

MICHIGAN MUNICIPAL LEAGUE · 2026 CONVENTION · TRAVERSE CITY

A.I., Access, and the Future of Governance

Closing the Tech Gap in Communities

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Tech Saturdays

Thursday, October 8

9:00 a.m. · Governors' Hall CDEF

General session

Sponsored by ITC Holdings

ROLL CALL

Show the room who's in it.

01 Stand if you serve on a council or commission.

02 Stand if you're a mayor, supervisor, or village president.

03 Stand if you manage a city, village, or township.

04 Stand if a resident has called you at home about a water bill.

05 Stand if you've used an A.I. tool this month.

06 Stand if you've never opened one.

Stay on your feet until I say sit. Look around while you're up.

THE NEXT SIXTY MINUTES

This is a working session.

The microphone belongs to the room.

Three short turn-and-talks, a few answers from the floor after each, and fifteen minutes of your questions through Slido.

Say the hard thing out loud.

Worries get said out loud, said back, and answered before we close. Nobody gets argued with for naming one.

Nobody here has to be an expert.

If you’ve opened a tool once, you’re ahead of most of the country. If you never have, this session was built for you.

9:09	Roll call, and the one lane for today
9:15	Story of self, and the throughline
9:18	Turn and talk 1 · The problems residents feel
9:22	What we built, and the part I want to own
9:27	Turn and talk 2 · Say the hard thing out loud
9:31	Michigan’s gap, and three Michigan stories
9:39	Turn and talk 3 · Build the first step
9:45	Three doors, six rules, ninety days
9:49	Your questions, in Slido
10:05	Close

ONE LANE TODAY

There are many A.I. conversations worth your time. Today we take one.

TODAY

Digital tools that raise quality of life for residents.

And one use of A.I.: the way founders in our community use it to build when they can't yet afford a team.

TAKE THE REST HOME

Ethics and civil rights

Climate and energy

Data centers

Privacy and public records

Procurement

Public safety

Workforce

Two of them have their own rooms today: data centers at 10:45 in the Mackinac Ballroom, and A.I. risk and readiness with Plante Moran at 2:45. Take the others home, on purpose, with your community in the room.

STORY OF SELF

I didn't come to this from a lab.

Raised in Detroit. An Army kid who went to eleven schools, which is where I learned that community is a survival skill and belonging is something you build.

Trained as an organizer in the Gamaliel network. Unionized my first shop, People's Food Co-op in Ann Arbor, forty-five days into the job. Built EvenScore, a civic-tech company, before this.

On April 29, 2023, in coffee shops and conference rooms, a few of us who were tired of being the only one in every room started meeting on Saturdays. That became Black Tech Saturdays.

Crain's Detroit Business 40 Under 40 and Newsmaker · SXSW speaker · Co-chair, Innovation and Emerging Industries Committee, Mayor Sheffield's transition team



THE THROUGHLINE

Access is the login. Belonging is whether the room changes once you're in it.

In 1899, Michigan's cities organized under a single idea: cooperation solves any problem. It became home rule, the conviction that the people closest to a problem should hold the power to solve it. That is a belonging argument, and this session is built on it.

What do residents call your office about most?

And how long do they wait for an answer? Give your neighbor one real example from the last month. Then write it down, on your phone or the back of your program. You will build on it at 9:39.

IT USUALLY SOUNDS LIKE

A water bill that looks wrong

A pothole reported three times

A permit “in review” for six weeks

A FOIA request nobody has time for

Trash pickup on a holiday week

Snow on a side street

A code complaint about the house next door

When is the next council meeting?

Then: three from the floor. Town, problem, and the wait.

I say every one back, so the whole room keeps the list.

STORY OF US

Last year I stood here and told you what we would build.

PROMISED

BTS Genius Bot

BUILT

Be The Source

An A.I. navigator for careers and entrepreneurship. More than 2,000 conversations a month.

