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# The Role of AI in Association Management in Developing and Emerging Markets

The Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) is a global organization that works to strengthen democracy and build competitive markets in many of the world's most challenging environments. Working alongside local partners and tomorrow's leaders, CIPE advances the voice of business in policy making, promotes opportunity, and develops resilient and inclusive economies. CIPE's unique model of collaboration with business associations is key to building fair and predictable legal and regulatory environments that are conducive to business. Founded in 1983, CIPE is a core institute of the National Endowment for Democracy and an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.


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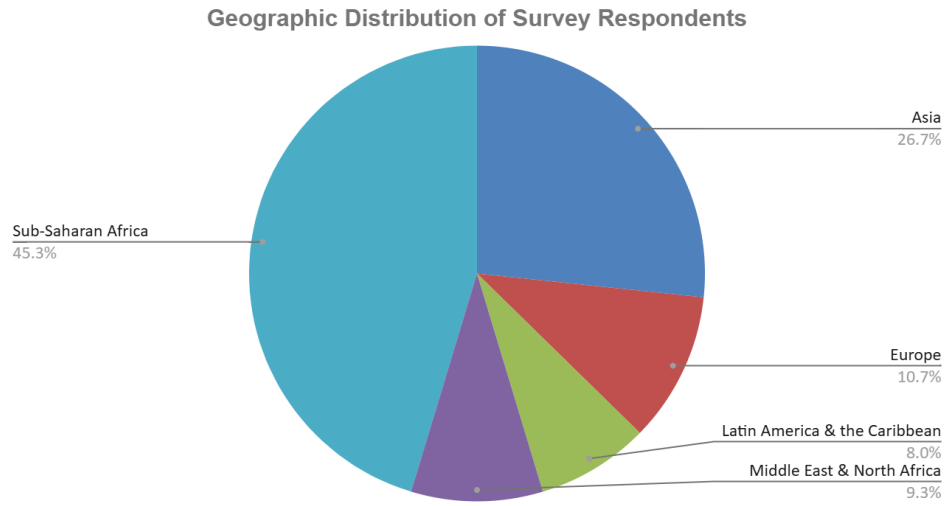
**Key Takeaways:** Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies are viewed overwhelmingly as a source of opportunity for associations in developing and emerging markets. Rates of adoption are significant, yet usage remains an evolving story. Bullish attitudes towards AI have not yet been converted to the level of member benefit. There is a tremendous need for upskilling within associations to meet the moment. Ethical considerations and privacy top the list of advocacy concerns, and association leaders overwhelmingly see a civic role for their organizations in addressing these issues. Lastly, risk management practices lag behind current AI usage and ambitions.

## BACKGROUND

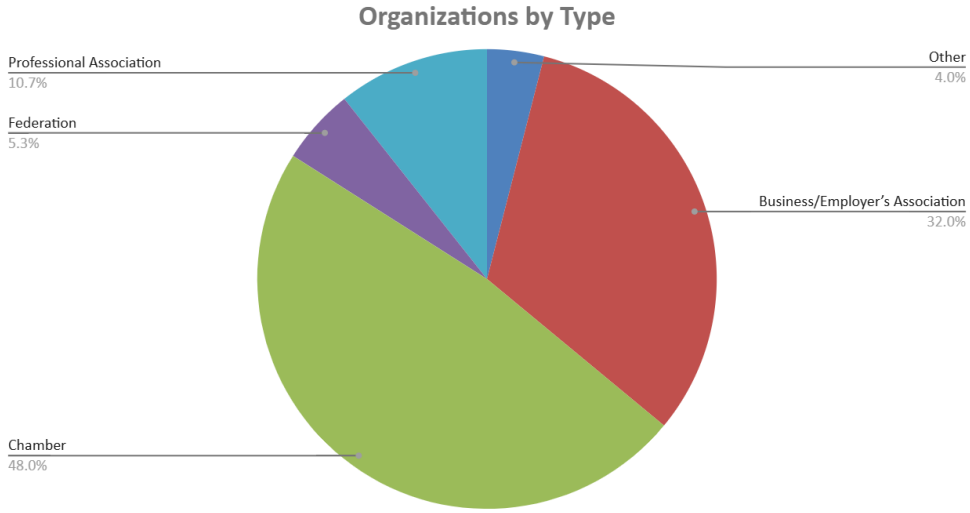
As in developed economies, AI technologies are rapidly altering the business landscape in emerging and frontier markets. As we have explored before, the AI revolution presents both opportunities and risks for associations at the level of governance, operations, services, and advocacy, among other implications. Much like the rise of the internet in the 1990s, followed by social media in the early 2000s, AI is the latest digital trend to understand and adapt to. As AI transforms the business environment and the market realities that member companies experience, associations must keep pace to help shape the policy environment and drive business success.

## SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

To better understand how associations are navigating this new environment, CIPE conducted a global survey of business membership organizations in November and December of 2024 in collaboration with Expectation State, a UK-based firm. The survey reached a total of 634 organizations across five regions of the world and yielded a total of 75 responses (a response rate of 11.8%).

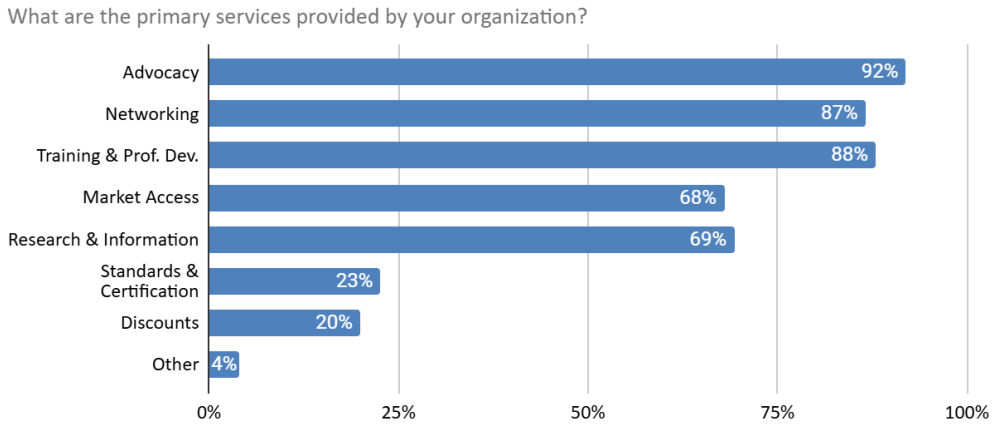



Respondents represented chambers of commerce, industry, and agriculture; federations representing multiple associations; business, trade, and employer's associations; and professional associations. (The term "association" is used broadly in this report to refer to all of these types of organizations.)




Slightly more than half of respondents (52%) have been in existence for over 20 years, 26.7% have operated for 11-20 years, and 21.3% have 10 or fewer years in operation. Approximately half of organizations (50.7%) have a membership exceeding 500 individuals or businesses, with an even distribution in size across the other half. Nearly half (49.3%) of organizations operate with annual revenues below $100,000, and 28% have revenues between $100,000-$250,000. A significant majority of organizations (58.7%) operate with fewer than 10 employees, underscoring widespread staffing limitations within associations.

Among respondents, the three most commonly provided association services are advocacy, training and professional development, and networking.

