JVS
TOGETHER WE WORK

BUILDING AI READINESS

FOR WORKFORCE ORGANIZATIONS

Insights from the First Economic Mobility AI Accelerator

JUNE 2026

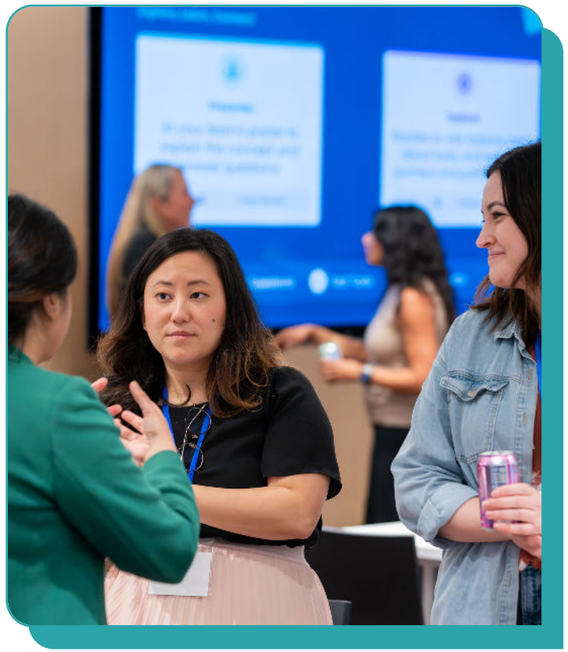
ABOUT THE ACCELERATOR

THE ECONOMIC MOBILITY AI ACCELERATOR was launched by **Jewish Vocational Service (JVS Bay Area), Leading Educators, Playlab,** and **Arathi Ravier Consulting** to help workforce organizations build practical AI fluency and implementation capacity.

California sits at the center of global AI innovation while facing profound workforce inequities and labor market disruption. Workforce organizations will play a critical role in determining whether AI expands opportunity or deepens existing divides.

Over a three-month cohort from **January through March 2026,** participating California-based nonprofits explored labor market trends related to AI, identified operational challenges within their organizations, and developed AI-enabled tools and workflows designed to strengthen service delivery and organizational effectiveness.

The Accelerator was made possible through support from Crankstart, Tipping Point Community, Salesforce, Google, and Anthropic, whose investments helped workforce organizations explore responsible AI applications grounded in economic mobility and worker outcomes.



WHY THIS ACCELERATOR WAS NEEDED

A CAREER COACH helping a participant rewrite a resume for jobs increasingly filtered through AI systems. A workforce organization struggling to keep up with rising caseloads as employers rapidly update the skills they expect from workers. A jobseeker navigating an unfamiliar labor market where the rules of hiring and work are shifting in real time.

Across the workforce development field, AI is already reshaping how people access opportunity, how organizations deliver support, and how economic mobility systems operate.

Workforce organizations are being asked to help workers adapt to rapidly changing employer expectations while managing growing operational pressure and limited capacity for AI implementation.

Over the January-March 2026 cohort, the Accelerator convened 18 California-based organizations to explore how AI could strengthen service delivery and improve access to support and opportunity.

The Accelerator was more than a training initiative: it functioned as a practitioner-led innovation lab where organizations could explore, prototype, and operationalize AI tools in real time.

THE WORKFORCE CHALLENGES AI IS CREATING

FOR MANY WORKERS, this shift is deeply destabilizing. Pathways into good jobs are becoming less clear, skill requirements are evolving faster than training systems can keep up, and workers are being asked to adapt in real time without adequate support.

Economic mobility organizations are at the center of this transition. Workforce organizations are navigating:

- **Rapidly shifting employer demand**
- **Limited resources to invest in innovation**
- **Increased pressure to deliver outcomes**
- **Little shared infrastructure to understand or respond to AI's impact**

Organizations are being asked to deliver stronger outcomes with limited resources while adapting to rapidly changing labor market realities. AI presents both a challenge and an opportunity: reshaping workforce demand while offering tools to strengthen service delivery.

