

Black Hills Area Community Foundation Capacity Building Grant Proposal

Project Title

Building Community Capacity Through Generative AI Training: A Collaborative Approach for the Black Hills Region

Organization Background

Black Hills Special Services Cooperative (BHSSC), through its Compass Partners and Learning division, has been a trusted educational partner in the Black Hills region for over 40 years. Our mission is to provide collaborative, innovative solutions that empower our communities. For the past 2.5 years, we have been at the forefront of generative AI education, conducting specialized training for schools, governmental organizations, and community groups throughout the region.

Abstract

This proposal seeks \$5,000 in capacity building funds to develop and deliver a comprehensive generative AI training program specifically designed for Rapid City's public, business, and governmental organizations. Unlike our previous applications that focused on building our own internal capacity, this project takes a collaborative approach by leveraging our expertise to strengthen the region's collective workforce efficiency, technological literacy, and innovation potential. Through structured workshops utilizing our proven "World Cafe" methodology, customized training materials, and expert-led sessions, we will create a sustainable ecosystem of AI knowledge-sharing that will continue to benefit the Black Hills community long after the grant period concludes.

Need Statement

The Black Hills region faces several interconnected challenges that this project directly addresses:

1. **Technology adoption gap:** While generative AI tools have rapidly transformed workplaces globally, many regional organizations lack the knowledge to effectively implement these tools, creating competitive disadvantages. Research by Aguinis et al. (2024) demonstrates that generative AI can significantly enhance public sector efficiency

through automation of routine tasks and provision of strategic insights.

2. **Workforce efficiency challenges:** Research from our previous trainings shows that even basic generative AI implementation can save employees 1-2 hours weekly—multiplied across organizations, this represents significant untapped productivity potential for our region. Kliestik et al. (2024) confirm that AI-driven tools improve job performance and productivity through predictive analytics and enhanced decision-making capabilities.
3. **Isolation of knowledge resources:** Currently, AI expertise and training resources exist in silos across different sectors (education, government, business), preventing collaborative learning and implementation. The World Café methodology directly addresses this challenge, as Silva & Guenther (2018) note its effectiveness in bringing together diverse perspectives across organizational boundaries.
4. **Security and ethical risks:** Without proper training, organizations attempting to adopt AI tools face increased risks of data privacy breaches, unintentional bias, or ineffective implementation that can undermine public trust. Cugurullo & Xu (2024) highlight these challenges specifically in the context of municipal governance.
5. **Sustainability challenges for smaller organizations:** Small businesses and non-profits in our region often lack resources to independently seek AI training, despite potentially benefiting the most from efficiency gains. Joshi (2025) emphasizes that inclusive generative AI training is particularly beneficial for bridging technology skills gaps.

Project Description

Our project will create a community-centered, collaborative approach to generative AI training that builds capacity across organizational boundaries. This approach aligns with findings from Brown & Isaacs (2005) that highlight the World Café's effectiveness in enhancing strategic planning and supporting community development, particularly when qualitative insights and collective wisdom are prioritized. Key components include:

1. Collaborative Training Sessions

- Host two comprehensive AI training events (one half-day and one evening session) open to all public businesses and governmental organizations in Rapid City
- Partner with the City of Rapid City to enhance accessibility and credibility
- Provide free admission to maximize participation, particularly for resource-limited organizations

2. Expert-Led Programming

- Engage two learning specialists from our organization with extensive AI training experience
- Feature Dr. David DeYoung from Dakota State University, a recognized state authority on generative AI
- Recruit community experts to participate in panel discussions, fostering cross-sector knowledge exchange

3. Interactive Learning Methodology

- Implement our proven "World Café" approach—a research-validated collaborative discussion format that builds community connections while addressing specific workplace challenges
- Research by Ropes et al. (2020) demonstrates that the World Café method effectively structures social and cognitive learning processes, making it particularly valuable for non-formal learning in organizational settings
- Facilitate hands-on practice sessions with customized worksheets tailored to participants' roles and needs
- Create scaffolded learning opportunities accessible to participants with varying levels of technical expertise
- As noted by Chang & Chen (2015), the World Café methodology has demonstrated significant impact on strategic planning capabilities across diverse organizations

4. Customized Content Development

- Design training materials specifically addressing workplace security, efficiency, and ethical implementation
- Create sector-specific application examples relevant to government, small business, and non-profit contexts
- Develop pre-event surveys to identify specific community needs and tailor content accordingly

