Integrating AI Tennessee into the National AI Action Plan

Response to the Request for Information (RFI) on the Development of an AI Action Plan

Submitted to: The Networking and Information Technology Research and Development (NITRD) National Coordination Office (NCO), National Science Foundation

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[1] Given the extensive collaboration across multiple institutions, a primary representative from each institution is listed here, with a full list of all contributors provided in Appendix B.

Executive Summary: Unleashing American Innovation Through AI Tennessee

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is not just a technology—it is a strategic national capability that will unleash American innovation, ensure economic prosperity, and secure critical infrastructure underpinning Tennessee's economic leadership in energy, manufacturing, healthcare, and logistics. Through AI Tennessee, the state offers a scalable model for aligning research, education, workforce development, and infrastructure investment to support trustworthy, innovation-driven AI adoption.

Tennessee's energy landscape, anchored by the nation's largest public power provider, creates an environment where AI innovation can accelerate energy resilience and modernization. Combined with Tennessee's leadership in manufacturing, logistics, and healthcare, Tennessee offers a nationally scalable model for AI adoption and governance.

AI Tennessee's collaborative ecosystem, powered by its industry consortium AI TechX, aligns with Tennessee's broader economic development strategy. AI TechX unites employers, academia, economic development entities, and government to accelerate AI innovation, validate transformative solutions, drive adoption, and build a future-ready workforce. With the addition of xAI data center in Memphis, this ecosystem strengthens AI-driven innovation across Tennessee's key sectors, including nuclear energy, critical infrastructure, advanced manufacturing, and healthcare. Looking ahead, envisioned an infrastructure like the AI Tennessee Stargate Data Center, as a response to OpenAI, Oracle, and Softbank's joint initiative, will further amplify these efforts, positioning Tennessee as a national leader in AI-enabled infrastructure resilience and grey-zone threat mitigation.

National Policy Imperatives: AI as the Cross-Cutting Enabler for Energy, Manufacturing, Robotics, Health, Infrastructure Security, and Education Systems

- Ensure American leadership in AI by embedding AI into every program focused on energy innovation, manufacturing leadership, supply chain security, and healthcare innovation.
- Recognize Regional AI Innovation Hubs, including AI Tennessee, as critical testbeds where applied AI adoption, workforce training, and real-time policy experimentation converge.
- Establish a Federated Industrial Data Trust to enable secure data sharing that boosts innovation and resilience.
- Launch a National AI Workforce and Reskilling Initiative with regional hubs serving as scalable models.

AI Tennessee: A National Model for AI Leadership

- **AI Tennessee** is a statewide initiative driving AI innovation, workforce development, and economic growth through cutting-edge research, education, industry collaboration, and transformative platforms like AI TechX and the envisioned Stargate Data Center.

- **AI TechX** serves as a catalyst for AI-driven business research, technology deployment, and workforce upskilling. By aligning with industry needs, it delivers specialized training, technical expertise, and collaborative research opportunities that empower companies to harness AI for competitive advantage and economic impact.

- The **AI Tennessee Stargate Data Center** is a visionary concept designed to deliver high-performance computing, real-time industrial analytics, and advanced AI research, reinforcing Tennessee's leadership in national AI innovation and infrastructure resilience.

Strategic Roadmap for scaling AI Tennessee

- **Research and Innovation Acceleration**
  - Build a multi-institution powerhouse AI R&D consortium aligned with national priorities.
  - Launch AI-driven testbeds to revolutionize smart manufacturing, energy, healthcare, and robotics.
  - Establish a Data Foundry for Industrial AI to drive innovation, advanced training, and deployment.
- **Workforce and Economic Development**
  - Launch a National AI Workforce Initiative with regional hubs to upskill American workers and power economic and technological growth.
  - Unleash America's AI workforce potential by leveraging education, industry and government to drive economic growth and global competitiveness.
- **Infrastructure and Policy Leadership**
  - Lead a National Strategy for Industrial AI and Robotics, prioritizing innovation, job creation, and domestic manufacturing competitiveness.
  - Secure America's AI dominance with policies that drive innovation, protect security, and ensure accountability.
  - Strengthen America's AI infrastructure by uniting industry, investment firms, academia, and government to drive policy leadership and secure economic and national interests.

