AI SYMPOSIUM REPORT

AI & Industry, Policy & Workforce in South Carolina



WITH INPUT FROM LEADERS IN INDUSTRY, TECH, BUSINESS, ACADEMIA & POLICY

South Carolina Research Authority, SCRA
Prepared by: Alka Roy
Founder, RI Labs, LLC, alka@rilabs.ai
Released: May 30, 2025

© Alka Roy, RI Labs, LLC, May, 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY 3
KEY TAKEAWAYS 3
WHO PARTICIPATED 3
SECTION 1: GOALS & METHODOLOGY 5
SECTION 2: KEY FINDINGS & INSIGHTS 5
- 2.1 AI & Industry Roundtable 5
- 2.2 AI & Workforce Roundtable 6
- 2.3 AI & Policy Roundtable 7

SECTION 3: RECOMMENDATIONS & NEXT STEPS 8
- 3.1 Recommendations 8
  - 3.1.1 Develop a Statewide AI Strategy 8
  - 3.1.2 Create South Carolina's AI Consortium 8
  - 3.1.3 Invest in AI Education and Workforce Training Beyond Tech Skills 9
  - 3.1.4 Create Innovation Sandboxes for Public-Private-Academic Sector 9
  - 3.1.5 Align Incentives Around Responsible Use of Technology & AI 9
- 3.2 Key Next Steps for South Carolina's AI Future 10

CONCLUSION 11
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION 12
- Call to Action 12
- Acknowledgements 12
- About Us 12
  - SCRA 12
  - RI Labs, LLC 12

© Alka Roy, RI Labs, LLC, May, 2025

AI SYMPOSIUM REPORT

April 2025 | Convened by South Carolina Research Authority (SCRA) for the State of South Carolina

---

SUMMARY

On **April 8, 2025**, the State of South Carolina sponsored an **AI Symposium** organized and hosted by **SCRA** in partnership with **RI Labs** to build AI leadership and a brighter future for the state. **Rep. Jeff Bradley**, Chairman of the South Carolina House Regulations, Administrative Procedures, Artificial Intelligence & Cybersecurity Committee, initiated the event.

A pre-symposium survey and roundtable discussions facilitated by local leaders, focused on **AI and Industry, Policy, and Workforce**. Participants identified opportunities and systemic barriers in deploying AI responsibly and effectively across the state.

This report synthesizes the most salient insights and presents strategic recommendations for state leaders, business executives, educators, and community partners seeking to ensure South Carolina remains competitive and prepared for the future with AI.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

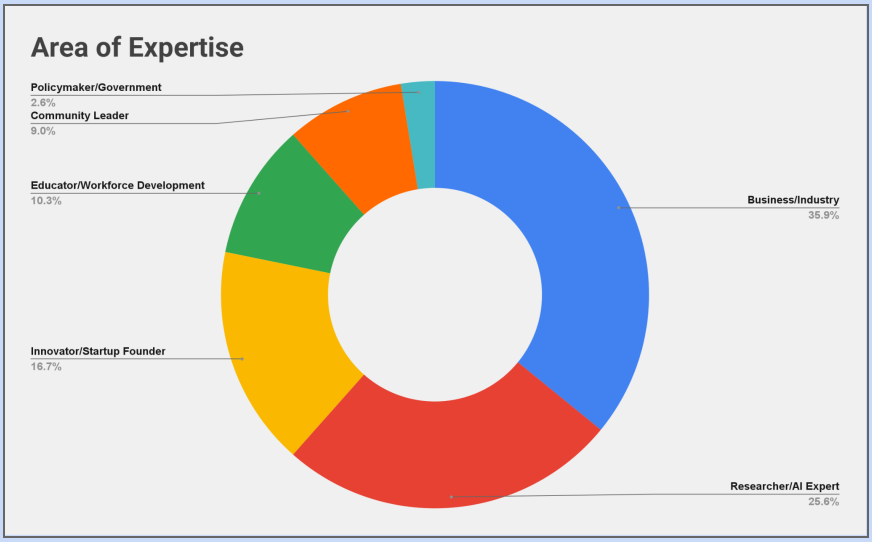
State leaders in South Carolina want a "***practical***" and "***informed***" approach to AI that creates a brighter future for the state, **not just AI for the sake of AI**. They want to get ready for an AI-powered future to attract jobs, investments, businesses, and opportunities that create value, are good for the people of the state, and proactively address vulnerabilities such as **cybercrimes, job loss, data privacy, safety, and environmental impacts.**

