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How to Audit Your Organization for AI Implementation

A comprehensive guide for construction leaders

AN INDUSTRY REPORT BY CANALS

www.canals.ai

Contents

Why AI Automation *Matters*

Complex capital projects have become the primary drivers of growth across the construction industry, and that growth shows no signs of stopping.

McKinsey estimates data center spending will reach $7 trillion by 2030. US utilities are planning $1.4 trillion in power infrastructure spending through 2030, effectively doubling spend from the previous decade. Healthcare projects worth $1 billion or more have grown from under 10% of all healthcare construction spending to nearly a quarter of it.

However, meeting the demand for data centers and megaprojects is not as simple as winning new business. It requires capital investment and capacity expansion in a time when meeting existing demand has proven difficult. According to data from the Associated General Contractors (AGC), 82% of firms report they cannot find enough hourly craft workers, and 80% cannot fill salaried roles. The Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) estimates the industry needs 349,000 net new workers in 2026 alone, rising to 456,000 in 2027.

With an overextended workforce and increasingly complex projects on the horizon, contractors need technology that closes the gap. In the field, that means robotics, prefab, and layout technology. In the office, it means AI handling the routine work that used to slip through the cracks when teams were stretched too thin.

Many leaders in construction want the benefits AI automation offers, but it's not always clear where to start or how to scale. That's the purpose of this guide: to equip leaders with the knowledge they need to implement AI initiatives that meet the moment and lay the groundwork for long-term growth.

KEY CHALLENGES

82%

of firms report they cannot find enough hourly craft workers

80%

of firms report they cannot fill salaried roles

805,000

new workers needed in 2026 & 2027 to meet industry demand

TOPIC 01

ASSESSING YOUR BASELINE:

Know Your Needs

Need creates its own blind spot. The more urgently an organization needs help, the fewer resources are available to assess and deploy it. If a team spends most of its time reacting to problems, there's less of it to spend proactively understanding current processes, measuring team output and bandwidth, or completing the due diligence required for an organizational diagnosis prior to implementing a new solution. It is difficult to define what success with AI can, or should, look like.

In these scenarios, leadership runs the risk of allocating resources to the most visible bottlenecks, rather than the most consequential.

That is why the first step of any AI-readiness audit is getting a clear picture of how your organization operates.

ESTABLISH BASIC REPORTING STANDARDS → BUILD TRUST WITH TRANSPARENCY → DON'T MISTAKE SILENCE FOR SATISFACTION

Establish basic reporting standards

While gathering every data point on your workforce's day-to-day would be valuable, it's not always realistic or necessary. Even basic reporting can prove valuable for finding and quantifying bottlenecks. This could be as simple as asking each team to track hours spent per person, per week, on core responsibilities to determine which tasks take the most time. Teams could also list important tasks that are currently neglected, applying dollar amounts or hours where relevant, or flag recurring errors and rework caused by lack of bandwidth and the time spent fixing them. Anywhere you can build in quantitative measures will help provide an objective view of business impact and assist with prioritization.

Build trust with transparency

Prevailing narratives about AI focus on tech as a people replacement, but that is not the case in an industry hurting for headcount. Make your organizational goals clear to your team from the start: you're assessing their needs to provide real support and enable them to do more with less. When paired with new reporting focused on identifying their operational pains, transparency around goals shows your team their success is a top priority for any new technology initiatives.

Don't mistake silence for satisfaction

Quiet performers rarely raise their hands, which means their problems don't always make it into the conversation. Balance what you hear from more vocal employees by deliberately seeking out the ones who are less forthcoming, whether they're people managers or individual contributors. Set aside 15 minutes with a handful of them, one at a time, and ask directly what's slowing them down. The manual processes and bandwidth problems that never get raised in a group setting tend to surface here and will give you a more complete picture of your organization.

TOPIC 02

SET UP YOUR TECH FOR SUCCESS:

Prepare Key Systems for Integration

Before you begin researching AI tools to relieve any organizational burdens, consult with your IT team to understand the technical specifications, limitations, or steps that should be taken before implementing new technology.

