

THE ROI OF RAI:

**EXPLORING THE  
BUSINESS IMPERATIVE  
FOR RESPONSIBLE AI  
IN 2025**





## An introduction

# If 2024 was about testing and developing AI solutions, 2025 is about results.

As we reflect on this year in AI, it's clear that the pace of opportunity and potential transformation has surpassed even the most optimistic projections. We've seen real examples of new conversational chatbots that increase sales, the automated development of templates, content, and processes that increase speed, as well as enterprise business copilots and integrations that support employee efficiency and productivity.

Yet, many organizations have also faced challenges with funding, adoption, concerns about latency, inference costs, and questions around long-term spending. While 2024 was our year to test and develop, 2025 is now the year to overcome these challenges and achieve results.

But as we walk into 2025, we must also be aware of the shifting winds of political change, especially as expectations for governance, regulation, and oversight continue to evolve. Despite the political consensus to grow at all costs, we must answer the call for sustainable innovation. It's tempting to believe in quick technological fixes for complex issues, but easy solutions can often overlook fundamental human rights. To drive lasting transformation, we need to expand the art of the possible and build a future that works for us all.

# Now more than ever, we need responsible AI.

Responsible AI (or RAI) refers to the development, deployment, and governance of artificial intelligence systems in a manner that proactively mitigates risk to ensure technology is safe, transparent, ethical, accurate, and upholds human rights.

This year-end report delves into the real returns of RAI, reflecting the insights and experiences of Slalom's AI team and our New York Responsible AI Client Advisory Board. Together, we're building next-generation AI systems grounded in ethical practices, and our deep expertise in technological and social transformations has guided us and unearthed new findings along the way. We have found that across industries and areas of expertise, regardless of organizational maturity, one truth remains: many of us are struggling with the same challenges. As such, we believe our lessons learned in 2024 can benefit others on their AI journeys – and we're happy to share those insights with you in this report.





## WHERE AI IS HEADED NEXT:

# Key trends arising from 2024

### #1: From POC plays to ROI returns

The conversation of cost, impact, and ROI is coming to roost. We are now moving beyond proofs of concepts (POCs), and AI budgets need to be justified and explained, ensuring real-world business impact. However, many organizations are still struggling to identify tangible measures of success amongst extreme projections and hype. It's also important to recognize that while today's tests and wins are valuable, they may soon be eclipsed by new possibilities and technologies.

### #2: The shift from shadow AI to enterprise-wide orchestration

2024 saw a marked transition from ad-hoc, departmental AI initiatives to the development of coordinated, enterprise-wide AI strategies. Organizations are recognizing the risks of "shadow AI"—the use of unsanctioned AI applications developed without central oversight—and are moving toward centralized governance models that balance innovation with control.

### #3: Interfaces, interactions, and automations

While AI capabilities have grown exponentially, human oversight remains crucial for ensuring accuracy, ethical alignment, and contextual understanding. Although AI can handle large datasets and automate many processes, it often lacks the ability to interpret nuances and make decisions that align with complex human values. This underscores the importance of combining AI capabilities with human expertise to ensure high-quality outcomes.

*As we observe these trends, the need for RAI becomes clear. Moving from isolated POCs to impact-driven, enterprise-wide applications requires a commitment to ethical standards and oversight. By prioritizing RAI, organizations can ensure that technological advancements contribute to their strategic goals without undermining human values and societal norms.*



## The rise of responsible AI as a competitive advantage

One of the most significant developments of 2024 was the widespread recognition that RAI is not just an ethical imperative, but a key driver of business value. Organizations that implement robust RAI frameworks are better positioned to navigate regulatory challenges, build trust with stakeholders, and accelerate AI adoption.



**AI projects and programs are successful when RAI is baked into the process end-to-end.**



# A roadmap from lessons learned

With a robust RAI framework in place, the stage is set for implementation. To ensure your AI journey is both successful and sustainable, here are some key considerations to keep in mind.

## Getting started

### Start with an iterative process.

Don't begin with an overly complex framework that's hard to deploy. Instead, organizations should start with basic guardrails, experiment with AI, and adapt guidelines based on emerging issues and shifts. AI models are rapidly evolving, and what's working today might not work tomorrow.