PROMISED

Bridge to Success

BUILT

A.I. Fluency cohorts

Built with the University of Michigan Center for Innovation. Credentials people can carry into a job.

PROMISED

Built to Scale

BUILT

Built to Scale

A marketplace and directory for inclusive wealth building. More than 100 companies on it.

PROMISED

Broadcast. Tell. Spotlight.

BUILT

Build The Story

Turns a founder's interview into their story. More than 30 stories, in public beta, already drawing press.

BLACK TECH SATURDAYS TODAY

What a Saturday can do.

30,000+

community members

8

states

\$65M+

in economic impact

4,500

businesses

840

jobs created

5,200

jobs supported

Partners include the Gilbert Family Foundation, Knight Foundation, Rocket Community Fund, MEDC, Kellogg Foundation, Song Foundation, Michigan Central, Kapor Center, and the University of Michigan Center for Innovation.

THE PART I WANT TO OWN

For founders who start without money, A.I. is the team we don't have yet.

The grant writer we couldn't hire

First drafts of applications, budgets, and reports. A person signs every one.

The analyst we couldn't afford

Financial models, market research, customer discovery, a pitch that holds up in the room.

The first engineer

Prototypes, websites, data, a product to show before there is a team to build it.

That is how founders in our community have raised millions, built teams, and put real infrastructure under their companies. Before these tools, many of them would not have gotten off the ground. The tool that worries some of this room is the same one that got a company funded. I'm not here to sell it to you. I'm here to tell you how we use it.

Say the hard thing out loud.

One worry and one hope about this technology in your community. Trade both with your neighbor. Nobody has to defend theirs.

A WORRY SOUNDS LIKE

"What happens when it's wrong and my name is on it?"

"Who sees what my residents typed?"

"We can't afford it, and we can't afford to fall behind."

A HOPE SOUNDS LIKE

"The grant we never had time to write."

"A notice in Spanish the same hour it goes out in English."

"An answer at 9 p.m., when the office is closed."

Then: three worries and two hopes from the floor. I say each one back.

Every worry gets an answer before we close.

STORY OF NOW

Michigan's gap, in Michigan's own numbers.

30%

of Michigan households struggle with some form of the digital divide.

92%

of jobs require digital skills.

730,000

households face a barrier of affordability, device access, or digital skills.

1 in 3

workers lack foundational digital skills.

STORY OF NOW

The on-ramp already exists.

\$70B

potential economic impact
in Michigan's A.I. and
Workforce Plan

130,000

good-paying jobs the plan
is built to create

16 of 16

Michigan Works! agencies
offering A.I. and digital-
skills training with Google
Career Certificates

+162%

growth in A.I. job demand
in the Detroit area, 2023
to 2025

Your job is to point residents to the door, and to walk through it yourself.

Flint: finding the lead pipes.

80%

of digs found lead when crews followed the model

15%

when the model was set aside in 2018

University of Michigan researchers built a model from records the city already had: pipe age, parcel data, past inspections. Crews dug where the lead was likely to be. When a new contractor set the model aside and dug street by street, four of every five holes came up empty, at full cost, while families waited. The city went back to the model.

Data the city already had, pointed at a problem residents could feel.

Oakland County: write the rule before the rumor.

4 pages

the county's entire A.I. guideline

80%

of departments already using A.I. before the rule existed

The county surveyed its own staff and found nearly four in five departments already using A.I. for research, drafts, summaries, and transcription. So it wrote four pages: no covert biometric scanning, and no A.I. making a final official decision on its own. Now it is piloting a secure internal platform, and one chatbot is expected to save each architect 15 to 20 hours a week.

A person makes every decision that carries a resident's name.

Northville Township: training before access.

1 hour

of required training before anyone gets an account

23 pages

of governance policy, written by a volunteer committee

A township that did not wait for a vendor. A volunteer innovation committee wrote the policy. Staff complete one hour of training before they get a secure account. Then they put it to work: contract reviews, an internal employee hub, and a bi-weekly audio briefing that keeps patrol officers current between shifts.

