Jobs for the Future

Reimagining Postsecondary Success in the Age of AI

Central Valley Regional Spotlight

OCTOBER 2025

At a Glance

In the Central Valley, artificial intelligence (AI) presents a pivotal opportunity to reshape postsecondary education and workforce systems in ways that better serve adult learners, farmworker families, and communities long excluded from innovation efforts. With strong regional leadership and a growing ecosystem of community colleges and universities, the Valley is poised to explore how AI can improve advising, support career navigation, and expand access to quality jobs.

Yet realizing this potential will require tackling foundational challenges—including fragmented cross-sector collaboration, limited digital infrastructure in rural communities, inconsistent faculty and staff preparedness, and deep uncertainty among learners about how AI fits into their lives. By investing in fair and accessible adoption strategies now, the Central Valley can ensure AI catalyzes accessible economic mobility.

KEY TERMS

Adult Learners

This report focused on postsecondary learners ages 25-54 with some college education, but no postsecondary degree.

Quality Jobs

Quality jobs offer competitive pay, benefits, stability, opportunities for learning and career growth, and a safe, supportive, and engaging work environment. For businesses and communities, quality jobs lead to a stronger, more resilient workforce with the skills needed to drive economic success today and in the future.

For more information, see JFF's Quality Jobs Framework.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the significant contributions of the California Post-Secondary Artificial Intelligence (CAPSAI) Working Group and external stakeholders consulted throughout the initiative.

In particular, we would like to recognize the contributions of the following organizations, which have helped to shape the research insights through stakeholder interviews and participation in our collaborative sense-making sessions:

- Fresno City College
- Merced College
- Valley Community SBDC
- Central Valley Mother Lode Regional Consortium
- California State University, Stanislaus
- E. & J. Gallo Winery
- Proteus, Inc.
- Stanislaus 2030
- San Joaquin A+

ABOUT THE CAPSAI WORKING GROUP

The California Postsecondary Artificial Intelligence (CAPSAI) Working Group was formed in November 2024 as a collaborative effort bringing together leaders from higher education, workforce development, community-based organizations, and government, and to explore how artificial intelligence is reshaping the future of learning and work. Many of the organizations named in the Acknowledgements participated in the CAPSAI Working Group.

Contents

Executive Summary

01

Executive Summary

Artificial intelligence (AI) is accelerating a structural shift in California's economy by transforming how people learn, work, and access opportunity. For the Central Valley, this technological shift presents both urgent challenges and generational opportunities. The region's rural geography, its reliance on agriculture, and persistent gaps in broadband and educational attainment deepen the challenges facing students and institutions.[1] Broadband access remains limited in many rural areas, and both bachelor's degree attainment among adults and college-going rates for students lag behind the state average.[2] These barriers compound risks but also create a unique context for innovation in deploying AI to expand opportunity.

Although still in the early stages of adoption, postsecondary institutions and regional stakeholders in the Central Valley are beginning to explore how AI can improve learner experiences and workforce outcomes. These efforts include pilots focused on enhancing student advising, building AI literacy, and supporting accessible career navigation. At the same time, employers in sectors like AgTech and logistics are grappling with persistent labor shortages and turning to automation. California farmers report that even after raising wages they are unable to find enough workers, while warehouses accelerated adoption of automation technologies during the pandemic to manage throughput demands.[3] These dynamics raise the stakes for responsive workforce development in the region.[4]

This moment of disruption also reveals long-standing structural barriers. Colleges and training providers face limited guidance on integrating AI, staff need support to build the skills and confidence to use new tools, and many adult learners, particularly in farmworker and multilingual communities, don't benefit equitably from emerging technologies due to gaps in trust, access, or digital literacy. Without intentional planning, these dynamics risk widening existing opportunity gaps.

This report, developed by Jobs for the Future (JFF) and informed by interviews with over 25 Central Valley stakeholders, aims to spotlight emerging trends, challenges, and bright spots. Drawing on JFF's national AI Call to Action and a statewide survey of over 500 California learners and workers, it offers region-specific insights and practical recommendations to help postsecondary, workforce, and industry leaders move from exploration to action—ensuring AI serves as a catalyst for greater economic mobility across the Central Valley.