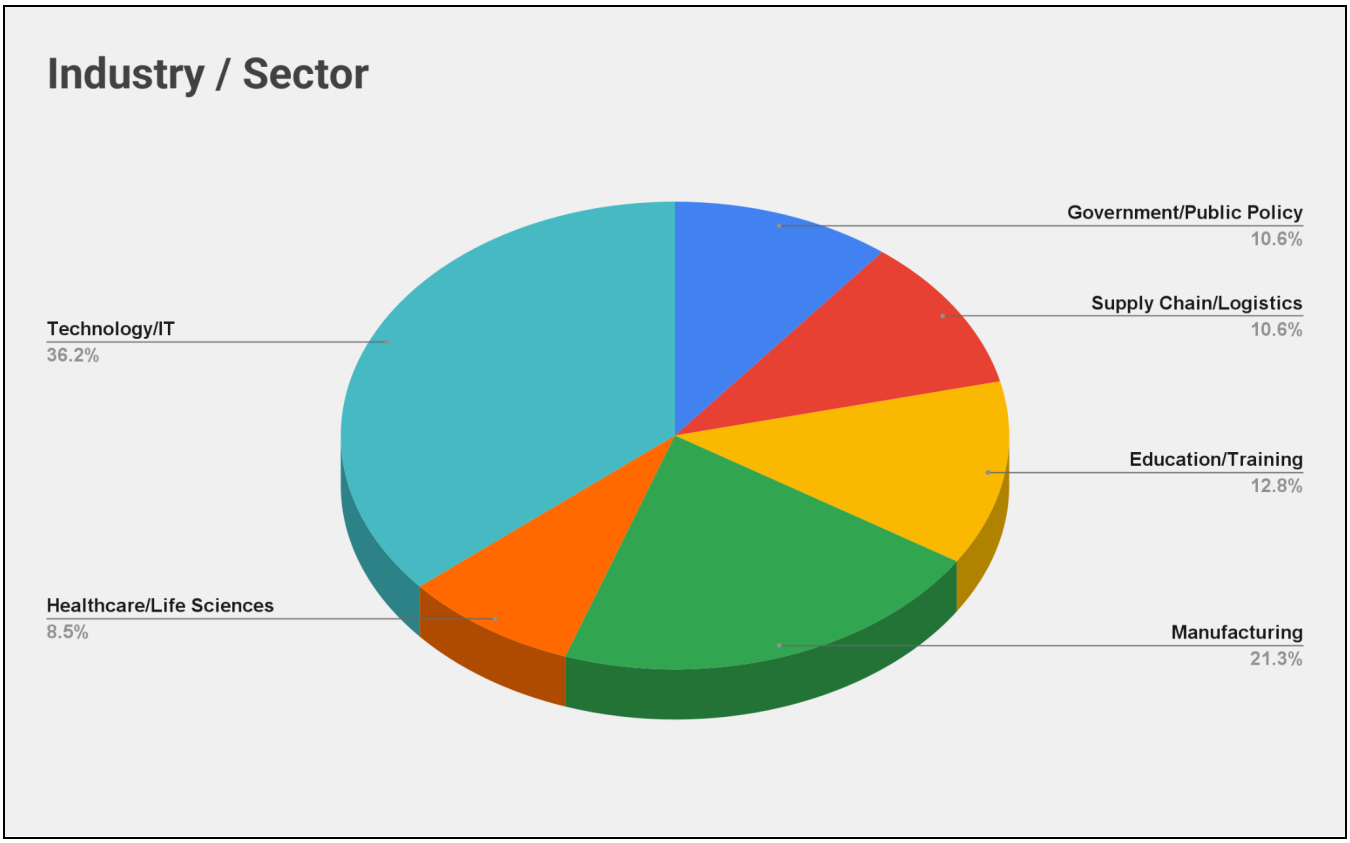
WHO PARTICIPATED

The following charts show the composition of the participants' primary organizational affiliation and area of expertise.

