

The Next Ladder

Hartford's Civic Compact and the Innovation Center —
a working case study for Connecticut's AI workforce

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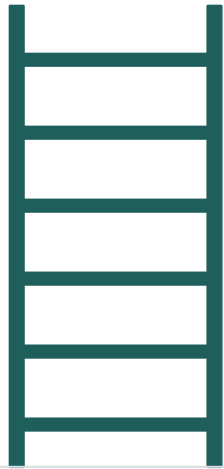
Member, Artificial Intelligence Working Group · September 14, 2026

The City of Hartford coordinated site, partner, and funding advocacy.

The Center will be governed by an independent nonprofit.

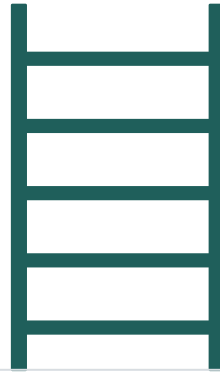


**Hartford has built a ladder to the middle class twice.
Both times, we built it here.**



MANUFACTURING

Precision machining, aerospace, tooling. A job you could get without a degree that seeds a career.



INSURANCE

When manufacturing contracted, the back office became the next ladder — claims, customer service, policy administration. Steady work, a path upward, no four-year degree required.

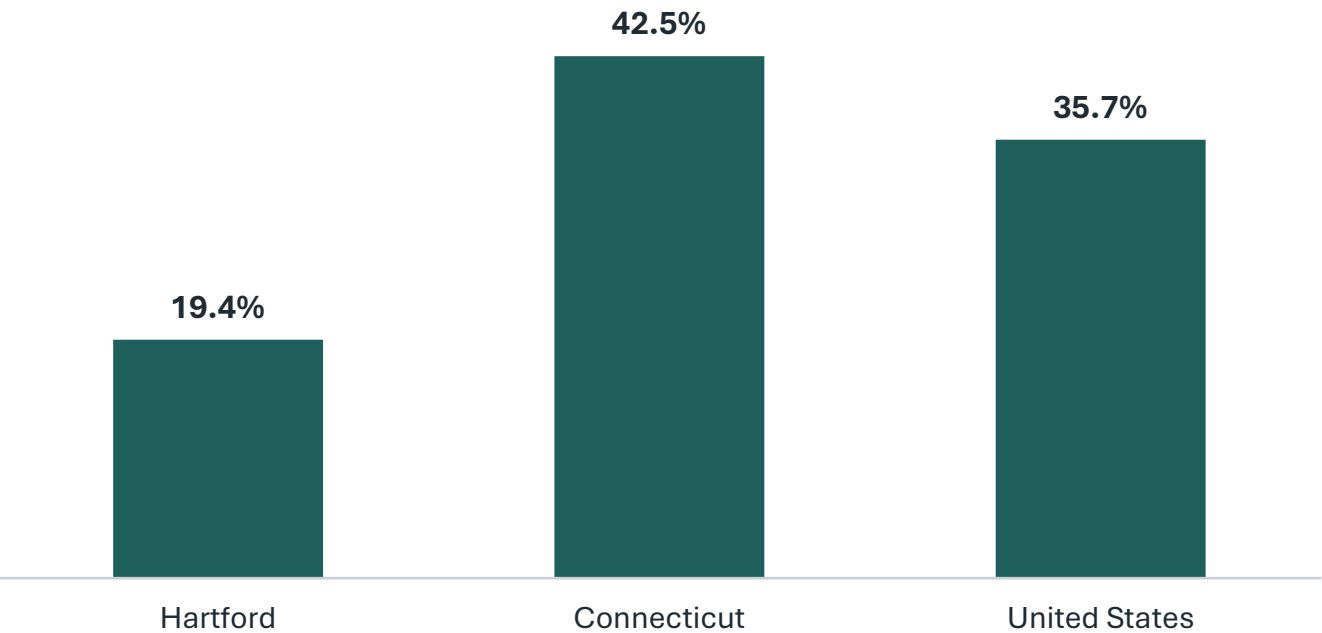


NOW

The third ladder, going up now: for applied AI and the technologies that follow it. Taller than either before, with more ways on. And built here.

