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ASIAN KALEIDOSCOPE

MN BIZ VISION

Ink, Identity, and Inclusion: The Story Behind Jackalope Tattoo

“Calling America HOME” Series: Daniel Men

The Next AI Adoption Gap Is Not Access—It Is Agency

Asian Media Access

This monthly e-Magazine is published by Asian Media Access and Multi Cultural Community Alliance to highlight the accomplishments of Asian American and Pacific Islanders' (AAPI) small businesses in MN.

Table of Contents

Bridging Cultures, Building Futures: Minnesota's AAPI Business & Workforce Magazine

Welcome to **MN Biz Vision: Asian Kaleidoscope**, a monthly e-magazine dedicated to empowering Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities across Minnesota. More than a publication, this platform uplifts AAPI entrepreneurs while advancing workforce pathways through the **Center for Wellness Technology** - a visionary hub that integrates Agricultural Technology, Multimedia Technology, and Wellness Technology into culturally grounded IT career opportunities.

AAPI Entrepreneurship & the Need for New Pathways

AAPI entrepreneurs are vital to Minnesota's diverse business landscape, operating successful restaurants, grocery stores, salons, healthcare practices, consulting firms, and manufacturing businesses, etc.. While AAPIs comprise 6% of Minnesota's population, Asian-owned businesses represent only 3% of the state's small businesses—revealing persistent barriers to entrepreneurship. Yet these 15,500+ Asian-owned firms account for 35% of all minority-owned businesses in Minnesota, demonstrating the community's outsized economic impact and resilience. Targeted workforce development in specialized IT sectors can help bridge this entrepreneurship gap and create new pathways for community economic mobility and innovation.

The Center for Wellness Technology: Our Dual Mission

At the heart of MN Biz Vision stands the Center for Wellness Technology, which unifies three high-impact technology tracks designed for AAPI youth, families, and entrepreneurs:

- **Agricultural Technology (AgTech)**: Blending modern engineering with ancestral agricultural knowledge, learners explore aeroponics, aquaponics, vertical farming, and sustainable food systems that support food sovereignty and sustainability.
- **Multimedia Technology**: Youth and creatives gain experience in game design, AR/VR development, digital storytelling, and AI-assisted media production—tools that amplify AAPI voices and ensure cultural stories are represented in the digital future.
- **Wellness Technology**: Integrating traditional healing practices with modern innovations, the Center supports healing with telehealth systems, VR calming room designs, and culturally informed wearable devices, advancing non-invasive and holistic care models.

Together, these tracks demonstrate why IT matters: technology becomes a vehicle for economic mobility, cultural preservation, and community innovation.

What You'll Discover Each Month

Every issue of MN Biz Vision highlights AAPI business owners across diverse sectors, celebrates immigrant and refugee success stories, and shares practical resources on financing, marketing, digital tools, and entrepreneurship. Workforce development features dive into emerging IT opportunities within AgTech, Multimedia, and Wellness Technology, supported by training programs and employer partnerships.

Building Economic Opportunity & Cultural Resilience

Whether you are strengthening a family business, exploring a career transition, entering tech fields, or launching a new venture, MN Biz Vision: Asian Kaleidoscope connects you to the networks, knowledge, and inspiration needed to thrive. Join us each month as we celebrate AAPI excellence - honoring cultural traditions while embracing the technological innovations shaping Minnesota's future.

Emi Nijiya

For Emi Nijiya (they/them), tattooing is more than an art form. It is a way to create connection, express identity, and build a space where both artists and clients can feel safe, respected, and comfortable.

As the owner of Jackalope Tattoo in South Minneapolis, Emi has spent more than 15 years in the tattoo industry, specializing in realism tattooing and gender-affirming tattoos. Founded in 2013, Jackalope Tattoo has grown into a shop with 21 artists and staff members of marginalized genders, with a mission of creating an inclusive, accessible, and continually evolving environment.

INK, IDENTITY, AND INCLUSION: THE STORY BEHIND JACKALOPE TATTOO

Building the Space They Wanted to See

Emi's decision to build an inclusive tattoo shop came from personal experience.

The tattoo industry has a long history of racism, sexism, misogyny, and other forms of discrimination. Emi experienced many of these challenges firsthand—as both a client and an artist. When they first entered the industry, women working in tattoo shops were uncommon, and seeing queer artists was even rarer.

After working in several shops, Emi often found themselves feeling unsafe or unequal. Rather than continuing to search for a workplace that reflected the environment they wanted, they decided to create it themselves.

“I felt that rather than continuing to try to search for a shop that had what I wanted, I would build it myself,” Emi shared.

That vision became the foundation for the work they continue to do today.