Despite AI's potential to transform operations and service delivery, nonprofit organizations continue to lag behind the private sector in adoption. According to a recent Chronicle of Philanthropy survey, 88% of nonprofit respondents reported that budget constraints were preventing their organizations from adopting new technologies. While 77% expected to use AI within three to five years, only 46% reported currently using AI.

Many organizations entered the Accelerator feeling the labor market was changing faster than existing systems were prepared for. This highlighted a growing gap between the pace of technological change and the capacity of workforce organizations to respond. Many participants entered the program looking not just for AI skills, but for practical frameworks to help their organizations adapt.

Staff were already seeing AI reshape hiring processes, employer expectations, and workplace practices, while workers increasingly asked questions organizations did not yet feel fully equipped to answer.

The Economic Mobility AI Accelerator was created in response to that need.

THE ACCELERATOR MODEL

WE LAUNCHED the Accelerator to help organizations build AI fluency, experiment with emerging technologies in a practical and mission-aligned way, and collectively problem solve around the challenges and opportunities AI presents for the field.

Leading Educators designed and facilitated the Economic Mobility AI Accelerator in partnership with JVS and Arathi Ravier Consulting, applying its AI Accelerator model to the workforce development context and building on work with nonprofit organizations across sectors. The model was informed by lessons from a prior AI accelerator for education-focused nonprofits, which demonstrated substantial gains in participant confidence and practical AI application.

We recognized that many organizations were confronting similar operational and workforce challenges, but were often tackling them in isolation.

Rather than waiting for the field to adapt incrementally, we created a shared learning environment where organizations could explore solutions together, test new approaches, and learn from one another in real time.

The Accelerator brought together practitioners, technologists, workforce leaders, researchers, and funders to explore practical applications of AI and accelerate the field's ability to respond to workforce transformation.

The goal was to help organizations engage critically and practically with a rapidly changing labor market.

> **Economic mobility organizations are being asked to do more with fewer resources while simultaneously helping workers navigate profound labor market change. AI has the potential to strengthen how organizations deliver support, but only if the sector has access to the tools, knowledge, and capacity needed to use it responsibly.**
>
> **— Lisa Countryman-Quiroz, CEO, JVS Bay Area**

A PRACTITIONER-LED MODEL FOR ADAPTATION

OVER A THREE-MONTH COHORT running from January through March 2026, the Accelerator brought together 18 California-based economic mobility organizations—**JVS Bay Area, Merit America, Opportunity Junction, Canal Alliance, JVS SoCal, JobTrain, Center for Employment Opportunities, Braven, First Place for Youth, Rivet School, Building Skills Partnership, La Cocina, EDvance, Growth Sector, Upwardly Global, Per Scholas, Step into a Job!, and Opportunity@Work**—to build the skills, tools, and shared understanding needed to operate in an AI-driven economy.

Together, these organizations serve tens of thousands of workers annually across California through workforce training, career navigation, youth development, immigrant inclusion, reentry services, and digital skills programs.

With support from **Leading Educators** and **Playlab,** participants moved through a structured process of:

- Understanding how AI is reshaping the labor market
- Identifying high-impact use cases within their organizations
- Building and testing AI tools aligned to real workflows
- Learning alongside peers facing similar challenges

In addition to cohort-based learning, each participating organization worked with a dedicated coach throughout the Accelerator. Coaches helped teams narrow their problem, identify a high-impact use case, build and refine their AI tool, and develop plans for testing and implementation.

The Accelerator also included a Community of Practice, designed by Arathi Ravier Consulting, featuring researchers, technologists, and practitioners working at the forefront of AI and economic mobility.

Guest speakers included Rachel Korberg (Intermediary Ed), Matt Ziegler (GitLab Foundation), Annette Bernhardt (UC Berkeley Labor Center), Seema N. Patel (UC Law), Justin Steele (Kindora), Steven Lee (SkillUp Coalition), and leaders from Anthropic including Shad Ahmed and Saffron Huang.