© Alka Roy, RI Labs, LLC, May, 2025

Makeup of Participants: Technology/IT (36%) and industries like Manufacturing (21%), Supply Chain Logistics (11%), and Healthcare (8.5%) had the highest representation. In addition, almost 26% of the participants identified as AI Researchers & Experts, and 17% of attendees were founders or affiliated with startups.





© Alka Roy, RI Labs, LLC, May, 2025

SECTION 1: GOALS & METHODOLOGY

The following strategies, formats, and methodologies were utilized to increase participation and gather insights. The key goals for the symposium were to:

- Define opportunities for South Carolina to lead in AI implementation
- Understand barriers to adoption across sectors
- Inform statewide strategies and directions with insights from local leaders

Before the symposium, attendees were invited to participate in a survey to share their concerns and baseline their current understanding—75% of attendees completed the survey. The AI symposium also included a keynote that provided case studies and examples of successful and challenging AI strategies followed by a panel discussion with local leaders: **Representative Jeff Bradley**, **Bob Quinn,** SCRA, **Susie Shannon**, SC Competes, **Marcus Branner**, BMW Manufacturing Co, and **Dr. Matthew Krugh**, Clemson University, who discussed different AI-related initiatives that are underway in South Carolina.

The event included a series of roundtables on AI & Industry, AI & Policy, and AI & Workforce. The roundtables followed a participatory World Café process to combine the benefits of small group conversations and cross-pollination of different perspectives. At the end of the roundtables, observations and strategies were synthesized using elements of Collective Narrative Methodology, which were further analyzed, edited, and organized to create this report.

SECTION 2: KEY FINDINGS & INSIGHTS

2.1 AI & Industry Roundtable

Manufacturing, Automotive, Life Sciences, Healthcare, General Business Use/IT, and Supply Chain Logistics were primarily represented. And while these sectors share several common AI concerns and use cases for business processes, it is important to note that each industry also has unique AI-related use cases and implementation challenges. Not only do organizations have different starting points, but the thresholds and appetites for vulnerabilities like safety, security, bias, environmental, and job impact also vary.

"We're trying to bring manufacturing back—but we need the

© Alka Roy, RI Labs, LLC, May, 2025

edge AI can give us." "The biggest fear is that we will apply AI and see no results." "Everything is changing so quickly—how do we decide when we should build, buy, or just wait with AI?"

Key Challenges Raised:

- High failure rate of AI pilots (the group mentioned that 75% of their projects fail or lack a Return on Investment (ROI))
- Overhyped Gen AI/AI solutions may be misaligned with real operational needs
- Trust gaps: concerns about vendor transparency, data, and AI readiness, security, and long-term sustainability

Needs Identified:

- Access to practical, results-driven use cases
- Clear strategies and better vendor matchmaking
- Better support for startups and small manufacturers to collaborate
- Multi-level skills and strategy development, and trial opportunities

Survey Findings:

- 32% of the survey respondents think South Carolina should take the lead in automated manufacturing with the use of AI.
- 49% find a lack of clear return on investment with AI and viable use cases as one of the biggest barriers to adoption.

2.2 AI & Workforce Roundtable

Many participants highlighted that AI-related workforce development is not "one size fits all." There was a call for an updated school curriculum for different age groups, as well as relevant hands-on training and upskilling opportunities for new graduates, the current workforce, and leadership. There were concerns that job opportunities may leave the state or be unevenly distributed without access to relevant training and jobs.

"The issue isn't job loss—it's opportunity loss if we don't prepare our people." "Training lessens resistance and escalates impact. But it has to address the issues with AI." "Do we

© Alka Roy, RI Labs, LLC, May, 2025

understand what we mean when we say AI?"