### Face and solve organizational challenges.

Getting every department on board is always a challenge. Effective AI adoption requires careful planning, stakeholder buy-in, and continuous adaptation to ensure the technology meets the organization's needs and ethical standards.

### Find the right balance of oversight.

While governance is imperative, strict AI policies and approval processes can lead to departments building "shadow AI".

## Preparation for 2025:

01

Develop cross-functional AI governance teams that include representation across technology, ethics, privacy, legal, end users, and communities, as well as business units. Implement regular reviews of the societal and environmental impacts of AI systems.

02

Invest in training programs that enhance human-AI collaboration skills. Develop clear guidelines for when and how human intervention should occur in AI-driven processes.

03

Implement agile methodologies in RAI development. This should include regular review cycles to update frameworks based on emerging ethical considerations and technological advancements.





## RAI in action: The UN's Principles for the Ethical Use of AI

The United Nations (UN) recognizes that AI is “an increasingly powerful tool with the potential for good, albeit one with a high risk of negative side-effects that go against fundamental human rights and UN values.” As such, the UN established a set of ethical principles that dictate that AI systems must operate in a manner that safeguards social, cultural, economic, and environmental well-being, and respects individual and collective freedoms. These principles emphasize the importance of human oversight and stress the need for transparency so AI can be understood and challenged.

In 2024, the member states of the UN agreed on the Pact for the Future, which updated the sustainable development goals in light of developments in AI and other emerging technologies and their potential for the benefit of humanity.

“ AI is going to require us to reframe what technology means...it’s going to change how people work. This is not just about technology, or the adoption of technology, but about how individuals do their work and will do their work in the future. Which is why cross-collaboration and partnership are so important to ensure that positive net benefit we want to see from generative AI.”

**Josh Rosenzweig, Senior Director of AI and Innovation at Morgan Lewis**

[Cross-Departmental Collaboration and AI Implementation](#)





## Measuring and modeling success

### Measure holistically.

Start by conducting risk, cost, and impact assessments for each use case, as well as the entire AI program. Define success metrics for immediate, intermediate, and long-term objectives and temper expectations by identifying opportunities for small, medium, and large-scale wins. Address dependencies by risk profile.

### Get creative and thoughtful with metrics.

Think beyond traditional metrics to capture the true value of your AI initiatives. Consider what a successful deployment looks like for your organization. ROI could mean an increase in revenue generation, but it could also mean an increase in adoption, employee morale, or customer satisfaction.

### Encourage a data-driven culture.

RAI investments can often yield additional capabilities that foster a cultural shift toward data sharing.

## Preparation for 2025:

### 01

Map, measure, and monitor. Implement a comprehensive intake process that assesses the impact, risk, and cost of each AI initiative. Account for the programmatic and transformational understanding of shifting expectations.

### 02

Listen and learn from diverse, marginalized, and critical voices. By actively seeking input from a broad range of perspectives, AI solutions will be more inclusive, equitable, and representative of all people.

### 03

Categorize and align challenges and blockers to specific metrics. This allows for the systematic assessment and resolution of barriers to AI enablement, ensuring a more effective and responsible AI implementation.



## Mastercard: a master example in AI governance

In a study examining [the New York City algorithmic bias audit regime](#), it was found that the challenges of AI implementation predominantly stem from navigating the complex relationships between companies, platforms, and governing bodies. To address these issues effectively, there needs to be clear definitions, metrics, and accountability frameworks in place.

How does this work in actuality? A great example is Mastercard's [AI Governance Program](#), a robust framework designed to ensure AI systems are "reliable, fair, and transparent."



This program is built on **four foundational pillars**:

- 1 ) Defining clear standards and policies for responsible AI.
- 2 ) Ensuring rigorous risk management across AI implementations.
- 3 ) Enabling stakeholders through education and resources.
- 4 ) Advancing best practices through external collaborations and transparency.

These pillars not only address the need for clarity and accountability identified in the NYC study but also create a collaborative ecosystem that drives the continuous improvement of AI governance.

// With any change, organizations will face resistance along with adoption. Having a holistic view and gauging the extended impact of AI on our lives, going beyond time and dollar savings, can allow organizations to fine-tune their systems and increase both gains and employee satisfaction."

