CASE STUDY

Co-Creating AI Tools That Meet Practitioner Needs

Aurora Public Schools and TalkingPoints Collaboration on AI Tool Development

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PROJECT EVIDENT

About Project Evident

Project Evident harnesses the power of data, evidence, and technology to achieve greater impact. We believe that by empowering practitioners to drive their own data and evidence building while also strengthening the surrounding ecosystem, we can increase the number of effective solutions in the social and education sectors and scale them faster, ultimately producing stronger, more meaningful, and more equitable outcomes for students and communities.

Project Evident's **OutcomesAI** practice provides consulting, technical assistance, resources, and tools to support practitioners – nonprofits, school districts, and funders. We achieve this by strengthening their ability to utilize AI to enhance their understanding, improve their impact, support informed decision making, advance R&D, and allocate resources toward achieving better and more equitable outcomes. We recognize the potential for misuse of data, evidence, and technology and seek to limit harmful practices. We serve on the EDSAFE AI Steering Committee and strongly recommend the S.A.F.E. Benchmarks Framework for K-12 AI efforts. Project Evident's differentiator is its use of AI to drive outcomes. We support processes to detect and avoid technology overriding our evaluative work in delivering equitable outcomes.

About the Equitable AI Adoption Project

Artificial intelligence (AI) and generative AI hold great promise for helping nonprofits expand their services and achieve more equitable outcomes for the people and communities they serve. Few in the philanthropic, social, and education sectors would claim satisfaction with society's progress in addressing persistent social problems. Grantmakers and nonprofits share the goal of scaling impact, and AI provides new tools to achieve this goal.

A February 2024 working paper by Project Evident and Stanford's Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence found that approximately 80% of funders and nonprofits believe their organizations would benefit from using more AI, specifically for mission-related work. However, there is a question about "how" – a lack of clarity about how AI will benefit individuals and organizations, as well as a lack of organizational expertise and materials about AI for social and education sector organizations, were the most frequently cited barriers for funders and practitioners, after concerns about bias. With the support of the Gates Foundation, the Equitable AI Adoption (EAIA) project aims to inspire and inform practitioners and educators on how AI can help them achieve their mission. To that end, EAIA is surfacing, creating, and disseminating stories of early adopters to study progress, distill broadly applicable insights, and share findings. At the same time, we are leading a Community of Practice comprising 15 nonprofit organizations in developing a practical and actionable tiered AI adoption framework to support others on their journey.

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Introduction: Why Stakeholder Engagement Matters for Equitable AI Adoption

Artificial intelligence (AI) holds great potential to improve program and student outcomes in the social and education sectors. Realizing that potential in practice, however, depends on how well AI program solutions respond to the needs of the audience it intends to serve. A recent survey found that while 89% of nonprofits report having integrated AI into their operations, almost 46% rarely engage with the communities most affected by these tools (and only 14% do so frequently). This gap highlights a recurring challenge: AI implementation often outpaces meaningful stakeholder engagement, undermining trust and limiting adoption.

Funders are increasingly attuned to this issue. Findings from Project Evident's Funding the Future Report show that the biggest technical feasibility concern (85%) among funders when reviewing AI-related grant proposals is whether AI is the right tool for the problem being addressed. Concerns about stakeholder engagement are paramount: 53% identify participatory design as a top consideration when assessing AI implementation. Together, these findings reinforce a clear lesson: designing AI program solutions that center stakeholder perspectives from the outset is critical to enhancing mission outcomes and increasing their adoption.

In the education and nonprofit sectors, program design has historically focused on defining goals, target populations, and evidence-based interventions under tight funding and timeline constraints, with limited post-launch iteration. Technology companies, by contrast, treat design as a perpetual core function, investing heavily in user research, testing, and refinement. As nonprofits increasingly integrate AI, this difference matters. Approaches that lack iterative, participatory design risk falling short of intended adoption and impact goals or creating safety, privacy, and bias blindspots. Bridging program and product design through more user-centered, iterative practices can help ensure that AI-enabled programs are desired and feasible, and that they provide ongoing value for the communities and students they serve.

