COMMUNITY

Inland Empire Entrepreneurs Learn Practical AI Tools at Corona Business Event

by **ARYANA NOROOZI**
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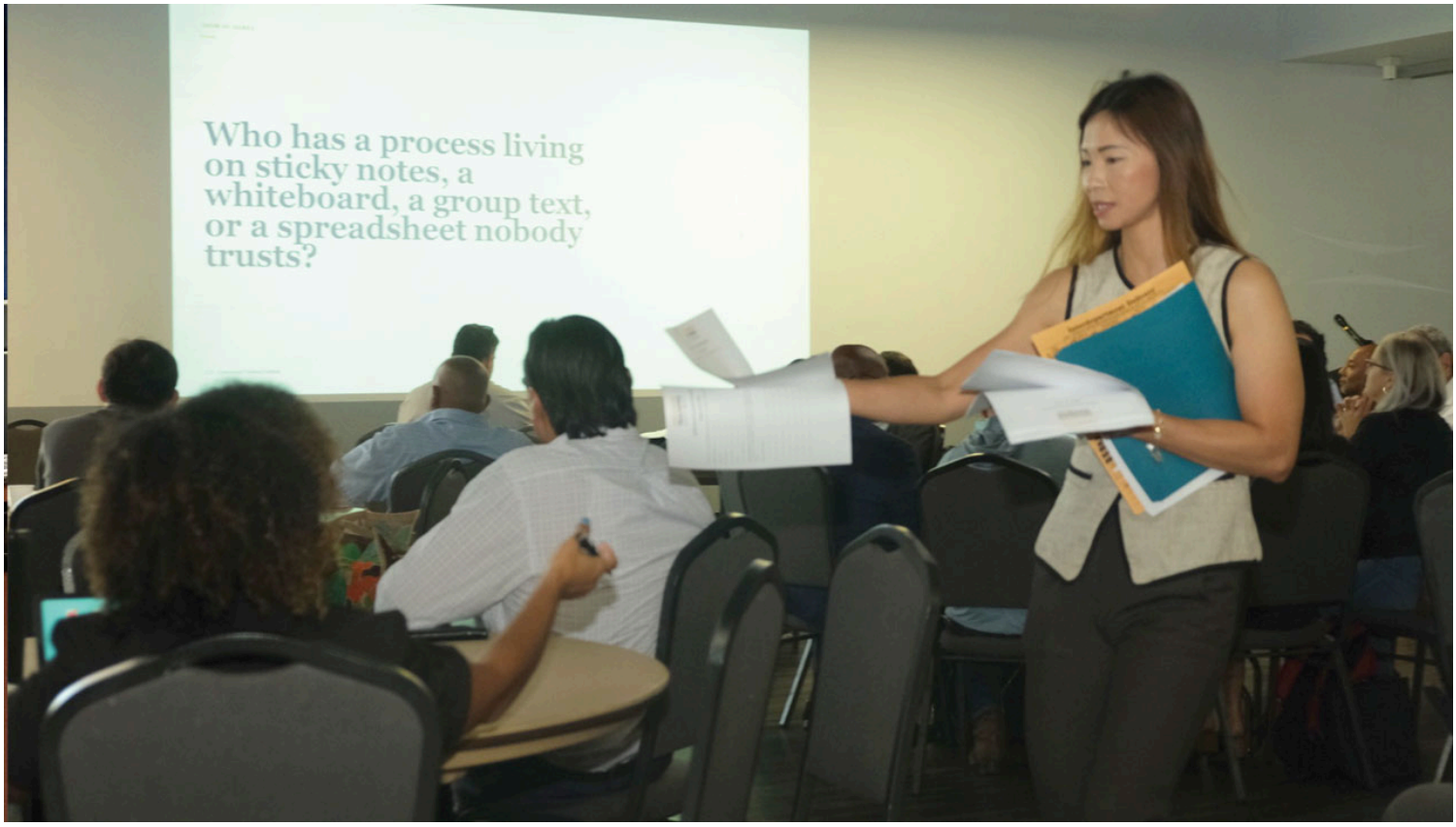

Organizers distribute worksheets to attendees ahead of a breakout workshop session at the AI Business Summit, hosted by the Corona Chamber of Commerce and the Asian Business Association Inland Empire in Corona, California on August 19, 2026. (Aryana Noroozi for Black Voice News)

Overview: *Inland Empire entrepreneurs gathered Wednesday for the AI Business Summit, co-hosted by the Corona Chamber of Commerce and the Asian Business Association Inland Empire. The event provided hands-on workshops focused on practical AI applications, such as automated workflows and custom business apps. Organizers also used the summit to recognize local leaders for their contributions to technological equity and community support.*

Aryana Noroozi

Inland Empire business owners and entrepreneurs packed a Corona banquet hall Wednesday morning for the AI Business Summit, an event joint-hosted by the Corona Chamber of Commerce and the Asian Business Association Inland Empire (ABAIE). The gathering aimed to motivate and inform local entrepreneurs on how to utilize AI beyond buzzwords and into hands-on use.

The daylong summit, hosted through the Customized Training Institute for Artificial Intelligence (CTI) at Rancho Santiago Community College District, paired a community awards ceremony with four breakout workshops on building AI-powered tools, agents and automated workflows. The training was partially funded through the state's Employment Training Panel (ETP), which allows qualifying businesses with five or more employees to access the sessions at no direct cost.

