



CivicPlay.ai Presents: The State of AI Readiness in Canada's Community Services Sector - 2025



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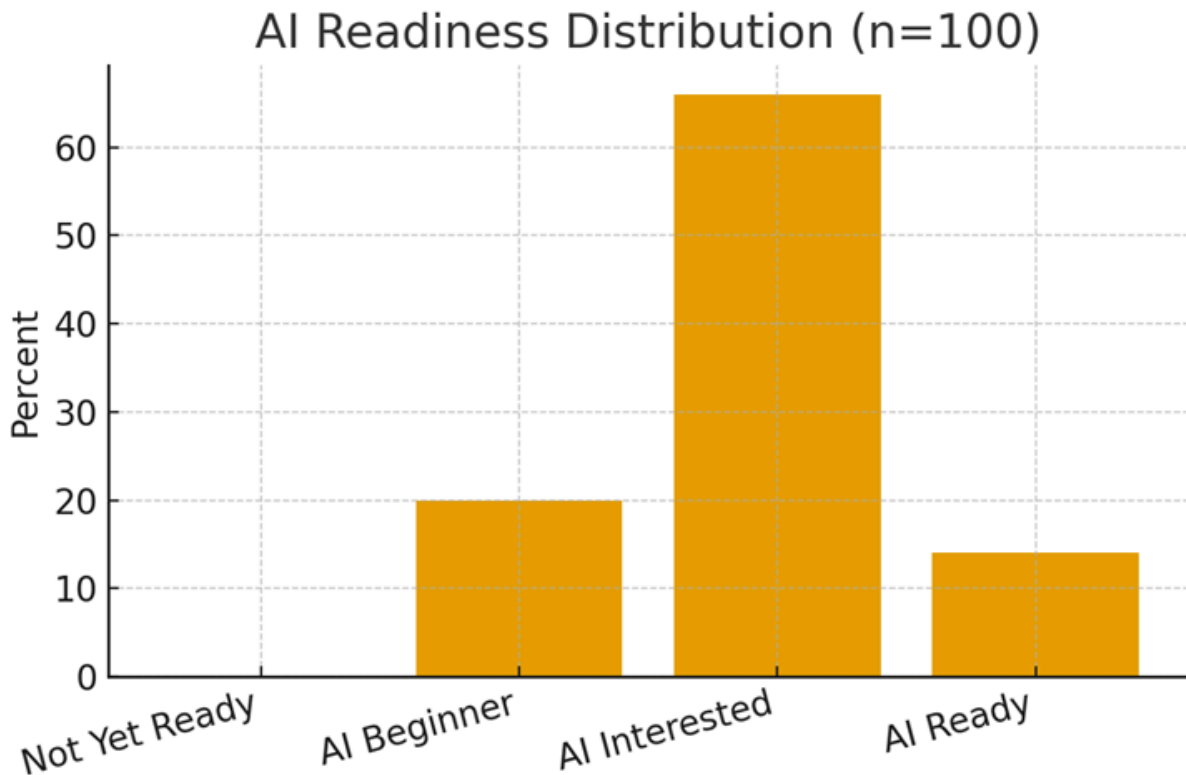
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Executive Summary

The Canadian Community Services sector is at a turning point with Artificial Intelligence (AI). Professionals are ready to lead, but organizational governance is lagging. The central challenge is urgency: **Leaders must be proactive now in establishing guardrails, rather than waiting to react to a safety incident or breach of ethics.**

