

AI and Workforce Development in Orange County

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About Me

Kristina Horn (khorn@claoc.org)

Manager, Artificial Intelligence Initiative

CEO Leadership Alliance Orange County (CLAOC)



AI Talent Lab Lead

Manage CLAOC's AI strategy, programs, and research.



Educator

Teach LLM Ethics & AI Tools at Chapman University.



Previously:

Center for AI and Digital Policy (CAIDP), National Humanities Center



What is CLAOC?

A coalition of business leaders building a thriving Orange County for all.

55+

OC CEOs in our coalition

20K

participate in work-based learning
experiences by 2030



Our Mission

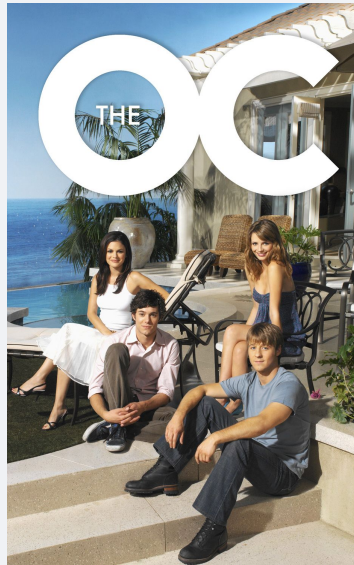
Develop and retain the talent needed for an inclusive, premier innovation hub.



The Real Orange County

The OC most people picture isn't the OC that Kostas and I actually work in!

THE PERCEPTION



THE REALITY

A diverse, \$351B (GDP) regional economy

3.16M residents, 6th largest county in the U.S.

18th most diverse region in the country

\$351B GDP, 8% of California's economy

34% Latino, 22% Asian, 38% white

Core growth industries: *healthcare, medtech, financial services, and increasingly, AI.*



The Orange County Challenge

OC has the resources and people to be a top innovation hub, but opportunity isn't evenly shared.

75%

Low-wage job growth

of projected OC job growth is for jobs paying \$60K or less.

94%

Degree barrier

of OC tech jobs require a bachelor's, excluding 60% of residents.

95%

Outside capital

of OC venture capital funding comes from outside Southern California.

Why AI Became a CLAOC Priority



*Turn Orange County into an AI hub.
Embrace it, empower it, expand it, and
drive it.*

STUART McCLURE

CLAOC Member & Entrepreneur

What we saw



Explosive investment

AI capital in OC growing 400%+ annually



Cross-sector impact

AI reaching every industry, not just tech

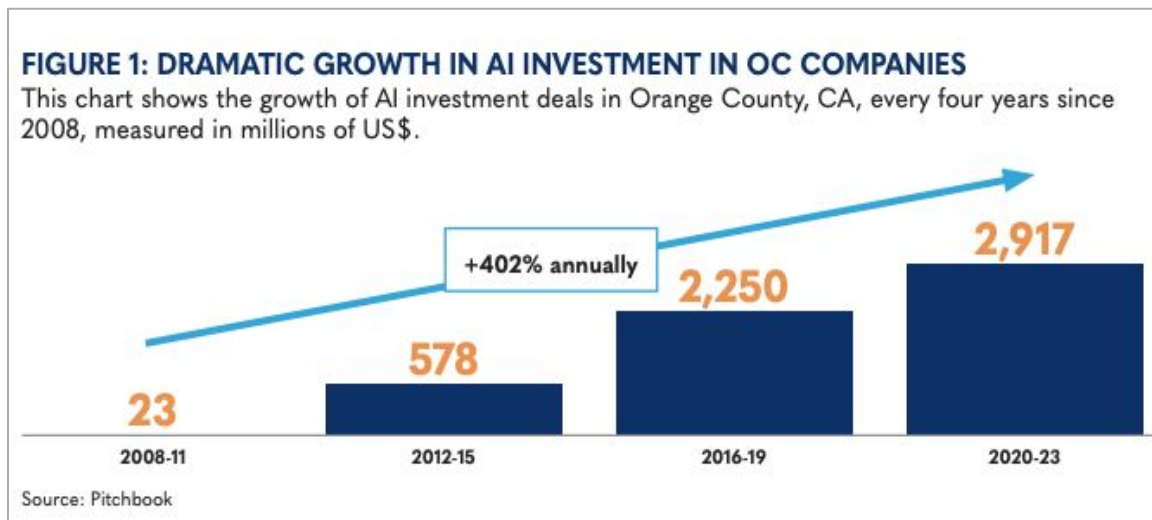


Talent gap widening

Demand outpacing OC's supply of AI-ready workers

Explosive AI Investment in OC Companies

AI investment deals in Orange County, by four-year period (millions USD)



Source: Pitchbook, State of AI in OC 2024

+402%
annual growth rate
in AI deal value

\$230 per person
OC's AI investment per capita, on par with LA (\$250) and ahead of Chicago and Houston.