About This Document

02

About This Document

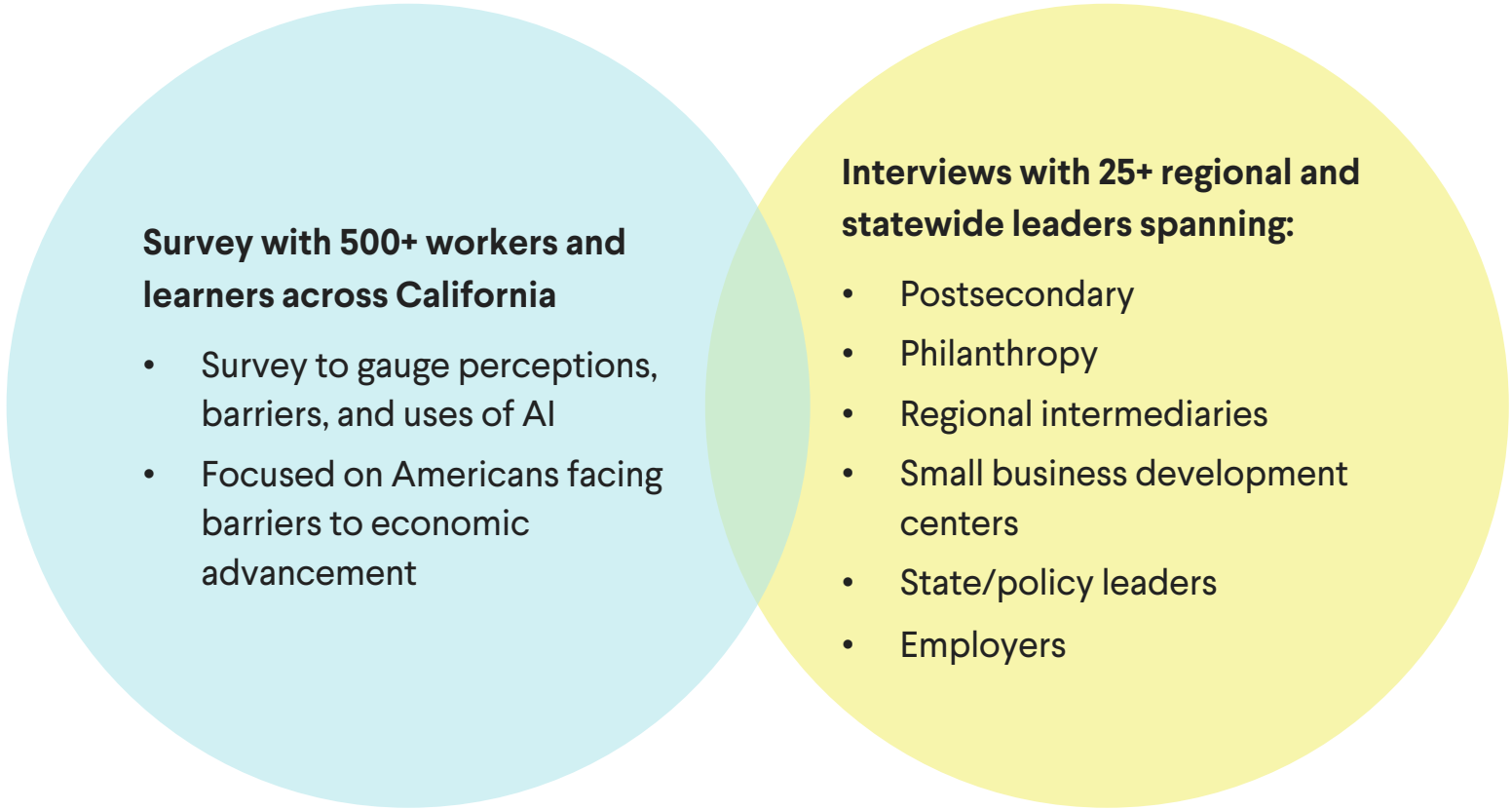
This spotlight report is part of a broader effort by Jobs for the Future (JFF) to explore how artificial intelligence (AI) influences education and workforce systems across California. Rather than focusing solely on technological advancement, this work is grounded in a central question: How can AI support postsecondary attainment and improve career navigation, ultimately connecting learners to quality jobs and accelerating economic mobility?

The Central Valley Regional Spotlight complements a similar report spotlighting AI opportunities and challenges in the Inland Empire and a set of postsecondary learner and worker profiles. Together, these deliverables aim to surface promising practices, illuminate gaps, and identify new opportunities for cross-sector collaboration. Each report centers the experiences of learners and workers while drawing from statewide and national trends that shape the AI landscape.

This report integrates desk research, survey data, and direct input from over two dozen stakeholders in the Central Valley, including leaders from higher education, workforce development, philanthropy, government, and industry. Rather than providing a definitive road map, the spotlight serves as a field-informed synthesis to support ongoing planning, experimentation, and action across the region.

Research Approach

The insights and recommendations presented in this report have been informed by two complementary data-gathering approaches at the regional, state, and national levels:



Jobs for the Future's national research through the Center for AI & the Future of Work has informed and augmented the research.

Central Valley Regional Insights

03

AI for Economic Opportunity: A Call to Action

JFF's AI for Economic Opportunity and Advancement call to action is a strategic framework designed to prepare people and systems for the transformative impact of artificial intelligence on the workforce and education. The Call to Action has been used to categorize thematic insights from stakeholder interviews and statewide survey findings. For more information, read the full call to action.

VISION

AI development and use should make us all better off, by advancing quality jobs, livelihoods, and human agency and potential.

ACTIONS

WORK & LIVELIHOODS

Use AI to create and grow

- New products, services, and businesses
- Employee-driven innovation

Design quality jobs to unlock uniquely human capabilities, with AI as a partner

- Understand human skills
- Prioritizing job quality

LEARNING & NAVIGATION

Empower learners and workers with the skills and supports they need to pursue economic opportunities in the age of AI

- AI literacy
- Future-ready skills
- Social capital
- Career navigation and coaching

TECHNOLOGY

Ensure all can shape and benefit from AI's potential to fuel opportunity

- Access
- Talent pathways
- Training data
- Responsible use

SYSTEMS

Prepare education and workforce systems for a transformed future

- Real-time labor market data
- Lifelong learning infrastructure
- Institutional readiness and technology enablement
- A new future of work

Sector Disruption and Workforce Misalignment

In the Central Valley, agriculture, food processing, and logistics comprise a significant portion of the regional economy, with over 25% of the workforce employed in these sectors.[1]

AI and automation are already beginning to reshape these industries by transforming **repetitive tasks such as sorting, packaging, scheduling, and data entry**. These changes are putting pressure on **entry-level roles**, which are increasingly being **redefined or eliminated**.

For example, **E. & J. Gallo Winery, the region's largest private employer, has adopted AI-powered systems** to automate tasks such as pallet stacking and inventory tracking in its distribution centers. This shift has **reduced the need for manual material handling roles**, while **increasing demand for technicians** who can manage robotics and data systems.[2]

Some local initiatives are beginning to explore how **AI can modernize agriculture and improve job quality**. For example, the Fresno-Merced Future of Food (F3) Innovation Initiative is working to develop AgTech solutions—including robotics, sensors, and AI tools—to improve crop management and reduce labor-intensive fieldwork.[3] Similarly, West Hills College Coalinga and Lemoore have launched programs focused on AI-integrated irrigation systems, precision agriculture, and drone-based monitoring, offering training to students from farmworker families and rural communities to prepare them for evolving roles in agricultural technology.[4] These pilots offer early models for how technology might **augment rather than replace farm labor**, especially if paired with strong workforce strategies.