Turning a Challenge Into a New Beginning

Jackalope Tattoo was originally founded by someone else in 2013 and was initially

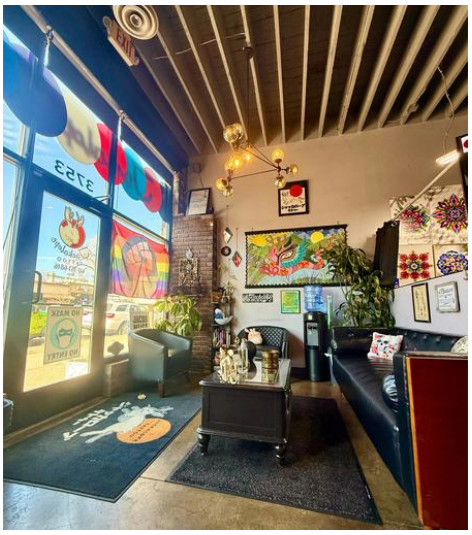
promoted as an “all female shop.” Over time, disagreements developed around issues of gender, racism, and the way the business was being managed.

Emi initially planned to leave Jackalope and open a new shop. Instead, in 2017, the opportunity arose to purchase the existing business.

Taking ownership came with significant interpersonal and financial challenges. Emi relied on patience, open communication, and community resources to navigate the transition. They applied for local grants and loans and were fortunate to find programs in Minneapolis that provided assistance to BIPOC and marginalized-gender business owners.

They also found a bank offering more favorable loan rates for BIPOC startup businesses.

With that support, Emi was able to rebuild Jackalope Tattoo from the ground up—with a larger location, a new brand, and a stronger commitment to inclusion.



Culture at the Heart of the Business

As an Asian tattoo artist and business owner, Emi's cultural identity is deeply connected to the way they operate Jackalope Tattoo.

Their experiences navigating the industry as a person of color continue to influence decisions about hiring, client relationships, partnerships, and education within the shop.

Emi places particular importance on open communication and continued education among artists and staff, helping create opportunities for growth while encouraging greater awareness of the challenges facing people in the tattoo industry.

For Emi, creating an inclusive business isn't simply a philosophy—it is something shaped by lived experience.

Celebrating Identity, Not Hiding It

Emi doesn't see cultural identity as something that needs to be separated from an American business environment. Instead, they see America's diversity as one of its defining characteristics.

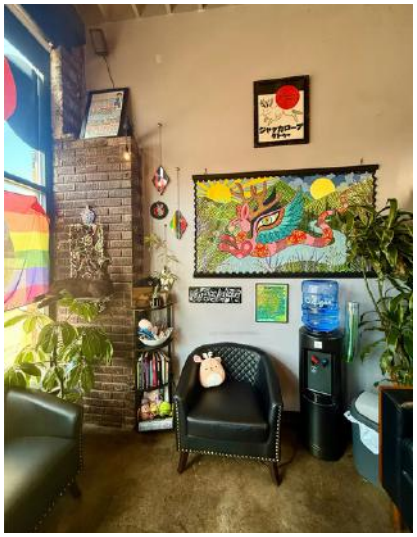
Their bicultural identity is an important part of that perspective.

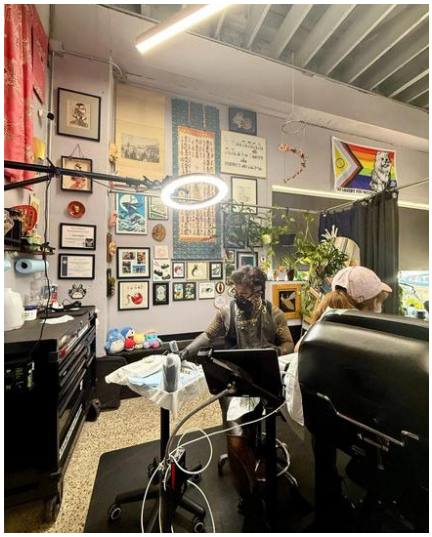
Culture can be seen throughout Jackalope Tattoo, from the shop's branding to Emi's station and decorations. Some of the items come from Japan, including pieces that belonged to Emi's great-grandmother, who immigrated from Japan.

Rather than minimizing their cultural identity, Emi embraces it openly.

“I take the loud and proud route with my cultural identity,” they explained, believing that doing so helps attract the kinds of people they want to share their space with.

That same philosophy extends to everyone who walks through Jackalope Tattoo's doors. Celebrating the identities of the artists, staff, and clients is an important part of what makes the shop unique.





An Achievement Built on Trust

When asked what achievement they are most proud of, Emi points to something that cannot easily be measured by revenue or business growth: creating the space they envisioned.

Jackalope Tattoo has developed a strong reputation through reviews and direct

feedback from both clients and artists. People describe the shop as inclusive, comfortable, and welcoming.

For Emi, hearing that artists and clients feel safe and happy in the space is one of the greatest measures of success.