Fewer than one in five Hartford adults holds a bachelor's degree — less than half the statewide rate.

ADULTS 25+ WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER



WHERE RESIDENTS WORK

Hartford's resident workforce is concentrated in office and administrative support and sales — the occupation groups where AI substitution concentrates.

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

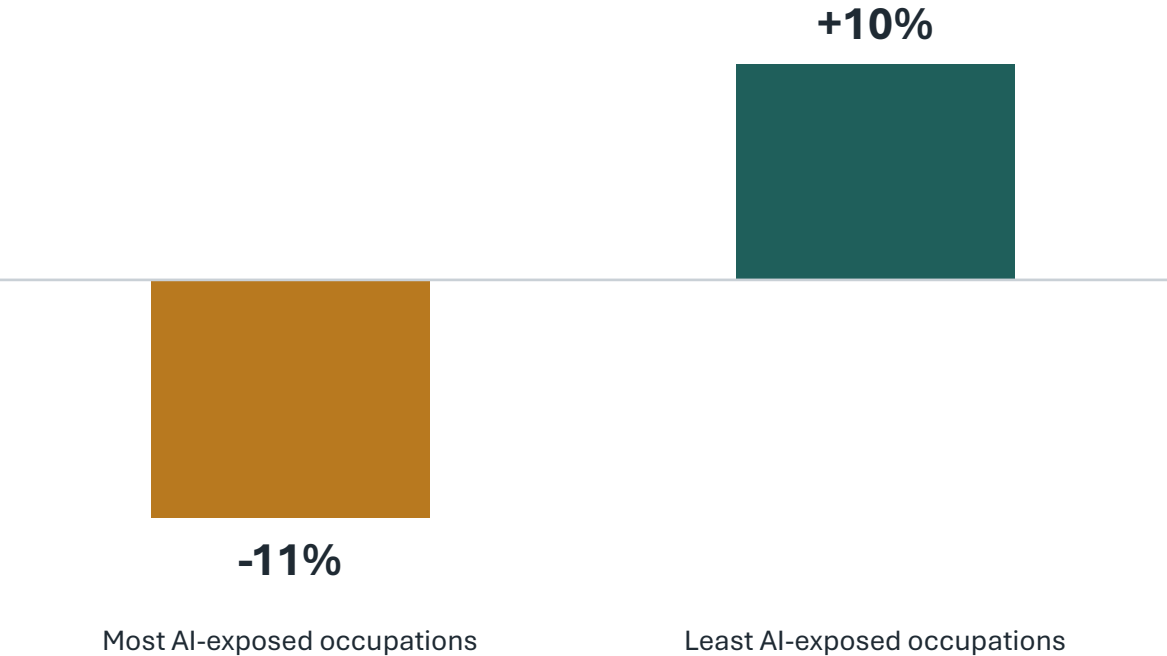
\$46,411 Connecticut: \$95,781

Opportunity in Connecticut has never been evenly distributed between its cities and its suburbs.

THE NORTH END TEST A curious nineteen-year-old from Hartford's North End, with no inside track, walks in and finds a real path to a real job.

The evidence points at entry-level hiring — which is precisely the rung Hartford depends on.

EMPLOYMENT OF WORKERS AGED 22–25, NOVEMBER 2022 → JUNE 2026



The decline runs through **reduced hiring**, **not layoffs**. There is **no evidence of widespread, economy-wide displacement**.

Declines concentrate where AI usage **substitutes** for tasks. Where AI usage **complements** workers, employment is flat or rising.

In 2020, the Governor's Workforce Council forecast long-term displacement in office support and customer service. The forecast was right.