This case study highlights how TalkingPoints, a national nonprofit that operates an AI-powered digital platform to improve student outcomes through school-family partnerships, designed and developed a targeted messaging tool that increased student attendance. Their partnership with Aurora Public Schools (APS) highlights how TalkingPoints can be used to target specific student outcomes, like attendance, in addition to their wider focus on family-school partnerships. As Antonio Vigil, Director of Innovative Classroom Technology at APS, reflected on the engagement

of families and teachers in the solution design, “we wanted to make sure that individuals who are not typically seated at the table had a place at the table, and were able to give their feedback very honestly and transparently.”

This case is a strong example of how stakeholder engagement, when treated as an ongoing, inclusive process rather than a one-time input, helps organizations develop AI program solutions that address real-world challenges. Key takeaways:

ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS IN SURFACING AND FRAMING OPPORTUNITIES: Direct engagement with stakeholders helps frame opportunities. Talk directly with stakeholders to understand their context, behavior, safety concerns, and challenges. Design AI program solutions based on their perspectives.

ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS IN DESIGNING & IMPLEMENTING SOLUTIONS: Solutions that require significant changes in user behavior face greater adoption barriers. Create multiple channels, both structured and informal, for stakeholder and community input in the design of AI program solutions. Design with users, not for them, to ensure alignment with existing workflows and expectations.

INCORPORATE ONGOING FEEDBACK: AI technology is evolving quickly, and user needs shift over time. Set up systems that continuously gather user feedback and continue building AI program solutions through an iterative design process.

CENTER HUMAN AGENCY IN AI-SUPPORTED DECISIONS: A significant concern about AI-enabled programs is that they may replace human decision-making. Define roles and limits within the program design that preserve human autonomy to build trust among users. Reinforce transparency to help users feel informed and in control.

Successfully building AI program solutions requires thoughtful stakeholder engagement, clear problem definition, and structures for continuous learning. The lessons shared here center users in the design process, enabling responsible and scalable use of AI. We are grateful to APS and TalkingPoints for offering insights that can guide other organizations as they begin or refine their design of AI-enabled programs.

> "I always say that our partners see their fingerprints all over TalkingPoints. Because we're really trying to develop things that matter to them."
>
> *— Emma Berry, Director of Partner Success, TalkingPoints*

Who is Aurora Public Schools

Aurora Public Schools (APS) is one of Colorado's largest and most diverse school districts, serving more than 38,000 students across 59 schools. APS students come from over 130 countries and speak more than 160 languages, making language access and family engagement essential considerations in how the district administers education and supports student development. More than 42% of students at APS speak English as a second language, and nearly three-quarters of them qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. In this context, traditional communication channels, such as English-only emails and texts, printed notices, automated phone calls, and in-person meetings, have often failed to reach all families in accessible and culturally responsive ways. This further highlights the need for accessible tools that enable meaningful family engagement.

APS leans on equity and community building as a core strategic pillar. TalkingPoints has become a key part of that. "We work hard to make sure that we're equitable in how we reach out to families, especially those that historically haven't had as many resources or access, because we want our community to feel like partners." Tracy Thielan, EdTech Coach at APS, explains.

Who is TalkingPoints

TalkingPoints, founded in 2015, is a national nonprofit with a mission to drive student success by unlocking the superpower of families to fuel children's learning, especially in under-resourced communities. They operate a digital platform that transforms a cell phone into a powerful AI-driven intervention that guides and facilitates meaningful partnerships between schools and families in 150+ languages. They currently serve over 9 million students, families, and educators in 325+ districts across the country, and have rigorous research showing the gains they drive in attendance, math, and reading.