5 Tips for New Tech Prep

1. **ASSEMBLE THE RIGHT STAKEHOLDERS**
   Bring in relevant leaders, technology team members, and an appointed project leader who can coordinate between them. Having a single "owner" responsible for assessing readiness and gathering requirements will provide clarity on accountability and keep up momentum across teams and timelines.

2. **SET UP SECURE PERMISSIONS VIA API KEYS, API TOKENS, OR WEBHOOKS FOR SAFE SYSTEM ACCESS**
   When speaking with potential technology partners, confirm data and permission requirements ahead of time. A permissions gap discovered after implementation begins means going back to renegotiate access, which can stall the project right before it really starts.

3

BEFORE COMMITTING TO A VENDOR, FIND OUT HOW YOUR SYSTEMS WILL ACTUALLY CONNECT

Some integrations use pre-built connectors, sometimes called "out-of-the-box" or "plug and play," that work with minimal setup. Others require a custom API, which takes more time and technical resources to build. Know which one you're dealing with up front to get the right resources in place ahead of time.

4

REMOVE DUPLICATE VENDOR AND CUSTOMER RECORDS FROM YOUR SYSTEM OF RECORD

Duplicates have to get reconciled, mapped, or flagged during setup, and they skew reporting on spend and vendor relationships. Perfection isn't a prerequisite for AI adoption, but doing some minor data cleaning upfront can expedite implementation.

5

PRO-TIP FOR CONTRACTORS

Check existing marketplaces maintained by your incumbent systems. Integrations that are endorsed by software vendors you already know and trust are pre-vetted for their quality and security. Microsoft AppSource and the Trimble Marketplace are two great examples.

Microsoft

Trimble Marketplace

Every business runs on a different combination of tools, so no implementation looks exactly the same. Regardless, new and existing systems still have to work together. When they don't, you lose the value of what you've already built and limit what any new system can actually deliver.

Knowing the technical requirements of any new solution will not only help you decide on the right vendor, it will help your implementation go as smoothly as possible. Leaning on your IT leadership's expertise and coming prepared can make the difference between a rollout that takes a few weeks, and one that takes many months.

TOPIC 03

CHANGE MANAGEMENT MADE EASY:

Communication Tactics that Drive Adoption

Effective change management campaigns don't require an expensive team of consultants, and they start well before the ink is dry on a new vendor contract. You can prepare for a successful AI tool rollout by approaching change management in three key phases:

PHASE 1

Start with your power users

Resist the temptation to focus on skeptical voices or push adoption on the entire organization all at once. Instead, identify those employees who are likely to embrace new technology and carry credibility with their peers. Loop them in early, and get them involved during the vendor evaluation stage. Not only will their input increase their personal investment, it will help guide the selection process with critical user-level insights.

PHASE 2

Let results speak for themselves

Once a pilot group is saving time and seeing results, make it visible across the organization. A shoutout at a meeting or a quick email to the wider team goes a long way, and lays the groundwork for future implementations in adjacent functions. Let those same early adopters lead training sessions and share their own successes and frustrations openly and honestly. Hearing the good and the bad from a peer builds credibility, and encourages users who may have hit similar early snags to try again and find their own success.

PHASE 3

Motivate from the top when momentum stalls

At some point organic adoption will plateau and require a direct push from leadership. Make usage a standing item in check-ins with supervisors, and give them a simple way to track it week over week. Treat adoption initiatives as an opportunity for feedback, rather than a mandate from the top. Ask holdouts directly: "What's stopping you from using this more?" The answer is often a fixable process problem, rather than resistance for its own sake.

Getting back office staff or field crews to use a new tool takes more than a good purchase decision, and the switch from uncertainty to mastery doesn't happen overnight. Contractors who go through all three phases come out the other side with a team that actually uses the tool and works better for it.

Read Canals' full guide to AI change management strategies at www.canals.ai/changemanagement

TOPIC 04

EVALUATING AI VENDORS:

Picking a Partner You Can Trust

Choosing the wrong AI vendor won't just waste budget, it will derail your team's workflows, frustrate your field crews and office staff, and leave you exposed to security and reputational risk. With so many early-stage vendors overselling unproven tech, contractors need to have a sharp eye during the evaluation process. A vendor confident in their own quality will treat scrutiny as a chance to prove it.