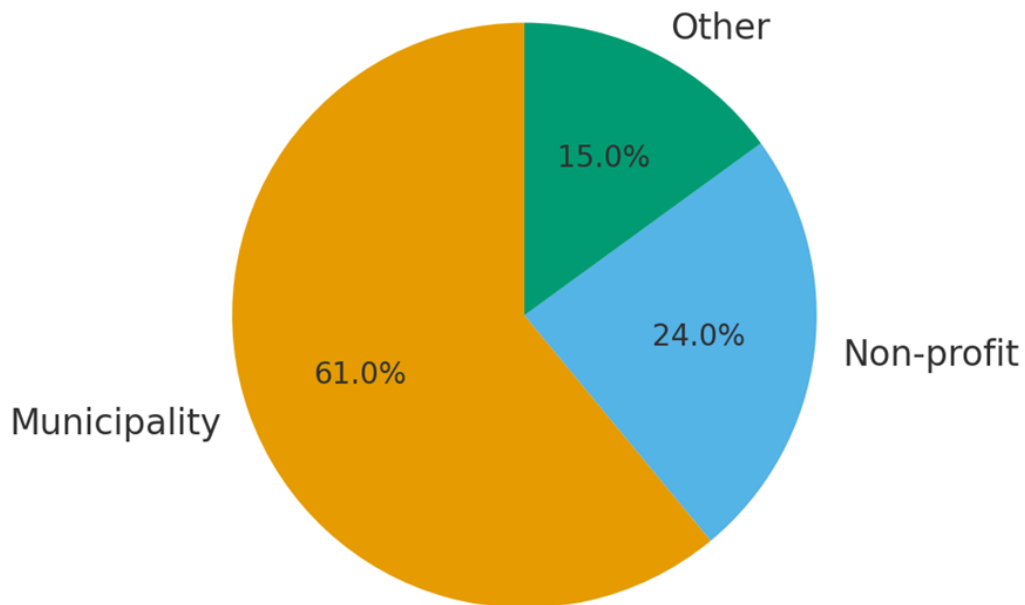


This national baseline report, with statistics derived from a voluntary assessment completed by 100 community service and recreation professionals in 2025 (see Report Context and Methodology on page 9), reveals a critical readiness gap: a significant majority (66%) are **AI Interested**—curious and experimenting—while only 14% are **AI Ready** with the safety policies and structured integration needed to scale. Another 20% fall into the **AI Beginner** category, reflecting limited exposure or being in the very early stages of learning and engagement with AI tools. Crucially, zero percent of professionals were classified as **Not Yet Ready**, indicating the sector is universally engaged and past the initial awareness phase. Overall, this indicates that a large portion of the workforce is currently testing tools and automating tasks without formal protocol, which increases the risk of error and misuse.

In short, **mindset is outpacing infrastructure**. Though practitioners strongly endorse ethical principles like "enhance, not replace" and prioritize data privacy, this confidence is undermined by low foundational AI literacy and fragmented policy. This fragmentation is rooted in broader non-profit challenges like resource constraints, where a reliance on free or uncoordinated upskilling prevents the investment in essential governance.

Municipal respondents (61%) show higher readiness due to existing governance and IT support, while non-profits (24%) rely more on passionate, isolated experimentation but lack formal policy infrastructure. The remaining 15% (a mix of education, companies, and undisclosed organizations) are primarily in the **AI Beginner** stage and rely heavily on individual, uncoordinated experimentation.

Respondents by Segment (Collapsed)



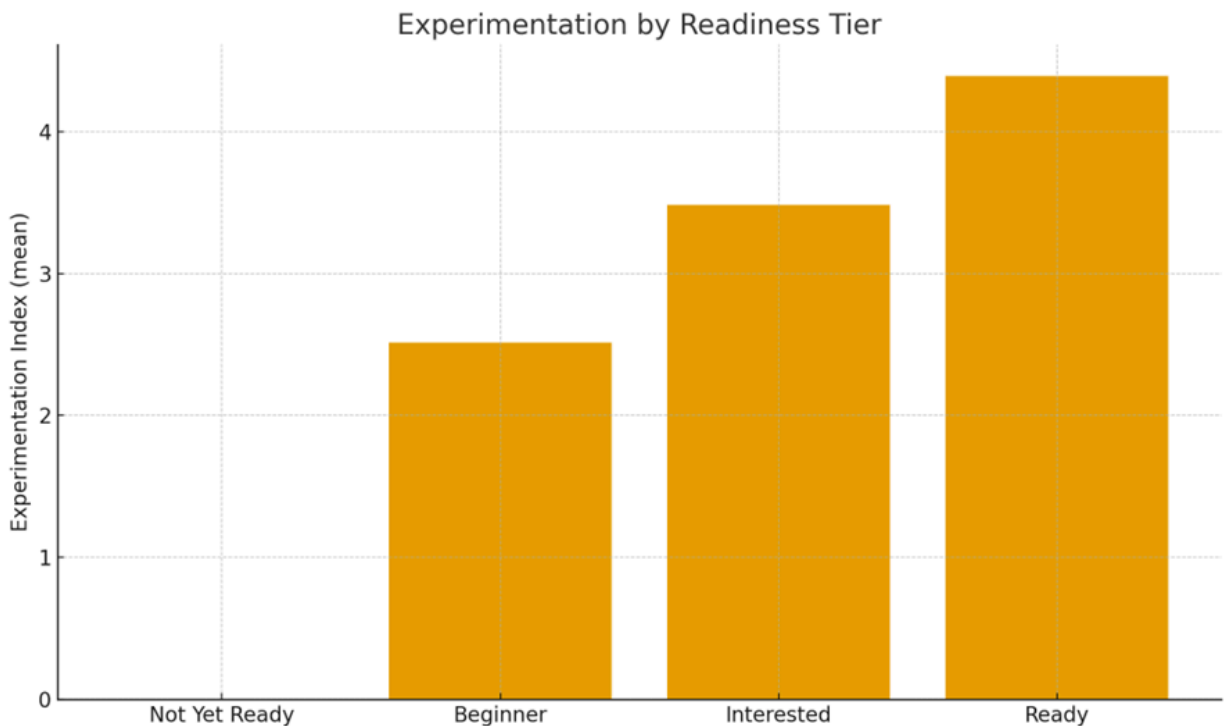
To safely and practically leverage this enthusiasm, the sector must translate its strong ethical foundation into clear, structured governance and targeted training. The findings affirm that for Canadian community services, AI is a work transformation that requires coordinated policy action now.