As a result, there is growing demand for workers with technical competencies, digital fluency, and supervisory skills. **According to The AI-Ready Workforce report, while 98% of in-demand occupations assessed in the report require tasks that AI may influence, 78% also heavily value human-centered skills—like critical thinking, communication, and resilience—underscoring the need for well-rounded skill development.[5]** Stakeholders shared concerns about supporting students and job seekers in preparing for an evolving labor market. As one regional leader noted,

"We're giving students the wrong information—not because we want to, but because we don't yet know what the jobs of the future will be."[6]

At the same time, the broader economic context remains challenging: according to a 2024 Urban Institute report, f**ewer than half of all jobs in the Central Valley pay a wage high enough to afford a two-bedroom home** without spending more than 30% of one's income. These higher-wage jobs are often concentrated in management roles and typically require a four-year degree—qualifications that many residents do not hold in communities with low resource allocation and investment.[7]

Small Business Innovation

While large employers are navigating automation, small business owners and entrepreneurs across the region are turning to AI as a tool for growth and efficiency.

According to small business leaders, early adopters are already experimenting with tools like ChatGPT to write job descriptions, automate marketing content, analyze past sales data, and identify new customer segments—**dramatically reducing time and overhead**.

As Richard Mostert, Director of the Valley Community Small Business Development Center, explained, AI is helping small business owners "who are great at building things but not writing about them" to better tell their story and build customer pipelines. One entrepreneur used AI to analyze historical purchase patterns and adjust product strategy. Another used it to launch a new marketing campaign without the cost of hiring a consultant. Mostert called **AI a "barrier remover" for small businesses, offering technical capacity that would previously have been inaccessible.**

These tools are especially impactful in **rural areas**, where small business owners often operate without dedicated HR or marketing departments. As AI becomes more embedded in digital tools, small business advisors are exploring how to integrate responsible use training into their services and support business owners in applying AI **without losing trust, quality, or control.**[8]

Postsecondary AI Pilots and Evolving Skill Needs

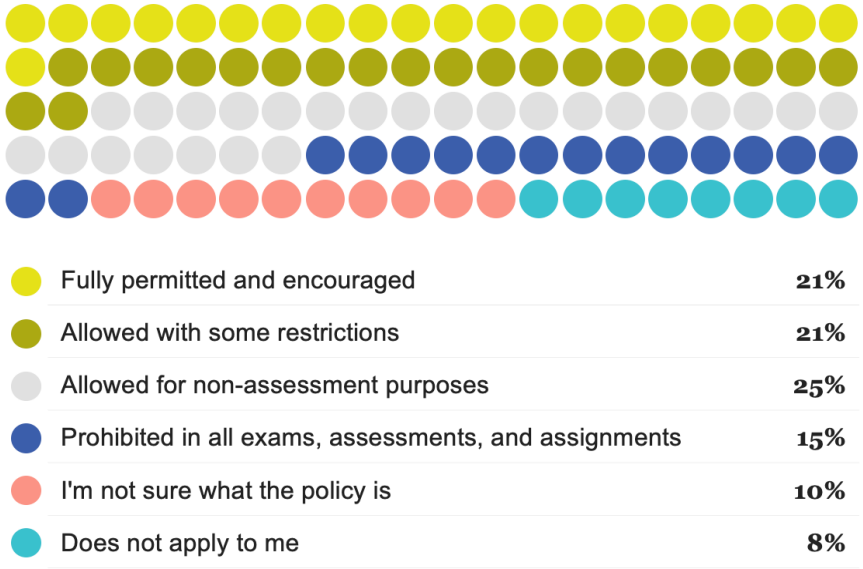
Postsecondary institutions in the Central Valley are beginning to pilot the use of generative AI tools to enhance student-facing career services. At CSU Stanislaus, the career services team is experimenting with ChatGPT to help students **compare their resumes to job descriptions, generate tailored cover letters, and build interview confidence.** These tools are integrated into workshops and one-on-one appointments, offering students a **digital starting point that enhances—not replaces—coaching.**

At Columbia College, career development staff are testing how AI platforms can help **multilingual** and **first-generation** students articulate their skills more effectively. Advisors have begun incorporating AI into mock interview prep and resume labs, helping learners craft professional materials when they might not have access to outside editing support. As one advisor at CSU Stanislaus explained,

"We're not replacing coaching. We're helping students understand how AI can enhance their confidence and communication."[9]

These pilots are still early-stage, but they offer promising models for how institutions can integrate AI tools into existing support systems to improve access and scale.

California survey findings revealed that only 21% of students reported that AI is fully permitted and encouraged