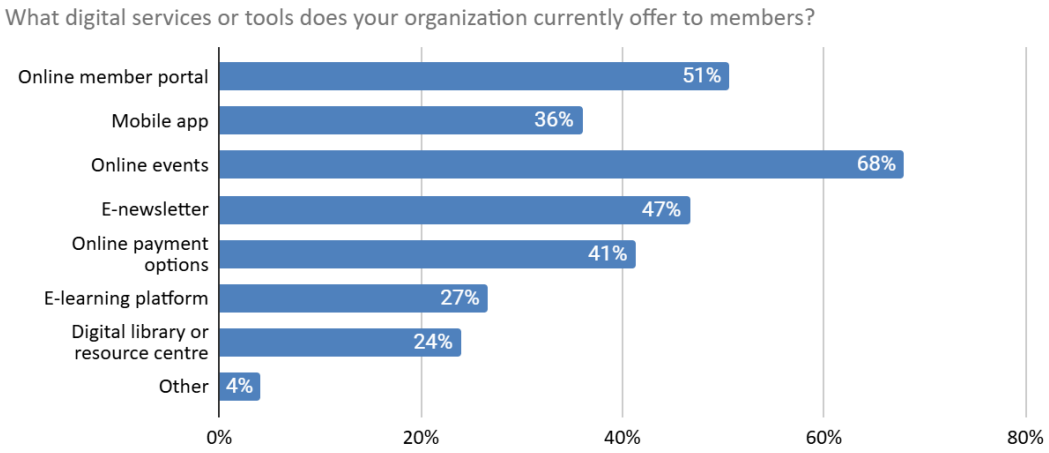



# KEY FINDINGS

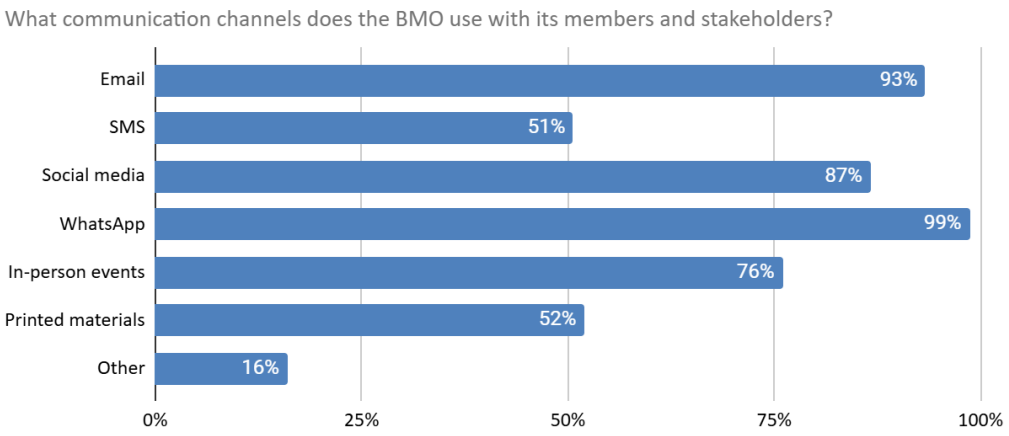
## The ICT Context

AI adoption fits within the broader context of how technology is utilized and resourced in an association. The deployment of AI within an association will leverage existing technological capabilities and require new investments. Around 50% of respondents assessed the level of ICT usage and digitalization within the association to be moderate, with another 30% assessing it as high. 41% of organizations allocate up to 5% of their total operating budget for technology utilization and adoption, and another 21% budget up to 10% for this purpose. However, nearly 30% of organizations are not budgeting for technology at all, although many plan to do so in the future.

Online events are by far the most provided digital service.



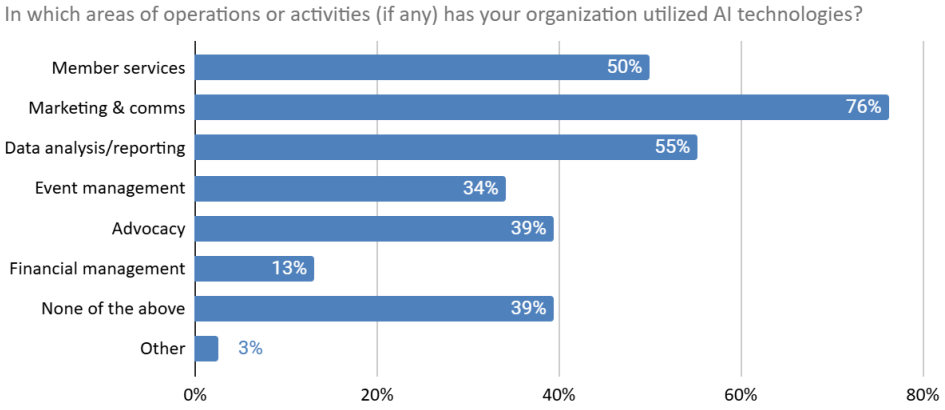

WhatsApp, email, and social media are the top three channels used to communicate with members.



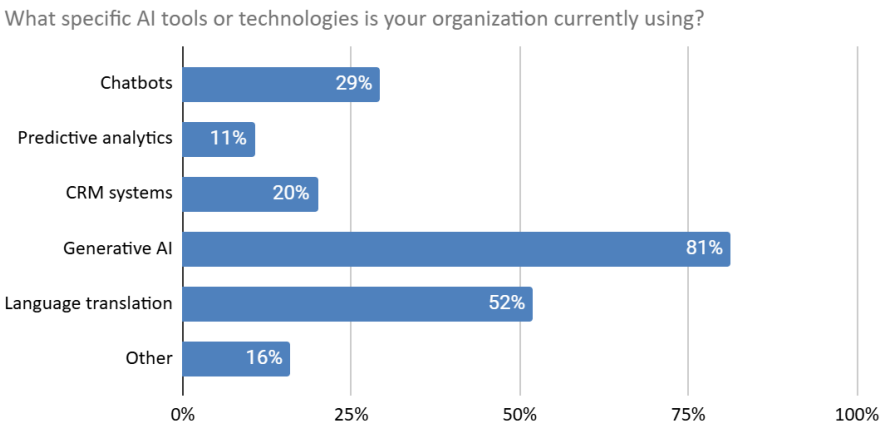

## AI In Practice

When it comes to AI technologies specifically, *half of associations have used AI tools, but a third have not* – revealing a significant rate of AI adoption within associations overall. A further *16% were unsure*, indicating a lack of understanding or awareness of the ways in which AI might be leveraged by staff or present within existing enterprise technologies. By comparison, the 2025 Association Benchmarking Report published by Naylor Association Solutions reveals that 57.7% of associations are using AI to some extent (to enhance member engagement).