Findings

The findings summarize and synthesize quantitative responses from the AI readiness survey, revealing the sector's current state as a critical challenge and a significant opportunity. The data is organized around three central insights: the gap between staff enthusiasm and organizational infrastructure, the sector's strong ethical foundation, and the urgent demand for clear governance to manage this transformation safely.

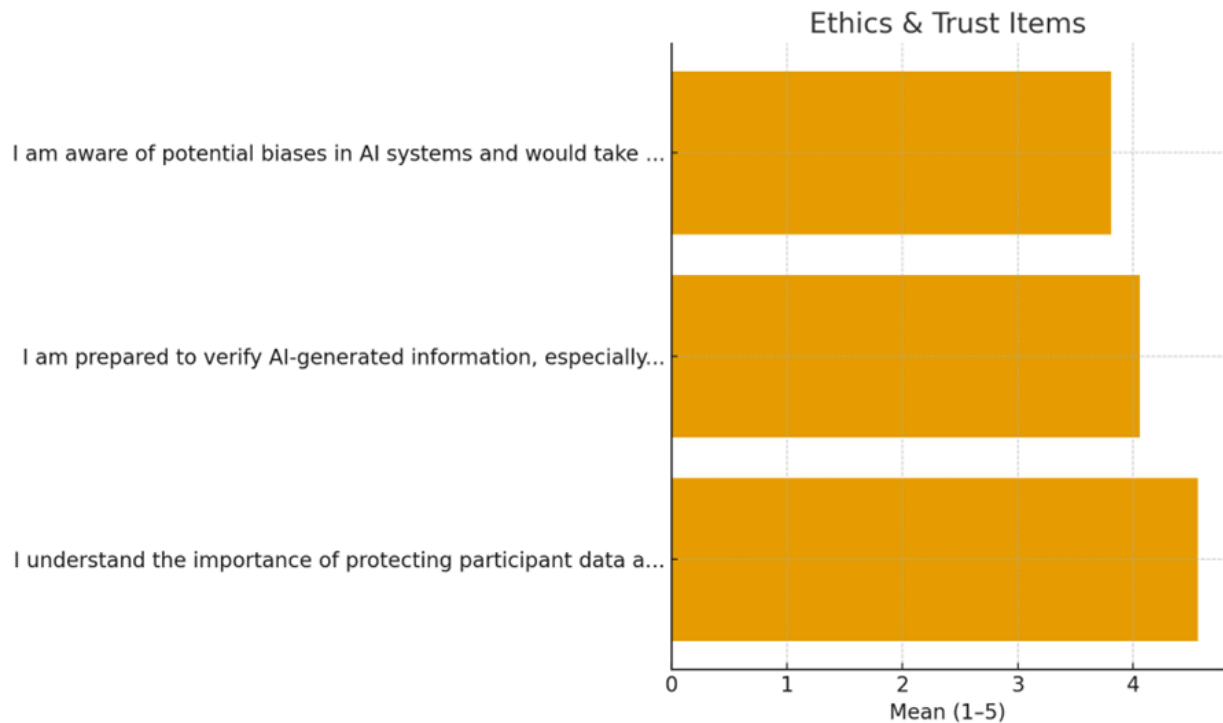
Mindset is Outpacing Infrastructure



Two-thirds of respondents are AI Interested but lack governance structures. Curiosity for AI significantly exceeds the current organizational capacity to manage it safely. This is the core challenge:

- **The Readiness Gap:** A massive 66% of professionals are **AI Interested** (testing tools without formal protocol), compared to only 14% who are **AI Ready** (integrating tools safely with policies).
- **Fragmentation:** There is a rapid growth in curiosity and experimentation across the sector, but it is hampered by fragmented governance and uneven access to resources.