“I am most proud of being able to create the space I hoped to create nine years ago,” they said.

Supporting Other Entrepreneurs

For other immigrants and bicultural entrepreneurs who may be uncertain about starting a business, Emi emphasizes the importance of community.

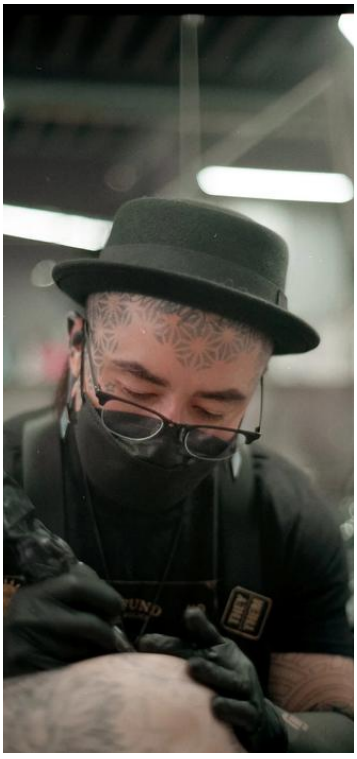
They encourage aspiring business owners to lean on their communities and seek support rather than feeling as though they have to navigate everything alone.

There are also programs and resources designed to help marginalized business owners succeed.

For Emi, one of the biggest hurdles can simply be allowing yourself to be vulnerable enough to ask for help.

“I could not have gotten here today without the support of my community,” they shared.

Looking Toward the Future



Emi's long-term vision for Jackalope Tattoo is not about changing what makes the shop special. It is about continuing it.

Their hope is to maintain a safe and inclusive environment for artists, staff, and clients for many years to come.

They also hope that one day, when they are ready to retire, another person—or group of people—will continue Jackalope Tattoo's mission and keep the business moving forward.

For Emi, that kind of continuity would mean that the space they worked so hard to create can continue serving the community long into the future.

A Place Where People Can Feel at Home

Jackalope Tattoo represents more than a tattoo shop. For Emi Nijiya, it is an opportunity to challenge longstanding problems within the industry and create something different—an environment where people can bring their identities, experiences, and creativity through the door without having to leave parts of themselves behind.

Their journey demonstrates how personal experience can become a catalyst for meaningful change. Through persistence, community support, cultural pride, and a commitment to inclusion, Emi has built the kind of space they once wished existed.

And their vision remains simple: **to keep creating a place where artists and clients feel comfortable, supported, and proud to be themselves.**

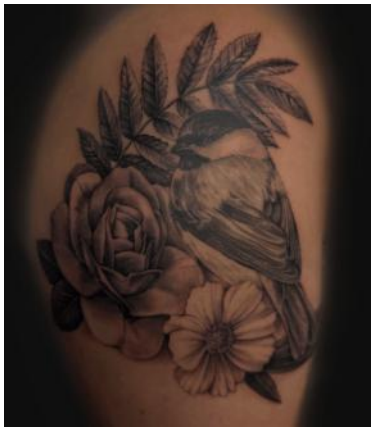
Connect With Jackalope Tattoo

Visit Jackalope Tattoo's website at www.jackalopetattoo.com to learn more about the artists, explore portfolios, view the space, and find booking information.

For upcoming events, including walk-in days and flash events, follow **@jackalopetattoompls** on Instagram.





Series Preface: Asian Media Access proudly presents “Calling America HOME” Series, inspired by the resilience and hope of immigrants and refugees from across the Asian diaspora who have rebuilt their lives in Minnesota. Through these stories, we invite readers to witness a legacy of survival, determination, and hope forged against impossible odds. In this edition, we feature **Daniel Men, passionate Product Designer in Minnesota.**

Q1. Thank you for speaking with AMA. Can you begin by introducing yourself and describing your journey to Minnesota?

Thank you so much for having me.

To stand on this soil, the land of opportunity, freedom, and hope, is something I cherish every single day. My heart goes out to the millions around the world who embark on perilous journeys, overcoming unimaginable hardships, loss, and sacrifice just to chase the dream of a better life. Knowing how much others endure to take even a single step here fills me with immense gratitude for my own path.

Daniel’s AI inspired work

Hi, I’m Daniel Men, a passionate Product Design Engineer right here in the wonderful Twin Cities!

When I first arrived in United States, like so many immigrants, I was met with

daunting obstacles, a steep language barrier and a world of culture shock. There were days I couldn't express what I needed, ask for help, or converse with my classmates and neighbors. Having not completed high school initially, I jumped straight into the workforce, grinding long hours in warehouses by day and pouring my heart into ESL (English as a Second Language) classes by night.

