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Workforce Challenges Are the Top Barrier to Federal AI Progress

87% of Federal IT leaders say their in-house workforce has only a fraction of needed AI knowledge

Alexandria, Va., September 26, 2022 - Ninety-five percent of Federal technology leaders feel that the appropriate use of artificial intelligence (AI) could supercharge the effectiveness of government and benefit the American people, yet half of them have had AI projects fail due to lack of expertise to support it, according to a new study from [MeriTalk](#), a public-private partnership focused on improving the outcomes of government IT.

AI innovation requires a mix of technical and non-technical skills, new governance models, and a commitment to building and nurturing a next-generation data-focused workforce. To understand how Federal agencies are meeting AI staffing and professional development needs, MeriTalk surveyed 150 Federal technology-decision makers familiar with AI. The resulting [Federal AI Workforce Index](#), conducted in partnership with Future Tech Enterprise, Inc., Dell Technologies Transformation Partner of the Year, identifies critical resource gaps and the skills most in-demand.

Federal technology leaders rank in-house expertise as the most important factor for successful AI implementations, with advanced AI technology as a close second. Yet just four in ten feel completely prepared for AI project implementation, with the lack of resources and available talent noted as the biggest roadblocks – ahead of budget.

While the study found that nearly all agencies are investing in in-house AI skill development, less than half have a formal strategy to do so. The most in-demand skills include:

- Advanced statistics/modeling
- Data visualization
- Responsible AI/algorithm bias / ethical AI
- Data mining or interpretation
- Data literacy
- Coding or programming
- DevOps

The study found that agencies are turning to trusted vendors, Federal system integrators (FSIs), and contractors to fill the gap. Sixty-three percent indicate that at least half of their AI work is outsourced, and 32% said their agency completely depends on outside support. Seventy-two percent expect to increase their use of outside help as their AI strategies advance.

The study uncovered that the Department of Defense was significantly more likely than their civilian counterparts to have at least half of their AI work done by contractors (73% compared to 53%). They also had a much lower AI project fail rate.



“As a strategic IT partner for leading FSIs, Future Tech continues to see firsthand how public/private partnerships are core to Federal AI success,” said Bob Venero, CEO of Future Tech Enterprise, Inc., a global IT solutions firm that focuses on serving FSIs.

“Successful AI requires a blend of attracting and retaining key talent, ongoing training, investing in the latest AI-powered hardware and software solutions, and making sure you have a business-focused AI strategy.”

Agencies report the biggest resource gaps that third-party contractors can help fill include:

- Technical expertise
- Training on AI application and data management skills
- Training on navigating trustworthy AI
- Strategic guidance
- Real-world examples of Federal AI in action
- Recommendations on how to secure senior leadership buy-in

The *Federal AI Workforce Index* report is based on an online survey of 150 Federal technology decision-makers familiar with their organization’s use of or plans for AI. The report has a margin of error of $\pm 7.97\%$ at a 95% confidence level. To review the full findings, visit [Federal AI Workforce Index: Identifying and Closing the Gap](#).

About MeriTalk

The voice of tomorrow’s government today, MeriTalk is a public-private partnership focused on improving the outcomes of government IT. Our award-winning editorial team and world-class events and research staff produces unmatched news, analysis, and insight. The goal: more efficient, responsive, and citizen-centric government. MeriTalk connects with an audience of 160,000 Federal community contacts. For more information, visit <https://www.meritalk.com/> or follow us on Twitter, @MeriTalk. MeriTalk is a [300Brand](#) organization.

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