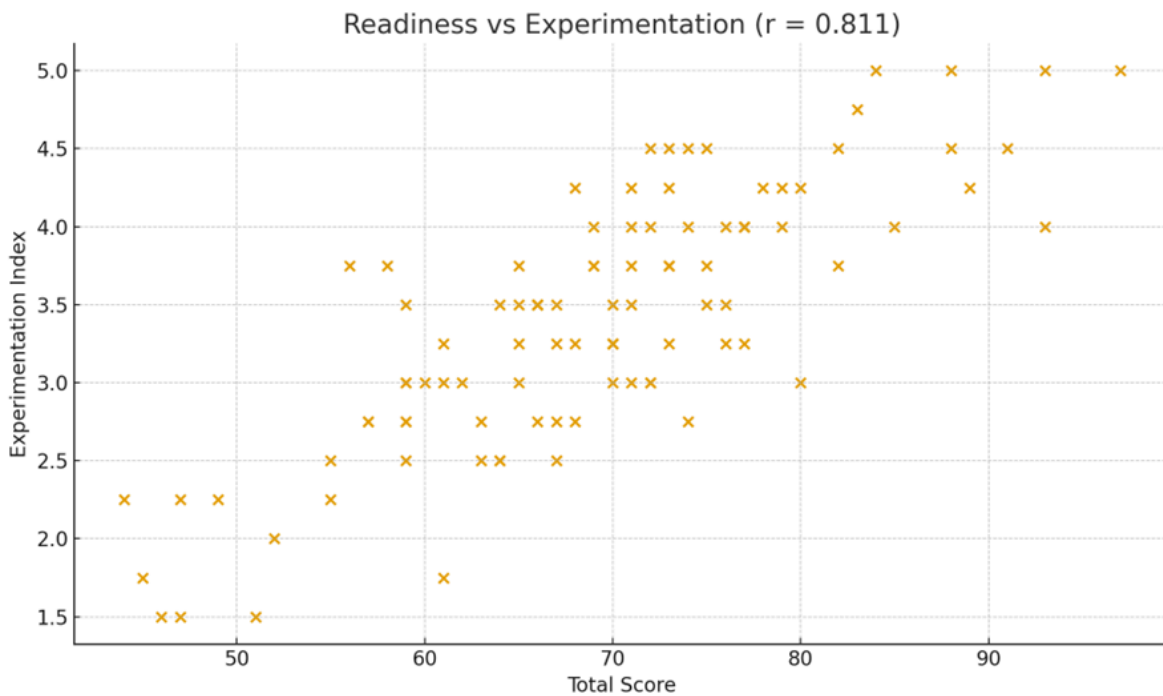
Ethics Leads the Way



The Canadian Community Services sector has a strong ethical foundation that leaders can leverage to build safe governance. This conviction is directly aligned with the sector's core mission, as effective community-building fundamentally relies on the trust between service providers and the people they serve.

- **Core Principle:** Professionals overwhelmingly endorse the principle to 'enhance, not replace' the human connection and prioritize privacy and verification.
- **The Opportunity:** This rising ethical awareness and cautious optimism provide the ideal environment for the necessary policy changes.

Governance Reduces Friction



The graph visually confirms a high correlation ($r \approx 0.811$) between a professional's score of experimentation and their overall AI readiness score. This indicates staff curiosity is the strongest predictor of preparedness, but the sector is demanding clear, practical guardrails because public trust is always at risk of being easily undermined by a safety or privacy incident.

- **Call for Action:** There is an increasing demand for training and practical guardrails to help staff.
- **The Outcome:** The sector is now moving to coordinated transformation, recognizing that simple governance is a critical safety measure that reduces errors and protects the fragile public trust required for responsible, accelerated adoption.

In summary, the sector is at a pivotal moment where its cultural strengths—high ethical conviction and an openness to experimentation—are being undermined by a low foundational literacy and fragmented policy infrastructure. The disconnect between a willing mindset and lagging organizational governance creates a high-risk environment. The findings affirm that for the Canadian Community Services sector to safely leverage its enthusiasm for AI and translate it into a responsible, coordinated work transformation, **leaders must prioritize structured governance and targeted training now**, which provides the essential context for the methodology detailed next (see page 9).

Report Context and Methodology

The [assessment](#) was voluntary and self-filled by participants. Responses were anonymized after being used to design CivicPlay.ai's tailored AI readiness workshops across Canada.

Sample

100 practitioners across Canadian community services in multiple provinces. Readiness tiers via total score thresholds (<40 Not Yet Ready; 40–59 Beginner, reflecting limited exposure or being in the very early stages of learning and engagement; 60–79 Interested, meaning curious and experimenting without formal protocol; ≥80 Ready, indicating integration with safety policies and structured scale). Indices are item means on a 5-point scale. Pairwise handling for item means; all rows kept for total-score analyses. Key results: Readiness = 0% Not Yet Ready, 20% AI Beginner, 66% AI Interested, and 14% AI Ready. Respondent segments = 61% Municipality, 24% Non-Profit, and 15% Other. Experimentation–Readiness correlation $r \approx 0.811$.