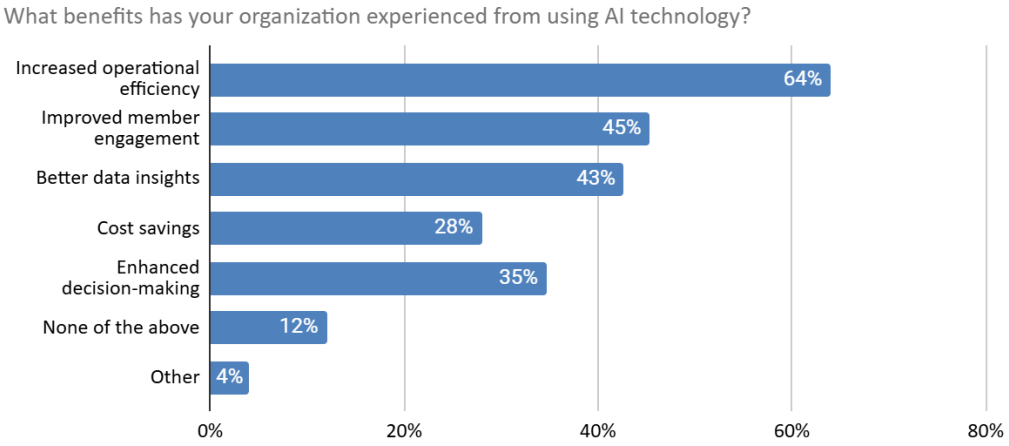
CIPE's survey reveals that AI is used primarily in marketing and communications, followed by data analysis/reporting. A recent survey conducted by the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) similarly found that content creation and data analysis/reporting are the top two current uses of AI among associations.



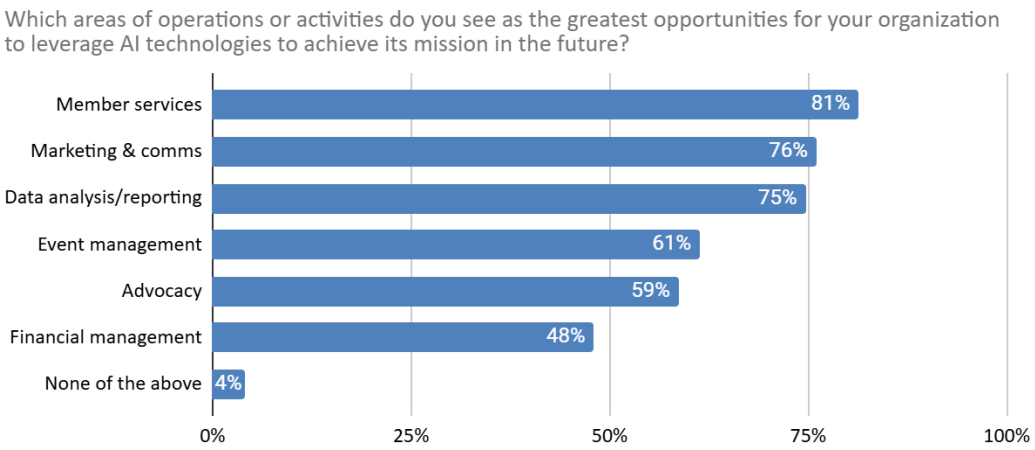

Associations are using generative AI (e.g. large language models and image content generators) far more than any other AI tools or technologies. Many popular generative AI tools are free to use and likely do not increase the overall spending on ICT systems.




In turn, respondents perceive increasing operational efficiency as the primary benefit of using AI technologies. This is especially relevant to associations with limited resources and staffing. By comparison, ASAE's survey reveals that operational efficiency and productivity is also the area where association leaders see the greatest opportunities for their organizations.