These sessions grounded the cohort in the **practical realities and broader implications of AI,** ensuring tool development was informed by labor market trends, employer dynamics, and emerging risks related to job quality and access.

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS BUILT

ACROSS THE COHORT, organizations developed AI-powered tools designed to address the most pressing challenges in their work.

These tools clustered into four primary categories:

- **Administrative efficiency:** reducing time spent on case notes, reporting, and intake
- **Participant support:** augmenting coaching, job search assistance, and communication
- **Decision-making:** improving insights into participant needs and program performance
- **Internal systems:** strengthening data workflows and staff guidance

Case Study

PER SCHOLAS — AIGENT: AI TALENT ADVOCATE

Per Scholas developed “AiGent,” an AI-powered career guidance assistant designed to help learners navigate the transition into technology careers at scale. Built as a structured “AI Talent Advocate” rather than a general chatbot, AiGent guides users through career exploration, professional branding, LinkedIn development, and personalized job search strategy.

In 2026, AiGent will be integrated into the broader Azari AI ecosystem to create a unified, AI-native experience that supports the technologist from the first day of training through career launch. During the Economic Mobility AI Accelerator, Per Scholas piloted the tool internally with career coaches and instructors, who consistently reported that the platform could reduce administrative coaching tasks by up to 50% while improving personalization and learner confidence. The organization is now preparing for a 500-learner pilot to evaluate real-world impact on job attainment outcomes.

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS BUILT

Case Study

FIRST PLACE FOR YOUTH — NOTE NINJA: REDUCING ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN TO EXPAND CLIENT SUPPORT

First Place for Youth piloted “Note Ninja,” an AI-supported case note tool designed to reduce administrative burden for frontline staff serving transition-age foster youth. The organization recognized that direct service staff were spending substantial time on documentation requirements, contributing to burnout and reducing time available for client engagement.

During the pilot, staff across multiple roles and levels of digital fluency tested the tool over several weeks. Results were striking: 100% of participants reported reduced time spent writing notes, improved note quality, and lower stress and burnout, while 75% reported increased time with clients and reduced after-hours work.

The pilot demonstrated how AI-enabled workflow tools can meaningfully improve staff capacity and service delivery in high-touch social service environments.

While the specific tools varied, organizations began integrating AI into real operational workflows and day-to-day service delivery. The process of building, testing ideas, encountering constraints, and iterating in real time was itself a critical learning mechanism.

Participants repeatedly emphasized that working on real organizational challenges made the learning more relevant and durable.

Key Themes FROM THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE complemented the build sessions by creating space to engage with broader shifts shaping the future of work.

Several themes emerged consistently across sessions:

AI is already reshaping frontline work.

Algorithmic systems ranging from scheduling software to automated hiring filters are actively shaping worker experience across sectors today, often with limited transparency into how decisions are made.

AI is changing job quality, not just job loss.

Discussions highlighted how AI can intensify work, reduce worker autonomy, and increase surveillance—even where employment levels remain stable.

AI cannot solve structural workforce challenges alone.

Longstanding challenges in workforce systems—fragmented pathways, limited mobility, and uneven outcomes—persist, requiring intentional design alongside technological innovation.

AI is reshaping workforce skills.

As AI systems take on more tasks, human roles are increasingly focused on supervision, verification, and decision-making—raising new challenges around skill development and retention.

Building AI matters more than studying it.

Participants were encouraged to move beyond observation and into creation, developing tools tailored to their own workflows and populations.

No single organization can drive system-level change alone.

Cross-organizational collaboration was seen as a prerequisite for scale, despite the fact that traditional funding models do not always incentivize or support this type of partnership.

The discussions reinforced that AI adoption is not solely a technology challenge. Organizations must also grapple with questions of governance, job quality, equity, and organizational change if they hope to realize AI’s potential responsibly.

