



NITIC

National Information Technology
Innovation Center

Labor Market Bytes

A data-driven briefing designed to inform IT faculty and workforce stakeholders of the latest employment trends, in-demand skills, and projections shaping the tech landscape.

February 2026

Mega BILT Industry Trends Labor Market Report – February 2026

Employer Perspectives on AI and Entry-Level Work

The NITIC Mega BILT (Business and Industry Leadership Team) identified several key impacts of AI integration into employer business processes on entry-level jobs at the Industry Trends meeting on February 10, 2026.

Trends discussed during the meeting included:

- Future impacts on workforce opportunity
- Alignment between AI implementation and business process requirements
- Necessary skills in entry-level positions

Participants emphasized a persistent misalignment between AI implementation and business process requirements. Employers agreed that new hires must now possess stronger critical thinking, systems understanding, and the ability to evaluate and correct AI outputs.

As AI accelerates, “entry-level” increasingly means being able to:

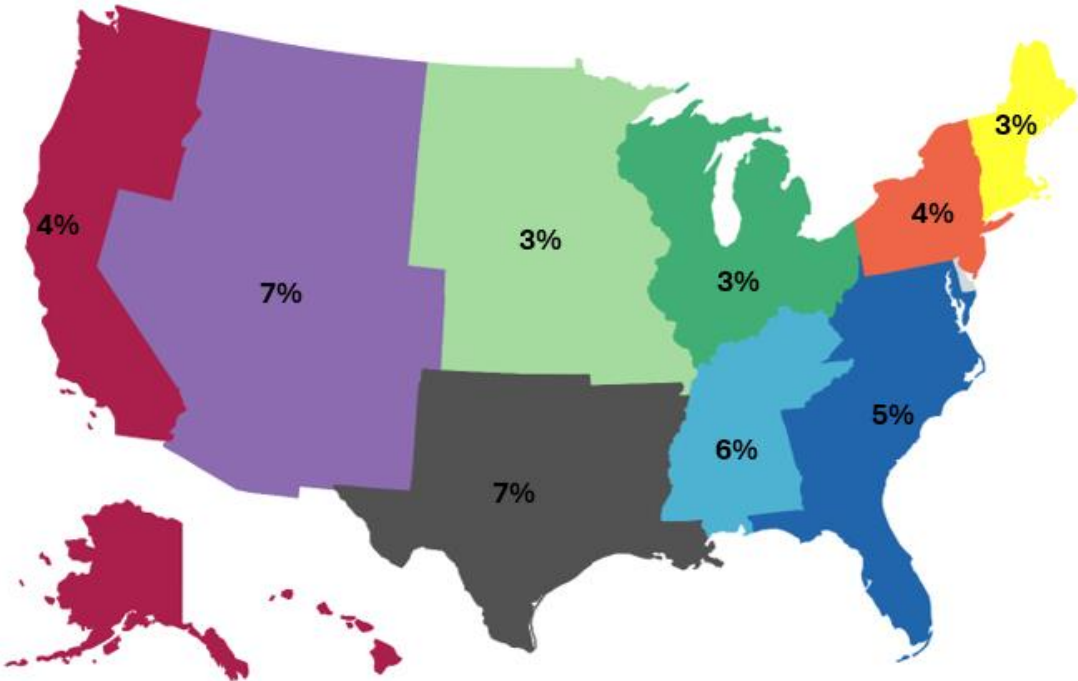
- Integrate AI tools into business workflows
- Understand security and compliance implications
- Communicate across organizational silos
- Maintain fundamentals in troubleshooting, logic, and technical literacy.

Finally, this report provides insight into AI programs in higher education through recent completion statistics. **All labor market data in this report is drawn from Lightcast in March 2026.**

Labor Market Outlook for IT Roles

AI is already impacting the national IT job market, with regional models up to 2028 showing a projected average job increase of 4.67%. Higher percentage increases are in the Rocky Mountains (purple region) and West South Central (dark grey region). The greatest net change is anticipated to occur in the South Atlantic around hubs in Florida and the DC metro area.