Through it all, I carried an unbreakable "**CAN-DO**" spirit and a refusal to give up. That drive turned every challenge into fuel. Step by step, I went on to earn my GED, certifications in Concert Sound Engineering, Green Energy, Building Maintenance, Medical Devices, Commercial Photography. Associate of Applied Science in Industrial Model Making, Associate of General Studies, and ultimately my Bachelor of Applied Science in Prototype Engineering.

Minnesota embraced me, and giving back to this community is my greatest joy. Over the years, I've had the privilege of Guiding Maple Grove High School students in robotics design and programming to spark their passion for technology.
Collaborating with nonprofits in White Bear Lake and St. Paul to create life changing products for low-income families and communities in developing nations.
Right now, my main focus is continuing to use my engineering skills and personal journey to lift others up. By serving my community, I am constantly learning, connecting, and growing alongside the amazing people who make Minnesota feel like home.

Q2. Please share more with us – How did your own cultural identity evolve while working in supporting others? How has that work shaped your sense of belonging in both Heritage and American cultures?

Daniel's AI inspired work, The House of Falling Waters

What a profound question, it touches the very heart of who I am today.

America is a magnificent tapestry of cultures, and living and working here in the Twin Cities, alongside people of so many different races, backgrounds, ages, and perspectives has been one of the greatest blessings of my life.

Early on, I realized that true connection comes from cultivating what I like to call a

"**Flexible Culture**" mindset. Working in engineering and serving diverse communities taught me to meet people where they are with openness, empathy, and respect. This philosophy has allowed me to build incredible, meaningful bridges across every walk of life from students and local volunteers to industry professionals.

I proudly identify as Chinese, deeply rooted in my heritage, while fully embracing American cultural values. By recognizing the unique strengths of both worlds, I get to keep the very best of each and pass those rich, uplifting values down to the next generation.

Like many immigrants, I've navigated that unique space where folks in Asia view me through an American lens, while people here notice my roots. But I discovered a wonderful truth: true belonging comes from within. I am fully American, fully proud of my roots, and happily adapting to the vibrant world around me!
Holding onto my heritage gives me grounding, but opening my heart to both cultures has completely expanded my universe. Supporting others showed me that we don't have to choose between our heritage and our new home. We get to weave them together into something stronger, healthier, and full of joy!

Q3. How do you balance cultural authenticity while making your work accessible to others who may not be familiar with your cultural traditions?

The House of Falling Waters, Moonlit Mechanica

That is such a thoughtful question, especially in today's fast-moving, hyper connected world.

We live in an age where social media moves at lightning speed, and authentic cultural traditions can easily get blurred or lost in the noise. For me, balancing cultural authenticity with universal connection isn't about slapping a label on what I create. it's about letting the heart and quality of the work speak for itself first.

I like to think of it like hearing a great song for the very first time: **First comes the melody**: You fall in love with the tune or the emotion of the lyric before you even know who wrote it. **Then comes the story**: Once you love the music, you naturally want to discover the composer, their background, their culture, and what inspired them.

That is exactly how I approach my work and my bicultural journey. I bring my full self,

my Chinese heritage, my American values, and my engineering mindset into everything I make. But I don't force people to digest a cultural definition right away. I let the craft build the bridge. When people connect with the human story, quality, and passion behind what I create, it opens a welcoming door for them to learn about my roots, my values, and where I come from on a much deeper level.

My believe in Bicultural Harmony:

- **Lead with Shared Humanity**: Focus on universal values, care, excellence, utility, and heart. Quality transcends cultural boundaries.
- **Patience Over Labels**: True cultural understanding takes time. Allow people to discover my heritage organically through meaningful connection rather than rapid social media trends.
- **Stay Grounded in Craft**: Let my work reflect my personal blend of cultures naturally without worrying about fitting into anyone else's box.

Understanding a multicultural person like me takes time, and that's the beauty of it. By letting my work shine first, I create space for genuine curiosity, authentic cultural appreciation, and long-lasting connection.

Q4. You have accomplished so much from arriving in the States to becoming a cultural bearer. What were some of the pivotal challenges you faced in building your life in America?

Looking back on this journey fills my heart with so much gratitude!

When I first land in America, survival is all about receiving seeking help, finding guidance, and trying to navigate a world that feels completely unfamiliar. But the most transformative challenge of my life wasn't just overcoming the language barrier; it was learning how to transition from being someone who receives help to becoming someone who **gives back** with open hands.

Daniel with his family having fun

Adapting to life in America has been an incredible, lifelong masterclass. Every single day, I am learning and absorbing the beautiful values. The deep devotion to family, the open-handed generosity toward those in need, and the core belief that people are fundamentally kind. The incredible resilience to

tackle challenges head on, the grace to learn from mistakes, and the wisdom to **work smart, not just work hard.**

Understanding these values wasn't something that happened overnight. it has taken a lifetime of observing, sharing, researching, and actively participating in my community and I'm still learning every single day.