Here are four red flags to watch for:

1

THEY CAN'T DEMO WITH YOUR DATA

A scripted demo is much easier to build than a solution that works well under pressure. Before you commit to a vendor, bring your own data or documents and ask the vendor to process them on the spot. If they hesitate or promise to get back to you later that's a sign their software is too unreliable for your use case. A vendor confident in their product will want you to test it live, on real documents, in real time.

2

THEIR ENGINEERING BENCH IS SHALLOW

Building accurate AI automation is technically demanding, and keeping that automation running reliably day after day takes serious engineering hours. Check the vendor's LinkedIn page: how many software engineers do they have, how experienced are they, and have they worked at reputable tech companies in the past? An understaffed engineering team translates to weaker support when something breaks and fewer updates over time.

3

THEY LACK INDEPENDENT SECURITY VALIDATION

According to IBM, data breaches cost a company roughly $4.4 million per incident. Because AI vendors often need access to pricing, vendor, and customer data, overlooking weak security protocols can literally cost you. When assessing vendors, ask for proof of their security standards. SOC 2 Type II attestation, SSO/MFA access controls, third-party penetration testing, and contracts that clearly state you retain ownership of your data are all objective indicators of an organization invested in security.

4

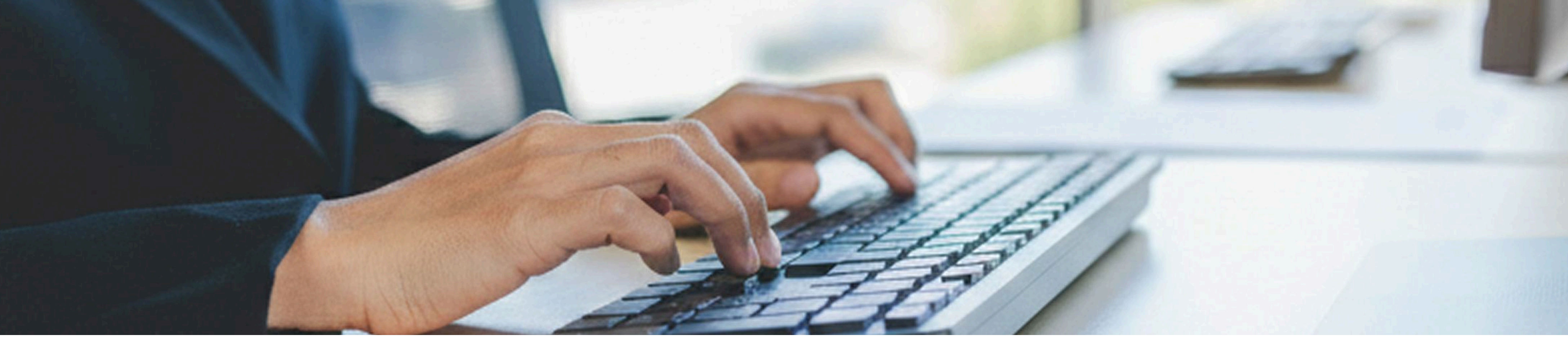
THEY AREN'T GROWING THE PRODUCT

Choosing an AI vendor is a long-term investment. A consistent release history and a clear roadmap are strong signals that a vendor will keep evolving the product and delivering new value over time. Long gaps or vague answers are a red flag. Ask for a timeline of past releases, it'll show you whether the product is continually moving forward or just standing still.

PRO-TIP FOR CONTRACTORS:

Data privacy and data security are related, but still distinct, concepts. A trustworthy vendor has controls, policies, and documentation specific to each rather than one general assurance covering both:

- **Data security** focuses on the technical and operational safeguards—like encryption, access controls, audit logging, and backup protocols—that protect information from unauthorized access, loss, or misuse.
- **Data privacy** governs how information is used, processed, disclosed, and retained through mechanisms including measures like consent requirements, retention schedules, and limits on third-party disclosure.