External Validation Sources

[KPMG — Trust, Attitudes and Use of AI \(2025 Canadian insights\)](#); [Microsoft Viva People Science — The State of AI Change Readiness \(2024\)](#); [CCNDR — The Demand for Digital Skills in Canada's Nonprofit Sector \(2024\)](#).



Sector Strengths and Emerging Practices

The sector's strengths provide a robust ethical foundation for AI adoption, while the capability gaps highlight where immediate, targeted training is required. The data shows a clear priority for ethical use that is currently undermined by low foundational literacy. (1 = Strongly Disagree ... 5 = Strongly Agree)

Top 5 Strength Areas

Statement	Mean (1–5)
I believe AI should enhance, not replace, the human connection in community services, focusing on community-building and inclusion.	4.61
I understand the importance of protecting participant data and maintaining privacy when using AI.	4.56
I would be open to trying AI tools like ChatGPT for content creation, like drafting program descriptions or promotional materials.	4.29
I am prepared to verify AI-generated information, especially when it impacts participant communications or programming.	4.06
I am aware of potential biases in AI systems and would take steps to ensure fair and equitable use.	3.81

Key Takeaway: Ethics & Openness Lead. Practitioners overwhelmingly embrace the core principle of 'enhance, not replace' (4.61) and are committed to privacy and verification (4.56 and 4.06). This strong ethical baseline and openness to experimentation (4.29) provide the ideal cultural environment for safe adoption.

Top 5 Capability Gaps

Statement	Mean (1–5)
I understand how AI can automate tasks and make work processes more efficient.	3.12
I recognize repetitive tasks (e.g., managing emails, scheduling) that could be automated with AI.	3.06
I understand the ethical implications of AI use in the community services field.	2.76
I am familiar with basic AI concepts like Machine Learning (ML) and Natural Language Processing (NLP).	2.28
I know the difference between terms like AI, ML, and Deep Learning.	1.74

Key Takeaway: Literacy Trails Confidence. While professionals are willing to try tools, foundational knowledge is critically low. The biggest deficit is in understanding basic terminology (1.74) and core concepts like ML and NLP (2.28). This low AI literacy is compounded by the broader digital skills deficit in the non-profit sector, particularly around data skills, as highlighted by external reports. This lack of literacy creates a risk, as staff are currently testing tools without the technical understanding required to manage ethical implications (2.76) or practically identify workflow efficiencies.

In summary, the sector's high ethical conviction must now be leveraged with structured training and governance to close the literacy gaps and ensure safe, practical scaling.

Canada's AI Context

National benchmarks synthesized from KPMG Trust in AI (2025), related Canadian polling, and findings from the non-profit sector's digital skills landscape indicate that the challenges facing the Community Services sector are mirrored—and often amplified—at the national level. These external trends validate the urgent need for structured governance within the sector.

National Findings and Sector Relevance

- **Trust Gap & Safety Concern:** Canadians show high concern over cybersecurity, privacy/IP, and misinformation relative to global peers. This aligns perfectly with the sector's top strength—its commitment to data privacy—but underscores the organizational risk of inadequate security protocols.
- **Widespread Literacy Deficit:** General AI literacy remains low across the country; most workers report limited training and unclear guidance. This directly correlates with the sector's Top Capability Gaps, where understanding of basic AI terminology is lacking.
- **Demand for Policy & Guidance:** Many Canadians are unaware of organizational AI policies or laws, leading to a high demand for clearer rules. This national demand echoes the sector's own urgent "Call for Action" for practical guardrails and governance.

The Foundational Digital Skills Challenge

The specific AI readiness gap identified in this report—**where staff enthusiasm is undermined by low literacy and fragmented policy**—is rooted in the broader digital skills and capacity challenges facing the Canadian non-profit sector. Findings from the report, *The Demand for Digital Skills in Canada's Nonprofit Sector*, provide critical foundational context:

- **Amplified Literacy Gaps:** The broader non-profit sector struggles with foundational digital skills, particularly in data privacy, security, and using data for decision-making. This validates the urgent need for structured governance in AI adoption, as low general digital literacy amplifies the risk of AI-related errors and misuse.
- **Resource Constraints & Governance Fragmentation:** The reliance on free resources for upskilling due to cost constraints directly contributes to the "fragmented governance" and "isolated experimentation" noted in our findings. This explains the organizational lack of investment in the essential policies and targeted training needed to safely move beyond the 'AI Interested' phase.
- **The Uncoordinated Investment Challenge:** Both national digital and sector-specific AI data underscore that the sector's primary barrier is not a lack of willingness, but a lack of coordinated, structured investment in fundamental digital and AI literacy. This prevents organizations from safely translating their ethical conviction into practical, scalable work transformation.