Graphic 1 & 2: Projected Regional Job Changes in NITIC SOC codes (see appendix) from 2025-2028, by percent (map) and by count (table).



Regional Division	2025 Jobs	2028 Jobs	25-28 Change *highest to lowest net change
South Atlantic	2,285,802	2,409,648	123,846 (5%)
West South Central	1,357,420	1,456,056	98,636 (7%)
Pacific	1,758,079	1,833,909	75,830 (4%)
Mountain	811,557	868,788	57,231 (7%)
Mid-Atlantic	1,318,103	1,374,178	56,075 (4%)
East North Central	1,280,598	1,319,565	38,967 (3%)
East South Central	427,797	455,097	27,300 (6%)
West North Central	673,085	693,047	19,962 (3%)
New England	567,459	584,781	17,322 (3%)

Geographic Concentration of AI Hiring

The top five AI-dense MSAs¹, the New York City metropolitan area, DC metro area, San Jose/Silicon Valley, San-Francisco/Oakland, and Dallas-Fort Worth, have had an average of 321% increase in all AI-related job postings in the last twenty-four months compared to job postings for the same criteria nation-wide that are increasing at 342%. While AI-dense geographic areas have a larger number of job postings, the fact that job posting rates across the nation are increasing at the same rate or higher than these AI-dense areas demonstrate that opportunities for jobs using artificial intelligence skills are accelerating significantly. Additionally, AI proficiency has a 12.4% projected skill growth between 2025 and 2028. Being competent in AI is increasingly necessary to gain and retain employment within IT.

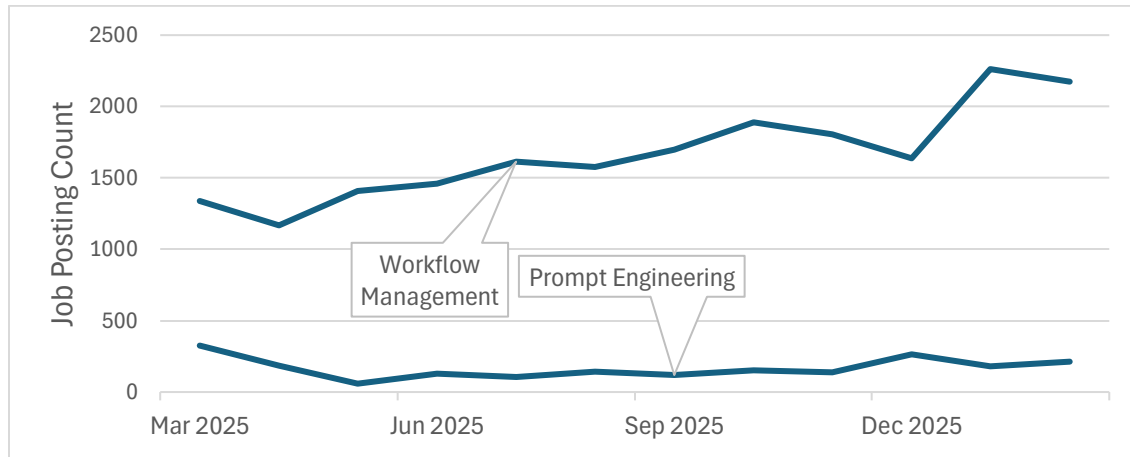
Graphic 3: Top 5 AI-Dense MSAs & U.S. from February 2024 to 2026

MSA Name	Unique Postings	Companies Posting	% Change of Postings (2024-2026)
New York-Newark-Jersey City	43,197	4,959	475%
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria	35,886	3,613	186%
San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara	34,738	2,224	301%
San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont	31,442	3,518	292%
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington	22,985	2,968	352%
United States	592,846	29,297	342%