AP FOR CONTRACTORS

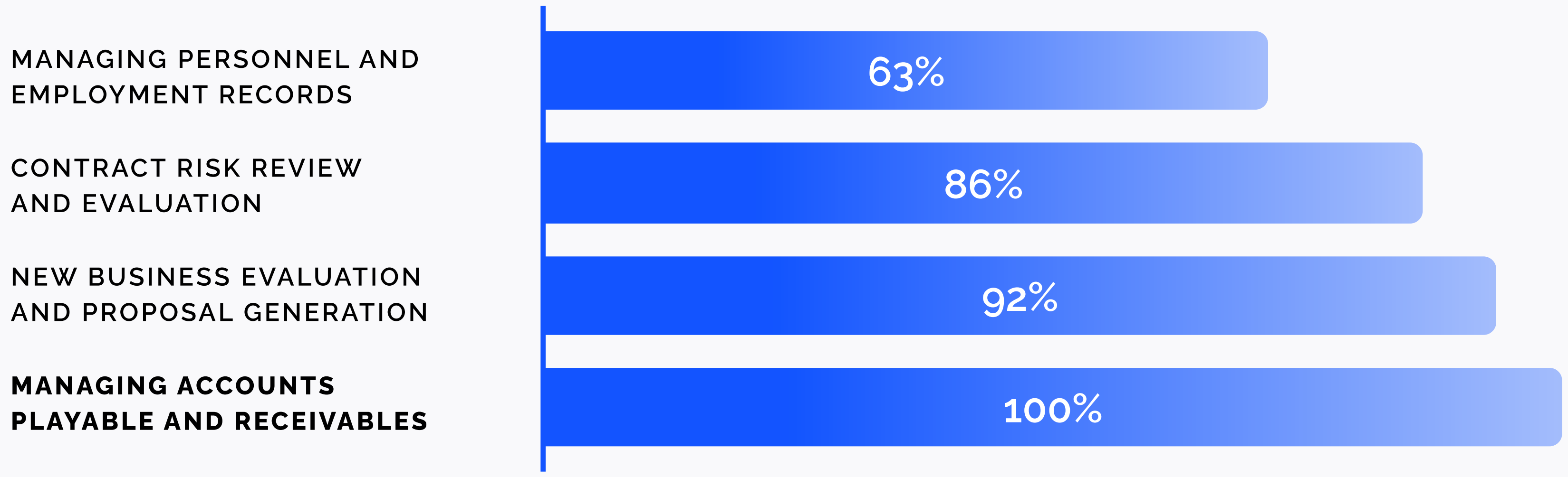
THE LOWEST-HANGING FRUIT FOR CONTRACTORS:

AI-Powered Accounts Payable

Purpose-built financial automation is one of the most straight-forward ways contractors can bid competitively, protect their margins, and move faster. It's also industry-tested and approved: According to research by the Dodge Construction Network, 100% of contractors who have adopted AI for managing their accounts payable—without exception—rate it as highly or *very* highly effective compared with their previous method.

Percentage of Contractors Rating AI as Highly or Very Highly Effective for Company Management Activities