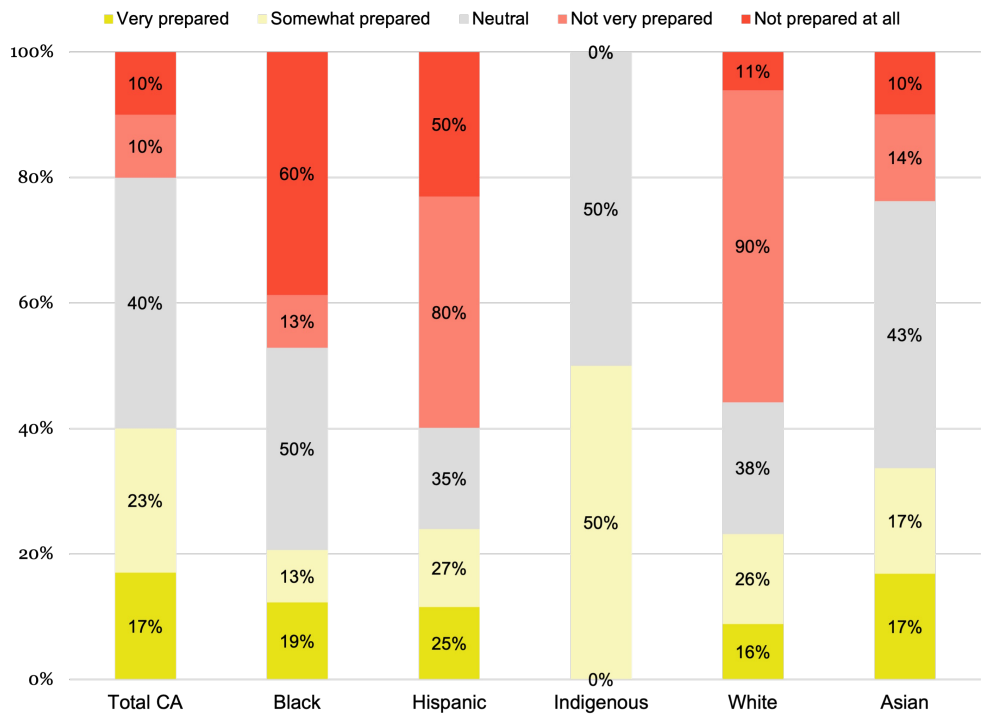
Gaps in Access and Confidence

Despite the early momentum, significant disparities remain in learners' confidence and access to AI tools. According to JFF's 2025 national survey, **only 39% of California learners reported feeling prepared to use AI at school or work.** Among women, this figure drops to 30%, and among adults aged 55 or older, it falls to just 16%.[10]

Regional stakeholders are responding with innovative efforts such as the San Joaquin A+ pilot, which uses AI storytelling tools to support high school students in exploring career pathways.[11] However, stakeholder interviews showed that many adult learners—particularly those from farmworker communities and those for whom English is not their primary language—continue to face barriers to adoption. **Without culturally responsive support, many of these learners are unlikely to access or benefit from AI-based solutions.**

In addition to access challenges, several advisors noted that few students know how to use AI effectively. Through career service pilots, staff observed that **learners needed to build foundational skills like crafting effective prompts, evaluating AI-generated responses, and applying outputs in real-world contexts.** These findings highlight the need to embed **AI literacy** and **digital discernment** into learner pathways.

California survey findings show that 39% of workers and learners surveyed felt prepared to use AI successfully in their jobs



Note: Small sample size for demographic breakdown; base size = 252

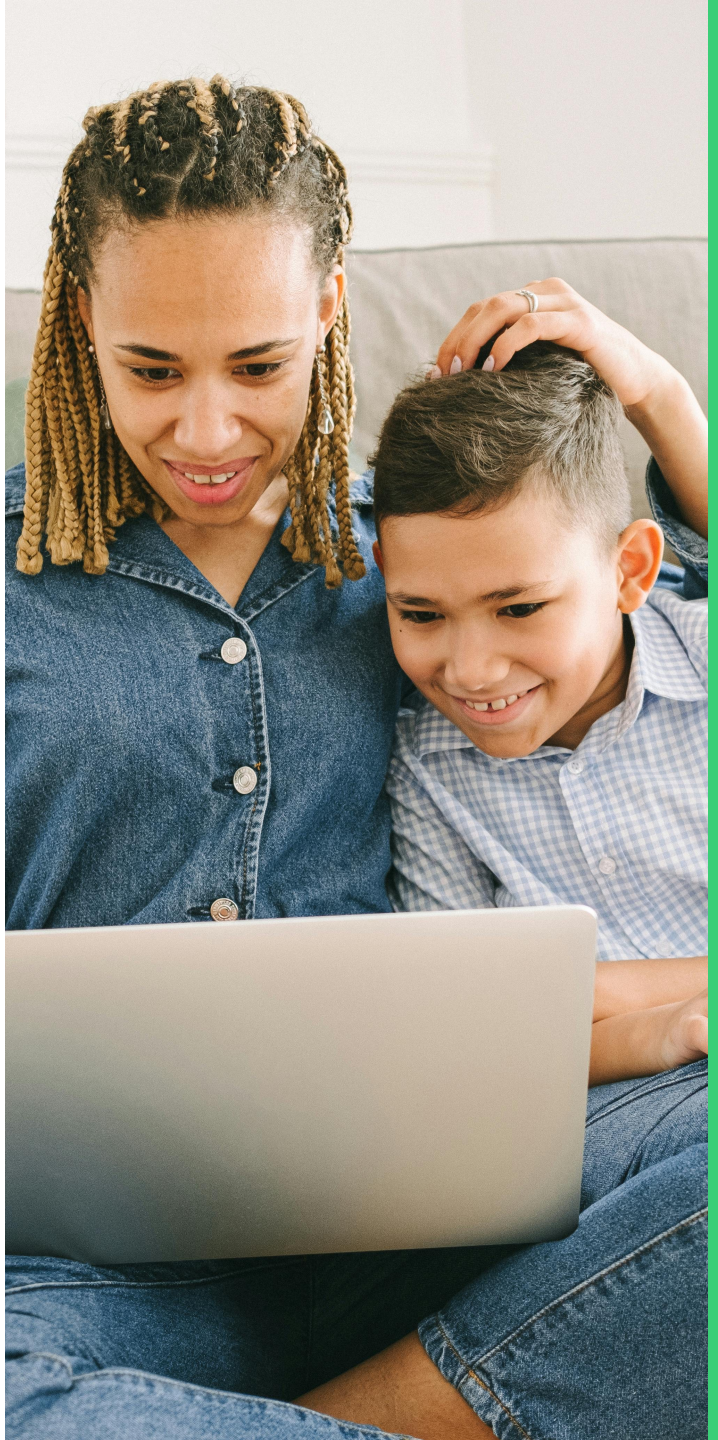
Infrastructure Challenges and Trust Gaps

Access to digital infrastructure remains a foundational barrier in many parts of the Central Valley. **Only 77% of households in Fresno County and 74% in Merced County have access to high-speed internet, compared to higher levels in more urban counties and 96% of Californians across the state according to data from 2023.**[12, 21]

These dynamics create both **logistical and trust-based** challenges when it comes to introducing new technologies like AI. In many rural and farmworker communities, parents rely on their children, who have greater digital literacy and confidence in online tools, to navigate online systems such as school enrollment and job applications.[13] Stakeholders from organizations like Proteus shared that some families are hesitant to engage with AI-powered platforms due to concerns about misinformation, job loss, or surveillance—especially when those tools are only available in English or feel impersonal. As one staff member explained,

"If it's not explained by someone they trust, or if it feels automated, many of our clients just won't use it."