Key Challenges Raised:

- Misalignment between the quality and speed of existing training and the emerging AI needs
- Limited access for rural or small-business workers
- Approach and narratives of AI as a job-taker rather than a useful tool

Needs Identified:

- Wider range & access to AI literacy, from schools to the workforce
- Understanding and reframing the conversation around AI and human agency
- More agile, hands-on training and industry-education partnerships
- Need for non-technical skills (i.e., complex decision making) along with AI

Survey Findings:

- 30% of respondents cited a lack of skilled talent as a barrier to AI adoption.
- Though 38% of respondents said they were "Leading With AI" during the survey, only a small number of organizations seemed to have an AI strategy in place.

2.3 AI & Policy Roundtable

The Policy roundtables spent some time discussing what is meant by "policy." They took the approach that policy is more than regulations and that leaders have access to, and can utilize, various state-, local-, and organizational-level levers to set guardrails and policies.

"Let's not overstate the risks—but let's not overstate the benefits either." "We need infrastructure for AI, along with policies about it." "AI should help our people, not replace them."

Key Challenges Raised:

- Lack of centralized state vision or guiding AI strategy
- Infrastructure gaps (e.g., access to affordable tech/AI, power, and water issues)
- Fear, uncertainty, and resistance to change hinder public sector AI use

© Alka Roy, RI Labs, LLC, May, 2025

Needs Identified:

- Statewide AI strategy and infrastructure plan
- Sandboxes for safe public sector experimentation
- Clear consumer protection, privacy, and data governance policies
- Policies around the use of environmental resources for data centers and AI Infrastructure

Survey Findings:

- 32% of respondents listed data privacy and security (including data leaks) as a key barrier to AI adoption.
- 12% highlighted environmentally friendly data centers as the area where South Carolina could take the lead.

SECTION 3: RECOMMENDATIONS & NEXT STEPS

Each roundtable group developed a series of recommendations. The following list synthesizes results from the roundtable discussions, feedback from the survey, and follow-up discussions to meet South Carolina's goals to develop AI and technology leadership that serves the state and its citizens.

3.1 Recommendations

3.1.1 Develop a Statewide AI Strategy

- Appoint a cross-sector task force to define goals, risks, and roles
- Build a shared roadmap linking infrastructure, education, and investment
- Build mechanisms to utilize examples and use-cases from successful strategies from other states and institutions. Create a feedback loop to learn and share information.

3.1.2 Create South Carolina's AI Consortium

- One of the most consistent recommendations from roundtable discussions with industry and tech companies was to create a hub or collection of hubs to connect industry, education, startups, and government.
- Co-develop or organize use cases, trials, or pilots (e.g., startup-enterprise

© Alka Roy, RI Labs, LLC, May, 2025

partnerships to organize use cases and utilize examples of successful implementations)
- Provide funding avenues, grants, and access to data or shared infrastructure.
- Share learnings and skills around AI capabilities and risks (e.g., data management, governance, risk management, return on investment, and security)

3.1.3 Invest in AI Education and Workforce Training Beyond Tech Skills

- Expand AI literacy programs for schools, technical colleges, and the reskilling workforce. While technical fluency is important, broader skillsets, like digital literacy, critical thinking, problem scoping, and human agency are needed.
- Explore reverse mentoring, micro-credentials, and industry-driven bootcamps for leadership development
- Encourage organizational designs where AI is an effective tool for people

