OPTIMANOVA AI · YEAR-END REPORT

The State of AI 2026

Three years of conversations with the people doing good in the world. What we learned, what we built, and where we go next.

387	5	23	3
ORGANIZATIONS REACHED	SECTORS SERVED	PARTNER ENGAGEMENTS	YEARS OF BUILDING

NOVEMBER 2026 · WASHINGTON, DC · INFO@OPTIMANOVA.AI

01 · THE JOURNEY

Where AI Stood When We Started

We opened our doors in October 2023, the year generative AI arrived in every inbox. Here is how the questions changed.

2023

CURIOSITY

“What Is This, and Should We Worry?”

Leaders saw the headlines before they saw the use cases. Most teams had a few early adopters, no policy, and plenty of quiet anxiety about jobs and judgment.

2024

READINESS

“Are We Ready?”

The year of assessments and first trainings. Organizations wanted a baseline, a policy, and a safe place for staff to practice. We spent the year in rooms with executive directors, boards, and frontline teams.

2025

IMPLEMENTATION

“Show Us It Works Here, for Us”

Generic demos stopped landing. Leaders wanted pilots tied to their own workflows, their own data, and their own budget cycle. Phased implementation became the path that moved.

2026

TRANSFORMATION

“How Do We Become a Better Organization?”

Most teams now use AI somewhere. The question moved to impact: time saved, quality of work, and whether people are building skill or just making faster mistakes. Agents arrived, and leaders started conducting them.

02 · WHAT WE HEARD

Three Themes Leaders Raised Again and Again

01

Show Me the Use Case

A phone attendant that works with the systems already in place

Tutoring and learner support where volunteers run short

Reporting that stops eating staff hours every month

02

Protect Our People's Judgment

Worry that staff stop thinking critically

Training that builds skill, beyond tool tours

Leaders who want to understand AI before they buy it

03

Help Us Move Safely

Internal legal and compliance reviews

Funding and budget calendars

Data privacy, residency, and who sees what

What Slowed the Yes

Reasons leaders gave for "not yet," ranked by how often we heard them.

Timing and Staff Capacity	12
Internal Approvals and Governance	9
Technical Integration	6
Budget and Funding Cycles	5
Shifting Priorities	3

Who We Talked With

387 organizations we reached out to or worked alongside, by sector.

Mission-Aligned Companies	128
Nonprofits	89
Health Systems, Universities, and More	88
Associations and Chambers	38
Public Agencies	31
Foundations	13

03 · WHAT WORKED

The Pattern Behind Every Engagement That Moved

	HOW IT STARTS	WHAT WORKS
People	A few early adopters. Enthusiasm lives in pockets.	Every team trained on its own work, built around real tasks and pain points.
Process	Tools first, workflow later. Licenses arrive before anyone maps the work.	Workflow mapped, then automated. Discovery surfaces the friction, and the build follows the work.
Technology	Scattered pilots that never reach daily operations.	Phased implementation. Each phase earns the next, sized to the team and the budget cycle.
Proof	Usage counts. Logins tell you who opened the tool.	Measured impact. Time saved, quality gained, and skill built, tracked with the AI Advantage Index.

Our order of operations has held for three years: **people first, then process, then technology.** Tailored staff training and phased, organization-specific implementation drew the strongest response of anything we offered.

04 · WHAT WE BUILT IN 2026

From Advice to Working Systems

Agents Built for Each Team

Team-by-team training that ends with working agents aimed at each team's own survey pain points.

AMERICAN GAS ASSOCIATION

A Learning Assistant for Adult Learners

An AI guide that supports students and staff between classes, paired with a monthly AI learning series.

ACADEMY OF HOPE

Engines That Find Opportunity

Lead and sponsor engines that surface the right prospects, score them, and hand teams a short list.

CREOLE FOOD FESTIVAL · CHARLES RAY LAW

Data That Arrives on Its Own

Payroll and staffing data that lands every morning, feeding reports leadership used to assemble by hand.

THE ARC OF PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

Phased Roadmaps for Foundations

Discovery, diagnosis, and a phased plan for grantmakers putting AI to work for staff and grantees.

DC BAR FOUNDATION · GREATER WASHINGTON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

An Executive AI Masterclass

A cohort program for senior leaders on leading with AI, launching its first cohort in early 2027.

LEADERSHIP GREATER WASHINGTON

IN GOOD COMPANY

The Organizations and Partners We Have Built Alongside

Academy of Hope	Colorado Health Foundation	A. Wash & Associates
The Arc of Prince George's County	DC Bar Foundation	Anozine Cleaning Services
CHC Impact	Greater Washington Community Fdn.	The Brand Guild
Creole Food Festival	American Gas Association	The Burns Brothers
Joe's Movement Emporium	Leadership Greater Washington	Charles Ray Law
Manna	Metro Washington Council of Gov'ts	Liminal AI
Pathways DC	Univ. of the District of Columbia	Square Peg Technologies
True Ground Housing	21st Century Expo Group	

05 · WHAT 2027 LOOKS LIKE

Five Shifts We Are Planning Around

01	Agents Move From Demo to Daily	Small, focused agents inside everyday work: intake, reporting, scheduling, follow-up. The edge goes to teams that can build and maintain their own.
02	Leaders Become Conductors	A conductor can't play every instrument. Leadership in 2027 means directing people and agents together, setting the score, and holding the standard.
03	Measurement Replaces Readiness	Most organizations have already deployed AI somewhere. The useful question now is impact, and the AI Advantage Index measures it.
04	Governance Gets Operational	Clear red, yellow, and green rules for staff, champions who answer questions, and review built into the workflow.
05	Plan in Q1, Move All Year	Timing, staff capacity, and budget calendars were the most common reasons for "not yet." Teams that scope early are running by summer.

07 · WHAT COMES NEXT

From Deployment to Measured Impact

Most organizations we meet are past the first chapter. The tools are deployed and the guardrails are written. The next chapter is proving what AI changes, and that calls for a new kind of measure.

INTRODUCING

The AI Advantage Index

Our measure of whether AI is making an organization better.

01

Time Returned

Hours given back to mission work, measured team by team.

02

Quality of Work

Whether the work got better, judged by the people who rely on it.

03

Human Skill

Whether people are growing sharper with AI or just making faster mistakes.

Wherever your organization sits on this journey, 2027 asks everyone the same question. What did AI actually change?

To measure your own AI advantage, write to us at

info@optimanova.ai

FINDINGS AGGREGATED FROM OPTIMANOVA OUTREACH, 2024 TO 2026. NO INDIVIDUAL CORRESPONDENCE SHARED.