Implication for Community Services

The convergence of national concern and sector enthusiasm creates a window for leadership. [CivicPlay.ai](#) is uniquely positioned to close this gap with plain-language training, governance templates, and role-specific pilots, moving the sector from a reactive stance to the Canadian leading edge of ethical AI readiness.



Foreseeable Safety Risks and Essential Guardrails

Governance is safety engineering, not bureaucracy. These guardrails are essential, practical safety measures to ensure your team's curiosity translates into confident, safe, and ethical practice by proactively addressing the most foreseeable risks.

- **Privacy and Data Security (Risk) / Privacy & Data Retention Rules (Guardrail)**
 - **The Risk:** Given the sector's focus on participant data, there is a high concern over breaches and unauthorized data retention. Without clear rules, sensitive client information could be inadvertently exposed through common AI tools.
 - **The Guardrail:** Implement clear rules on what participant and internal data can never be used with external AI tools, and define protocols for safe data handling and retention to prevent breaches.
- **Misinformation and Inaccuracy (Risk) / Accessibility & Verification Steps (Guardrail)**
 - **The Risk:** Staff literacy trails confidence, leading to a risk of blindly trusting AI outputs. Without formal verification steps, AI-generated information could lead to critical errors, especially impacting care for participants.
 - **The Guardrail:** Formalize a clear, mandatory process for staff to verify all AI-generated content (especially for participant care) and ensure all outputs meet accessibility standards.
- **Bias and Equity (Risk) / Vendor & Bias Checklists (Guardrail)**
 - **The Risk:** There is a constant risk of perpetuating or amplifying bias embedded in AI systems. The sector's awareness of potential bias (a core strength) must be matched by proactive checks. For example, a scheduling tool trained on limited historical data may allocate fewer resources to marginalized communities.
 - **The Guardrail:** Proactively vet and monitor new AI systems for embedded bias to ensure fair and equitable service delivery for all community members.
- **Fragmented Governance (Risk) / Acceptable-Use Policy & Incident Response (Guardrail)**
 - **The Risk:** The reliance on individual experimentation means AI is not being used in a coordinated way. When errors or breaches occur, there is often no standardized process for staff to follow, increasing organizational liability.
 - **The Guardrail:** Publish a concise, plain-language Acceptable-Use Policy to define approved tools, reduce fragmentation, and establish clear safety rules. This policy must explicitly state: What data is restricted (e.g., Never input client PII, confidential HR documents, or sensitive participant files into public-facing generative AI apps.) What is an approved use case. Establish an Incident Response Workflow for staff to follow when an error or misuse occurs.

Investment and Measurable Progress: Budgeting for Responsible AI Transformation

Treating AI readiness as a serious work transformation requires a planned allocation of resources. The immediate cost of implementing the necessary guardrails and literacy training is minor compared to the potential long-term liability and reputational damage of a data breach, privacy incident, or critical service error resulting from fragmented, uncoordinated AI use. Leadership must proactively budget for:

- **Training & Literacy:** Dedicated funding for plain-language workshops to close the foundational knowledge deficit (mean score 1.74).
- **Policy & Governance:** Time and budget for commissioning and communicating a simple, binding Acceptable-Use Policy and Verification Steps.
- **Audit & Monitoring:** Resources for technology audits and vendor/system bias checks to mitigate ongoing risk.

With this investment, measuring AI adoption should focus on organizational value and mission outcomes, not merely tool usage. Organize tracking around *the 3 pillars of responsible adoption*:

- **Efficiency & Impact (Value)**
 - Time saved on reports, data entry, and routine administrative tasks.
 - Accuracy and fact-check pass rates for AI-generated content.
 - Readability scores for client-facing materials created with AI assistance.
- **Safety & Ethics (Risk Mitigation)**
 - Number of AI incidents, near-misses, or reported privacy breaches.
 - Compliance rate with the new Acceptable-Use Policy and Verification Steps.
 - Vendor/System bias and equity audit compliance scores.
- **Culture & Literacy (Readiness)**
 - Staff confidence scores (as measured by pulse checks).
 - AI training and governance completion rates.
 - Staff reporting of successful, documented AI pilots (internal "Wins" documented).

Measurement Cadence: Use pre/post assessments (before and after major training or policy launches) and lightweight quarterly pulse checks to track directional progress, maintain alignment, maintain momentum, and quickly identify new pain points.

Leadership Moves for 2026

To close the readiness gap and leverage our sector's ethical foundation, treat AI adoption as a work-transformation process, not a software project. Organizations that do this see faster and safer adoption.