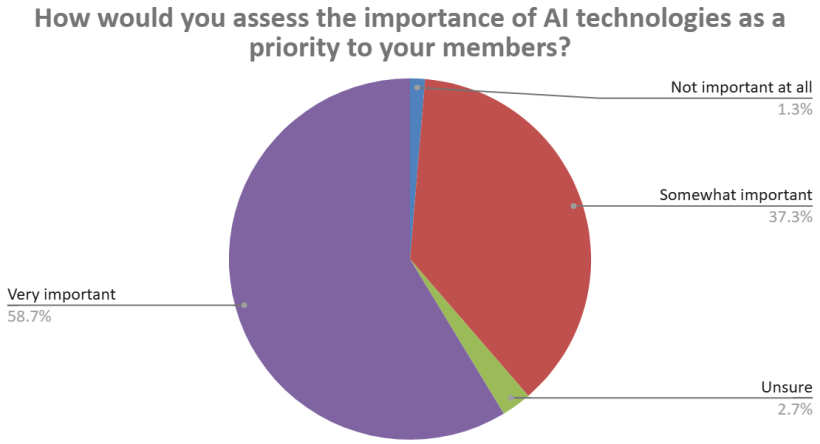



Respondents to CIPE's survey see the greatest opportunities for AI in their associations in member services, marketing and communications, and data analysis and reporting. This reflects a growing range of AI use cases within the association context, including tools that can make knowledge content more accessible and useable on-demand, track and analyze member sentiment and engagement, and develop communications content more efficiently. In the realm of advocacy, associations generally have a small (if any) dedicated advocacy or government relations staff. AI can help small-staff associations analyze complex policy issues and generate positions—informed by the input of their members and the wisdom of their boards—that they might not be able to develop otherwise.

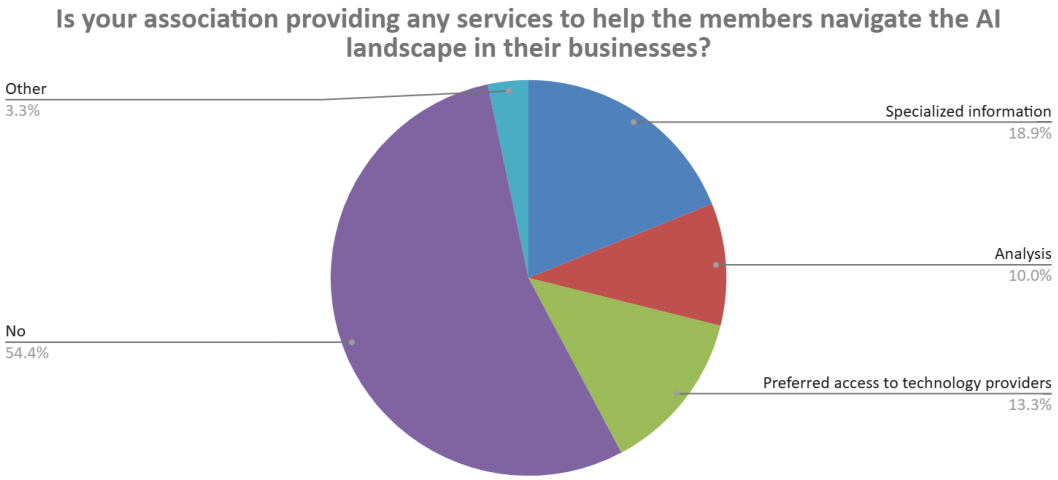



## Enormous Upside Potential

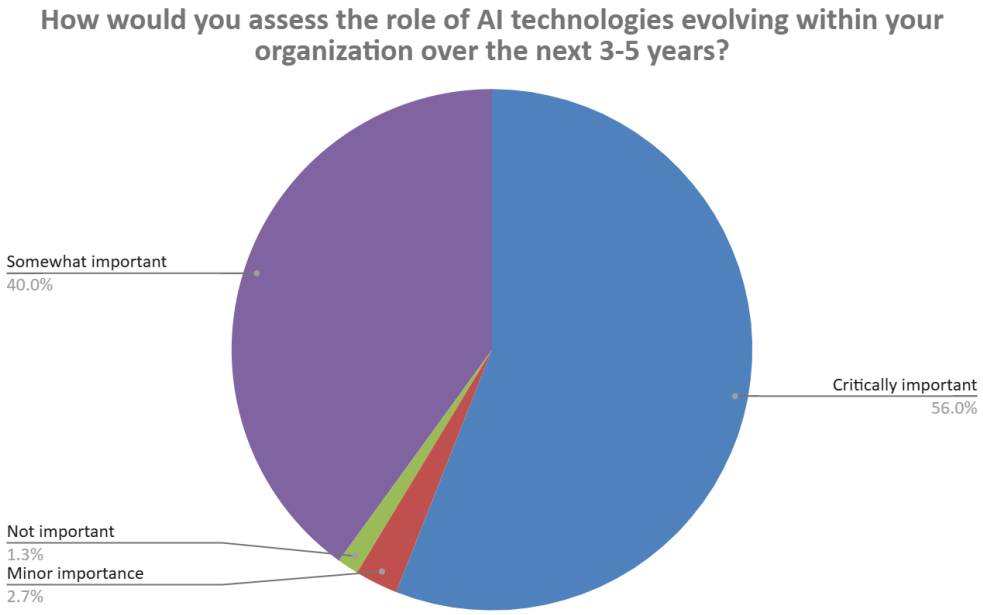
Association leaders are bullish about the prospects for AI adoption within their organizations. Approximately 96% of association leaders feel positive (46%) or very positive (50%) about the potential benefits of using AI-powered tools for member engagement and communications. Moreover, associations clearly view AI technologies as a priority of their members.