Without culturally responsive design and community-based support, new technologies may be viewed as inaccessible or risky, rather than helpful.



Designing Tools for Access and Relevance

To ensure AI can benefit all learners and workers, stakeholders emphasized the importance of designing mobile-first, multilingual, and functional tools in low-connectivity environments. In the Central Valley, promising use cases include **real-time translation in advising sessions, document interpretation, resume generation,** and **voice-guided application support**.[14]

Examples from national models and peer communities across California offer insights into what inclusive design can look like. Tarjimly, an AI-enabled language access tool, connects English-language learners to live volunteer translators via mobile app and has been used by refugee resettlement and community-based organizations to bridge communication gaps.[15] TalkingPoints, a multilingual family engagement platform powered by AI, helps educators and service providers communicate with families via SMS and mobile app—providing real-time translation in over 100 languages without requiring high-speed internet or formal digital literacy.[16] These models demonstrate how AI can be adapted to meet the realities of rural, multilingual, and mobile-first communities in the Central Valley.

Ensuring relevance and usability for populations facing technological or language barriers is essential to closing participation gaps and unlocking AI's potential as a support mechanism.

Institutional Readiness and Emerging Practice

System-wide guidance around AI use in postsecondary institutions remains limited—and this gap is evident across Central Valley campuses. While several colleges, including Columbia College and CSU Stanislaus, have hosted faculty workshops and AI awareness sessions, most efforts remain siloed at the department or program level.[17]

Faculty adoption of AI tools varies widely, leading to conflicting expectations for students. In one interview, a college leader noted that students sometimes receive warnings against using ChatGPT in one class, while being encouraged to explore it in another—**causing confusion and undermining consistent learning outcomes.**[18] These inconsistencies are particularly difficult for first-generation and those whose primary language is not English, who may be unsure how or when AI use is acceptable.

Career services teams and campus innovation hubs are often at the forefront of responsible experimentation, but **without clear campus-wide policies, they face challenges in aligning their efforts with academic programs.** Leaders from the Central/Mother Lode Regional Consortium emphasized the urgent need for coordinated faculty development, policy guidance from system offices, and cross-campus collaboration to ensure AI is deployed accessibly and ethically.

BRIGHT SPOT

Columbia College Fosters Cross-Faculty Collaboration on AI

In spring 2025, Columbia College hosted a regional faculty convening focused on the implications of AI across disciplines. The event allowed instructors to exchange early use cases, raise questions about ethics and academic integrity, and begin co-creating shared guidance. This peer-driven effort demonstrates how institutions can take proactive steps toward alignment—even without top-down policy.

Cross-Sector Collaboration and Future Direction

Early signals of alignment are emerging across the Central Valley. In May 2025, Modesto Junior College hosted the region's inaugural AI Innovation Summit, convening college leaders, employers, and policymakers to explore responsible AI use and workforce alignment. The Central/Mother Lode Regional Consortium is helping colleges identify high-opportunity sectors such as AgTech, cybersecurity, and advanced manufacturing by providing labor market data, facilitating regional employer engagement, and supporting the development of AI-related curriculum through faculty convenings and shared resources.[19]

During JFF's Central Valley AI Sense-making Session in July 2025, a convening of regional postsecondary, workforce, and employer leaders, stakeholders emphasized the importance of **identifying what regional actors can shape proactively and what changes they must prepare to adapt to.**

As one participant explained:

"We can't control everything AI will change, but we can control how we prepare people to respond to it."[20]

Institutional Spotlights

04

CSU Stanislaus Career Services

Using AI to Expand Access to Career Readiness

At California State University, Stanislaus, the career services team has taken early steps to integrate AI into student advising by piloting generative tools like ChatGPT. Staff have used these tools to support students in refining resumes, generating tailored cover letters, preparing for interviews, and building confidence in articulating their skills and experiences. These AI tools are especially useful for students who are first-generation, multilingual, or balancing multiple commitments, such as work and caregiving responsibilities.

Rather than replacing personalized coaching, the team views AI as a "scaffold" that gives students a baseline for building and improving. One staff member described how students often bring an AI-generated resume draft into their 1:1 advising appointments, which becomes a starting point for deeper conversations around career goals and employer expectations. The team also encourages students to engage critically with the content—comparing AI output to their real-world experiences and making edits to reflect their own voice and identity.

Importantly, this effort is grounded in a broader institutional commitment to career readiness and innovation. The pilot is helping CSU Stanislaus explore how to scale personalized support services without overextending staff, especially given increasing student needs. While still in an exploratory phase, this work demonstrates the potential of AI to enhance—not diminish—student-centered advising, particularly when implemented with care, transparency, and attention to learner voice.

Photo by California State University Stanislaus

San Joaquin A+

Piloting AI to Expand Career Exploration for High School Students

San Joaquin A+ is a regional intermediary that works with school districts, postsecondary institutions, and employers across the San Joaquin Valley to improve educational and career outcomes. Recognizing that many high school students—especially those from low-income families or predominantly Black and Latine communities—lack access to consistent, meaningful career advising, the organization is piloting a new AI-powered tool for career exploration.

The pilot is modeled after the Future.me platform and is designed to simulate a "day in the life" of different careers through AI-generated storytelling, interactive prompts, and regional labor market data. By providing students with a personalized, narrative-driven experience, the platform aims to spark curiosity and build understanding of how various career paths align with their interests and local opportunities.

The tool will be piloted with local high-school students and will initially focus on careers in health care, education, and agriculture—sectors identified as high-opportunity by regional planning efforts. A key goal is to embed career exploration earlier in the K–12 journey and make it more accessible to students who may not otherwise receive individualized guidance.

As one leader explained, "We want students to feel like they can see themselves in these roles—not just read about them on a handout. AI can help us personalize that journey and offer practical entry points into local pathways." San Joaquin A+ is also working to ensure that the tool reflects the region's cultural and linguistic diversity, offering functionality in multiple languages and formats.