5. Sustainable Knowledge Network

- Establish ongoing communication channels for participants to continue sharing implementation strategies
- Create accessible resources for organizations unable to attend in-person events
- Document best practices that emerge from cross-sector discussions
- Implement key findings from Kochan et al. (2024) on the importance of involving workers in AI implementation, ensuring that our training emphasizes participatory approaches that benefit both organizations and employees
- Foster what Bumble & Carter (2020) identify as a core strength of the World Café approach: addressing localized issues through solutions-focused discussions that include diverse stakeholders

Timeline

Month 1-2:

- Conduct needs assessment with potential participants
- Develop customized training materials
- Secure venue and finalize event logistics
- Recruit additional community experts for panels
- Launch promotional campaign with City of Rapid City

Month 3-4:

- Host half-day training session
- Collect participant feedback
- Refine content based on initial response
- Host evening training session

Month 5-6:

- Follow-up with participating organizations
- Document outcomes and efficiency improvements
- Develop sustainability plan for ongoing knowledge sharing
- Complete final grant reporting

Budget

Total Request: \$5,000

Personnel (\$3,200)

- Learning Specialist facilitation fees: \$1,800
- Expert panel honorariums (including Dr. DeYoung): \$1,000
- Support staff for event management: \$400

Materials and Resources (\$1,000)

- Custom training materials development: \$600
- Digital resource creation for participant take-home use: \$400

Event Costs (\$800)

- Venue rental (if needed): \$400
- World Cafe setup supplies (placards, markers, etc.): \$200
- Refreshments to enhance collaboration atmosphere: \$200

Expected Outcomes

1. Enhanced Regional Workforce Capacity:

- At least 50 organizations will gain practical AI implementation skills
- Participating organizations will report at least one hour per week in efficiency gains
- 75% of participants will implement at least two new AI applications in their workflows

2. Strengthened Collaborative Networks:

- Creation of at least three new cross-sector partnerships resulting from training connections
- Establishment of an ongoing community of practice for AI implementation in the region

3. Improved Organizational Sustainability:

- Participants will develop skills that reduce administrative burdens, allowing focus on mission-critical work
- Organizations will gain tools to address workplace challenges with limited resources

4. Long-term Regional Competitiveness:

- Increased technological literacy across sectors will enhance the region's ability to attract and retain talent
- Improved collective capacity to navigate ongoing technological changes

Evaluation Plan

We will measure success through:

1. Participation Metrics:

- Number and diversity of organizations attending
- Geographic and sector representation

2. Knowledge Acquisition:

- Pre/post surveys measuring confidence in AI implementation
- Evaluation of hands-on demonstration activities

3. Implementation Tracking:

- 3-month follow-up survey tracking specific applications implemented
- Measurement of reported time savings and efficiency gains
- Collection of case studies demonstrating successful implementation

4. **Collaboration Outcomes:**

- Documentation of new partnerships formed
- Measurement of resource-sharing between organizations

Sustainability Plan

This project is designed to create lasting capacity beyond the grant period through:

1. **Peer-to-Peer Knowledge Transfer:** The World Cafe methodology specifically builds internal capacity for organizations to share learning among staff, creating multiplier effects beyond direct participants.
2. **Resource Development:** All materials created will remain accessible to regional organizations beyond the grant period.
3. **Foundation for Future Collaboration:** By positioning BHACF as a catalyst for technological capacity building, this project creates a model for continued cross-sector collaboration.

Conclusion

This project represents a pivotal opportunity for BHACF to strengthen the entire Black Hills region by fostering technological capacity that crosses traditional organizational boundaries. As demonstrated by Carson (2011), the World Café methodology is particularly effective for designing public conversations that engage diverse stakeholders and generate community-owned solutions. Rather than building capacity within a single organization, this collaborative approach maximizes community impact by creating efficiency gains, knowledge sharing, and innovation potential across multiple sectors simultaneously.

By supporting this initiative, BHACF will position itself as a catalyst in our community's technological adaptation story, creating lasting value that extends far beyond the grant period. Research by Recchia et al. (2022) confirms that the World Café method is especially valuable for collecting best practices and generating practical recommendations across diverse participants. Our organization's demonstrated expertise in AI training, combined with our extensive regional relationships and evidence-based methodologies, makes us uniquely qualified to implement this high-impact capacity building project that will strengthen the efficiency and technological literacy of organizations throughout the Black Hills.

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