That said, slightly more than half of associations (54.4%) are not yet providing any services to help their members navigate the AI landscape in their businesses. This represents a substantial opportunity for associations to meet market demand by introducing new lines of business that will generate value for members. This may involve partnerships with technology providers and specialized information and training, among other possible services.



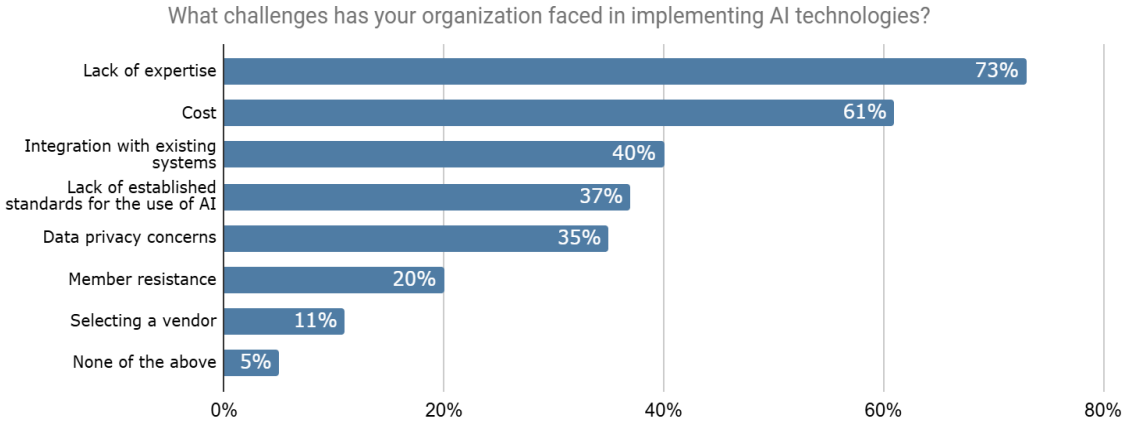

Ultimately, nearly all associations view AI technologies as playing an important role (56% critically important and 40% somewhat important) in their organization over the next 3-5 years. By comparison, ASAE's survey found that just over half (51.6%) of association leaders are cautiously exploring AI use cases and more than a third (37.1%) are actively embracing and investing in AI, with a further 6.2% taking a "wait and see" approach. Both surveys reveal a very small percentage of outright skepticism or resistance to AI.




## Upskilling Needed

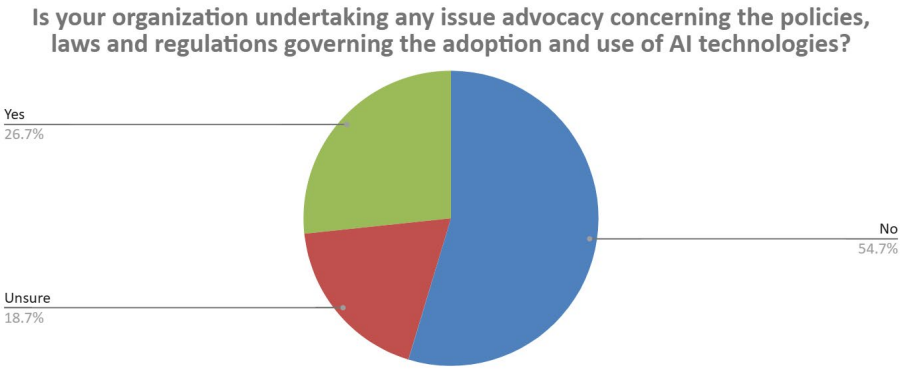
To maximize this opportunity, there is an urgent need for staff upskilling. Approximately 70% of association leaders assess their staff's level of skills and experience with AI technologies to be limited with a need for training, while another 24% are viewed as somewhat skilled. Indeed, the top challenge that organizations face in adopting AI technologies is a lack of expertise, though the

potential cost of AI adoption is also a major consideration. ASAE's survey also revealed a lack of internal expertise to be the top barrier to adopting AI within associations.