AI Skills Demand: OC Leading Peer Regions

55%

of AI-skill job postings in OC (2023) were for technical roles

45%

were for non-technical roles: HR, marketing, operations, and more



AI is no longer a tech-only skill.

Nearly half of all AI-skill demand in OC is for non-technical roles, which reshapes how we think about AI workforce development.

Source: Lightcast, State of AI in OC 2024



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01

WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

Three Takeaways About AI Skills in the Workplace



Based on CLAOC Tech Leaders Group research, Nov 2025



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TAKEAWAY 1

Human skills are becoming MORE important, not less.

Technical Skills

- AI literacy & tool proficiency
- Prompt engineering/design
- Data literacy & analysis
- ML workflows & AI QA
- Cloud infrastructure

Human Skills

- Critical thinking & problem solving
- Systems thinking
- Communication across teams
- Adaptability & continuous learning
- "Catalytic questioning"

For tech leaders, writing code is no longer sufficient. Judgment is the differentiator.

TAKEAWAY 2

The Critical Thinking Paradox

PRO

AI makes it easier than ever to produce output quickly.

Drafting, summarizing, analyzing, coding: tasks that used to take hours can now take minutes.

CON

Over-reliance can atrophy the very skills AI needs from us.

Without practice verifying, questioning, and reasoning, people can become faster and less thoughtful at once.



Critical thinking is simultaneously **the most needed** and **the most at-risk** skill in the AI era.

TAKEAWAY 3

The roles themselves are shifting.

TECHNICAL ROLES

FROM

Core programming

TO

→ **AI integration, evaluation & QA**

Engineers become "power users" who rigorously test AI against edge cases.

NON-TECHNICAL ROLES

FROM

Depending on tech teams

TO

→ **"Coding without coders"**

Domain experts in HR, marketing, ops now perform technical workflows, if they can frame problems well.

02

HOW WE RESPOND

The AI Talent Lab: Programs Across the Talent Continuum



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Programs Across the Talent Continuum



HIGH SCHOOL

Careers in AI

With Intel & OCDE. 100+ HS students from 9+ districts. Intel Global Impact Festival awards 2022 & 2023.



COLLEGE

Break Through Tech

With UCLA. 44+ community college & university students. eCornell ML cert + industry-sponsored projects (PIMCO).



HS, COLLEGE, & UNIVERSITY

AI Micro-Internships

100+ interns placed with OCPW, Kaiser, Expert AI Consulting, Wisk Aero, Ingram Micro, CSUF, and more.



UPSKILLING

Sector Upskilling

\$215K California Jobs First pilot training 75 water district employees in applied AI for infrastructure.

AI Talent Lab Impact Since 2021



8,000+

stakeholders engaged through AI events



75

water district employees in applied AI training
(\$215K CA Jobs First pilot)



400+

high school & college students in AI course,
workshops, and internship programs

03

CASE STUDY

Geospatial AI in Action

A 2023 Pilot with Orange County Public Works



ArcGIS Pro • LiDAR • Drones • Digital Twins • Python



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What 11 High School Students Built



Flood Severity Dashboard

Displays flood data & statistics across OC; address-level inspector app.



Wildfire Hazard Tools

Fire severity dashboard and address-based WHP score inspector.



Traffic Hot-Spot Analysis

SWITRS crash data 2012–2022, mapped to identify high-risk locations.



COVID-19 Spatial Analysis

Cases by population density, housing, hospital proximity.



WHAT THEY LEARNED

- ArcGIS Pro
- Python automation
- LiDAR & Total Station
- Drone reality capture
- Space-time analysis

What to Take Away

1

AI skills are not just technical.

Human skills like critical thinking, communication, and adaptability matter more, not less.

2

Learning has to change with the work.

Real tools, real problems, and real-world exposure are what build judgment.

3

Regions need connective tissue.


Employers, educators, workers, and communities need institutions to align them.

4

The goal isn't keeping up.

It's shaping how AI is used, who benefits, and what future of work we build together.

Thank you!

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