3.1.4 Create Innovation Sandboxes for Public-Private-Academic Sector

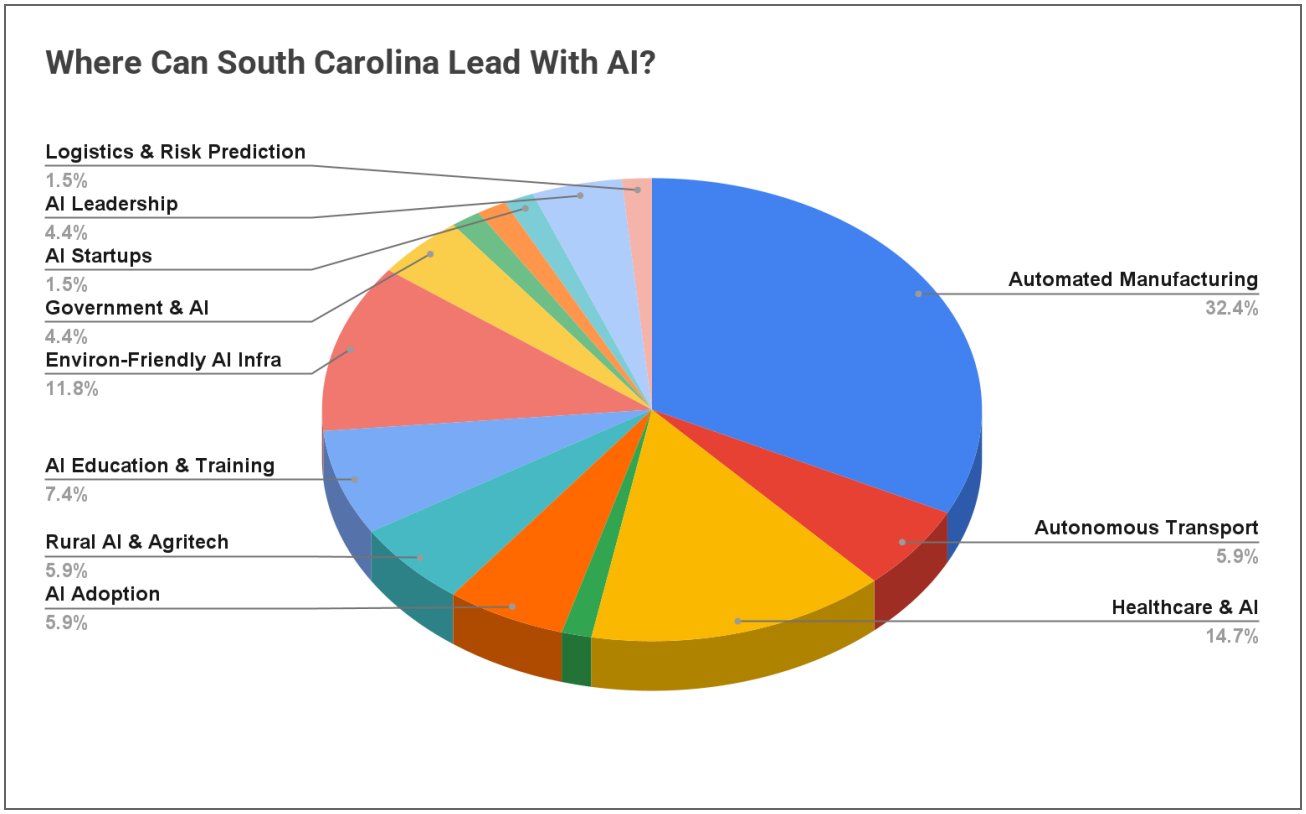
- Allow agencies and partners to test AI solutions safely with proper oversight
- Share learnings to improve efficiency and trust, and assess value creation (ROI), viability, and risks
- Share learnings and skills around data management and security
- Vet vendors, co-develop use cases, and reduce duplication

3.1.5 Align Incentives Around Responsible Use of Technology & AI

- State incentives to value creation, community benefit, and beneficial use of AI
- Encourage companies to invest in workforce and local talent pipelines
- Manage the environmental impact of AI infrastructure, like data centers
- Lead with trust—Manage data privacy, job impacts, security, and safety

Where Can South Carolina Lead With AI? The following chart shows the areas where participants would like to see South Carolina take leadership. Automated Manufacturing ranked as the top choice with 32%, Healthcare was almost 15%, and Environmentally-Friendly Data Centers & AI Infrastructure was third at almost 12%. Rural Access to AI (including Agricultural Technology) was about 6%.

© Alka Roy, RI Labs, LLC, May, 2025



3.2 Key Next Steps for South Carolina's AI Future

While the recommendations in this report offer clear direction, the real impact will come from ***how*** they are carried out. South Carolina has a unique opportunity to lead by shaping an approach to technology & AI that is thoughtful, strategic, and rooted in shared leadership.