Volunteers before vendors. Training before access.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Everyday wins for a two-person hall.

Nothing here needs a big-city budget. It works in a U.P. city of 4,000 the same way it works in Detroit.

Council minutes

A first draft from the recording, in minutes.

FOIA requests

Organized, searchable, and flagged for a person to redact.

Plain-language notices

Boil-water and snow emergencies in plain English, Spanish, and Arabic.

Grant applications

The ones you never had time to chase.

Code complaints

Sorted by street and urgency before the morning meeting.

Budget narratives

A budget a resident can read.

Meeting prep

Last year's packet summarized before this year's vote.

Resident questions

Answered at 9 p.m., in the words the resident used.

A person checks every one of these before it goes out. The clerk keeps the job and gets the hours back. You don't have to run any of this; you have to say yes to one of them.

Pick one problem. Build the first step.

Start with the problem you wrote down at 9:18, or one you heard from the floor. Answer three questions with your neighbor.

- 1**

What is the first task a tool could take off someone’s desk?
- 2**

Who checks it before it goes out?
- 3**

Who has to be in the room before you start?

WORKED EXAMPLE			
Problem	First task	Who checks	Who’s in the room
Boil-water notices go out late, and only in English.	Draft the notice in plain English, Spanish, and Arabic from the city’s template.	The clerk, before anything posts.	The water department, and two residents who got the last notice late.

Then: three tables report out, one minute each. Bring the problem and the first step to the mic.

ACCESS

Three doors, all of them open.

1

The Michigan Local Government A.I. User Group

Started by Van Buren County. Online every two months. Policy drafts, security protocols, and case studies from your peers. Free.

2

Michigan Works! and your public library

A.I. and digital-skills training through Google Career Certificates at all 16 agencies. Send residents. Send staff. Go yourself.

3

The organizations residents already trust

The church, the library, the barbershop, the Saturday meetup. In Detroit, that is Black Tech Saturdays. Find yours, and bring them in before the contract is signed.

Six plain rules.

1

Start with a problem a resident can feel.

2

Write the policy before the rumor. Four pages will do.

3

A person makes every decision that carries someone's name.

4

Training before access. One hour is enough to start.

5

Measure the resident's wait, not the tool's activity.

6

Bring the people most affected into the room before the contract is signed.

BEFORE THANKSGIVING

Your first ninety days.

Days 1–30

- Name a committee: a council member, your manager, and residents.
- Take the one hour of training yourself, elected or not.
- Have your manager join the Local Government A.I. User Group.

Days 31–60

- Adopt a policy you can fit on four pages.
- Pick one everyday win from this morning's list.
- Decide who checks it before it goes out.

Days 61–90

- Ship it, with a person checking.
- Measure the resident's wait before and after.
- Report it at a council meeting, in plain language.