Participating Institutions (in this RFI) [2]

- **Chattanooga State Community College**: AI-integrated education, workforce readiness, and AI adoption
- **Tennessee State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE):** AI policy and governance, education innovation, workforce readiness, stakeholder engagement
- **Middle Tennessee State University**: industrial cybersecurity, data analytics, AI-enhanced agriculture and food systems, regional innovation, and automation
- **State of Tennessee AI Advisory Council:** The collective responsibilities of the Council are to develop recommendations to the Governor, the Governor's Cabinet, and the Legislature regarding the organizational structure, governance, policies, and responsibilities for the coordinated use of Artificial Intelligence within the State of Tennessee
- **Tennessee Tech University**: advanced manufacturing, rural workforce outreach, and critical infrastructure resilience
- **University of Memphis**: data science, cybersecurity, and healthcare AI
- **University of Tennessee Chattanooga**: smart cities, quantum-enhanced AI decision-making, cybersecurity, AI-enhanced public safety and security
- **University of Tennessee Health Science Center:** AI-powered medical innovation, predictive healthcare analytics, next-generation clinical training
- **University of Tennessee Knoxville**: smart manufacturing, AI-enabled energy, precision health, and future mobility, applied AI research and development

Key Components

- Applied research aligned with regional industrial needs (AI Tennessee)
- AI-integrated workforce pipelines (AI TechX)
- Public-private partnerships to de-risk AI adoption (AI TechX)
- Vision for infrastructure backbone (AI Tennessee Stargate Data Center)
- Policy testbed for AI governance and regional resilience (State of Tennessee AI Advisory Council)
- Dual-use AI for grey-zone threat resilience

Sector-Specific Applications: AI in Energy, Manufacturing, Healthcare, Robotics, Infrastructure Security, and Education Systems

The following sections illustrate how AI Tennessee's strategic priorities, as outlined in the Strategic Roadmap, translate into sector-specific applications across energy, manufacturing, healthcare, robotics, education, and infrastructure security.

[2] For additional details on institutional infrastructure and workforce development platforms, the reader may refer to the Appendix A.

AI + Energy: Energy Innovation, including Nuclear, Grid Modernization, and Materials Discovery

Tennessee's leadership in advanced energy innovation, including nuclear, supported by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the Oak Ridge National Lab (ORNL), and the University of Tennessee, positions the state as a natural testbed for AI-enhanced energy resilience, especially against grey-zone threats. AI is essential to securing American energy dominance while ensuring resilience against both natural hazards and emerging security threats. Tennessee is uniquely positioned to support the national nuclear renaissance thanks to the strengths and capabilities of TVA, ORNL, Y-12, Tennessee firms, colleges and universities, and a growing nuclear energy supply chain.

Research Priorities

- AI-enabled materials discovery for advanced nuclear reactor components, both for fusion and fission
- AI predictive maintenance and digital twin modeling for nuclear plants
- AI-enhanced grid anomaly detection and grid resilience modeling
- AI-driven optimization for energy storage and renewable integration

Workforce Development

- Dual-discipline programs in AI, nuclear engineering, and cyber resilience
- AI apprenticeships with regional utilities, energy firms, and national labs
- Energy-focused AI challenges through AI TechX
- Upskilling programs to prepare operators and technicians for AI-enhanced energy systems

Education Pathways

- AI modules in nuclear engineering curriculum programs
- AI-driven energy innovation capstone projects
- K-12 AI and advanced energy career initiatives
- Work-based learning programs connecting K-16 students with AI-driven energy careers

AI + Manufacturing: Smart Factories, Advanced Materials, and Supply Chain Resilience

Tennessee's 60-billion-dollar manufacturing[3] sector is not only a cornerstone of the state's economy but is also a critical driver of American competitiveness. With leadership in automotive, aerospace, materials, and consumer products manufacturing, Tennessee offers a national proving ground for AI-enabled advanced manufacturing systems. AI Tennessee will demonstrate how AI enhances productivity, agility, and resilience across the entire manufacturing lifecycle — from design and materials discovery to production and logistics.

Research Priorities

- AI for predictive maintenance, adaptive process control, and autonomous production
- AI-driven materials discovery for additive manufacturing, composites, and advanced alloys
- AI-powered logistics planning and supply chain optimization for real-time decision-making and resilience
- AI-enhanced quality assurance and defect detection in real-time manufacturing environments
- AI-enabled sustainability tracking and circular manufacturing optimization

Workforce Development

- AI TechX in collaboration with the Tennessee Manufacturing Extension Partnership delivering manufacturing-specific AI upskilling and professional certifications
- Industry co-developed AI-in-manufacturing training programs targeting mid-career professionals
- Work-based learning initiatives, including internships, apprenticeships, and capstone projects, engaging students in real-world factory challenges
- AI-enhanced apprenticeship and workforce innovation programs embedded smart factories statewide