¹ AI-dense MSAs are the metropolitan statistical areas with the highest number of job postings containing the following AI-related skills from Lightcast: Artificial intelligence (AI), generative AI, artificial general intelligence, AI strategy, AI infrastructure, AI development, AI risk, applications of AI, AI systems, AI project scoping, AI product management, AIOps, AI project estimation, AIML, AI use case design

Shifting Skill Demands in Entry-Level IT Roles

Graphic 4: Average Entry-Level Job Postings with “Workflow” and “Prompt Engineering” related skills



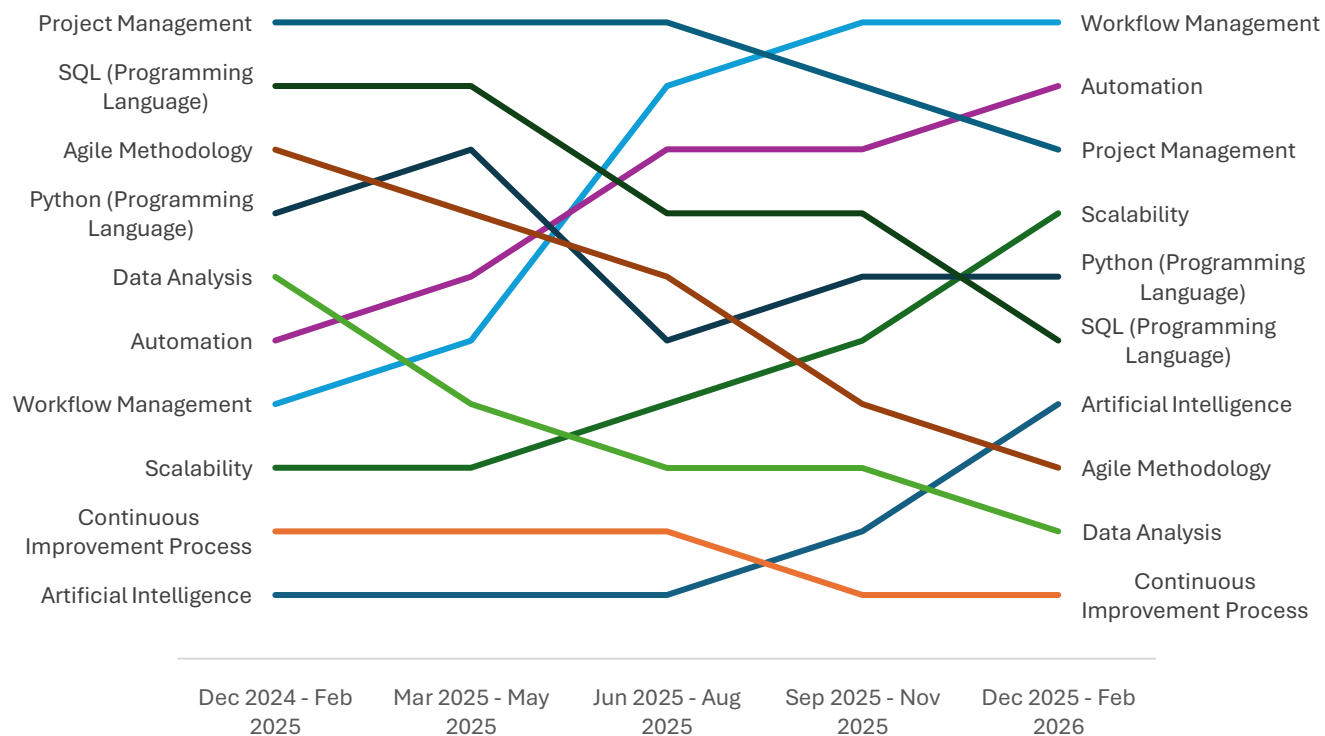
AI-fluency is a progressively crucial skill in IT positions and across industries, but not all candidates with artificial intelligence experience are the same. Mega BILT members expressed the need for balance between having AI skills and understanding business requirements. Applying artificial intelligence in context of the business process, being able to quality check outputs, and recognizing the business workflow are increasingly necessary to retain one’s position. Jobs with workflow management skills have increased by 62.2% in the last year while jobs with prompt engineering skills² have remained stable, decreasing by 35%. The average difference between the number of postings with workflow management and those with prompt engineering is 1502 per month. Employers are increasingly relying on problem solving, troubleshooting, and high-level systems thinking beyond generative prompt engineering when identifying well-rounded candidates for entry-level IT positions.