The hardest and most rewarding pivotal shift is realizing that **giving is a practice that requires wisdom.** It's easy to throw hard work at a problem, but real impact happens when we work *smart* creating sustainable solutions, mentoring the next generation, and lifting up families so they can thrive on their own.

Minnesota is where I am spending the rest of my life. To go from a newcomer needing support to someone who helps design a better future for local students and families is the greatest honor of my story. I am so deeply grateful to call this place home, and I'm excited for every opportunity to keep giving back.

Q5. Love your statement "be grateful, CAN-DO attitude, never give up". Reflecting on that journey, what impacts do you hope to have on the next generation?

Looking back on every obstacle turned into an opportunity, my greatest hope for the next generation is that they realize **life isn't about what you accumulate along the way, but the rich, beautiful experiences you collect.** Life presents challenges to all of us. it treats us all equally in that way. But the real magic happens in how we choose to respond and learn to genuinely enjoy the journey.

If I could pass down a blueprint for the future leaders, dreamers, and innovators following behind us, it would be this:

- **Fill Your Life with Colors:** Don't be afraid to try new things, learn different crafts, and step into unfamiliar worlds. When you live with curiosity and passion, joy and smiles naturally follow.
- **Work Smart, Think Smart:** Hard work is the foundation, but strategy and innovation build the house. Approach problems with a calm mind, analyze carefully, and look for sustainable solutions that elevate everyone.
- **Turn Gratitude into Action**: Every step forward is a gift. Use what you learn to build tools, mentor others, and leave your community stronger than you found it.

My Ultimate Wish for the Next Generation: I want young people, especially those facing big hurdles, language barriers, or tough starts, to look at my path and know:

You belong here, your dreams are valid, and with a "CAN-DO" spirit, you can shape a life full of purpose, creation, and joy.

I am so deeply grateful for my journey, for Minnesota, and for the chance to pass the torch to the incredible generation coming up next.

Daniel with his family having fun

Q6. Any final words for our readers?

If there is one thing my entire life has taught me, it's that life is an endless, breathtaking journey of learning!

My love for understanding how the world works started when I was just a young boy. My dad brought home a foldable alarm clock, and driven by pure curiosity, I took the entire thing apart. I couldn't put it back together, destroyed it, and received a very memorable 'spank' from my dad since he needed it for work. But that moment sparked something lifelong in me. From that day on, I vowed to learn how things worked from the inside out, taking notes, drawing sketches, and snapping pictures at every step. That early curiosity built the foundation for my reverse engineering skills, and to this day, I wake up every single morning with that same childhood excitement, eager to discover something new.

I used to think that after years in photography, art, and engineering, I had seen it all. But embracing continuous learning opened up an infinite new universe. I recently completed advanced training with Asian Media Access, earning certificates as an **Augmented Reality & Virtual Reality Specialist, Digital Experience Specialist, Digital Marketing Specialist,** and in **Generative AI Fundamentals**. Integrating AI into my daily life bridged every gap in my creativity. it breathed entirely new life into my work, supercharged my research, and expanded my vision beyond anything I previously imagined.

I am pouring this newly unlocked creative energy and AI technology into my award-winning adaptation of Journey to the West, bringing timeless cultural storytelling to life through cutting edge digital experiences.

I am currently collaborating with Asian Media Access to build a revolutionary **5D**

Immersive Lab (combining 3D visuals, motion, and environmental effects). We are creating a wellness focused center that leverages interactive technology and AI to offer comfort, healing, and relief for individuals navigating anxiety and mental health needs.