**Idil Cakim, Founder and CEO of Iris Flex**

[Time Shift: Measuring the Impact of AI on Work and Play](#)





## Focusing on what matters

### Start with the right kind of problems.

Focus on what really matters: user-led solutions. Involve end-users in the development and roll-out of programs to ensure solutions are feasible, appropriately tailored, and genuinely useful. Don't let the allure of integration, the promise of over-hyped outcomes, and the ease of possible opportunity impact what you build. Instead, solve the real problems that impact people directly.

### Meet end-users where they are.

Listen to end-users and meet them at their current level of AI literacy. Understand their needs and adapt AI tools to fit the platforms they use and the knowledge they have. Solve real-world problems by making technology accessible and effective for everyone.

### Right-size the risk mitigation.

AI and the evolution of AI engineering involve cross-system integrations that could impact existing partnerships and commitments. It's essential to review and update third-party contracts to accommodate AI use. But once these agreements are in place, focus on what's ahead.

## Preparation for 2025:

### 01

Involve risk professionals from the onset to prevent the waste of time, money, and resources.

### 02

Bring the right people to the challenge, and hold them accountable. AI projects involve many moving parts, and it's important to equip decision-makers with the necessary documentation, resources, and tools to take ownership. If certainty is lacking, don't make overpromises.

### 03

Align AI innovation to value and purpose-driven needs. Focus AI initiatives on the areas that are driven by your core mission and offer tangible value to the people you support.



# Meeting guests where they are: NCL bridges the digital divide



"Our team believes that GenAI will make it easier for our guests to build and plan their dream vacation. In developing our vision, it became clear how sizable the gap is between those comfortable with AI applications and our average consumer. Most of the GenAI products in the marketplace are not built to inspire and immerse their consumers. Our guests won't accept that. So, we made a focal point of our journey about bridging the gap between traditional LLM user interfaces and immersive, easy-to-use, and capable experiences... But LLMs are not yet replacements for the personal touch of true human interaction."

**–Dylan Brock, Senior Director of Digital Product Design & Innovation at Norwegian Cruise Lines**

*[Beyond Text: Making GenAI Applications Accessible to All](#)*

“ LLMs were designed for human-like conversations, not as knowledge repositories. However, when the conversational skills turned out wildly successful, we started treating the chatbots as oracles to rely on their ‘knowledge.’ To meet this role, we must build new LLMs with valid, balanced data reflecting culture, wisdom, and voices from all of society.”

**Lambert Hogenhout, Chief Data and AI at the United Nations**

*[Artificial Intelligence and Women](#)*



## CLOSING REFLECTIONS

# Upholding our commitment to responsible AI in 2025



As we stand on the cusp of 2025, it's clear that our decisions will reshape industries and societies in profound ways.

The coming year will undoubtedly bring new surprises and challenges in the AI field. However, by maintaining a commitment to responsible development, fostering a culture of continuous learning, and embracing a holistic and honest view of AI's impact, we can work toward a future where artificial intelligence truly augments and enhances human potential.

While the landscape of regulation shifts, and technological possibility expands, our responsibility and obligations remain the same: to promote and insist on responsible AI systems to build better tomorrows for all.



# Slalom is a fiercely human business and technology consulting company that leads with outcomes to bring more value, in all ways, always.

From strategy through delivery, our agile teams across 52 offices in 12 countries collaborate with clients to bring powerful customer experiences, innovative ways of working, and new products and services to life.

Our commitment to customer success guides every decision we make – which is why responsible AI is so integral to the work we do. Together, we're not just implementing technology; we're creating a better tomorrow for all.

## Slalom's RAI Client Advisory Board

*Slalom launched its first RAI Client Advisory Board to work together and learn from each other to steer the course of AI development toward a future where technology amplifies human potential, operates within ethical boundaries, and serves the greater good.*

*To explore Slalom's AI capabilities or learn more about our RAI Client Advisory Board, please contact Jillian Powers at [jillian.powers@slalom.com](mailto:jillian.powers@slalom.com).*

## Do you have a successful AI use case? Join our research!

Slalom is participating in a research project in collaboration with New York University and the Turing Institute. Working with Professor Umang Bhatt from NYU, we are supporting the collection of successful AI use cases to identify patterns of human decision-making, algorithmic action, and governance roles.

To learn more and submit your own use case, scan the QR code.





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**\*We would also like to acknowledge the involvement of additional CAB members who have chosen to remain anonymous but whose contributions have been invaluable.**