That means creating space for different leaders—statewide, local, institutional, and community-based—to take initiative in ways that reflect their specific needs and strengths. Progress doesn't come from a single plan or top-down effort. It needs **distributed action, collaboration across sectors, and trust-building over time**. The goal isn't uniformity—it's **alignment**.

A big part of how South Carolina leads in AI also depends on **who** is participating in these conversations. As a step forward, SCRA and SC Competes have sponsored the creation of an **AI Leadership Hub for South Carolina**—an online space hosted by RI Labs for skill-building, partnerships, and conversations about practical use cases, and foundational

questions like: *Where is AI truly adding value, and who is it serving?*

Looking ahead, it's equally important to look outward. Building partnerships beyond the state, for knowledge-sharing, technical infrastructure, and innovation, will be essential in positioning South Carolina for long-term success in a global AI economy.

CONCLUSION

South Carolina is at a pivotal moment. Like the rest of the world, the state's industry and technology leaders are navigating how to succeed in a post–generative AI era—balancing the need to stay competitive with the responsibility to build capacity, leadership, and opportunity across the state.

AI is no longer a distant concept. It's already reshaping how work is done, how decisions are made, and how communities evolve. To ensure the benefits of AI are **accessible and responsibly shared**, South Carolina must lead with **strategy, resources, collaboration, and trust**.

> *"South Carolina could be the home of the next big thing—if we invest in talent and make it easy to build here."*

The leaders who gathered at this symposium made it clear: **South Carolina doesn't want to just follow—it wants to actively shape its future**. With the right alignment of vision, policy, infrastructure, and human-focused design, AI can become a powerful and useful tool for the people across the state. But it's neither simple nor easy.

So, what will it take?

- **Understanding AI in a broader context**—as part of a larger technological landscape, with societal and workforce impacts
- **Investing in a statewide strategy** that connects policy, education, infrastructure, and AI adoption—guided by values and practical capabilities.
- **Collaborating across public, private, and academic sectors** to create a strong ecosystem and a culture of innovation

The work has begun. The conversations and connections sparked by this symposium reflect a shared vision for South Carolina's future. Now it is up to the state's leaders to decide how to move forward—effectively and together.

© Alka Roy, RI Labs, LLC, May, 2025

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Call to Action

Questions? Ideas? Contact Us to advise, mentor, support, or share ideas and projects. We have found that examples and applications give the most practical insights and tell the most powerful stories. If you have questions or ideas about a new AI project or approach you want to share, or challenges where you need help or partnership, please reach out!

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we thank Chairman Bradley for his leadership in conceptualizing this symposium and acquiring the requisite resources from the South Carolina General Assembly. We are also extremely grateful to all the survey and roundtable participants for their time and valuable thoughts and ideas. Without their participation, this report would not exist. We are also grateful to the table host leads, Adam Anderson, Marcus Benjamin, Kim Christ, Erin Curtis, Wren Gregory, Dave Ingram, Rembert Moore, Jack Neil, Allyn Powell, Michael Rentz, Dan Rundle, and Joel Weinbach, for volunteering to facilitate and lead the discussions during the roundtable. Special thanks to all the panelists and volunteers who helped on the day of the event, as well as key contributors and reviewers of this report.

About Us

SCRA

Chartered in 1983 by the State of South Carolina as a public, nonprofit corporation, South Carolina Research Authority fuels the state's innovation economy through the impact of its comprehensive services to technology-based startups, academia, and industry. SCRA provides funding and support to accelerate the growth of academic startups; high-quality lab and administrative workspaces; facilitation and funding for partnerships between and among industry, startups, and academic institutions; assistance and funding for the relocation of technology-based companies to South Carolina; and coaching and funding for startups that may also receive investments from its affiliate, SC Launch Inc. **SCRA.org**

RI Labs, LLC

RI Labs, LLC helps leaders make AI work for them, their ecosystems, and the bottom line—through self-assessments, workshops, strategy development, vendor evaluations, and AI proof of concept development. We encourage a human-focused, practical, and iterative approach to AI and tech innovation, **rilabs.ai**

© Alka Roy, RI Labs, LLC, May, 2025