



Artificial Intelligence at Work: Key Facts and Tools

What is artificial intelligence?

Artificial intelligence (AI) are computer systems that we teach to do things that usually require human intelligence. Modern AI learns from many examples, like photos or past decisions, and then determines what to do next. AI already assists with many job tasks that are routine, like filling out forms and scheduling deliveries, and its scope is expanding. Today it can draft reports, chat with customers, create images and videos, write legal clauses and much more.

What kind of positions will it impact?

AI impacts jobs across all AFSCME sectors, from health care to public safety. Data entry and processing roles are highly vulnerable to automation, as AI can rapidly handle well-defined and repetitive tasks. More employers are also turning to AI for language translation and real-time interpretation. Customer service duties, particularly handling common queries, are also vulnerable. AI is also augmenting the duties of workers with specialized education and training. It is increasingly effective for complex tasks, such as medical image analysis.

We've adapted to new technology at work before. How is this different?

AFSCME, like other unions, is not new to adapting to and bargaining over new technology. However, there are unique challenges that AI poses to AFSCME members. AI's impact is exceptionally broad, and it is expanding across every area of public service. AI systems adapt their performance over time, "learning" in ways that even their creators do not fully understand, leading to a lack of transparency and accountability. Replacing human judgement with AI has already resulted in errors with devastating impacts to public services, particularly when it has been used for benefits determination. **AI has the potential to support workers, but irresponsible and unregulated use of AI threatens to erode the quality of AFSCME jobs as well as vital public services.**

What should the Union look out for?

- **Automation and de-professionalization of bargaining unit work.** While AI proponents tout AI's potential to decrease the time needed for simple tasks so that workers can focus on their more complex duties, there is a risk that jobs will require less specialized training or become obsolete due to automation.
- **Loss of worker autonomy.** More employers will use algorithms to manage workflow, including scheduling, assigning tasks and determining quotas.
- **Loss of human oversight, transparency and accountability.** AI systems work like black boxes. It is often unclear why it makes certain responses, making it difficult to check for errors. If used for decision-making, AI errors could have serious consequences without

human oversight. AI vendors will also likely resist demands for transparency, citing their systems and data as proprietary.

- **Expansion of worker surveillance and loss of worker privacy.** AI systems often require extensive data collection to “learn” and improve over time. This data may include worker activity and communications and can be used to monitor and discipline workers.
- **Skills-gap.** As AI reshapes roles, workers may lack employer support and paid time for training.
- **Impacts on workplace health and safety.** If the employer relies on AI to ensure a safe workplace, novel hazards that humans would notice may be missed. Workers may also experience increased stress from constant performance monitoring through AI.
- **Exacerbation of discrimination in hiring and promotion.** AI systems learn by finding patterns, which often results in repeating and perpetuating biases.
- **Work fragmentation.** AI facilitates breaking down jobs into smaller tasks that can be easily outsourced — often to lower-paid workers.

How should the Union prepare?

As with all workplace changes, it is ideal to start negotiations and advocacy as early as possible, before any critical decisions are made.

- Advocate for state and local legislation that protects workers and public services, creating a strong foundation for negotiating over technology in ways that will benefit workers. For assistance with state and local government legislative language, please email research@afscme.org.
- Demand all pertinent information from the employer and vendor(s): the AI Info Request template can be found in the [AFSCME contracts database](#), “Model & Sample Contract Language,” under “Templates.”
- Negotiate strong guardrails and worker protections. Broad model AI language can be found in the [AFSCME contracts database](#), “Model & Sample Contract Language.”
- For model and sample contract language for specific worker classifications (e.g., call center workers) and contract language from other unions, please contact research@afscme.org.