Navigating the Future: Key Insights from the New Hampshire AI Banking Roundtable

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Artificial intelligence is moving quickly from a topic of experimentation to a strategic consideration for financial institutions. Over the summer, the New Hampshire Bankers Association, in collaboration with the New Hampshire AI Taskforce, convened roundtable discussions with banking executives to explore how institutions are approaching AI today and how they are thinking about its role in the future.

One theme emerged consistently across the conversations: cautious optimism.

Banks across New Hampshire are at different stages of their AI journey, from early exploration and employee education to active deployment of tools designed to improve efficiency and enhance existing processes. Yet regardless of where an institution falls on that spectrum, the conversations revealed a shared recognition that AI is likely to reshape how banking is delivered, how employees work and, ultimately, how financial institutions compete.

From Efficiency to Strategic Advantage

Today, many of the most practical applications of AI are focused on improving operational efficiency. Banks are exploring or deploying tools for areas such as fraud mitigation, appraisal summarization, automated spreading and other repetitive, time-intensive processes.

But the conversation is beginning to move beyond efficiency.

Banking leaders are increasingly considering how AI can become a strategic capability, one that helps institutions better serve customers, strengthen operations and remain competitive as technology changes the financial services landscape.

At the same time, participants emphasized that innovation must be balanced with appropriate oversight. A strong consensus emerged that AI should not make fully automated decisions without meaningful human review, particularly when applications involve customers, sensitive information or personally identifiable information.

The message was clear: AI can enhance decision-making, but accountability remains human.

The Human-AI Partnership

Perhaps the most consistent theme throughout the roundtables was the role of people.

Rather than viewing AI primarily as a replacement for employees, banking leaders described a future in which AI works alongside employees, handling repetitive and time-consuming tasks so people can focus on higher-value work that requires judgment, relationships, creativity and experience.

That shift also has implications for how banks prepare their workforces.

Participants discussed a two-tier approach to AI education:

- Basic AI Awareness: Ensuring all employees understand what AI is, how it is being used within the institution and the bank's expectations for responsible and acceptable use.
- Practical, Tools-Based Training: Providing employees with hands-on experience using approved AI tools and applying them effectively to their work.

Some institutions are taking this a step further through “train the trainer” approaches, developing internal AI Champions who can help colleagues understand new tools, identify practical applications and encourage responsible adoption.

The goal is not simply to teach employees how to use AI. It is to help them understand where AI can add value and where human judgment must remain at the center.

Looking Beyond the Bank

The strategic conversation also extended beyond internal operations.

Participants identified the emergence of agentic AI, systems capable of taking actions and completing tasks on a user's behalf, as an important development for the banking industry. Large technology platforms, including companies such as OpenAI and Anthropic, could increasingly become the interface through which consumers interact with financial services.

That raises an important strategic question for banks: If consumers increasingly access financial products and services through AI-driven platforms, how will banks maintain their customer relationships and remain part of that experience?

The potential for technology platforms to sit between banks and their customers creates both opportunity and risk. Institutions that understand these changes early may be better positioned to determine where they want to participate, how they want to integrate and what role they want to play in the next generation of financial services.

Governance remains an important part of that equation. Participants noted that regulatory guidance around AI continues to develop and can be fragmented, while the technology itself is advancing rapidly. For banks, that makes strong internal governance, clear policies and thoughtful risk management essential components of responsible adoption.

From Conversation to Action

While New Hampshire banks are moving at different speeds, the roundtables surfaced several practical areas for institutions to consider as they develop their AI strategies:

1. Connect AI to the broader strategic plan. Identify where AI can advance existing organizational priorities rather than treating it as a standalone technology initiative.
2. Establish clear governance. Develop policies addressing acceptable use, data protection, security, oversight and employee responsibilities, supported by appropriate acknowledgment and training.
3. Invest in the workforce. Provide employees with both foundational AI awareness and practical training on approved tools and applications.
4. Learn from one another. Continue sharing experiences, case studies and lessons learned across the banking industry so institutions can learn from both successful implementations and challenges.

Preparing for What Comes Next

There is no single AI roadmap for every bank. Institutions have different strategies, resources, risk profiles and customer needs. What is becoming increasingly clear, however, is that AI is no longer simply a technology conversation.

It is a business, workforce, customer and strategic conversation.

The banks that approach AI thoughtfully, balancing innovation with governance, technology with human judgment, and experimentation with strategic purpose, will be better positioned to navigate what comes next.

The New Hampshire banking industry's AI journey is just beginning. The opportunity now is to move from asking *“What can AI do?”* to asking the more important question:

“What should we do with it?”