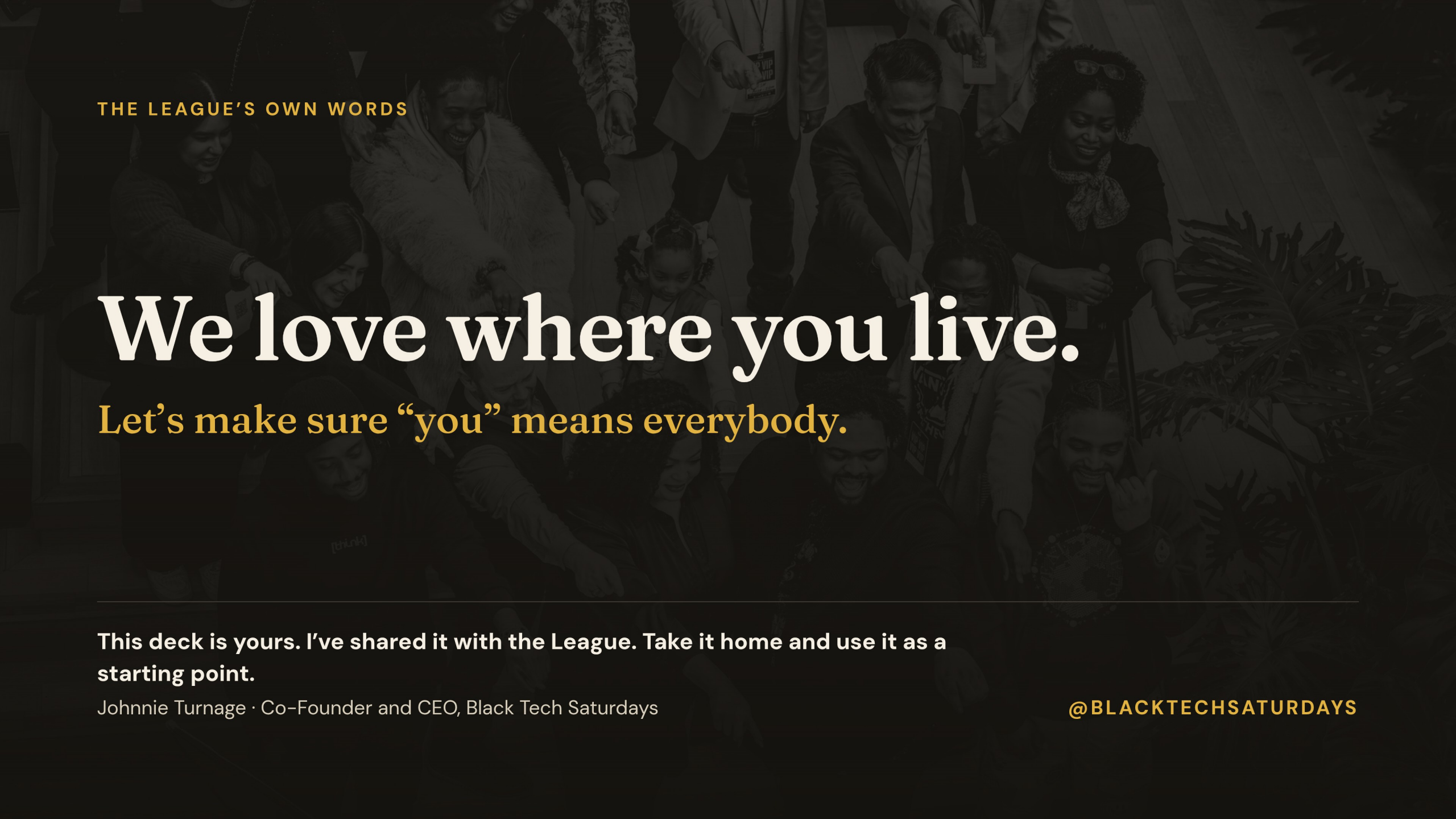
Then come back next year and show the room what you built.

YOUR QUESTIONS · FIFTEEN MINUTES

The microphone belongs to the room.

Put your question in Slido at slido.com with the League's event code. The League's team is reading them live. If you'd rather say it out loud, raise a hand for the mic.

- 1 What did your table build?
- 2 Which worry hasn't been answered yet?
- 3 What do you need from the League, from Lansing, or from each other?



THE LEAGUE'S OWN WORDS

We love where you live.

Let's make sure "you" means everybody.

This deck is yours. I've shared it with the League. Take it home and use it as a starting point.

Johnnie Turnage · Co-Founder and CEO, Black Tech Saturdays

@BLACKTECHSATURDAYS

KEEP IN TOUCH

Let's build the next one together.

AN OPEN INVITATION

A deeper A.I. class, hosted at Michigan Central.

In collaboration with the League, I'd be glad to host your communities in Detroit for a hands-on working day: clerks, managers, and council members in the same room, building on this morning's list. I'll help coordinate and pull it together. Say the word.

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I appreciate you all.