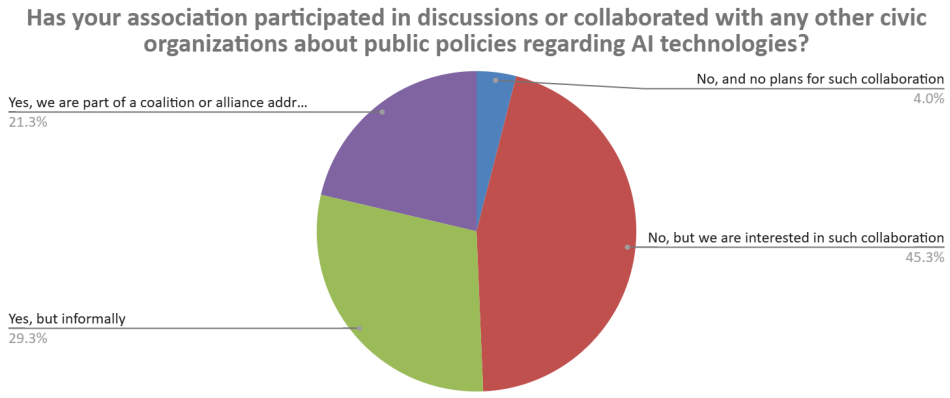



## A Role for Advocacy?

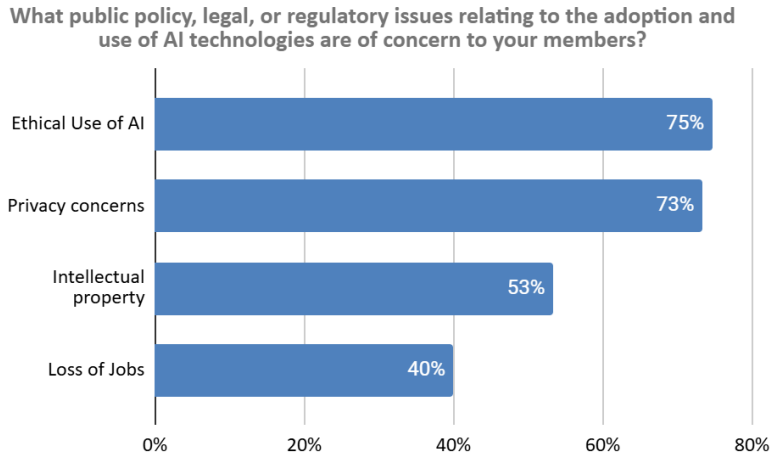
Most associations (over 54%) do not consider themselves to be engaged in advocacy concerning the policies, laws, and regulations governing the adoption and use of AI technologies.




However, around half of the associations have participated in discussions or collaborated at some level with other civic organizations about public policies governing AI technologies, and another 45% are interested in such collaboration.

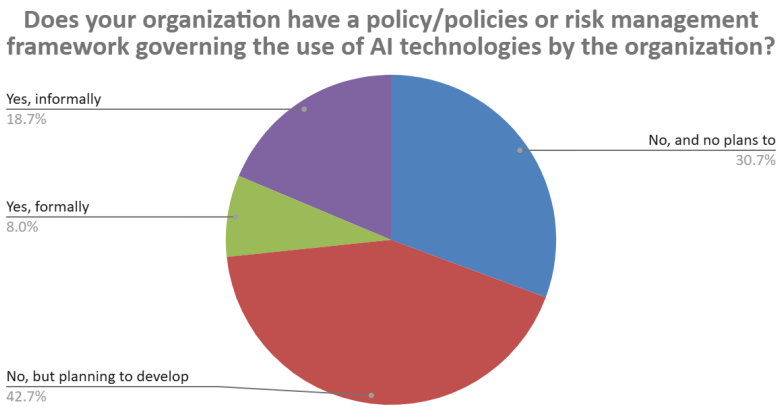



Association leaders see ethical considerations and privacy issues relating to the adoption and use of AI technologies as the main policy, legal, or regulatory matters of concern to their members. There is fertile ground for associations to play a civic leadership role in shaping the enabling environment for AI that promotes innovation while mitigating legal and societal risks. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, for example, launched the Commission on Competitiveness, Inclusion, and Innovation which calls for appropriate policies and a risk-based regulatory framework "that will provide the pathway for the development and deployment of AI in a responsible and ethical manner."

