THE AI COWBOYS FOUNDATION

RESEARCH BRIEF 03 · WORKFORCE

Closing the AI Skills Gap in the Workforce

Building AI literacy for veterans, students, and communities left out of the technology story.



Closing the AI Skills Gap in the Workforce



The divide that matters is not aptitude. It is access to training and a chance to practice.

A brief on building AI literacy across teams, with a focus on veterans, students, and communities that are too often left out of the technology story.

The gap is about access, not aptitude

As AI reshapes work, the divide that matters is not who is smart enough to use these tools. It is who gets access to clear training and a real chance to practice. When access is narrow, opportunity narrows with it. When access is wide, whole communities move forward together.

The shift is already here. Stanford University's 2025 AI Index found that the share of organizations using AI jumped to 78 percent in 2024, and that generative AI use in business functions more than doubled in a single year. AI skills are becoming a baseline expectation across roles, not a bonus for technical staff.

71%

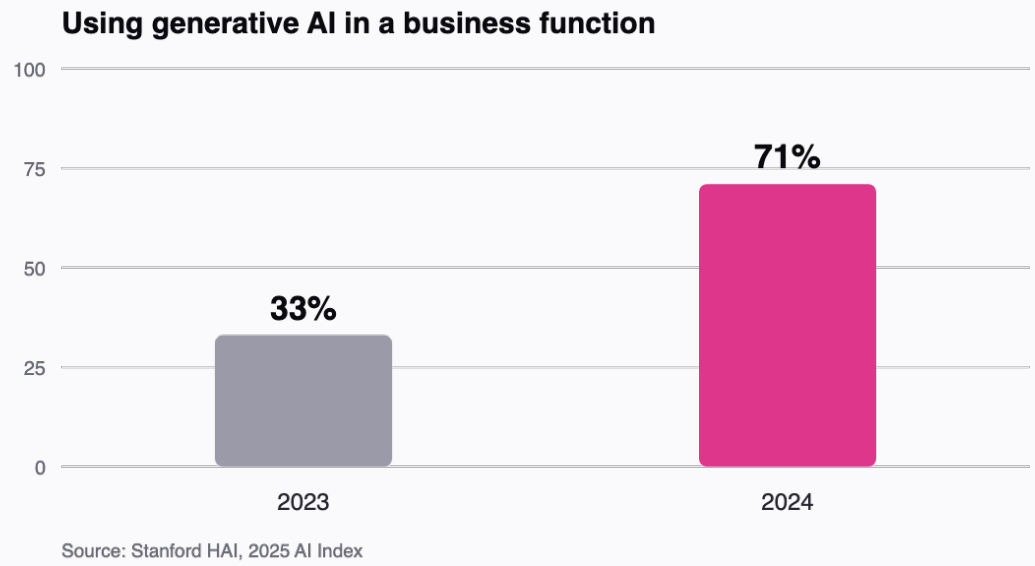
of organizations use generative AI in a function, up from 33%

5

AI training programs Texas certifies for its workforce

4

skills define AI literacy, none require coding



Demand for AI skills is accelerating. Generative AI use in business functions more than doubled in a year. Workers with basic AI literacy have a real advantage. Source: Stanford HAI, 2025 AI Index.

REAL WORLD: TEXAS MADE AI LITERACY MANDATORY

Texas offers the clearest signal yet that AI literacy is workforce infrastructure. Under Government Code 2054.5191, state and local government employees who work with AI systems must complete a certified AI awareness training program every year. The Texas Department of Information Resources certifies at least five training programs so agencies of every size have options.

The lesson: the largest employer group in Texas, its government workforce, now treats AI literacy the way it treats cybersecurity awareness, as required annual training. Private employers and community programs should read that as a preview of where every workforce is headed.

What AI literacy actually means

AI literacy is not coding. It is a practical set of skills any worker can build:

- Knowing what these tools do well and where they fail
- Writing clear instructions and checking the results
- Protecting privacy and handling data safely

- Keeping judgment and responsibility with people

A worker who can do these four things can put AI to work in almost any role.

Who we focus on, and why

Veterans bring discipline, mission focus, and hard won experience that transfers directly into technology roles, and the U.S. Department of Labor's Veterans Employment and Training Service maintains employment programs that help bridge the transition. Students need a real on ramp before they enter the workforce. Workers in mid career need a path to reskill without starting over. Reaching these groups is both the right thing to do and the fastest way to widen the talent pool.

What works

- Short, plain English training tied to real tasks people already do
- Hands on practice with approved tools, not lectures alone
- Mentorship that continues after the first course
- Clear pathways from a first skill to a first role

How organizations can help

1. **Train every team, not just technical staff**
   AI literacy belongs in every department. The four core skills do not require coding, so anyone can build them.

2. **Give people time and safe tools to practice**
   Skills form through hands on practice with approved tools, not lectures alone. Protect a little time for it.

3. **Recognize and reward the workers who build these skills**
   Make AI literacy something people are proud to add, and visibly value the ones who lead.

4 **Partner with nonprofits and schools**

Organizations like this Foundation already reach veterans, students, and underserved learners with free training. Meet people where they are.

A note on measurement

Count outcomes, not attendance. Track how many learners move into new roles, take on new responsibilities, or report real time savings in their work. Those are the numbers that show a program is working.

Sources and further reading

- 2025 AI Index Report, Economy chapter, Stanford Institute for Human Centered AI
- Veterans Employment and Training Service, U.S. Department of Labor
- Statewide AI awareness training, Texas Department of Information Resources
- NIST AI Risk Management Framework, National Institute of Standards and Technology



PUT THIS TO WORK

Want help applying this in your organization?

The AI Cowboys Foundation delivers free briefings, workshops, and readiness assessments for business, government, classrooms, and veteran programs. Tell us what you are working on and we will point you to the right next step.

Contact us

contact_us@theaicowboys.com · theaicowboysfoundation.org/contact

The AI Cowboys Foundation is a Texas nonprofit organization based in San Antonio, Texas. This document is provided free for education. Adapt it to your organization and have counsel review policies before you rely on them. Veteran founded, Texas built.