Unlocking AI's Full Potential:

How Governments Can Build an AI-Ready Workforce
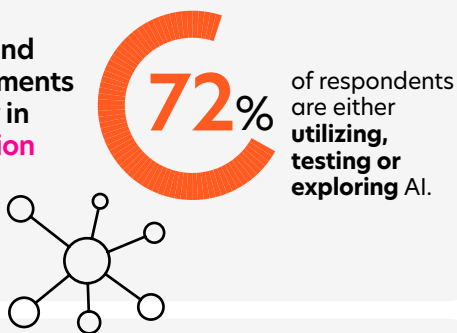
INTRODUCTION

State and local governments are gradually integrating artificial intelligence into various parts of their operations, from permitting and case management to public safety and infrastructure maintenance. But as governments become more AI-enabled, they also need to ensure their workforce is AI-ready.

A recent Center for Digital Government (CDG) survey[1] found that most states and localities know they need to upskill their workforce and increase AI literacy — but few have plans to provide continuing AI education for non-IT employees.
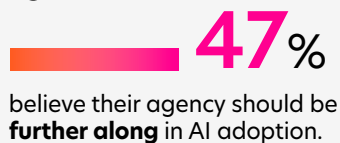
That's a troublesome disconnect, especially given that state and local officials in the survey also cited a lack of AI skills as the No. 1 barrier to implementing AI.

The Current State of AI in Government

Most state and local governments are currently in the exploration phase of AI.

72% of respondents are either **utilizing, testing or exploring** AI.

Governments say they need the most training in:

Managing AI risks — **40%**

Developing workforce skillsets — **38%**

Developing AI policies and standards — **38%**

But many employees are frustrated by the slow pace.

47% believe their agency should be **further along** in AI adoption.

46% of respondents said that **more than half** of their workforce needs AI upskilling and retraining.

While 23% said their agency plans to start providing AI education soon...

51% said they have **no plans** for AI-related continuing education.

43% said their organization **has not dedicated time or resources** to assessing employees' AI skills and knowledge.
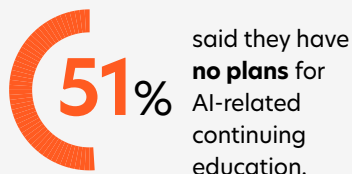
Developing a Plan for Upskilling on AI

Before governments develop training programs, they must conduct a skills assessment. Organizations often struggle to accurately assess their team skills and align skills to specific roles, which can lead to ineffective training.

Pluralsight, a leading training and development company, has created two tools to address these challenges:

▶ Skill IQ allows organizations to quickly understand and objectively measure their individual and team competencies, helping them pinpoint skills gaps and areas of strength within their organization.

▶ Role IQ, PluralSight's role alignment tool, lets organizations map particular roles to specific upskilling programs and initiatives.

As you put together a plan for deploying AI, don't just have leadership mandate the strategy. Engage technical and non-IT staff at all levels of your organization to identify relevant AI use cases.

"For real transformation to happen, it's going to happen with those who are closest to the work, the people at the operational level who are going to explore and interpret the technology according to their own specific needs," says Tony Holmes, practice lead for solutions architects for the public sector at Pluralsight.[2]

Building an AI-Ready Workforce

AI can be a great enabler for government workforces, but there are still persistent concerns and misconceptions among employees that the technology will replace their jobs.

This is why state and local governments must invest in their employees and empower them with new skills — particularly those employees in non-technical roles.

"AI literacy for non-technical roles is going to be critical to ensuring effective integration into governments' day-to-day operations," Holmes says. "Nobody has a monopoly on great ideas. Our next generation of successful intelligence experts may come from parts of your organization that have absolutely nothing to do with tech."

Define success. Align all AI use cases with clear and measurable outcomes, especially when launching AI pilot projects.

Start small. Develop an AI sandbox for your workforce to learn about the technology in a safe environment with clear guidance about how to manage AI risks. Use pilot projects to build confidence and secure buy-in from leadership. Scale out from there.

Train on ethical AI. AI governance training — on issues including data privacy, bias and potential hallucinations — must be a core part of your workforce upskilling and development strategy.

Best practices for AI skills development

Embrace microlearning. Short, focused training lessons are ideal ways to address specific skills gaps for both IT staff and non-technical employees.

Lean on your partners. Work with strategic partners and professional organizations to assess employee readiness, identify skills gaps and target your training efforts. These partners can also provide analytics to help you continuously improve your upskilling programs.

Don't stop learning. Continuously refine your AI governance policies. You'll also need to continuously educate your workforce on current trends and emerging AI risks.

1. Center for Digital Government survey of 184 state and local leaders conducted in September and October 2024.
2. https://webinars.govtech.com/Is-Your-Workforce-Ready-for-AI%3F-What-the-Latest-Research-Says-for-State-and-local-Governments-142685.html

This piece was written and produced by the Government Technology Content Studio, with information and input from Pluralsight.

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