Traditional engagement channels between these parties often fail because of linguistic, cultural, and logistical barriers. TalkingPoints seeks to address this gap by enabling multilingual, two-way exchanges between teachers and families, making family engagement accessible, scalable, and equitable. Their focus on the school-family partnership stems from the fact that family engagement is twice as predictive of success as family wealth. However, family engagement has historically been limited to in-person activities or traditional communication channels, leaving out many families who face barriers such as language and time constraints. TalkingPoints is using technology to make family engagement accessible, scalable, and equitable.

TalkingPoints' mission is shaped by its founder, Heejae Lim's experience as an immigrant student. After moving from Korea to England as a child, Lim relied on her mother, who spoke limited English, to serve as an informal translator and intermediary between her family and the school. "I don't know how I'd have survived that first year without my mom," Lim recalls. "She was nearly as lost as I am, but with the little English she knew, she spoke to my teachers in broken English, every day, about how she could help me at home. Compared to many other

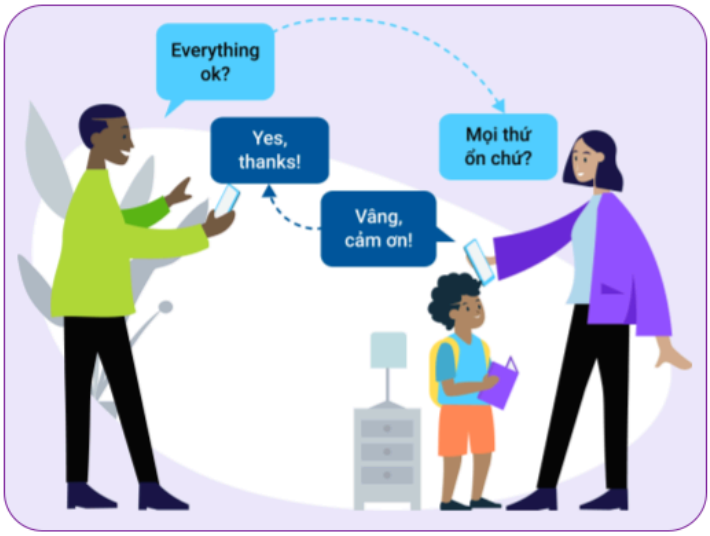
parents in the school who spoke no English at all or were even scared to ask the questions, she was much better off. And for that, I'm much better off."

This experience showed Lim that language was one of the foundational barriers preventing families from understanding school expectations, communicating with teachers, or advocating effectively for their children. Her observations align with a substantial body of research showing that family engagement is vital to improving student outcomes. Research has shown that regular text-message updates to families about student progress can significantly improve outcomes, with one study reporting a 27% reduction in course failures.[1] However, such interventions only work if they can be read, demonstrating that language access is a key driver of educational participation. This insight became the founding idea behind TalkingPoints.

TalkingPoints relies on user feedback as one of its product pillars. In fact, "the very first prototype of TalkingPoints was co-designed with teachers who chose the solution [at the hackathon where the idea was born] and said, "we have needed this for our entire career. Let's build this together," says Laila Brenner, TalkingPoints' Head of Philanthropy. TalkingPoints' feedback-driven approach has allowed the platform to expand its functionality over time to focus on driving specific student outcomes, while remaining closely aligned with the priorities of its key stakeholders, the educators and families it serves.

TalkingPoints' Platform

The foundational design of TalkingPoints' platform required no behavior change from stakeholders; families already expected to receive messages from their child's school, and in 2015, texting was the most popular feature on smartphones. Instead of an app that requires downloading, signing in, and checking for updates, TalkingPoints lets families and educators simply text each other. Educators type the message into the TalkingPoints web app, and it is automatically translated to the stakeholders' native language and arrives via text message.



Though other solutions for language translation exist, what sets TalkingPoints apart is the decade of research they've committed to building a proprietary translation model that is highly educationally context-specific. Brenner gave a particularly clear example of this importance:

[1] Peter Bergman and Eric W. Chan, Leveraging Parents through Low-Cost Technology: The Impact of High-Frequency Information on Student Achievement, *Journal of Human Resources,* January 2021

"Your student will have a sub. Our translation engine knows that we are not talking about a submarine, we're not talking about a sandwich, it is a substitute teacher." Families can then respond to these messages directly in their native language, and the message is automatically translated back into English for the teacher to respond.