- **Strategic Move 1: Host Leadership Literacy Briefings**
 - **Goal:** Close the foundational literacy deficit (lowest mean score: 1.74).
 - **Action:** Build shared understanding of ethical principles, opportunities, and limits for your executive team and all managers to create a common language.
- **Strategic Move 2: Publish Your AI Use Policy**
 - **Goal:** Address fragmented governance and the urgent demand for guardrails.
 - **Action:** Issue concise guidance on what tools are approved, what data is restricted, and why. Include examples and FAQs to reduce organizational liability.
- **Strategic Move 3: Launch a Verification-Focused 90-Day Pilot**
 - **Goal:** Bridge the literacy-confidence gap by formalizing verification (mean: 4.06).
 - **Action:** Choose one AI enhanced workflow (e.g., email summarization) to measure impact with defined inputs/outputs, a mandatory verification checklist, and success metrics. Document the lessons learned.
- **Strategic Move 4: Translate Readiness to a Measurable Roadmap**
 - **Goal:** Turn enthusiasm into a coordinated, long-term strategy.
 - **Action:** Use the survey scores and capability gaps to create a practical, year-long adoption plan with clear, quarterly milestones and defined owners.
- **Strategic Move 5: Build AI Clinics & Communities of Practice**
 - **Goal:** Scale practical knowledge and reduce the friction of isolated experimentation.
 - **Action:** Encourage staff to learn together by providing office hours, prompt libraries, and documented "wins." Nominate and empower key staff as internal AI Champions.
- **Strategic Move 6: Embed the Communicate-Skill-Measure Loop**
 - **Goal:** Ensure sustained, safe transformation.
 - **Action:** Consistently communicate the why of safe use, train staff in the how of practical use, and measure progress against the Efficiency, Safety, and Culture metrics.
- **Strategic Move 7: Bridge the Non-Profit Capacity Gap**
 - **Goal:** Target the resource and policy deficit in the non-profit sub-sector (24% of respondents) to move them safely from AI Beginner toward AI Interested/Ready status.
 - **Action:** Offer tailored, highly-subsidized, or free governance templates and foundational literacy workshops specifically designed to address non-profit resource constraints, reducing their reliance on isolated, uncoordinated experimentation.

Calls to Action

Leaders: Move from Report to Roadmap

- **Organizations can book an AI Readiness Workshop:** Schedule a **CivicPlay.ai AI Literacy and Safety Workshop** to build shared understanding and principles across your executive and leadership teams.
- **Launch a Governance Quick Start:** Commission a **CivicPlay.ai Tailored AI Governance Program** to publish a concise, ethical AI use policy and implement essential Guardrails (Privacy, Bias, Verification) in 90 days.
- **Strategize for 2026:** Partner with us to translate your staff's Readiness into a clear, measurable **AI Adoption Roadmap** with defined milestones for the year ahead.

Managers: Empower Your Teams

- **Host an AI Clinic:** Leverage **CivicPlay.ai's hands-on workshop modules** to run practical, job-specific AI Clinics for your team and build a shared Prompt Library.
- **Nominate Your Champions:** Identify enthusiastic staff and empower them with a Community of Practice to ensure ethical and practical knowledge spreads organically across the organization.
- **Share Your Wins:** Document and share your successful AI use cases—fostering confidence and reducing friction for others.

Individuals: Build Your Personal Edge

- **Join a Webinar:** Sign up for an [engaging CivicPlay.ai webinar](#) to gain foundational knowledge (e.g., differentiating AI/ML/Deep Learning) and practical, time-saving tips.
- **Self-Assess and Act:** Use your current readiness score as a starting point to identify your top capability gaps, and request resources from your manager to close them.
- **Verify and Document:** Embrace the core ethic: document every 'AI Wow' and, more importantly, document what you verified and how, to ensure your work remains participant-centric and safe.

Our sector's **future is not about if you adopt AI, but how safely and intentionally you do so**. The data is clear: **professionals possess the ethical foundation and enthusiasm to lead**. By implementing the necessary governance and structured training now, you can **transform curiosity into a coordinated, responsible, and high-impact work transformation**. Ethical AI implementation is a shared responsibility across Canada's community ecosystem.

[Get in touch](#) today and transform AI curiosity into confident, ethical practice.



About [CivicPlay.ai](https://civicplay.ai) — A Leader in Ethical, Practical AI for Community Services

[CivicPlay.ai](https://civicplay.ai) helps civic and community-service professionals reduce burnout, save time, and lead responsibly in an AI-enabled era. Through engaging webinars, hands-on workshops, and tailored AI governance programs, CivicPlay.ai has collaborated with nearly 1,000 professionals across multiple provinces—building literacy, confidence, and ethical standards for AI in recreation, community, and public service settings.

