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Submitter Information

Organization: National Digital Inclusion Alliance

General Comment

See attached for comments from the National Digital Inclusion Alliance

Attachments

25.05.28 - NDIA Comments - AI RFI - NSF-2025-OGC-0001

NATIONAL DIGITAL INCLUSION ALLIANCE

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Date: Wednesday, May 28, 2025

RE: RFI Response: Docket ID No. NSF-2025-OGC-0001

The National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Request for Information (RFI) regarding the Development of a 2025 National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Research and Development (R&D) Strategic Plan. NDIA is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that ensures all US residents have the technology access and skills they need to live, work, learn, and thrive. NDIA connects organizations, supports community programming, and equips policymakers to act. We create trusted spaces for shared learning among our community of over 2,000 affiliate member organizations nationwide to identify best practices, understand resource gaps, and develop solutions to fill these gaps. Our affiliates are community-based organizations, nonprofits, local and state governments, and many others that support individuals using technology to live, learn, work, and thrive in today's digital economy. It's our work with these affiliates and their feedback to us that informs these comments.

Since our inception, NDIA has supported our affiliates by piloting digital skills instruction methods in local communities. From these experiences, we've identified and created replicable models and resources for digital skills educators.

Digital skills programs employ various formats and techniques to accommodate diverse learning styles and knowledge levels, including topical or long-term classes, independent learning, or one-on-one training. Digital navigators also provide one-on-one training and support to learners. They are trusted guides who assist community members with ongoing, individualized support for accessing affordable and appropriate connectivity, devices, and digital skills[1]. Digital skill educators, including digital navigators, are on the front lines, assessing what program participants already know and how to help them develop digital skills to meet immediate needs and be on a pathway to longer-term success[2].

In 2024, NDIA launched a working group of NDIA affiliates with experience integrating AI into their digital skills curricula and three pilot programs. NDIA's goal for the working group and the pilot programs was to prepare our affiliates to teach AI skills to their program participants, evaluate available AI skills curricula, and tailor them to meet the unique needs of their users. With support from corporate sponsors, the pilot projects explore strategies for integrating AI into community digital skills programs aimed at learners seeking to enhance their personal and workforce-related goals. The working group serves as a platform for community-based digital skills educators to share resources, knowledge, and best practices for safe and effective use of AI

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[1] "NDIA Definitions," National Digital Inclusion Alliance, accessed May 14, 2025, https://www.digitalinclusion.org/definitions/

[2] David Keyes, " Digital Skills – Which skills are we talking about?" *Digital Inclusion Bytes: Insights and Resources* (blog), February 17, 2025 https://www.digitalinclusion.org/blog/digital-inclusion-bytes-digital-skills-which-skills-are-we-talking-about/

across all age groups. The working group also informed the design of an AI instructional materials rubric, which will assist practitioners in sourcing and selecting appropriate educational resources.

Based on the insights gained through our pilot programs and working group, NDIA recommends that the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), Networking and Information Technology Research and Development (NITRD, and the National Science Foundation (NSF) include the following recommendations in the 2025 National AI R&D Strategic Plan.

Fund Research for AI Skills Acquisition

The federal government should fund research on AI skills acquisition for youth and adults of all levels to ensure AI benefits the US public. This research should focus on identifying appropriate AI educational content and teaching methods, and developing and widely distributing context-aware learning materials and programs. This research priority aligns with our efforts to identify promising instructional approaches in our AI pilot projects and working group.

AI has rapidly become pervasive in daily lives, and digital skills educators (of youth and adults) are trying to keep up with an entirely new set of skills, while grappling with the implications for their work and their community members. They seek opportunities to learn more about the technology's practical use and discuss teaching approaches in their digital skills classes, tutoring sessions, and community events. AI literacy is essential for youth and adult learners, including older adults who must develop online skills to fully participate in the digital world and parents with young children who should learn about AI to help their kids navigate it in school and beyond.