Action Steps and Recommendations

05

Recommendations Overview

The recommendations are organized by stakeholder type to provide targeted, actionable guidance aligned with the audiences for this report: primarily **postsecondary institutions**, with additional focus on **regional intermediaries** and **philanthropic organizations**. While the promise of AI to advance postsecondary attainment and economic mobility is widely recognized, realizing that potential requires differentiated strategies across these audiences.

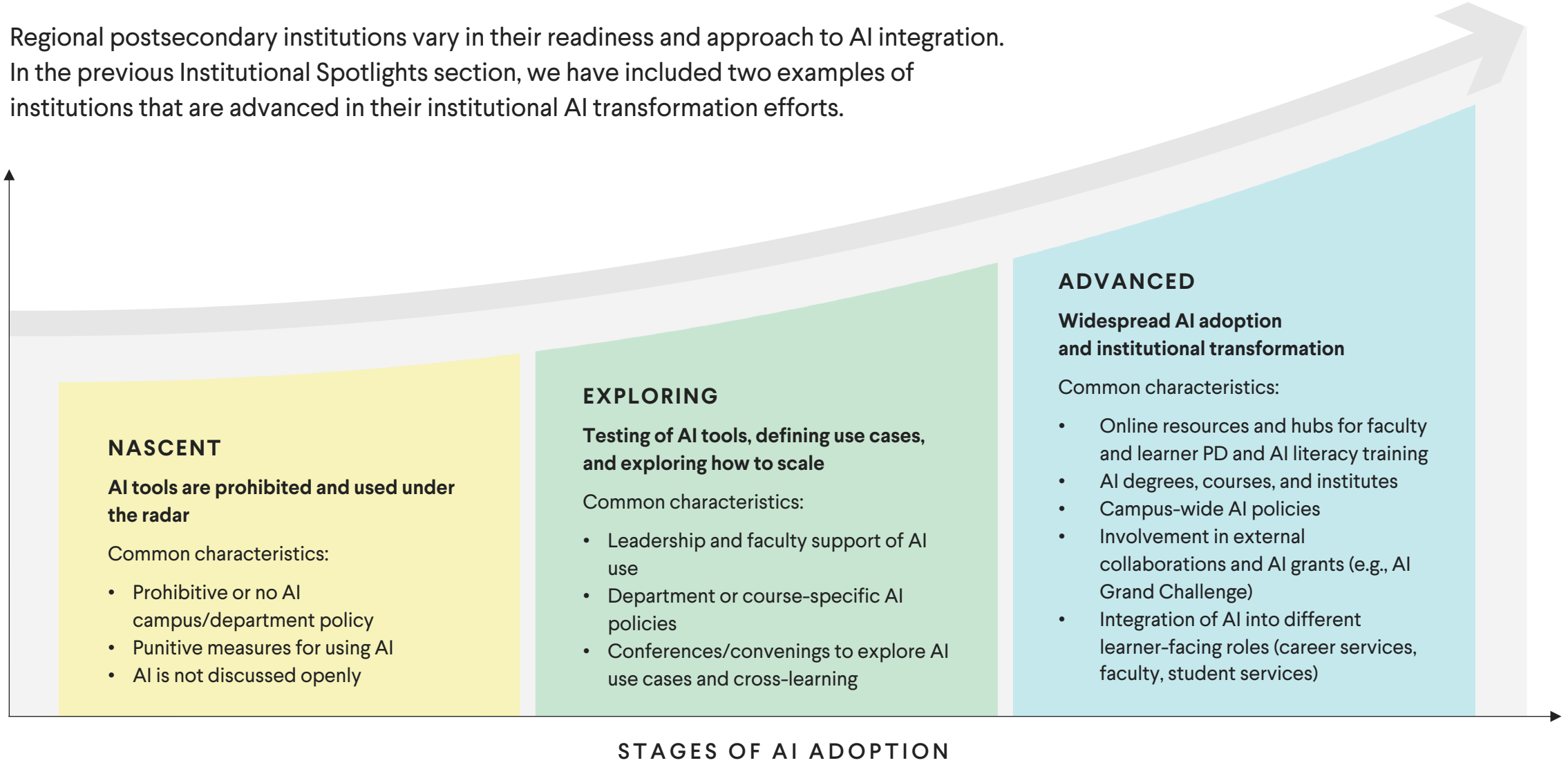
- **Postsecondary institutions** are positioned to implement programs and support learners directly.
- **Regional intermediaries** facilitate cross-sector collaboration and elevate community priorities.
- **Philanthropic organizations** catalyze innovation and fill critical funding gaps.
- **Statewide system leaders** set policy, incentives, and infrastructure at scale.

Organized into thematic goals to support economic mobility through AI adoption, the recommendations for postsecondary institutions aim to meet organizations where they are in their AI adoption journey, offering actionable pathways from early exploration to advanced integration.

These recommendations build on others for postsecondary and other stakeholders developed in JFF's AI-Ready Workforce transformation blueprint and Skills Development in the Age of AI training provider toolkit, and span all four pillars of JFF's AI Call to Action: Work and Livelihoods, Learning and Navigation, Technology, and Systems. They aim to strike a balance between **bold reimagining of the future of postsecondary institutions and actionable, immediate action steps.**

Stages of AI Adoption

Regional postsecondary institutions vary in their readiness and approach to AI integration. In the previous Institutional Spotlights section, we have included two examples of institutions that are advanced in their institutional AI transformation efforts.



Recommendations for **Postsecondary Institutions**

OBJECTIVE 1:

Build awareness and applied knowledge around AI to equip leaders, faculty, and staff with the understanding needed to make informed decisions and integrate AI into teaching, learning, and operations.