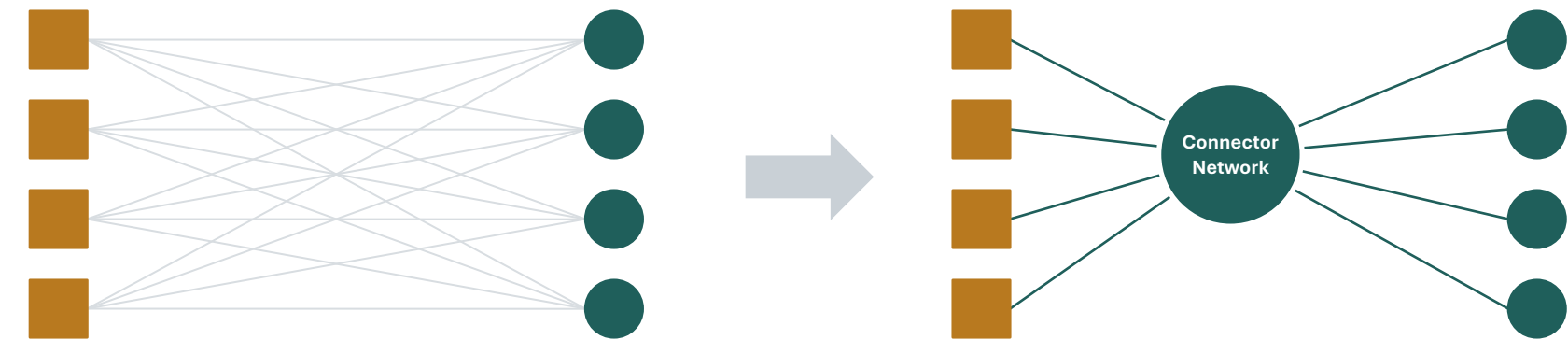
Connecticut has the talent, the programs, and the employer demand. The Connector matches them.

EMPLOYERS

Go school by school, department by department, professor by professor — every year — hoping to find a class with enough students to take on a real project.

SCHOOLS

Shop their capstone projects company by company, looking for a sponsor. Both sides pay that search cost annually. Neither can fix it alone.



Today: one company, one school at a time

The Capstone Connector: plug in once, reach many

CONNECTICUT AI ALLIANCE

21 of Connecticut's public and private nonprofit colleges and universities — research universities through community colleges — working as one front door for employers. Formed through a state task force the Governor initiated, alongside the Hartford center effort; now statewide. **CAIA runs the Capstone Connector.**

HOW THE MARKETPLACE OPENS — MASTER THE MODEL, THEN OPEN IT

1 Master

Prove the marketplace where demand and funding already exist: employers and higher education, through the Capstone Connector.

2 Generalize

Apply the same matching discipline to workforce boards, youth agencies, and community programs — the providers that already exist.

3 Open

High school graduates, adult learners, and community entrants reach the same employers, on the same terms, with the same record.

Every learner exits with a portfolio and a verified record of their own work. The learner owns it.

A \$20 million state investment, a 100,000-square-foot campus downtown, and programs already running.

\$20M

Connecticut Innovation Clusters Program, DECD — the Governor's \$100M, five-year program created in 2024.