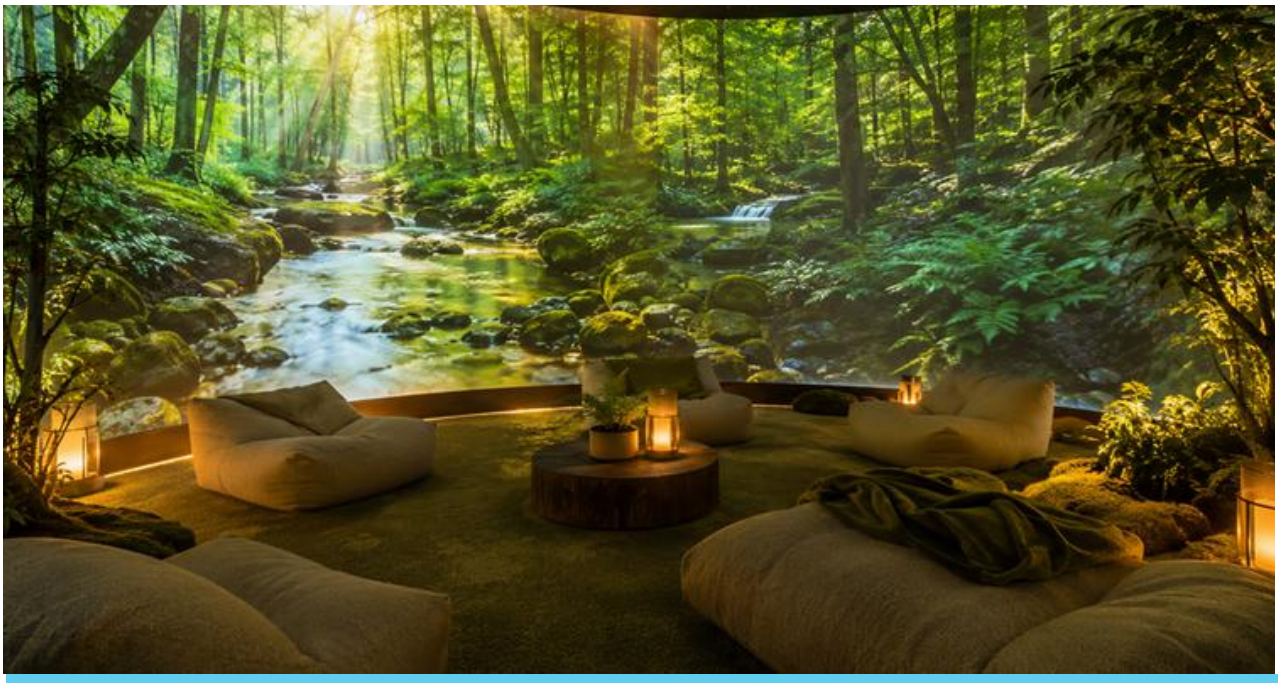
We know there will be challenges and hurdles along the way, but every obstacle only makes us stronger and more innovative. I am counting down the days until the grand opening of this center, and I can't wait to welcome you all there.

To everyone reading: **Never lose your curiosity, never leave an opportunity behind, and keep filling your life with color**. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for letting me share my story.

Daniel's AI work, Crimson Veil Ascending

Cobra Through the Nebula Drift

The Teacup Trouble Trio



Immersive Forest Stream Calming Room. Image Credit: ChatGPT Design

VIRTUAL REALITY AND MENTAL WELLNESS

A New Frontier in Care

Preface: For decades, virtual reality lived mostly in gaming and entertainment. Today it is quietly becoming one of the more rigorously studied tools in mental health and addiction recovery - not as a replacement for therapy, but as a way to make therapy more immersive, accessible, and, across a growing body of controlled trials, measurably more effective. The evidence base has expanded substantially in the last ten years, moving VR from a laboratory curiosity to a clinically validated option for specific conditions - particularly anxiety, phobias, PTSD, and pain management - with promising emerging research in substance use, social cognition, and cancer care.

This article examines what the research actually shows, with specific study examples, and places those findings alongside the Digital Forest Calming Room being developed at the Center for Wellness Technology (CWT) in downtown St. Paul - a real-world application grounded in the same science.

