AI support that helps students tackle complex challenges without removing the productive struggle that leads to genuine skill acquisition and deeper understanding.

Action Steps

IMMEDIATE: NAVIGATING CHANGE

- Audit one program to identify productive versus unproductive friction points in the curriculum.
- Hold office hours or faculty listening sessions to understand prevailing attitudes on AI use.

THREE TO SIX MONTHS: BUILDING CAPACITY

- Pilot AI-integrated, problem-based learning in one or more courses.
- Create a framework with principles for AI use that emphasize faculty and staff agency.

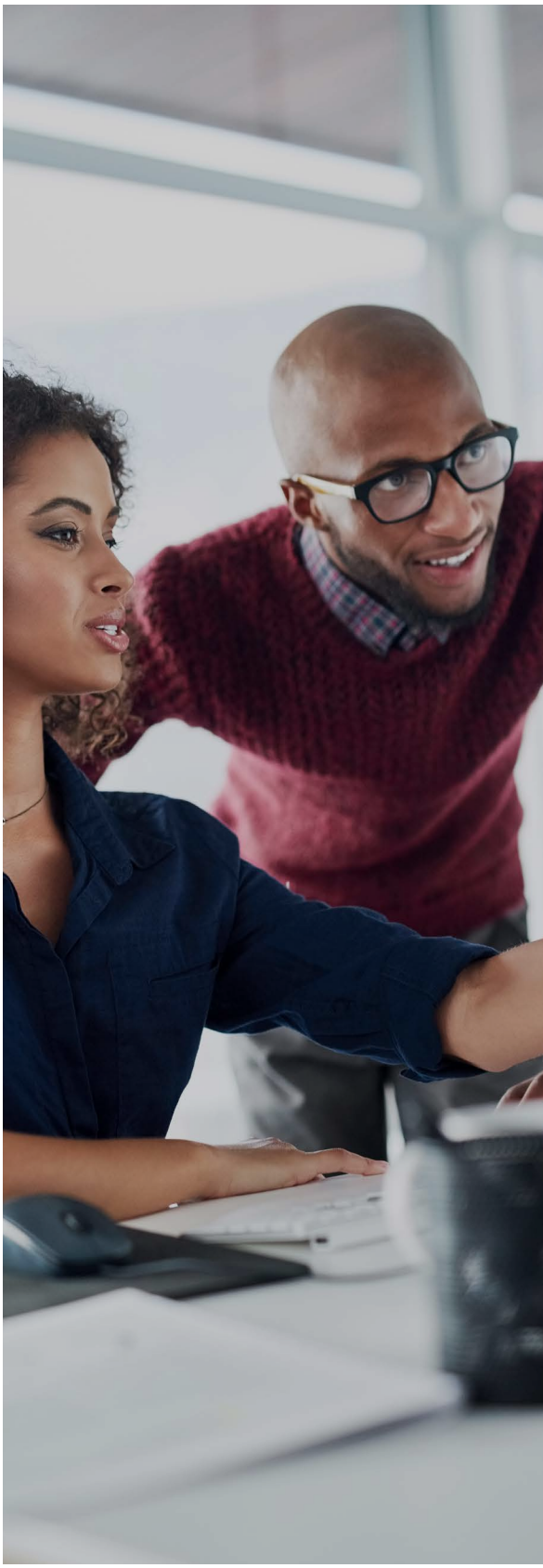
ONE TO THREE YEARS: SUSTAINING MOMENTUM

- Redesign core curricula around authentic, AI-enhanced challenges.

Reimagining Work-Based Learning for the AI Era

The disruption of traditional entry-level positions requires education providers to design new models for career entry and progression that reflect current labor market realities. Pioneer Lab participants' "mini-apprenticeships" offer one promising approach. They connect learners to short-term employer projects where they can apply skills to real business challenges and earn digital badges that can unlock future work. "Mid-level apprenticeships" represent another innovation. They allow learners to skip eroding entry-level paths and move directly into roles with greater responsibility and earning potential, building off work-based learning experiences. While these are not industry-standard categories, they reflect the efforts of Pioneer Lab participants to expand learners' access to work-based learning and navigate an evolving hiring market.