NDIA supports the National Artificial Intelligence Research and Development Strategic Plan 2023 Update's[3] imperative to develop AI instructional materials for all educational levels. The Plan emphasizes that effective content curation for K-12 education requires thorough research and a strong focus on identifying the best teaching methods and training for instructors. NDIA proposes that these strategies should extend to and include adult digital skills education offered through community programs.

Conduct Research To Prepare Students and Workers for AI-Related Roles

To achieve US AI research and development goals, federal investments in research, education, and workforce development must prepare students and workers for careers and roles where they develop and use AI tools. Digital skills instructors emphasize the importance of helping individuals use AI for job searching, completing tasks, and advancing their skills. NDIA urges OSTP, NITRD, NSF, and other federal agencies to conduct and fund research to understand the most effective teaching strategies for integrating AI into the workplace for learners of all ages, including K-12, post-secondary, and adult learners.

US businesses have increasingly adopted AI technologies recently, but this trend has been uneven across industries. Federal policymakers have the opportunity to strengthen investments that prepare workers and companies for an AI economy. While advanced manufacturing firms lead in AI adoption, small and mid-sized businesses often rely on publicly funded support and educational organizations to support AI adoption[4] and equip workers with the necessary skills to use technology effectively.

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[3] National Science And Technology Council, Select Committee On Artificial Intelligence. National Artificial Intelligence Research And Development Strategic Plan 2023 Update. United States of America, May 2023. https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/National-Artificial-Intelligence-Research-and-Development-Strategic-Plan-2023-Update.pdf

[4] For more on manufacturers' adoption of AI technology in one Midwest state, see: https://www.conexusindiana.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/AI-report-v12.pdf

The federal government must sustain and support AI skill-building as technologies--and AI specifically--evolve rapidly. Effective strategies known to help individuals develop digital skills should guide this support[5]:

- Programs that focus on providing a strong foundation in digital skills and the digital resilience necessary to navigate new technologies and tools.
- Learning opportunities must reflect the real-world contexts in which learners use digital tools and should include hands-on experience alongside traditional classroom instruction.
- When applicable, participants should have the chance to earn industry-recognized, portable, and stackable postsecondary credentials to demonstrate expertise.
- Partnerships between industry sectors and education and workforce development organizations are crucial. These collaborations help identify talent needs and create training programs for various candidates, including veterans, multilingual individuals, opportunity youth, and people with disabilities.

Establish Ongoing Engagement Opportunities with the Digital Skills Educator and Research Community

To fully understand the implications of integrating AI into community programs nationwide, policymakers and researchers must continuously engage with the digital skill practitioner community to develop foundational AI research and development projects. NDIA has established a research process to understand the experiences of both instructors and learners. This process gathers lessons learned and highlights promising practices from pilot projects. To effectively address the various stakeholders involved, federal policymakers have an opportunity to establish ongoing collaboration with NDIA, our affiliate network, and organizations like ours. This collaboration will help ensure that

[5] Many of these factors are discussed in Boosting Digital Literacy in the Workplace (National Skills Coalition, 2020): https://nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/12152020-NSC-Boosting-Digital-Literacy.pdf

future research, guidance, and resources align with the foundational AI research and development needs our affiliates identify.

Conclusion

NDIA recommends that OSTP, NITRD, and NSF allocate federal funding for research focused on adult AI skills acquisition for nontechnical individuals of all ages to understand AI's implications and implementation in the broader community. This investment should support research, education, and workforce development initiatives that prepare students and workers for AI-related roles. Expanding ongoing engagement opportunities with the community of digital skills educators and researchers is essential to understanding the implications of integrating AI into nationwide community programs. This effort aligns with the objectives of the 2025 National AI R&D Strategic Plan, which emphasizes prioritizing AI research in areas that the industry is unlikely to invest in. As you review input on this research and development strategic plan, we are eager to collaborate to ensure this foundational AI research serves the broad public interest.

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