Education Pathways

- Integration of AI into engineering, manufacturing, and supply chain curricula at colleges and universities at all levels, technical college to PhD programs
- Practical training opportunities within AI Tennessee-affiliated smart manufacturing centers
- Dual-degree programs blending manufacturing engineering with specialized AI skills
- K-12 outreach and competitions in collaboration with TMEP to introduce students to AI-driven manufacturing careers

[3] Statista Research Department

AI + Health: Precision Medicine, Health Security, and Biomedical Innovation

Nashville's 97-billion-dollar healthcare industry — home to about 1,000 healthcare and health-related companies[4] — creates a unique opportunity to integrate AI across precision medicine, health operations, and biomedical innovation. Nashville's globally recognized healthcare management ecosystem, combined with Memphis' medical devices and biomedical expertise, makes Tennessee a national model for AI-enabled health transformation.

Research Priorities

- AI-enabled drug design and discovery leveraging data from the envisioned AI Tennessee Stargate Data Center and the High Performance Computing (HPC) infrastructure
- AI-driven precision medicine integrating public health, clinical, and genomic data
- AI-enhanced biomedical imaging, diagnostics, and digital pathology
- AI for real-time bio-surveillance, outbreak modeling, and public health decision support

Workforce Development

- AI TechX delivering health-focused AI upskilling for clinicians, researchers, and public health professionals
- Work-based learning programs, including clinical AI internships, apprenticeships, and residency-style training for students and professionals
- Integration of AI into nursing, public health, and medical school curricula
- Health innovation bootcamps hosted by AI Tennessee and Tennessee colleges and universities

Education Pathways

- Dual-degree programs blending AI with health informatics and biomedical engineering
- Student research projects linking AI to real-world health challenges
- K-12 outreach promoting AI careers in healthcare, biomedical research, and public health
- AI-integrated clinical training simulations to enhance medical decision-making, diagnostics, and personalized treatment planning

[4] Nashville Health Care Council

AI + Robotics: Flexible Automation, Autonomous Systems, and Infrastructure Defense

Tennessee's strengths in advanced manufacturing, logistics, and supply chain management position the state as a national leader in AI-driven robotics innovation. By integrating AI with robotics, Tennessee will transform industrial automation, streamline and secure complex supply chains, and strengthen critical infrastructure resilience. Tennessee is positioned to serve as a scalable regional model for national competitiveness and innovation.

Research Priorities

- AI-driven collaborative robotics for adaptive and human-robot teamwork in manufacturing
- AI-enhanced autonomous logistics and warehouse robotics for efficiency and security
- AI-powered defect detection and quality assurance
- AI-integrated robotics for hazardous environments, emergency response, and infrastructure resilience

Workforce Development

- AI and robotics training through AI Tech X to upskill technicians, engineers, and operators
- Work-based learning initiatives, including apprenticeships, internships, and industry-led training programs, linking AI-driven automation with real-world industrial applications
- AI-enhanced robotics certification and training pathways for mid-career reskilling
- Cross-disciplinary AI and robotics leadership programs to equip industry professionals with strategic decision-making skills for implementing AI-driven automation at scale.

Education Pathways

- Dual-degree programs combining AI, robotics, and systems engineering
- AI-integrated curricula for automation and control systems engineering
- K-12 outreach programs to introduce students to robotics and AI careers
- Industry-partnered AI and robotics apprenticeships to provide hands-on experience in automation, manufacturing, and autonomous systems development.

AI + Education Systems: Securing America's AI Talent Pipeline

AI-driven education is a national imperative for ensuring American leadership in AI innovation, workforce resilience, and economic prosperity. Tennessee is advancing AI integration across K-12, higher education, and workforce training, ensuring that students, educators, and industry professionals develop the expertise needed to lead in an AI-powered economy. AI Tennessee's approach to AI literacy, technical training, and applied research builds a talent pipeline that drives innovation in manufacturing, energy, robotics, and healthcare.