WHAT CHANGED ACROSS THE COHORT

FROM AI AWARENESS TO AI IMPLEMENTATION

Participants entered the Accelerator with strong curiosity about AI, but limited confidence in how to apply it meaningfully within their organizations.

Many teams were still experimenting with tools in an ad hoc way and lacked the internal capacity needed to move from interest to execution.

By the end of the program, participants demonstrated substantial growth across every measured dimension of AI readiness.

The strongest gains were in practical application and organizational integration, reflecting a shift not just in individual skill, but in how organizations are embedding AI into their workflows and systems.

This suggests that hands-on experimentation may be more effective than awareness-building alone. While many participants entered the Accelerator with a general understanding of AI, the greatest growth occurred when they applied it to real organizational challenges.

This shift extended beyond technical knowledge. Participants reported increased confidence in leading organizational conversations about AI, evaluating ethical considerations and implementation risks, and identifying mission-aligned use cases rather than focusing on technology adoption alone.

KEY OUTCOMES INCLUDED:

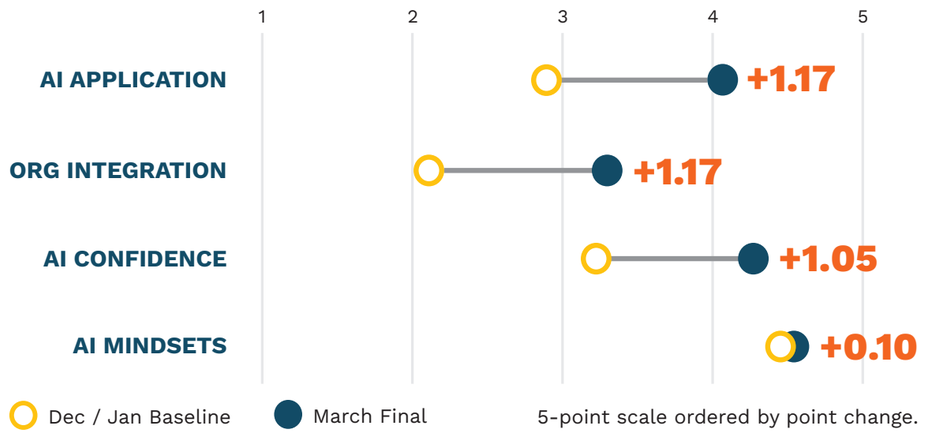
- **AI Application** (ability to apply AI tools to real organizational challenges and workflows) increased from **2.89 to 4.06 (+1.17)**
- **Organizational Integration** (extent to which AI is embedded into organizational strategy, systems, and day-to-day operations) increased from **2.12 to 3.29 (+1.17)**
- **AI Confidence** (understanding and comfort with how AI works and when to use it) increased from **3.23 to 4.28 (+1.05)**
- **AI Mindsets** (openness to AI adoption and belief in its potential to be used responsibly and equitably) remained consistently high, slightly increasing from **4.45 to 4.55 (+0.10)**

Participants also reported meaningful qualitative shifts in how they approached their work, including increased ability to:

- Incorporate AI into day-to-day workflows
- Evaluate tools critically, including risks, limitations, and ethical considerations
- Support colleagues and teams in adopting new approaches
- Identify practical, mission-aligned use cases for AI within workforce systems
- Move more quickly from ideas to experimentation and implementation

Several organizations also reported stronger internal alignment around AI strategy.

Taken together, these results suggest that workforce organizations may be further along in their willingness to engage with AI than is often assumed. The greater challenge appears to be translating individual interest into organizational systems, processes, and implementation capacity.



Key Lessons FROM THE COHORT

THE COHORT SURFACED several lessons about how workforce organizations can adapt to AI-driven change.

1. Individual AI readiness is outpacing organizational readiness

While participants made significant gains, many organizations lacked the operational infrastructure necessary to fully support and scale that progress over time.