100,000 sq ft

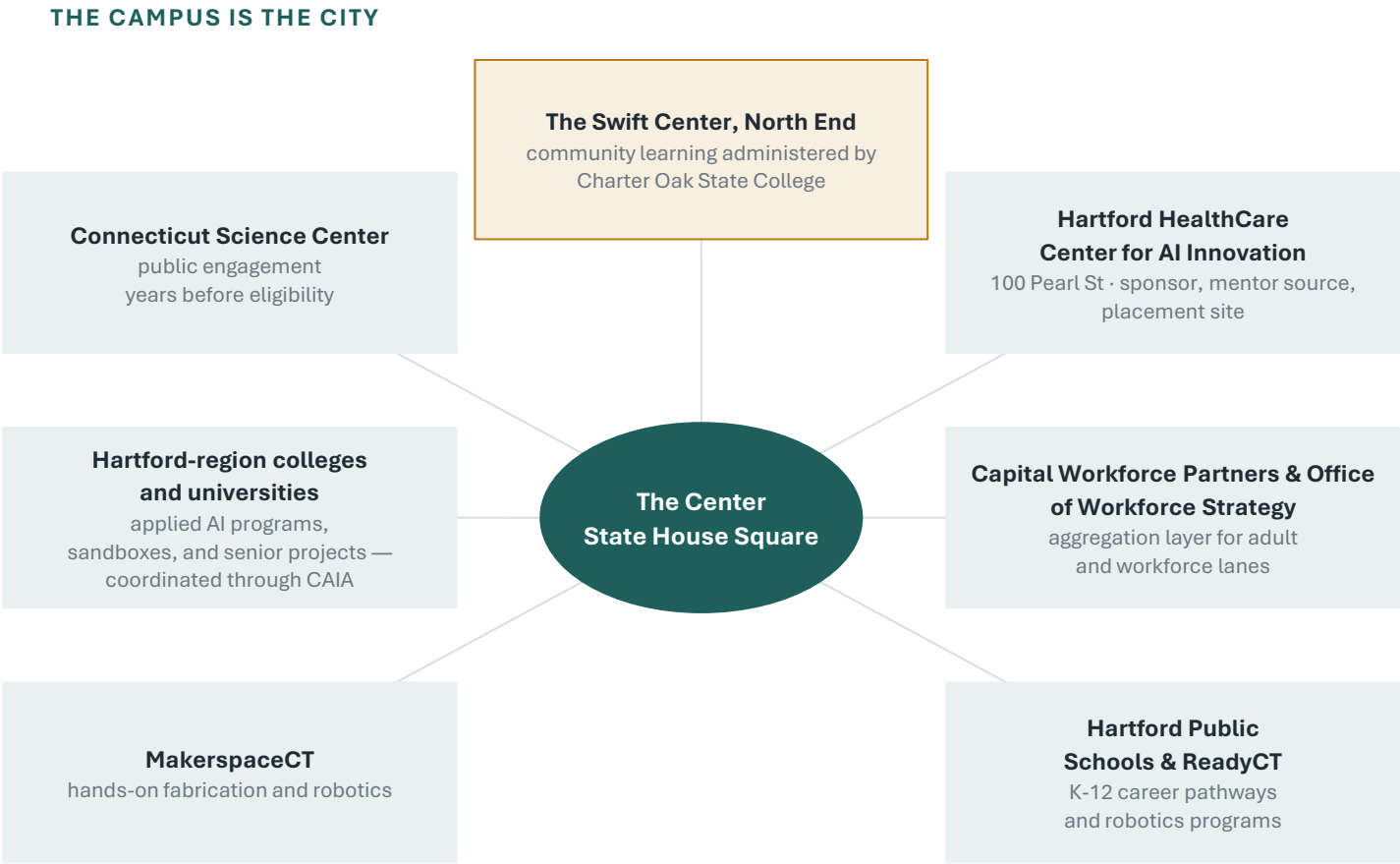
At State House Square — City-owned space, operated under a management agreement, governed by an independent nonprofit.

Already operating

Piloted in 2025 at 10 Constitution Plaza. AI capstone pilots running with CAIA member institutions since the 2025–26 school year, with student demand roughly doubling this year.

Reusing a downtown asset

The campus fills vacant downtown space, at the site selected in collaboration with the DECD and Governor’s office.



Each institution keeps its own mission, funding, and name. The Center connects them.

The standard is set before the first cohort walks in: a Civic Compact.

A commitment the City of Hartford made before the investment arrived — carried by conditions every partner accepts and every project is measured against.