Research Priorities

- Develop a national AI education framework that aligns K-12, higher education, and workforce training with economic and national security priorities
- Advance AI-driven instructional models that enhance STEM education, problem-solving, and technical training
- Expand applied research in AI-driven adaptive learning, assessment tools, and workforce analytics to improve education outcomes

Workforce Development

- Embed AI literacy and fluency in teacher-preparation programs, technical colleges, and industry-driven training initiatives
- Expand AI-focused apprenticeships, industry-aligned certifications, and professional development to ensure workforce adaptability
- Train institutional and industry decision-makers on AI applications for economic competitiveness, security, and productivity

Education Pathways

- Integrate AI and data science courses across K-12, community colleges, and university programs
- Expand AI-enabled career and technical education programs to prepare mid-skill and high-skill workers for emerging job markets
- Foster AI-driven public-private partnerships that align education, industry needs, and national workforce strategies

AI + Infrastructure Security: Protecting Critical Assets and Enhancing Resilience

AI is a key enabler of securing critical infrastructure, including energy grids, supply chains, and industrial networks. AI-driven security tools can mitigate threats, detect vulnerabilities, and ensure resilience in the face of cyber and physical risks.

Research Priorities

- AI-enabled cybersecurity solutions for industrial control systems and smart grids
- AI-driven predictive maintenance for transportation, energy, and public infrastructure
- AI-powered threat detection and real-time anomaly detection for infrastructure networks
- AI-integrated emergency response systems and disaster preparedness models

Workforce Development

- AI-based cybersecurity and critical infrastructure security training programs through AI TechX
- Industry collaborations to upskill professionals in AI-driven infrastructure resilience
- AI-enhanced apprenticeships prepare cybersecurity analysts and infrastructure engineers for real-world challenges in critical sectors

Education Pathways

- AI-integrated public policy and cybersecurity curricula in higher education
- Research initiatives in AI-driven risk mitigation for infrastructure security
- K-12 programs introducing AI in national security and resilience planning

Final Call to Action

AI Tennessee provides a scalable, innovation-driven model that can serve as a blueprint for national AI adoption. A federal – state – industry partnership leveraging Tennessee's AI infrastructure, education and workforce development, and applied research leadership would ensure the United States remains at the forefront of AI-driven economic and technological leadership. Tennessee stands ready to lead and collaborate in making AI a pillar of American competitiveness and security.

Appendix A: Institutional Infrastructure and Workforce Platforms

The AI Tennessee, launched under the leadership of its inaugural director, Dr. Lynne Parker, is a statewide initiative designed to position Tennessee as a national leader in AI-driven innovation, workforce development, and economic competitiveness. By uniting academic state institutions across the state, AI Tennessee advances applied research, industry collaboration, and scalable workforce training supported by the Tennessee-wide AI TechX consortium. With existing and envisioned infrastructure like the AI Tennessee Stargate Data Center, AI Tennessee addresses key sectors including energy, manufacturing, robotics, healthcare, and infrastructure security, serving as a replicable model for integrating AI to enhance national resilience, secure critical infrastructure, and sustain long-term economic growth.

The AI TechX drives AI adoption through applied research, technology deployment, and workforce upskilling, serving as a bridge between industry, academia, and innovation. By aligning with industry needs, it delivers specialized training, technical expertise, and collaborative research opportunities that equip businesses, STEM professionals, and the skilled technical workforce with AI-driven solutions for innovation and economic growth. Through strategic partnerships, AI TechX fosters AI integration across key sectors, ensuring a competitive and future-ready workforce.

The AI Tennessee Stargate Data Center represents a visionary infrastructure concept designed to provide cutting-edge computational and data capabilities that support advanced AI research, innovation, and workforce development across Tennessee. Envisioned as a critical national asset, the center would enable real-time industrial data analytics, advanced simulations for nuclear energy, biomedical research, autonomous systems, and accelerated materials discovery. By aligning closely with national AI priorities around innovation, data sovereignty, and infrastructure resilience, the AI Tennessee Stargate Data Center positions Tennessee as a scalable model for American technological leadership.

Chattanooga State Community College is advancing AI adoption in education and workforce development, equipping students with the skills needed for an evolving job market. The college integrates AI into curriculum design, student learning, and faculty training, fostering digital literacy and ethical AI use. Through hands-on applications and professional development, Chattanooga State prepares students and educators to leverage AI for problem-solving, efficiency, and innovation across various fields. By continuing to explore AI's role in workforce readiness and academic instruction, the college supports regional economic growth and technological adaptation.

The Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) plays a critical role in AI Tennessee, contributing deep expertise in industrial cybersecurity, data analytics, AI-driven agricultural systems, and workforce automation. Through its strong connections with regional industries in the growing greater Nashville MSA and in agriculture in the surrounding rural counties, MTSU integrates AI-focused research with practical applications, helping Tennessee's small and mid-sized enterprises remain competitive. MTSU also actively engages in workforce development

initiatives, providing targeted training and certifications in AI and cybersecurity, ensuring the region's industries and agricultural sectors have access to skilled, AI-ready talent.