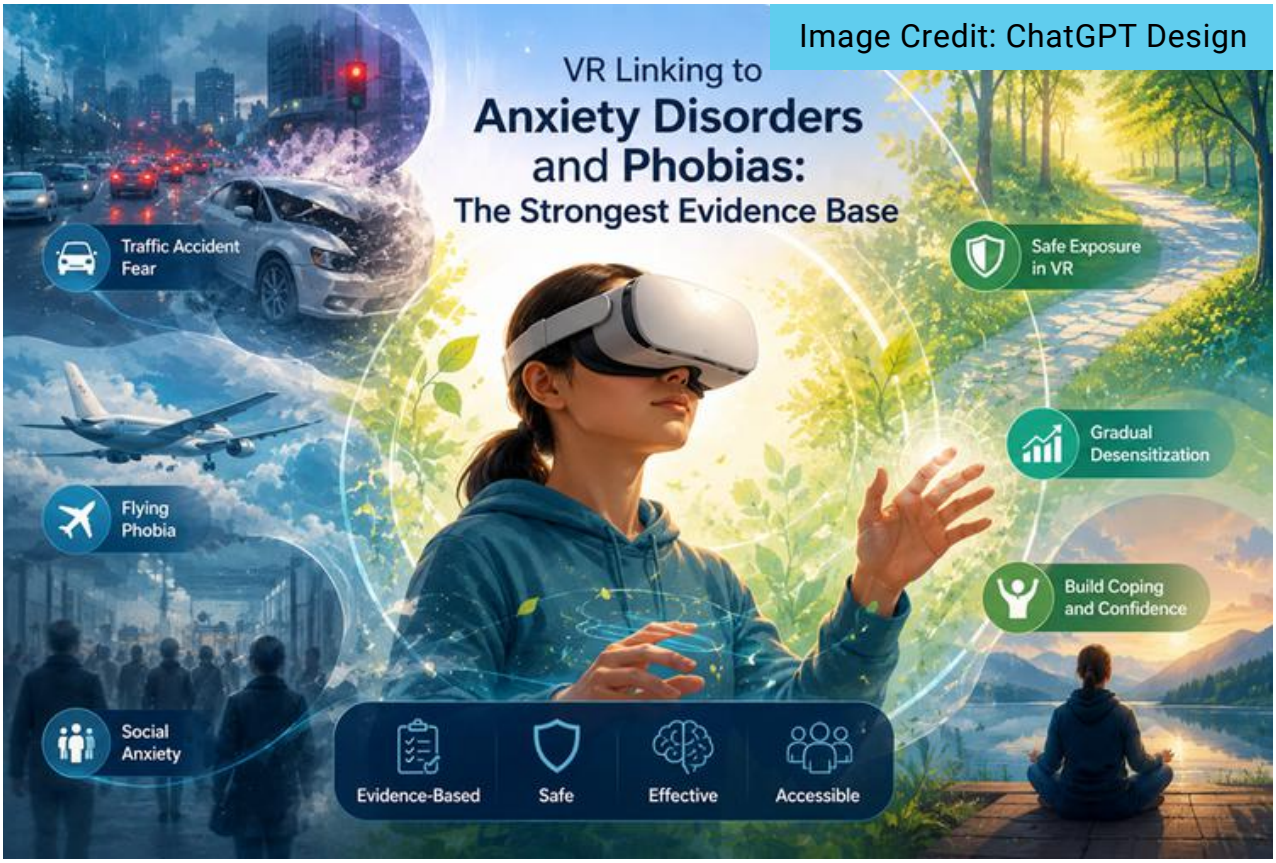
Why VR Fits Mental Health Care

Effective mental health treatment often depends on a person's ability to engage with a scenario vividly enough to work through it - confronting a feared situation in exposure therapy, or practicing a coping skill before facing a real-world trigger. VR removes the guesswork of imagination. It places someone inside a controlled, repeatable environment where a clinician can adjust intensity, pacing, and context in real time.

Three qualities separate VR from standard talk-based or worksheet-based interventions in ways that matter clinically:

- **Precision control.** A clinician can dial a scenario up or down - a slightly crowded room versus a packed auditorium, a calm street versus a chaotic intersection - something impossible to arrange safely or repeatably in ordinary life.
- **Repetition without real-world cost.** Practicing a difficult conversation, a triggering environment, or a feared situation can happen as many times as needed, without the logistical or emotional cost of arranging a real-life equivalent each time.
- **Presence and physiological engagement.** VR's sense of "being there" - what researchers call the sense of presence - engages the same emotional and physiological responses as real situations. A 2019 study by Maples-Keller and colleagues found that presence ratings in VR correlated significantly with physiological arousal (heart rate, skin conductance), confirming that the nervous system treats a well-designed virtual environment as real enough to learn from.

Image Credit: ChatGPT Design



Anxiety Disorders and Phobias: The Strongest Evidence Base

The most robust clinical evidence for VR in mental health comes from exposure therapy for specific phobias and social anxiety. Exposure therapy - gradually confronting a feared object or situation until the fear response habituates - is among the most empirically supported psychological treatments in existence. VR extends its reach by making exposures more controllable and repeatable.

Key studies:

- *Morina et al. (2015), "**Virtual reality in the treatment of mental health conditions**," Psychological Medicine*. A meta-analysis of 30 randomized controlled trials involving 1,057 participants found that VR exposure therapy produced large effect sizes for anxiety and phobias (Cohen's d = 0.95), with gains maintained at follow-up. Effect sizes were comparable to in-vivo exposure and significantly larger than waitlist controls.
- *Parsons & Rizzo (2008), "**Affective outcomes of virtual reality exposure therapy for anxiety and specific phobias**," Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*. A quantitative review of 21 studies across phobias (heights, spiders, flying, public speaking) found significant anxiety reduction in 100% of studies, with a mean within-group effect size of d = 0.95.
- *Pull (2005), "**Current status of virtual reality exposure therapy in anxiety disorders**," Current Opinion in Psychiatry*. Reviewed clinical outcomes for acrophobia and flying phobia specifically - two of the most studied targets. Found VR-treated patients showed transfer of treatment gains to real-world situations (e.g., actually flying on an airplane post-treatment) at rates equivalent to traditional exposure.

For social anxiety disorder specifically, a 2016 study by Anderson et al. in npj Schizophrenia used a virtual social environment where participants practiced conversations with avatar characters of varying perceived hostility. After four sessions, participants showed significant reductions in social anxiety severity and improved real-world social functioning. The researchers noted that the ability to pause, rewind, and repeat social scenarios without real-world consequence was cited by participants as the key therapeutic mechanism.