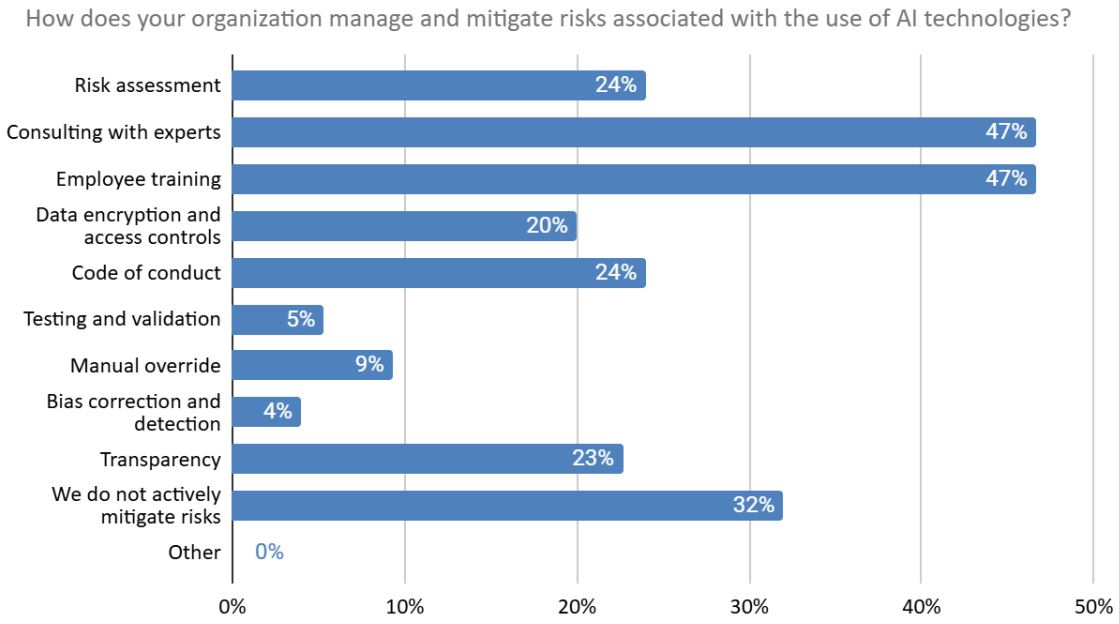



## What about the Risks?

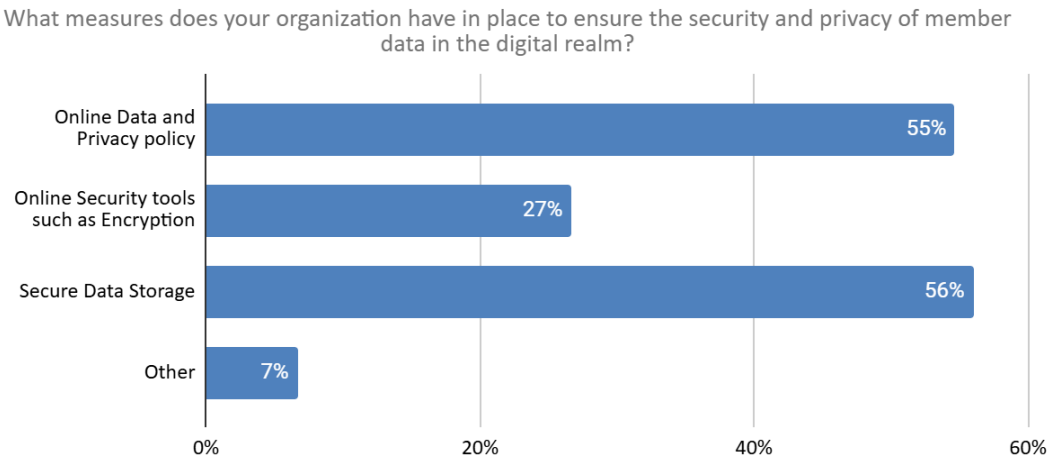
The use of AI in the association context presents various risks which are well documented. (See e.g., *The Legal Impact of AI on Associations*, ASAE.) It is important to put organizational policies or risk management frameworks in place governing the internal use of AI. CIPE's survey reveals that few associations have already done so, although many more are planning to develop such policies. By comparison, research conducted by the American Management Association (AMA) shows that 50% of North American organizations had an AI governance policy in 2024, up dramatically from 15% the year prior.




The most common ways that associations do manage and mitigate AI-related risks are consulting with experts and training employees, although even these measures have been taken by less than half of respondents.




As with other enterprise-level technology usage, policies and procedures can be updated and adapted to reflect AI usage and adoption, including new cybersecurity and data privacy practices (especially when using free online tools).




As a matter of governance, it will be essential for associations to identify and address risks to both unleash innovation and protect the interests and assets of the organization.

**Conclusions:** Associations in developing and emerging markets are well positioned to capitalize on the technological advances brought about by the AI revolution. AI provides substantial opportunities for associations to better serve and represent their members. This is especially so in small-staff organizations that can harness the power of these tools to bring about new operational efficiencies. New technologies bring new risks, and associations must be proactive about putting appropriate safeguards in place.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