This use case effectively bridges the communication gap between educators and families speaking different languages. TalkingPoints has evolved beyond this core functionality to build additional features and products that drive outcomes, including AI-powered message generation and at-home learning interventions.

> "When parents get a text message… fully translated in their first language, it communicates very lucidly: we see you. You belong. We value you."
>
> — *Antonio Vigil, Director of Innovative Classroom Technology, Aurora Public Schools*

COVID-19 Pandemic Increases Urgency for School-to-Family Communication

By 2017, TalkingPoints had broad nationwide adoption, reaching more than 100,000 families and educators and supporting the exchange of more than 2 million messages between families and teachers. These messages led to tangible results. TalkingPoints found that better communication between school and home lead 80% of teachers using TalkingPoints to see improvements in student behavior and performance.[2] At APS, individual teachers were using a free version of the tool to communicate with their students' families. At the time, APS relied on paper notices sent home with students as the primary means of communication. Even with the school translating those materials into the most common languages, gaps persisted. "When I would ask families, did you know about this event? Did you hear about that event? … it would always be, nope, we had no idea," Antonio Vigil recalls, then serving as a school principal within the APS network. He noted that for teachers who consistently used TalkingPoints, "it changed the game for us."

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 marked a turning point, as schools shifted rapidly to remote and hybrid learning environments. APS faced an urgent need to communicate with families across multiple languages about attendance, instructional changes, and health guidance. In this context, APS formally adopted TalkingPoints at the district level. Rather than launching a limited pilot, the district moved directly to broad implementation across all 59 schools in the district. "It was essential in a whole new way for teachers and families to be in communication with one another," says Emma Berry, Director of Partner Success at TalkingPoints. "The gap between home and school was greater than ever, and for Aurora in particular, the language gap was creating additional barriers for supporting students and families."

[2] From TalkingPoints website, About Us

APS Stakeholders Identify an AI-Shaped Problem: Attendance

After the COVID-19 pandemic, student absenteeism became a national concern. Brenner said, “One out of four kids across the country isn’t regularly showing up for school, meaning they miss 10% or more of school days. In some districts, that figure reaches 50–60%.” She also highlighted that, beyond its impact on learning and well-being, attendance also affects school funding, which in many states is tied to daily student presence. “We were hearing (about absenteeism) from schools, teachers, families,” recalled Stephanie Kaufman, Director of Product at TalkingPoints. “It was clear that there was a problem.”

Student absenteeism at APS reflected a myriad of issues the district was already grappling with: real-time communication needs, language access, and fragmented, manual workflows. Families had to call school offices, often in English, to report absences or provide documentation, which was not only challenging given the district's linguistic diversity but also difficult for schools to track. Attendance clerks spent hours each day listening to voicemails and returning calls. Even when translation services were available, the process was both slow and intimidating. Berry, who worked closely with APS schools, described the difficulties, saying, “Think about how intimidating it would be not to be fluent in English and to have to call the front office.” Many absences remained unexcused, not because families weren’t trying to engage, but because existing systems made it difficult to respond. At APS, patterns of absenteeism went unnoticed, and schools missed critical opportunities to intervene early to support student attendance and outcomes. “Attendance itself really isn’t an outcome,” explains Kaufman. “It’s more of a blocker to an outcome. You can’t learn if you’re not in school.”

By 2022, APS had begun experimenting with using TalkingPoints to mitigate these communication challenges related to absenteeism. APS knew that texting via TalkingPoints was already working to reach families: “We make phone calls home, and we hear nothing, but we send a text message home, and we hear back from our families,” explains Berry. This led APS teachers to get curious about how TalkingPoints could be used more systematically to address their attendance needs.