These models work best when paired with flexible, stackable credentials that employers value and can be earned incrementally and combined in ways that reflect evolving skill needs rather than fixed degree requirements. Interdisciplinary student projects that tackle real employer challenges prepare learners for workplaces where AI collaboration crosses departmental boundaries. Building shared language across technical and non-technical roles helps ensure all workers can participate meaningfully in AI-enhanced work environments.



CASE STUDY

Per Scholas Experiments With Embedded Employer Capstones

Per Scholas is a national nonprofit that seeks to empower learners with rigorous technology and AI training to acquire tech careers and connect skilled talent with leading businesses. It has trained more than 30,000 learners in 30 years.[4]But it's also become clear that the employment landscape is changing, and entry-level roles that support workers transitioning into new fields like IT and Salesforce administration are harder to access than ever.

Working with Riipen, an experiential learning platform, the Per Scholas team developed an employer capstone project that matched program alums with companies for short, real-world projects with business applications. This was first implemented within the IT support training program, and the team at Per Scholas is experimenting with further iterations across its course catalog to better understand the ideal depth of engagement for learners and how much to embed these work-based learning experiences into core curricula. Its goal is to connect 100 alums to a variety of experiential opportunities through the end of 2026.

Per Scholas is also experimenting with a model in which it acts more as a direct talent broker for employers, connecting its technologists to employers and providing services to nonprofits and small businesses using their own program graduates as service delivery. As a result, graduates gain valuable work skills, develop a broader portfolio, and ideally showcase themselves for future employment.

> *"The goal of these experiences for our learners is to better enable them to gain entry into roles where the entry-level 'rungs' have or are completely disappearing."*
>
> Tamara Johnson
> **COO, PerScholas**

WHAT IT'S LEARNED

While it's too early to see results, Per Scholas' efforts offer some early lessons learned for other organizations looking to deepen their engagement with program alums and support hiring. For one, having dedicated staff to work with a pool of 2,000+ program alums and engage with employers is critical to getting this initiative moving. Likewise, employer engagement is complex and sometimes slow-moving, so results from new partnerships may take years rather than months to materialize.

Looking Forward

The pace of AI evolution means education and training organizations cannot build static programs and expect them to remain relevant for years. Instead, institutions must create adaptive systems capable of continuous evolution in response to changing market needs and technologies. This requires establishing robust feedback loops that pull real-time information from employers, students, and labor market data to inform ongoing program adjustments. Building organizational capacity for rapid curriculum iteration allows institutions to respond to emerging skill demands.

Central to this adaptive capacity is developing faculty as continuous learners and innovators who embrace experimentation and view their own professional development as an ongoing journey. Micro-credentials and stackable pathways play an essential role in this adaptive ecosystem by reducing learner friction through shorter, more flexible credentialing options that allow people to upskill without committing to multi-year degree programs. These bite-sized credentials also increase employer adoption by demonstrating specific, job-relevant competencies, making it easier for hiring managers to understand exactly what a graduate can do. Perhaps most importantly, stackable credentials support lifelong learning beyond traditional degree pathways, creating on-ramps and off-ramps that allow workers to return for additional skills as their roles and industries evolve.

From Early Movers to Field-Wide Transformation

Key Principles for Success

- Start with purpose and local context before technology
- Preserve what makes learning effective while leveraging AI's strengths
- Partner with employers as co-designers rather than as customers
- Measure human development in addition to efficiency gains
- Build for continuous adaptation instead of one-time transformation

Additional Resources for Postsecondary AI Transformation From JFF's Center for Artificial Intelligence & the Future of Work:

- *Future Skills at Scale: How Community Colleges Can Lead on AI* [5]
- *Reimagining Postsecondary Success in the Age of AI* [6]
- *Skills and Talent Development in the Age of AI* [7]

Endnotes

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2 "How to Build an AI-Resilient Workforce: The AI-Enabled Professional Framework," Business-Higher Education Forum, accessed June 8, 2026, https://www.bhef.com/publications/how-to-build-an-ai-resilient-workforce-the-ai-enabled-professional-framework.

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7 Jobs for the Future, Skills Development in the Age of AI (Boston: JFF, February 2025), https://info.jff.org/hubfs/Google%20AI%20Toolkits/Skills%20Development%20in%20the%20Age%20of%20AI_VF.pdf.

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That Works
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