Compared With Their Previous Method(s) for Each Activity



From AI for Contractors by Dodge Construction Network, Dec 2025

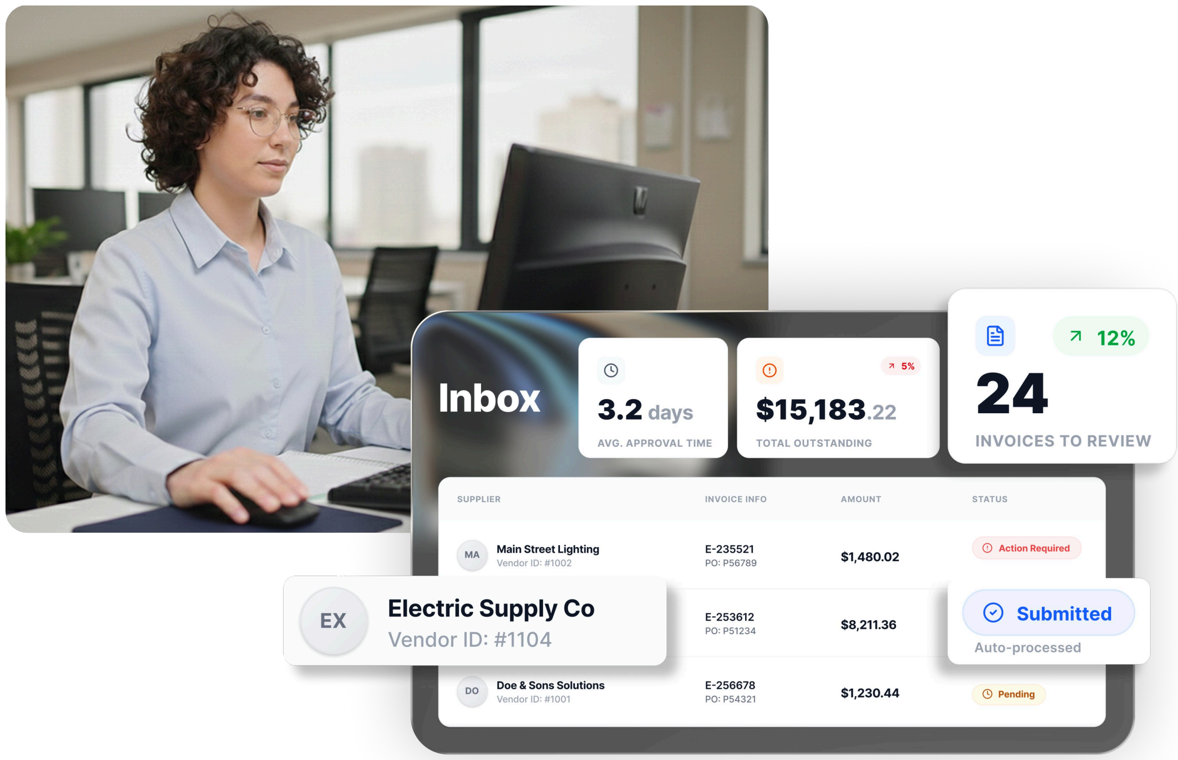
An analysis of the 2026 ENR Top 400 Contractors echoes these findings. As Rodd Merchant, Chief Strategy Officer at JE Dunn Construction shared, “A major success [this year] has been the intentional move toward more consistent, enterprise-level AI deployment.”

Another contributor, Rebekah Gray, President and CEO at Gray Construction, agreed, “We are taking a deliberate, phased approach to AI adoption, starting with foundational tools and progressively expanding into more sophisticated capabilities.”

READ MORE: CONTRACTOR

How AI Is Simplifying Purchasing and Accounts Payable for Contractors

CLICK HERE



AP Automation Built for the Way Contractors Work

Canals automates invoice processing, three-way matching, and payables submissions for construction teams, reducing manual work, catching errors before they become costly, and giving you a clearer view of cash flow, all without asking your vendors to change how they invoice.

Canals identifies invoices, expenses, and vendor statements the moment they hit your AP inbox, with no templates or vendor setup required. Matching runs automatically against your POs and receipts, and valid invoices go straight into your accounting system as payables. Invoices that can't be processed get flagged with a clear reason and routed to your Canals Inbox for review, correction, and submission.

Canals is proprietary AI built specifically to handle complex, industry-specific documents, and it has already processed more than $2 billion in construction-specific payables.

THE RESULTS:

95%
Invoices Submitted Automatically

80%
Manual Intervention Cut

ROI
In Days, Not Months

ABOUT CANALS

Field productivity depends on efficient and accurate office operations. That's why we built Canals AI: to keep material moving. Save your staff from manual, time-consuming work like reconciling purchase order changes, processing supplier updates in different formats, and parsing invoices that don't match what was delivered.

Contractors applying Canals AI to accounts payable workflows can more effectively track orders, updates, and invoices to address staff shortages head-on, reduce errors, operate more proactively, and achieve more visibility across projects.

With pre-built integrations and minimal setup, you can get up and running–and see immediate value–in just days, without taking up IT resources. As your teams use it, our AI models learn and adapt to your business, preserving institutional knowledge and getting more and more accurate.

Schedule a call to learn more about automating your AP workflows today.

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