	RECOMMENDATION	STAGE*	RELEVANT ROLES
1	**Develop cross-disciplinary dialogue spaces, such as a Community of Practice (CoP) to share promising practices on responsible, accessible AI use.** Support faculty in embedding AI tools and concepts and basic AI literacy training into humanities, business, career technical education (CTE), and other fields. Host interdisciplinary trainings and create space for experimentation, especially for non-technical faculty. *Reference Resource: PlayLab AI, UC Berkeley School of Education, Chancellor's Office: Playlab Professional Learning Community*	NASCENT EXPLORING ADVANCED	Administrators Faculty
2	**Support learner adoption by addressing ethical and security concerns.** Offer and/or require training for learners that includes information on responsible data use of AI tools; invest in AI tools that have enhanced security features to keep data safe. *Reference Resource: Educause: AI Ethical Guidelines*	NASCENT EXPLORING ADVANCED	Administrators Student Support Services

***Stage** indicates the level of institutional AI adoption at which this recommendation is most relevant (see previous slide for definitions).*

	RECOMMENDATION	STAGE	RELEVANT ROLES
3	**Invest in faculty and staff AI literacy training, by providing hands-on, applied, and experiential learning opportunities for faculty and staff members.** For nascent postsecondary institutions: Consider hosting AI workshops and convenings to discuss key challenges and barriers to AI adoption, such as mistrust of AI. For exploring to advanced: Support experiential learning opportunities, such as hackathons, design labs, and AI "sandboxes" that allow faculty, staff, and students to experiment with emerging AI tools in real-world contexts. These hands-on experiences build institutional readiness and foster a culture of innovation grounded in equity and learner impact. *Reference Resource: Educause: AI Literacy in Teaching and Learning: A Durable Framework for Higher Education; Reference Resource: National Artificial Intelligence Advisory Committee (NAAIC) (Members Only)*	NASCENT EXPLORING ADVANCED	Administrators Faculty
4	**Integrate AI into teaching and learning practices, including curriculum redesign, across disciplines outside of STEM.** Support faculty in embedding AI tools into course design, curriculum development, instruction, and assessment to enhance student engagement, personalize learning, and build critical AI literacy. Prioritize hands-on use of AI in assignments and projects so learners gain real-world experience navigating and applying emerging technologies. *Reference Resource: American Association of Community Colleges (AACC): Artificial Intelligence Incubator Network; Reference Resource: National Artificial Intelligence Advisory Committee (NAAIC) (Members Only)*	NASCENT	Administrators Faculty

Recommendations for **Postsecondary Institutions**

OBJECTIVE 2:

Elevate learner voice and uplift success stories of early adopters on campus to highlight opportunities for innovation with AI that enhance educational experiences and advance institutional priorities.

	RECOMMENDATION	STAGE	RELEVANT ROLES
1	**Codesign AI supports with learners and provide opportunities for learners to provide direct input through advisory councils and focus groups.** Engage learners directly in designing and testing AI tools, programs, and literacy training to ensure the technology and programs are responsive to their needs. *Reference Resource: Office of Educational Technology: AI and the Future of Teaching and Learning*	NASCENT EXPLORING ADVANCED	Administrators Faculty
2	**Integrate career services innovations into academic programs in institutional contexts where career services departments are leading the way.** Several institutions in the Central Valley region are piloting AI-enabled tools within student services and career readiness programs. Institutions should create structured pathways for innovations to be shared across departments so that lessons from career services can shape curriculum, instructional strategies, and broader student success initiatives.	EXPLORING ADVANCED	Administrators (Lead) Student Support Services

	RECOMMENDATION	STAGE	RELEVANT ROLES
3	**Develop and implement clear, campuswide AI policies that guide responsible, ethical, and effective use of AI across teaching, learning, advising, and operations.** These policies should be co-created with input from faculty, students, staff, and industry partners to ensure alignment with institutional values, academic integrity, data privacy standards, and evolving workforce needs. *Reference Resources: ASCCC Academic Integrity Policies in an AI World; CSU AI Commons – Ethical and Responsible Use*	EXPLORING ADVANCED	Administrators
4	**Establish current learner and alumni advisory committees to provide a real-time perspective on employment opportunities and workplace skills expectations.** These committees can help institutions align programs with evolving industry demands and ensure students are equipped with the skills and experiences that employers value most, especially as AI reshapes job roles, required competencies, and the pace of change in the workplace.	NASCENT EXPLORING ADVANCED	Administrators

Recommendations for **Postsecondary Institutions**

OBJECTIVE 3:

Establish the technical infrastructure necessary to enable the responsible and scalable adoption of AI across campus operations, teaching, and learning.

	RECOMMENDATION	STAGE	RELEVANT ROLES
1	**Bridge the digital divide to expand access to AI opportunities so that every learner has access to high-quality AI tools.** Invest in broadband infrastructure, distribute laptops pre-loaded with AI software, and offer digital fluency programs to ensure all learners, particularly adult learners and rural residents, can benefit from AI-enabled tools. *Reference Resource: AI and Access to Education: Bridging the Digital Divide*	NASCENT	Administrators
2	**Ensure all faculty members, staff, and student support services have access to AI tools and training.** Invest in universal access to AI tools, training, and support for faculty to enable effective integration into teaching and learning. Equip educators with the resources and time needed to lead AI-driven innovations that improve student success and institutional capacity.	EXPLORING	Administrators Student Support Services Faculty
3	**Develop clear guidance and key decision-making to evaluate whether to adopt existing AI tools ("buy") or develop custom solutions in-house ("build") for use in student services and academic programs.** Include considerations such as cost, scalability, data privacy, integration with existing systems, and institutional capacity. *Reference Resource: Buy versus build: AI tool adoption in academic settings*	EXPLORING	Administrators

Recommendations for **Postsecondary Institutions**

OBJECTIVE 4:

Develop clear and actionable AI policies that provide guidance on the ethical, effective, and responsible use of AI tools across campus.