State of Tennessee AI Advisory Council: The Tennessee Artificial Intelligence (AI) Advisory Council's mission is to provide a collaborative source of knowledge, expertise and information sharing to advance the State of Tennessee's use of AI technologies in an ethical, adaptable, collaborative, and beneficial modality for all Tennesseans. The Council will recommend and support the implementation of sound policies and strategies regarding AI use and adoption.

The Tennessee State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan advocacy and research institution, founded in 2009 by Senator Bill Frist, MD, former US Senate Majority Leader. SCORE strives to be a durable and trusted advisor in education and drive change for students from kindergarten to career through policy and practice – and taking it to scale. SCORE plays a critical role as a trusted leader in AI in education through stakeholder engagement, regularly convening national experts and state leaders in the K-12, higher education, industry, philanthropy, and technology spaces to ensure Tennessee is equipped to educate and prepare students for careers of the future. SCORE has focused these future-forward conversations on the innovative and transformative potential of AI in education and has elevated collective learnings and recommendations with the Tennessee's AI Advisory Council.

The Tennessee Tech University is a critical partner in AI Tennessee, bringing significant AI expertise in advanced manufacturing, cybersecurity, rural workforce development, high-performance computing, and infrastructure resilience. Known for its practical, hands-on approach, Tennessee Tech integrates AI into applied research and industry partnerships, directly addressing regional and national priorities. The university's commitment to workforce readiness is exemplified through targeted programs that equip students with practical AI skills, including trustworthiness and explainability, large-language models, multidisciplinary application of AI in areas of national need, and the use of AI in support of software development. Through collaborative initiatives with industry and regional partners, Tennessee Tech helps accelerate the adoption of AI technologies statewide, supporting Tennessee's leadership in innovation and economic competitiveness.

The University of Memphis plays a pivotal role in the AI Tennessee, contributing expertise in data science, cybersecurity, precision medicine, and AI-driven healthcare innovation. Leveraging its strong research capabilities, particularly in addressing health disparities and biomedical challenges, the university actively engages in collaborative AI research with industry and regional partners. The University of Memphis integrates AI workforce development through targeted training programs that enhance the region's capacity in healthcare analytics, biomedical informatics, and cybersecurity. By aligning its research strengths and workforce programs with statewide initiatives, the university supports Tennessee's economic competitiveness, infrastructure resilience, and strategic growth in AI.

The University of Tennessee Chattanooga (UTC) is a key member for in the AI Tennessee, leveraging its strengths in AI-driven automation, cybersecurity, and quantum-enhanced computing for infrastructure resilience. UTC specializes in real-time data analytics, machine learning applications, and AI-powered optimization models, advancing AI's role in intelligent systems,

logistics, and digital twin simulations. With growing expertise in quantum AI for transportation and security applications, UTC explores how quantum computing can enhance AI decision-making in critical infrastructure and complex system modeling. Additionally, UTC's capabilities in cyber-physical security, AI-driven anomaly detection, and AI-enhanced workforce development provide strategic leverage for AI Tennessee, strengthening the state's leadership in AI adoption and national competitiveness.

The University of Tennessee Health Science Center (UTHSC) is advancing AI adoption in healthcare education, clinical practice, and research. By integrating AI into medical training, diagnostics, and patient care, UTHSC enhances clinical decision-making, operational efficiency, and health outcomes. Its focus includes AI-driven medical imaging, predictive analytics for patient monitoring, and automation in healthcare workflows. As a key player in Tennessee's healthcare ecosystem, UTHSC leverages AI to strengthen medical education and support innovation in clinical applications, ensuring the state remains at the forefront of AI-driven healthcare transformation.

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UT) spearheaded the creation of AI Tennessee and, as the state's largest land-grant institution, is uniquely positioned to lead in AI innovation. UT possesses cutting-edge AI capabilities in nuclear energy, intelligent transportation, advanced manufacturing, supply chain optimization, and cyber-physical security, driving advancements in critical infrastructure, industrial automation, and national security. With world-class expertise in high-performance computing, digital twin simulations, AI-driven automation, predictive analytics, and logistics optimization, UT delivers scalable, real-world AI solutions that transform industries and strengthen economic resilience. Through applied research, strategic industry partnerships, and AI-driven workforce development, UT provides nationally competitive, innovation-driven capabilities that directly support AI Tennessee's mission and American technological leadership.

Appendix B: List of all contributors (in alphabetical order by last name)

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