Rather than rushing to formalize a solution, TalkingPoints first focused on supporting what APS teams were already doing. They engaged with APS staff to understand how they were using the platform for attendance and, based on that, developed workarounds - creating an attendance email address, showing schools how to manually group students absent on a given day, and supporting mass outreach through the existing messaging tools. “It wasn’t a perfect solution, because it was still incredibly manual,“ explains Berry, “So that’s where this idea came from of ‘Let’s actually build an attendance module’”.

What had surfaced was a user-defined problem shaped by teachers', attendance clerks’, and families’ daily experiences. Defining the problem was the initial step; understanding how to translate these insights into a solution required TalkingPoints to engage a broader set of stakeholders.

Taking a Multi-Faceted Approach To Understanding Stakeholder Needs

TalkingPoints was intrigued: APS "was the first place that we saw a partner really use TalkingPoints to help improve attendance outcomes," continues Berry. They launched a systemic effort to understand how attendance challenges were unfolding across schools, roles, and communities — and how their technology could support those realities. This effort was part of TalkingPoints' general philosophy of stakeholder engagement: "We really work alongside the administration and the teachers, take their feedback and build that into our platform," Brenner explains. This feedback loop is central to their product philosophy and leverages multiple channels, intentionally designed to reach different stakeholder groups in the ways they already engage. As the organization has scaled, it has invested in multiple, overlapping mechanisms to ensure that feedback is continuous, diverse, and actionable.

> "Not only do we listen to teachers and school districts, but we then take action on what we hear."
>
> *— Laila Brenner, Head of Philanthropy, TalkingPoints*

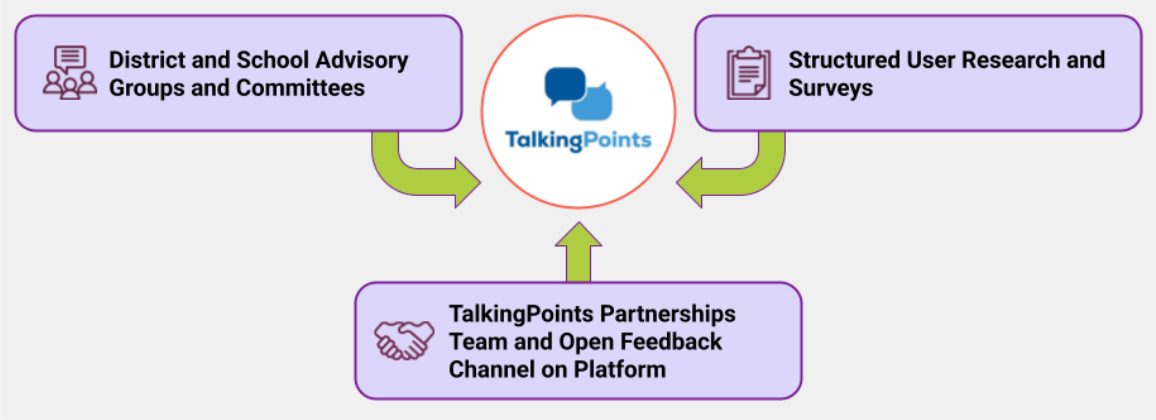
Importantly, TalkingPoints engages different stakeholders in different ways. Teachers — often the most trusted point of contact for families — are frequently the first to experiment with new uses of the platform. School and district leaders, who typically own attendance workflows, are engaged through panels and targeted outreach to understand operational constraints and policy considerations. Families are engaged through surveys, direct SMS outreach, and observation of real response behavior rather than abstract product walkthroughs. Students are engaged more selectively, given privacy and consent requirements, but TalkingPoints has convened student panels and incorporated feedback relayed through educators when student-facing use patterns emerge. Across these groups, the emphasis is on meeting stakeholders where they already are, using channels and behaviors they naturally adopt.