Across the top 10 specialized skills for job postings in the NITIC SOC list within the last five quarters, workflow management has increased considerably with artificial intelligence following. Skills similar to workflow such as automation and scalability increased as well while there is slightly less emphasis put on direct coding skills in Python and SQL. Vibe coding³ may require less technical knowledge of these coding languages but understanding outputs in the context of automated business processes and high-level workflow provides balance.

² Identified by aggregating the top five business workflow skills and prompt engineering skills for entry-level postings within the NITIC SOC list.

³ More information on vibe coding can be found on the NITIC news page at: <https://www.nitic.org/vibe-coding-will-it-change-how-we-teach-programming/>

Graphic 5: Top 10 Specialized Skill Ranking Changes for NITIC SOC List



Implications for Higher Education and Workforce Preparation

With such a heavy reliance on integrating artificial intelligence skills into pre-employment training in higher education institutions, colleges and universities are changing the way they approach educating the next generation of the workforce. With strategic implementation of AI fluency goals across universities⁴⁻⁵, more institutions are integrating artificial intelligence into their curriculum. TechCrunch reported that enrollment within traditional computer science degree programs at four-year institutions has declined within the last two years, with the University of California system reporting a 6% enrollment fall in

⁴ Forbes article on the need for AI fluency in higher education: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/avivalegatt/2025/09/18/90-of-college-students-use-ai-higher-ed-needs-ai-fluency-support-now/>

⁵ The Ohio State University AI fluency initiative: <https://oaa.osu.edu/ai-fluency>

their CS program last year⁶. Alternatively, institutions with designated AI or AI-adjacent degree programs are showing increased enrollment. Across higher education institution types, four-year schools make up the majority (86%) of those with students completing an AI credential by 2024 according to IPEDS data from Lightcast. Community colleges only made up 12.1% of completions in 2024; however, because certificate awards of less than one academic year made up 29.8% of completions, there is high opportunity to create new programs for community college graduates.

Graphic 6: 2024 IPEDS Data aggregating AI academic program (CIP 11.0102) completions by institution type



Graphic 7: 2024 Award Completions by award level



⁶ TechCrunch article on AI degree programs: https://techcrunch.com/2026/02/15/the-great-computer-science-exodus-and-where-students-are-going-instead/?utm_campaign=daily_weekend

Appendix of SOC Codes Aligned with NITIC

Code	Name
11-1021	General and Operations Managers
11-3021	Computer and Information Systems Managers
13-1111	Management Analysts
15-1211	Computer Systems Analysts
15-1212	Information Security Analysts
15-1221	Computer and Information Research Scientists
15-1231	Computer Network Support Specialists
15-1232	Computer User Support Specialists
15-1241	Computer Network Architects
15-1242	Database Administrators
15-1243	Database Architects
15-1244	Network and Computer Systems Administrators
15-1251	Computer Programmers
15-1252	Software Developers
15-1253	Software Quality Assurance Analysts and Testers
15-1254	Web Developers
15-1255	Web and Digital Interface Designers
15-1299	Computer Occupations, All Other
15-2031	Operations Research Analysts
15-2041	Statisticians
15-2051	Data Scientists
17-3029	Engineering Technologists and Technicians, Except Drafters, All Other
43-9021	Data Entry Keyers

Data Source: Lightcast, pulled March 2026