One of the clearest findings across the cohort was that individual AI readiness is advancing faster than organizational readiness. While participants rapidly developed skills and confidence, many organizations lacked the infrastructure, governance, and implementation capacity needed to scale adoption.

Organizations that demonstrated the strongest and most sustained adoption typically had several factors already in place: active executive engagement, clearer internal ownership of AI strategy, stronger cross-functional collaboration, and at least some baseline data or technical infrastructure to build from.

The experience reinforced that while building individual AI skills is essential, long-term impact depends far more heavily on organizational readiness, implementation capacity, and the systems required to integrate these tools into day-to-day operations and decision-making.

2. Many implementation barriers are structural

A majority of the obstacles encountered during the program—such as fragmented data systems, platform limitations, and governance constraints—were not created by the Accelerator. They existed prior to participation and became more visible through the process of building. Certain barriers will require longer-term, system-level solutions.

3. Focused pilots produced the strongest results

The strongest results came from organizations that paired ambitious long-term goals with tightly scoped pilots.

Teams focused on a single, well-defined problem were able to test, learn, and demonstrate impact more quickly than teams tackling broader challenges.

This underscores the importance of starting small while maintaining a broader strategic vision.

4. Different AI use cases mature at different rates

The tools developed through the Accelerator varied in both complexity and time to impact.

- Tools focused on **internal productivity** were the fastest to pilot and measure
- Tools focused on **participant outcomes** required more time due to higher stakes and operational complexity

This distinction is important in understanding how and when impact can be observed, particularly in short-term programs.

The program reinforced that AI adoption requires ongoing iteration, and many organizations left with pilots still in development but significantly stronger internal implementation capacity.

WHAT COMES NEXT

THE ACCELERATOR demonstrated that workforce organizations are eager and capable of engaging deeply with AI when given structured support and space for experimentation.

The next challenge is scale. The experience of the Accelerator suggests that future investments should focus not only on building AI literacy, but also on strengthening the organizational conditions that enable successful adoption. Sustained adaptation will require continued investment in technical assistance, implementation support, governance frameworks, and shared infrastructure.

The field will also need stronger collaboration across workforce organizations, funders, researchers, policymakers, and technology partners to ensure AI adoption advances economic mobility rather than deepening inequities.

Future iterations of the Accelerator will continue exploring how workforce organizations can leverage AI to strengthen operational effectiveness and improve participant experience.

The work ahead is not only technical. It is organizational, ethical, and deeply connected to questions about equity, access, job quality, and economic opportunity.

> The AI Accelerator was extremely meaningful for our agency, strengthening our team's tech skills, strategic thinking, and ability to develop a real solution to an industry capacity challenge.
>
> It gave our team the opportunity to step outside of day-to-day operations, think critically about a key focus area, and explore how AI, technical assistance, and peer collaboration can help solve real workforce challenges in a safe and supportive learning environment.
>
> **— Erica Waterford, Vice President of Programs, First Place for Youth**

CONCLUSION

THE ECONOMIC MOBILITY AI ACCELERATOR demonstrates that workforce organizations can adapt to an AI-driven economy when given the opportunity to build, test, and learn collaboratively.

Participants developed practical tools, new ways of working, and a clearer understanding of how to navigate a rapidly changing labor market.

The program also highlighted that while individual capability can be built quickly, organizational transformation requires long-term investment and infrastructure. This may be the most important challenge facing workforce organizations as they adapt to an AI-driven economy.

As technological change accelerates, workforce organizations will play a critical role in determining whether economic opportunity expands or contracts. This work represents an early but important step toward ensuring that the systems supporting workers evolve alongside the labor market itself.

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ABOUT JVS

Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) is a nonprofit working to close opportunity gaps in employment by supporting jobseekers to gain the skills and connections to secure quality careers with family-sustaining wages. Every day, we invest in skills training, employer engagement, and systems-level change across California because we believe that everyone deserves access to quality jobs and economic mobility.

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