

Daring to Use AI: Skills for Change's Journey

Pathways to Prosperity Conference

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Skills For Change – Who We Are

- Founded in 1982, Skills for Change (SfC) is a leading national non-profit organization committed to advancing the economic and social inclusion of immigrants, refugees, and underserved communities across Canada.
- For over four decades, we have been known for pioneering programs that anticipate and respond to shifting labour market and societal trends.
- Each year, SfC delivers 20+ programs and services to over 20,000 people, including newcomers, immigrants, refugees, women, seniors, youth, Black Canadians, and members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community.
- Our offerings span settlement, language training, employment, career development, mental health, leadership, mentorship, sustainability, climate action, and beyond.
- Guided by a social justice lens, our work is anchored in equity, inclusion, and accessibility.
- Skills for Change continues to be a trusted partner and thought leader, shaping innovative solutions that strengthen communities and contribute to Canada's prosperity.

The context — Laying the Foundation for Digital Transformation

 **Pandemic-driven transformation:** Shifted rapidly from in-person to hybrid and online delivery.

 **Adopted digital tools:** Salesforce CRM, LMS, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, HubSpot, Mailchimp.

 **Built digital culture:** Staff trained and supported to deliver services and collect data virtually.

 **Real-time insights:** Developed internal dashboards to track participation, outcomes, and employer engagement metrics—enabling data-driven decisions.

 **Partnerships for data capacity:** Collaborated with CanadaHelps and Imagine Canada on sector-wide data projects to benchmark digital maturity and strengthen governance.

 **Funding secured for capacity-building:** Invested in developing a Digital Systems Department to centralize data management, analytics, and automation.

 **Foundation for AI:** Built strong digital literacy and infrastructure, positioning SfC to responsibly integrate AI tools for matching, forecasting, and program optimization.

The Catalysts for Change

- ChatGPT's release in 2022 signaled a new era for AI in the workplace.
- SFC received the **Google AI Opportunity Fund**—enabled launch of AI Upskilling Program.
- Staffed with AI, data science, and education experts
- Trained frontline staff first, ensuring readiness and referral capability.
- Sparked need for an organization-wide AI policy.



The Google Opportunity Fund

Generative AI could add **\$230 billion to Canada's economy** and save workers **175 hours per year** through task automation — but only if the workforce is equipped to use it productively and responsibly

\$13 million national fund from Google.org

Goal: reach **2 million+ Canadians** with AI skills training

Focus: digital inclusion, employability, and hands-on AI literacy

Participating Partners:

- **Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute:** Delivering foundational AI education for post-secondary students nation-wide.
- **First Nations Technology Council:** Equipping Indigenous learners and communities with AI knowledge and digital tools.
- **Toronto Public Library:** Offering free, city-wide AI learning programs to bridge the urban digital divide
- **Skills for Change:** Developing accessible, employment-driven AI training programs for newcomers & underserved communities facing high unemployment.

Strategic Thinking & Policy

- We see AI as a **general-purpose technology**—innovation surfaced bottom-up
- Launched internal **AI Use Policy**: emphasizing responsible innovation, trust, privacy, human dignity + public document to support other nonprofit organizations.
- Built comprehensive **change management program**, including training and development, AI Champions Network.
- Client journey mapping: **reduced** wait times from **6 weeks to 48 hours** via automation
- Learning Library initiative: weekly sharing of articles/artifacts, fostering a **learning culture**

Strategic Thinking & Policy

Main Objectives:

- Responsible Innovation
- Privacy and Compliance

Fears & Resistance:

- Fears dispelled with clear and transparent communication
- To reduce resistance, scaffolded policy with extensive training and 90-day amnesty period

Risk Management:

- Created practices to capture anomalies
 - Data Classification system
 - Approval workflows
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Implementation – Tools & Methods

- Microsoft Copilot (Excel, PowerPoint integration)
- Google Essentials through Coursera
- Avoided consumer-grade AI tools unless approved and accompanied by legal disclaimers
- Supporting tools, including NotebookLM
- Blended learning models





Insights and
what we've
learnt so far

June – October 2025



Program reach (including internal training): **287 unique participants** who have completed **> 2363 learning hours** (1150 in live sessions + 1213 online) since June 2025 (**4 months**)

Overall impact:

- **Confidence Boost: 97.1%** of completers feel confident or very confident post-program
- **Action Intent: 95.6%** plan or maybe will apply AI at work within the next month
- **Program Rating: 80.9%** rated the program as "Excellent" or "Very Good"
- **NPS Score: 48.5**

Insights: Demographics & Background

Gender Identity

- 64.5% Women | 32.3% Men | 3.2% Other/Prefer not to say

Economic status:

- 49.3% earn under \$50K annually
 - 35.1% earn under \$30K

Employment

- 37.4% Unemployed, seeking work | 19.2% Employed full-time | 8.7% Students

Newcomer status

- 58.4% Newcomers to Canada
 - 29.7% arrived within last 5 years

Results & Impact

- **Program Delivery:**
 - Program delivery: agile, effective small team, automation maximizes output.
 - Learners earn Google certificates (Coursera + live sessions).
 - Learners walk away with confidence, being able to use AI tools more effectively.
- **Internal AI implementation:**
 - Internal shift: open conversations about AI, improved efficiency, consistency, and communication.
 - Time and financial savings (long-term).
 - Faster decision-making process.
- **Lessons Learned & Successes:**
 - Need to balance overwhelming individuals with the speed at which AI is changing the workforce.
 - Keep resilience and the value of learning top of mind

Key Recommendations

For Funders:

- ✓ Community-based AI training achieves world-class outcomes
- ✓ ROI evident in confidence gains, action intent, and economic impact
- ✓ Model is scalable and replicable across communities

For Policy Makers:

- ✓ AI literacy gap is closable with targeted, accessible programs
- ✓ Equity-seeking groups can lead AI adoption with proper support
- ✓ Community organizations are critical delivery infrastructure

For Nonprofits:

- ✓ You don't need tech expertise to deliver quality AI training
- ✓ Partner with platforms (Coursera) and funders (Google) for resources
- ✓ Embed in existing programs for higher engagement

For Practitioners:

- ✓ Hands-on practice + ethics = responsible adoption
- ✓ Confidence matters as much as knowledge
- ✓ Meet learners where they are, focus on practical applications

Thank you

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