1

More than one way in

Multiple concurrent entry points — high school graduates, mid-career adults, displaced workers, enrolled students. No single gate.

Answers slide 4

2

A way in without a four-year degree

We're building the system so residents without a bachelor's degree have real routes in — community programs, workforce channels, community colleges — lane by lane.

Answers slide 3

3

Train for the work that's growing

Applied judgment, oversight, and durable skills that transfer between sectors — and carry into the technologies that follow applied AI.

Answers slide 4

4

Recruit where residents live

Residents participate on the same terms as any applicant — and programs are located and recruited in Hartford, through neighborhood organizations and libraries.

Answers slide 3

5

Demonstrable, or it doesn't count

Placement and 12-month retention, by population, published, gaps stated.

Answers slide 2

THE PROTOCOL — WHAT EVERY PROJECT IS HELD TO

Use-case review

Fairness, safety, privacy, foreseeable harms — before work begins

Workforce support

Wraparounds and milestone tracking for every learner

Community benefit

Demonstrated by every employer partnership — not asserted

Public transparency

Documentation and outcomes published

Building it in Hartford first, for every Connecticut city.

THE PATTERN

Connecticut's cities share Hartford's workforce composition: concentrated employment in office and support occupations, credential attainment below the surrounding region, and a regional economy specialized in one exposed sector. What we're building here is designed to travel.

WHAT THE MODEL REQUIRES — EVERY CT CITY HAS ALL THREE

- ✓ Employers who will define the skills they hire for
- ✓ Postsecondary institutions
- ✓ A regional workforce board

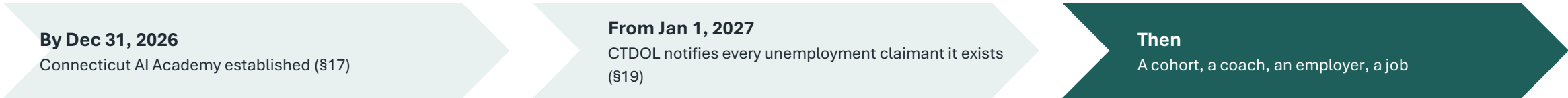
THE DEMAND IS ALREADY STATEWIDE

11,000+

Connecticut job postings that have explicitly sought AI skills since August 2024 — up 40% year over year.

One in 23 Connecticut roles requiring a bachelor's or associate's degree now asks for some level of AI expertise.

The Center builds the room behind the door your law opens.



Working group mandate	How the Center aligns	Status
§18(b)(2) — small business AI adoption	Employer marketplace; neighborhood AI help desk	Piloting / concept
§18(b)(6) — digital divide outreach and workforce training	Community and workforce lanes; Swift Center	Building
§18(b)(1) — impacts on state services and employees	Neutral venue for joint testing and training; learner-record protections as a model	Available
§18(b)(7) — testbeds and safeguards against AI misuse	A governed, neutral venue with use-case review already designed in	Available
§17(b)(8) — Academy outreach via free or discounted public internet access	Library-branch help desks	Concept
§§17, 19 — Academy delivery and claimant notice	In-person Academy delivery; workforce-lane intake	Building

TWO THINGS HARTFORD'S EXPERIENCE SUGGESTS — FOR WHENEVER THIS GROUP GETS TO RECOMMENDATIONS

The leverage is in the connections. Connecticut has built the parts — the Workforce Council, the sector partnerships, CareerConneCT, the AI Academy. CAIA is the layer connecting them statewide, and as it scales, its coordination is the piece that carries the rest.

Measure by conversion. Placement and 12-month retention, by population served, gaps stated. The national partnership Connecticut joined in June — RAISE US, with Arkansas, Maryland, and Utah — intends to measure success by jobs created, not enrollment.

The test.

A curious nineteen-year-old from Hartford's North End, with no inside track, walks in and finds a real path to a real job.

We'll come back and tell you whether she did.

The law tells people the door exists. Let's build the room behind it.