	RECOMMENDATION	STAGE	RELEVANT ROLES
1	**Create an institutional scan to map current AI uses, applications, and potential future opportunities across campus.** Begin by conducting a comprehensive scan of AI use across the institution to understand where and how it is being applied. Engage departments, faculty, staff, and students to identify existing tools, pilots, and informal uses. Document use cases by function (e.g., instruction, advising, career services, operations) and assess both risks and opportunities. *Reference Resource:* *Developing Institutional AI Policies and Practices: A Framework*	NASCENT EXPLORING	Administrators
2	**Develop and implement clear, campuswide AI policies that guide responsible, ethical, and effective use of AI across teaching, learning, advising, and operations.** These policies should be co-created with input from faculty, students, staff, and industry partners to ensure alignment with institutional values, academic integrity, data privacy standards, and evolving workforce needs. *Reference Resource:* *ASCCC: Academic Integrity Policies in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*	NASCENT EXPLORING ADVANCED	Administrators
3	**Establish an institutional AI task force composed of faculty, staff, administrators, and student representatives to make critical decisions and provide guidance on appropriate uses on campus.** This task force will guide the strategic integration of AI across campus operations and learning, ensure alignment with responsible and accessible deployment of AI tools, and help the institution remain responsive to emerging workforce demands. *Reference Resource:* *UC Riverside: Generative AI at UCR*	EXPLORING ADVANCED	Administrators (Lead) *Engage* Faculty and Staff

Recommendations for **Postsecondary Institutions**

OBJECTIVE 5:

Build institutional agility to anticipate and respond effectively to the rapid changes AI brings to education and the job landscape.

	RECOMMENDATION	STAGE	RELEVANT ROLES
1	**Conduct a comprehensive review of current degree programs to assess alignment with emerging labor market needs in the age of AI.** In partnership with Centers of Excellence and using up-to-date labor market information (LMI), identify programs that are becoming less relevant due to AI-driven industry shifts and consider phasing them out. Use these insights to project future workforce demands and inform the development or expansion of programs that prepare learners for high-growth, AI-resilient careers.	EXPLORING ADVANCED	Administrators
2	**Develop and institutionalize streamlined curriculum approval processes that allow for rapid updates in response to evolving industry needs driven by AI.** This includes creating cross-functional curriculum innovation teams, establishing industry advisory boards with real-time labor market input, and implementing rolling review cycles that enable programs to pilot and scale AI-relevant content quickly.	ADVANCED	Administrators

	RECOMMENDATION	STAGE	RELEVANT ROLES
3	**Address postsecondary affordability and re-entry barriers faced by adult learners by implementing AI tools that can facilitate enrollment barriers, reduce the time-to-degree, and offer flexible, personalized learning paths.** To support the redesign of current degree pathways, leverage AI tools to help learners navigate faster, more efficient routes through their education by analyzing prior learning, career goals, and real-time performance to suggest tailored course selections and interventions. This can shorten the time (and cost) students spend completing degrees or credentials. *Reference Resources: Department of Education: Artificial Intelligence (AI) Guidance*	ADVANCED	Administrators System Leads
4	**Leverage employer partnerships to align education with AI-driven workforce needs.** Augment existing employer advisory boards and partnerships to prioritize employer representatives with AI expertise, increasing the frequency of connections and experimenting with innovative work-based learning (WBL) models. *Reference Resource: Guide to Essential AI Competencies*	EXPLORING ADVANCED	Administrators

Recommendations for Regional Intermediaries

1 Lead the development of a regional AI strategy designed to drive economic growth and opportunity for all.

The AI strategy should include components such as recommendations for the development of AI skills from K-12 into lifelong learning, anticipating and building talent for future in-demand roles, supporting employer use of AI for quality jobs, and seeking opportunities to support populations to use AI in pursuit of quality jobs and economic opportunity. Several of the regional intermediaries are well-positioned to serve as the convener to bring together K–12, postsecondary, employers, workforce boards, and philanthropy around a shared AI road map.

2 Translate employer needs into responsive and accessible AI training pathways.

Collaborate with employers to identify emerging AI-related competencies and ensure that training providers, especially community colleges and workforce partners, can adapt quickly to integrate future-ready competencies into curriculum and learning experiences. This includes integrating digital fluency, uniquely human skills, and the ability to collaborate with AI tools into new and existing programs.

3 Continue to spotlight and scale accessible AI innovations.

Building on the examples included in this document, share effective models around how AI can accelerate economic mobility and postsecondary attainment. Use storytelling, convenings, and regional communications platforms to spread practices that advance both innovation and inclusion.

4 Bridge grassroots and institutional perspectives in AI program design.

Center the lived experiences of postsecondary learners by hosting regular listening sessions, establishing learner advisory boards, or funding participatory design efforts. These insights should directly shape AI-related interventions and help build trust between communities and institutions.

Recommendations for Philanthropy

1 Fund regional AI literacy and trust-building efforts.

Invest in community-based AI literacy programs that go beyond technical skills to include emotional and cultural trust-building, particularly for the populations identified by our focus groups: adult students, English language learners, and students who are undocumented or face other barriers to advancement.

2 Support infrastructure for responsible experimentation.

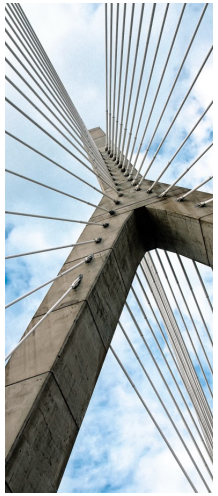
Provide flexible, multi-year grants for colleges and intermediaries to pilot AI-integrated programs in learning, advising, and workforce development. Prioritize initiatives that include safeguards around ethics, privacy, and transparency. Include in-kind supports where appropriate, such as access to technical fellows or advising.

3 Build local AI capacity in rural and under-resourced communities.

Target grantmaking to fill geographic gaps in AI access—such as areas with weak broadband, limited faculty professional development opportunities, or no AI-aligned workforce training. Partner with local libraries, adult schools, and community colleges to extend reach.

4 Catalyze cross-sector collaboration across the region to support responsible and ethical AI implementation.

Building on existing statewide funder AI collaboratives, align efforts across K–12, postsecondary, workforce, and economic development in service of helping local employers identify which jobs will be in demand and how the postsecondary ecosystem can train workers to meet those needs. Use philanthropy's convening power to reduce duplication and accelerate shared learning.



Acknowledgements

This work was made possible with support from the College Futures Foundation: collegefutures.org

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: jff.org

Endnotes

06

Endnotes

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