Contact us via our [website](https://civicplay.ai) or Connect via [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/civicplayai)

Some organisations we've worked with

- Alberta Recreation & Parks Association (ARPA)
- Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association (SPRA)
- Recreation Newfoundland and Labrador (Rec NL)
- Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO)
- Recreation New Brunswick (Rec NB)
- Alberta Association of Aquatic Professionals (AAAP)
- Alberta Association of Recreation Facility Personnel (AARFP)
- Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta (FCSSAA)
- City of Red Deer

What Pros Are Saying

On Expert, Relatable Communication

"Toby is very professional and knowledgeable. The presentation to our membership was clearly presented and easy to understand with lots of helpful tips." — Melissa Kraft, Executive Director, FCSSAA

"Toby uses plain language to make AI relatable and approachable to those of us who aren't tech experts." — Chantel Doerksen, Saskatchewan

On Ethical Leadership and Practical Use

"Toby Nwabuogor delivered one of the most engaging sessions at the 2025 AARFP Conference, getting the entire room to rethink what's possible when recreation embraces AI in a real, practical way... His message around using AI ethically and keeping the human touch in our work really resonated, and people left not just informed, but inspired to lead the future of recreation with AI as an ally."

— John Napier, Technical Director, AARFP

On Reducing Intimidation and Saving Time

"Toby is a fun, dynamic, and engaging presenter who brings great energy to the room. His practical insights and hands-on examples made the content both relatable and memorable."



— Ashley Lamoureux, President, AAAP

“The time-saving realization. Mind blown!” — Attendee, SPRA SPARKS 2025

“Very helpful and practical information! Made AI seem less intimidating.” — Attendee, SPRA SPARKS 2025

On Job-Specific Training and Impact

“Informative, loved the demo that was job-specific – hiring lifeguards!” — Attendee, SPRA SPARKS 2025

“I liked how interactive Toby was and how he simplified a complex topic while showing practical examples of using AI as a tool and not a crutch.” — Participant, Board Leadership Calgary 2025

You're not alone on the AI journey, get in touch today!





Appendix

AI Readiness Quiz

Instructions: Rate each question on a scale of 1–5, with 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree. Add up your score at the end to evaluate your readiness level.

Email (optional as we only use it to contact you about your result)

Organization (type NA if you are filling this form as an individual)*

I am familiar with basic AI concepts like Machine Learning (ML) and Natural Language Processing (NLP).*

I understand how AI can automate tasks and make work processes more efficient.*

I know the difference between terms like AI, ML, and Deep Learning.*

I understand the ethical implications of AI use in the community services field.*

I currently use digital tools (e.g., scheduling apps, customer databases) to manage programs and participant interactions.*

I am comfortable using new technology in my daily workflow.*

I track participant data and use it to make decisions, like adjusting programs based on feedback.*

I regularly engage in online learning or use technology to keep up-to-date with community services industry trends.*

I recognize repetitive tasks (e.g., managing emails, scheduling) that could be automated with AI.*

I can identify areas where data insights could help, like understanding participation trends or improving programs.*

I see potential for using AI to enhance participant experiences, such as personalized program recommendations or chatbots for inquiries.*

I can envision using AI to develop new ideas for programs and events based on participant interests and needs.*

I am comfortable with the idea of using AI to support decision-making, such as program scheduling or budgeting.*

I would be open to trying AI tools like ChatGPT for content creation, like drafting program descriptions or promotional materials.*

I feel confident in my ability to learn and experiment with AI tools, even without formal training.*

I believe AI can enhance my role by allowing me to focus more on direct participant engagement and less on administrative work.*

I understand the importance of protecting participant data and maintaining privacy when using AI.*

I am aware of potential biases in AI systems and would take steps to ensure fair and equitable use.*

I am prepared to verify AI-generated information, especially when it impacts participant communications or programming.*

I believe AI should enhance, not replace, the human connection in community services, focusing on community-building and inclusion.*

Scoring & Readiness Levels Total Score: [Add] up your scores for a total out of 100. Review your readiness level: 80–100: AI Ready You have a strong understanding of AI's role and potential in community services. You're prepared to start integrating AI tools to enhance efficiency and improve participant experiences. 60–79: AI Interested You're open to using AI and have some understanding of its concepts. With some targeted learning and practice, you can start applying AI in your work. 40–59: AI Beginner You recognize AI's potential but may need additional guidance. Consider exploring foundational AI concepts and small pilot projects to get comfortable with AI applications. Below 40: Not Yet AI Ready You may be new to AI and could benefit from learning basic concepts. Start by understanding how AI applies to community services and experimenting with low-risk tools, like chatbots for participant inquiries or automated scheduling.