In addition, they conduct sophisticated analyses of usage patterns within the app to understand how families and teachers engage with the tool. The team tracks clicks, behaviors, and response rates, and runs A/B tests to validate what works in practice. These signals help surface where users are adapting the platform in unexpected ways, and where existing workflows fall short.

This layered approach — combining practitioner insight, family voice, leadership perspective, and usage data — revealed that schools were already using the platform to address attendance issues because existing systems weren't working. What began as a workaround revealed a clear opportunity for a more intentional solution.

TalkingPoints User Feedback & Research Ecosystem

TalkingPoints maintains advisory groups and stakeholder committees of teachers and school district employees that surface both feature-level input and broader signals about educator and district needs. These conversations are complemented by ongoing structured user research, including user testing with both educators and families to understand how they use the product, where friction arises, and what gaps remain. As Brenner described, the goal is to understand "how they're using the product, what barriers they're running into, [and] how we could be making it better." To supplement this qualitative work, they also conduct surveys with families. At an even broader level, TalkingPoints directly solicits feedback from all its users via both an "open channel from within the platform," as Kaufman explains, and by collecting feedback through its partnership team, which works directly with schools and is encouraged to share what they are learning back with TalkingPoints. "Really, at the end of the day, it's about listening, it's about hearing, it's about responding," Kaufman explains.



Moving from Feedback To Product

This insight — that schools were already using TalkingPoints to address attendance issues — was taken up by the TalkingPoints Solutions Incubator team, which is responsible for research and development and for translating practitioner feedback into new product features. Drawing on input from various stakeholders, the team began experimenting and designing a more structured attendance tool that reflected how schools were actually using the platform. The result was an Attendance Improvement Package, a structured set of tools designed to support proactive communication, real-time absence follow-up, and pattern-based intervention.

Stakeholder input directly shaped the features of this new solution. For example, realizing that attendance problems often escalated before families fully understood why attendance mattered led to the creation of the Attendance Messaging Series - proactive, scheduled messages designed to provide context to families. These messages explain why attendance matters, reinforce routines such as on-time arrival, and intentionally emphasize positive reinforcement while acknowledging families' efforts. Schools could customize the cadence, language, and tone, and personalize outreach with students' and schools' names. TalkingPoint's proprietary AI translation allowed these messages to be delivered – and responded to – in families' native

languages, increasing accessibility, leveraging the same AI tooling that had been designed for family-teacher interaction. The design reflected what APS educators had consistently observed: families often heard from schools only when something went wrong, undermining trust.

In response to attendance staff, who described the administrative burden of managing reporting, the platform introduced a daily dashboard that processes attendance data to cleanly show which students are absent and which absences lack a reason. From that perspective, schools can send a (AI-generated, but personalized-by-humans) text message in a family's home language to request context. This structure maintains a humans-in-the-loop – using AI to handle the administrative burden while keeping outreach in the hands of school staff. Families reply directly by text, in their own language, and (AI-translated) responses flow into a dedicated inbox for attendance staff. As Kaufman explained, the goal was not efficiency, but to enable action. "In order to get the student to school, you have to understand why they're absent, and then you have to be able to do something about that."

Over time, usage data revealed that the most valuable insight wasn't simply who was absent, but patterns across groups of students. The most actionable insight was which students were trending toward chronic absenteeism — and which families were already doing well. This led to the development of tiered messaging, allowing schools to group students by attendance thresholds and leverage AI-generated messages to tailor outreach accordingly. The design reflects what APS staff had learned firsthand: Tone and timing matter as much as the message itself. Dusty Burton, who had been involved in early attendance efforts at Aurora Public Schools, noted how powerful positive outreach could be. Hearing something affirming about their child, he said, "makes a huge difference in the day of a parent."

Stakeholder feedback also influenced where automation made sense and where it did not. While daily outreach, grouping, and dashboards benefited from automation, decisions about coding absences or intervening with families needed human judgment. TalkingPoints intentionally designed the module to organize information and surface trends, without replacing the school's discretion. APS's real-world experience not only informed the feature set but also defined the tool's boundaries.