Tim Gramling, president and CEO of the Corona Chamber of Commerce, poses for a portrait at the AI Business Summit in Corona on August 19, 2026. (Aryana Noroozi for Black Voice News)

In an exclusive interview before the workshops, Tim Gramling, president and CEO of the Corona Chamber of Commerce, said the summit reflects the chamber's broader philosophy about economic development in the city.

“At the Corona Chamber, we believe that when businesses thrive, people choose to grow, stay, and invest, particularly in Corona,” Gramling said. “This conference is an amazing opportunity because AI is a great way to help businesses thrive.”

Gramling said the chamber looks for partnerships that extend its reach, and pointed to ABAIE, a chamber member, as a natural fit for the AI-focused summit. He credited ABAIE President Sarah Oswald with the idea of bringing the group together, noting the association has organized similar trainings before.

The summit also built directly on a business expo the Corona Chamber hosted the day before, which drew roughly 50 exhibitors and hundreds of attendees from around the city, Gramling said. He described that earlier event as “more broad based, a general opportunity for local businesses to connect and do business with each other, while Wednesday’s summit was designed to go deeper with a more narrowed group.

Attendees fill the room at the AI Business Summit, hosted by the Corona Chamber of Commerce and the Asian Business Association Inland Empire in Corona on August 19, 2026. (Aryana Noroozi for Black Voice News)

“We have some folks that are in the AI space that were there [at the expo], those same folks are here today, and now this event builds on that from a different perspective, which is how everybody can use it,” Gramling said. “It’s accessible.”

That shift was the throughline of the morning's keynote-style workshop introduction, led by CTI trainer Fred de la Riva. De la Riva told the room that most small business owners still treat AI as a prompting exercise – typing a question and taking whatever answer comes back – when the more valuable skill now is building "artifacts": working web apps, dashboards, presentations or calculators that once required a professional coder.

"We're way past prompting," de la Riva told attendees. Human expertise guiding the technology, he said, is what he means by "AI in the loop": "So that's why we're again using AI in the loop."

De la Riva urged even experienced business owners not to defer entirely to the tool. "You guys are the brains. Use your experience… We've been in the trenches for a long time. Use that. Use that experience," he said.

De la Riva also cautioned attendees against publishing AI-generated content without review. **"**You never want to let it go out and trust the AI 100%. I've seen the AI be very, very confident of its answer when it's wrong," he said.

Attendees filled out a live survey on how their businesses currently track AI updates and where they most wanted help. Categories that topped the list included lead generation, email marketing and task automation, which data organizers said will shape future CTI workshops. Business owners with five or more employees were also invited to complete an interest form to be considered for state-funded, no-cost employee AI training through ETP.

Before the breakout sessions began, ABAIE and its partners recognized several Inland Empire community members and organizations.

Dr. Kim Carter Tillman, founder of the Time for Change Foundation and the Black and Brown Opportunities for Profit (BBOP) Center, a technology and entrepreneurship hub, received a certificate of recognition from California State Treasurer Fiona Ma and ABAIE for her work advancing ethical AI use and community training. The certificate, read aloud at the ceremony, praised her "visionary leadership and unwavering dedication in advance to the ethical use of artificial intelligence," and her commitment to "empowering business and nonprofit[s] to embrace AI for innovation growth and community impact.

Tillman framed AI access as an equity issue, saying her goal is making sure "every single mom with four kids" and "every dry cleaners, every automobile shop" knows how to put the technology to work in daily life — not just large companies or people already plugged into the tech industry.

"It began there [in Silicon Valley], but it ends with us," Tillman said. "What will we create for the future? You're gonna either create your future or you're gonna be living in it."

She also urged business owners not to overlook cybersecurity as they adopt new AI tools, saying she had recently overhauled her own systems and passwords to protect business assets.

ABAIE also presented a $1,000 check to Eastern Harmony Mental Health, a nonprofit that provides mental health resources to the Asian community. A representative identified as Eric said the organization trained 20 high school students as mental health ambassadors this past summer. “Mental health became a very important issue in so many communities, especially in our Asian community, we are an underserved community,” he said.

Dr. Kim Carter Tillman, founder of the Time for Change Foundation and the BBOP Center, speaks after receiving a certificate of recognition for her work advancing ethical AI use at the AI Business Summit, hosted by the Corona Chamber of Commerce and the Asian Business Association Inland Empire in Corona on August 19, 2026. (Aryana Noroozi for Black Voice News)

Following the awards, attendees split into four concurrent workshop tracks, each offered at a beginner or more advanced level. The four workshop tracks covered building a no-code business app with Fred de la Riva, creating a working AI agent with Gisele Hasman, producing an AI-generated video from prompt to finished cut with Josh Garcia, and automating everyday tasks like meeting notes and calendars with Brendan Ryan.

A second round of sessions followed later in the morning, including tracks on AI-assisted design tools, multi-agent systems for lead handling and customer follow-up, and connecting everyday software tools like email and calendar platforms.

Organizers said the event was supported by a coalition of partners including the U.S. Small Business Administration, the state Employment Training Panel, ADP, BBSI, New York Life, the Black Chamber of Commerce Inland Empire, and several regional chambers of commerce.

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