Rollout and Results

For TalkingPoints, attendance became the place where communication, data, and outcomes converged most clearly. Brenner reflected, "In the beginning, it was about breaking down barriers and making family engagement accessible. Then it became about how we double down on outcomes that really drive economic mobility." Attendance emerged as the starting point, not because it was simple, but because it was foundational. Because early adopters were already using TalkingPoints to manage attendance manually, the rollout of the new module could build on familiar practices — allowing schools to test and refine new workflows against real operational needs before scaling further. Rather than introducing an entirely new system, the

Attendance Improvement Package formalized behaviors educators had already found useful, reducing friction and accelerating adoption.

Early results at APS reinforced that insight. Parent response to attendance messaging was overwhelmingly positive, with opt-out rates remaining exceptionally low. As Burton explained, "We have less than 1% of people opting out… out of 35,000 students. That's amazing." Attendance data also helped identify previously undetected issues. In one district, the data revealed that busing routes were driving chronic absenteeism. As Brenner described, "their buses simply weren't going far enough. Kids would miss the bus, and they had no alternative transportation." In response, the district expanded routes and adjusted transportation policy, leading to improved attendance — something that may not have surfaced through absence phone calls alone.

Engaging closely with educators, families, and school leaders helped TalkingPoints build a scalable, district-ready product shaped by those closest to the problem. Today, the TalkingPoints attendance module is in use across more than 30 school districts.

As the module spread, those same patterns held at scale. Districts using TalkingPoints have reported 15–24 percent reductions in absenteeism, with improved attendance associated with up to seven additional months of learning. The strongest gains have been observed among historically marginalized groups, including Black students (22%), Latino students (17%), students with disabilities (25%), and English Language Learners (18%), underscoring the role of accessible, culturally responsive communication in narrowing opportunity gaps.[3]

Together, these results illustrate that stakeholder engagement — not technology alone — improved outcomes. The attendance module did not succeed because it automated decisions, but because it translated lived experience into actionable insights. APS helped surface the problem and shape early practices; sustained engagement with educators, families, and district leaders ensured those practices could scale responsibly. In doing so, TalkingPoints demonstrated how AI-enabled tools can support real outcomes when they are designed *with* communities, not just deployed to them.

[3] From TalkingPoints website, Improved Attendance

Co-Creating AI Tools That Solve Practitioner Needs

ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS IN SURFACING AND FRAMING PROBLEMS: Current or potential program users have the clearest insights into what solutions are needed, and collaboration with stakeholders is critical to surfacing and framing problems. TalkingPoints learned about APS attendance-tracking needs from teachers and administrators and built a solution that addressed those specific problems.

> "We heard [about problems reporting attendance] from schools, teachers and families – 'I have to call, I'm not doing that, I forget all the time' kind of questions. So, when we heard that, we knew that there was an opportunity for us to be able to support this."
>
> *– Stephanie Kaufman, Director of Product, TalkingPoints*

ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS IN DESIGNING & IMPLEMENTING SOLUTIONS: Nonprofits should take a stakeholder-driven approach to mapping problems and potential AI solutions, with program outcomes and user safety at the center. TalkingPoints purposefully focused its Solutions Incubator team on piloting solutions identified by stakeholders.

> "Many of features that we have came straight from… having conversations with parents, because that's something we do constantly in everything we do"
>
> *– Sergio Sanchez, Data Engineer, TalkingPoints*

INCORPORATE ONGOING FEEDBACK: Stakeholder engagement should not be a one-time conversation but rather an ongoing process. TalkingPoints continues to engage with teachers and school districts, using its platform to surface new opportunities and product enhancements.

> "I think making sure that we are hearing from a diverse group of people, whether that's families who are diverse, teachers who are diverse, or sometimes leaders that represent diverse populations... We're making sure that we're talking to the right people."
>
> *– Stephanie Kaufman, Director of Product, TalkingPoints*

BUILD TRUST BY PRESERVING HUMAN AGENCY AND TRANSPARENCY: AI can supplement, not replace, human agency and control. TalkingPoints designed their teacher and family communication tools to provide helpful suggestions without replacing the human touch.

> "Teachers have full agency in every message that gets sent to a family, so they have the opportunity to edit, accept, or reject any message that we help them generate with AI.
>
> *– Laila Brenner, Head of Philanthropy, TalkingPoints*

Recommendations

Both grantmakers and nonprofit practitioners should recognize the importance of engaging stakeholders in the scoping, design, and sustainability of AI projects. For practitioners, this starts with understanding who the stakeholders are and involving them directly in identifying the problem and designing multiple channels for feedback and insights. For grantmakers, enabling impactful AI projects requires investing in iterative processes and feedback loops that foster strong stakeholder engagement. Across the field, everyone should consider how to ensure that underrepresented voices are heard in stakeholder engagement.

FOR NONPROFIT LEADERS

- Engage those closest to the work – frontline staff, community members, and operational leaders – to surface and frame opportunities and problems before pursuing AI-enabled solutions. Treat their lived experience as a primary signal for where technology can add value.
- Prioritize solutions that build on practices users already trust and adopt rather than requiring entirely new behaviors.
- Engage communities historically excluded from decision-making processes. Evaluate whether AI tools improve access, reduce barriers, and strengthen outcomes for those most affected by inequities. Listen closely for design insights about creating safety, ensuring privacy, and mitigating bias.
- Build both structured and informal channels for ongoing input from diverse stakeholders. Incorporate advisory groups, surveys, usage data, and direct observation of behavior to ensure AI tools align with existing workflows and community norms.
- Identify where AI can operate independently, and where human discretion remains essential. Preserve staff agency for AI recommendations that could have significant consequences for program participants to strengthen trust and accountability.
- Create systems for continuous improvement, including structured user research, engagement data analysis, and regular reassessments of feature performance.

FOR GRANTMAKERS

- Assess whether proposed AI solutions are tightly connected to clearly defined program goals and measurable improvements, rather than adopting technology for its own sake.
- Resource the time and infrastructure needed for R&D and authentic co-creation. Support grantees in engaging stakeholders early and often in problem and opportunity definition, prototyping, and implementation.
- Recognize that responsible AI solution design unfolds over time. Fund pilots, refinements, and continuous evaluation, allowing grantees to test, learn, and adjust.
- Provide flexible funding for data systems, user research, evaluation, and ongoing monitoring — not only initial tool development. Sustainable AI requires sustained infrastructure.
- Inquire and learn about how stakeholder input shaped design, how human agency is preserved, and how tools will be monitored for unintended consequences that could impact safety, privacy, or bias — especially for systems that interact directly with communities.

"Our mission is universal family engagement. And the process was long for us to land on the word universal. It means no matter what, if you're interested in helping your students, there's nothing that should stop you from doing that. And that means all our tools have to work for everybody."

— Sergio Sánchez, Senior Data Engineer at TalkingPoints

Appendix

Resources

- EDSAFE AI framework

Additional Reading from Project Evident

- Equitable AI Adoption Framework
- Equitable AI Adoption (EAIA): Highlighting AI in Action
- Sustaining Scaled Impact, AI & Technology at Crisis Text Line
- Staying Ahead of the Technology Curve: AI Technology Evolution at Quill.org
- How to Foster a Culture of Learning and Manage Change: AI Integration at Chicago Public Schools
- Using Data to Drive Outcomes with AI: Beyond 12's Data-Driven Approach to Using AI for Impact
- Funding the Future: Grantmaker Strategies in AI Investment
- Inspiring Action: Identifying the Social Sector AI Opportunity Gap
- Next Generation Evidence Strategies for More Equitable Social Impact
- NextGen Tools for NextGen Evidence: AI-Enabled Decision Making for Impact