Image Credit: ChatGPT Design

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Reconstructing the Narrative Safely

PTSD treatment using VR has been studied most extensively in combat veterans, with a program called Bravemind developed at the University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies. Bravemind immerses veterans in virtual reconstructions of Iraq and Afghanistan environments - a market bazaar, a military convoy, a forward operating base at night - with a therapist controlling sensory elements (sound, rumble, smell) as the patient narrates and processes their traumatic memory.

- *Rizzo et al. (2011), "**Virtual reality and interactive digital game technology: New tools to address obesity and diabetes**," Journal of Diabetes Science and Technology / Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking.* Initial Bravemind trials with 20 active-duty soldiers showed a mean 50% reduction in PTSD Checklist (PCL) scores after an average of 7 sessions, with 16 of 20 patients no longer meeting diagnostic criteria for PTSD at post-treatment.
- *Gerardi et al. (2008), "**Virtual reality exposure therapy using a virtual Iraq: Case report**," Journal of Traumatic Stress*. Case series of Iraq War veterans with treatment-resistant PTSD (who had not responded to imaginal exposure) showed clinically significant improvements in PTSD, depression, and anxiety after VR-assisted exposure, suggesting VR may reach patients for whom traditional imaginal approaches are insufficient.

Beyond combat PTSD, VR has shown promise for civilian trauma. A 2017 pilot by Botella and colleagues used VR exposure with survivors of road traffic accidents and found significant reductions in PTSD symptoms and avoidance behaviors after six sessions, with gains maintained at three-month follow-up. The researchers specifically noted that patients who had refused traditional exposure therapy due to distress tolerance concerns agreed to try VR exposure - a finding that speaks to accessibility as much as efficacy.

Substance Use Disorders: Practicing Refusal in a Safe Risk

Cue-reactivity is a core mechanism of relapse in substance use disorders: environmental cues (the sight of a bar, the smell of cigarette smoke, the sound of a party) trigger cravings through conditioned learning. VR allows clinicians to expose patients to these triggers in a controlled setting and practice coping responses - effectively conducting cue-exposure therapy without the real-world risk of actual substance access.

- *Hone-Blanchet et al. (2014), "**The use of virtual reality in craving assessment and cue-exposure therapy in substance use disorders**," Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*. Reviewed 17 studies across alcohol, nicotine, cannabis, and cocaine use disorders. VR consistently induced craving levels comparable to in-vivo cue exposure, validating VR as an ecologically valid tool. Studies using extinction-based protocols (repeated exposure with no substance availability) showed significant craving reduction over sessions.
- *Bordnick et al. (2008), "**Virtual reality cue reactivity assessment in cigarette smokers**," Cyberpsychology & Behavior*. In a sample of 44 smokers, VR bar and party environments induced significantly greater urge ratings than a neutral VR environment ($p < 0.001$), confirming that VR cues elicit genuine cue reactivity - a prerequisite for therapeutic use.

Additionally, a 2019 randomized controlled trial by Ghiță and Bhatt (published in Behaviour Research and Therapy) randomized 60 alcohol-dependent patients to VR cue-exposure therapy plus standard care versus standard care alone. The VR group showed significantly greater reductions in craving intensity and relapse rates at six-month follow-up (28% vs. 49% relapse), providing the strongest controlled evidence to date for VR in alcohol use disorder treatment.

Chronic Pain and Medical Anxiety: Attention as Analgesic

VR's pain-reducing effects are among its most replicated findings and operate through a well-understood mechanism: the brain's attentional resources are finite. Immersive VR environments absorb enough cognitive and sensory attention that the processing bandwidth available for pain signals is meaningfully reduced - a

phenomenon researchers call attentional interference.

- *Hoffman et al. (2011), "**Virtual reality as an adjunctive non-pharmacologic analgesic for acute burn pain during medical procedures**," Annals of Behavioral Medicine*. The most-cited study in VR pain research. In a sample of burn patients undergoing wound care, VR (using the game SnowWorld, designed to be immersive and sensorially absorbing) reduced pain intensity by 35–50% compared to no VR, and reduced pain-related brain activity on fMRI scans. The effect was additive to opioid analgesia, suggesting VR could reduce required medication doses.
- *Li et al. (2011), "**Virtual reality and pain management: Current trends and future directions**," Pain Management: Reviewed 15 clinical trials.* Found VR effective for procedural pain (wound care, port access, physical therapy) with consistent findings of reduced pain intensity, reduced pain unpleasantness, and reduced time spent thinking about pain - all subjective dimensions of pain experience.

In cancer care specifically - a population directly relevant to CWT's model - a 2017 study by Indovina et al. (Supportive Care in Cancer) found that VR relaxation experiences reduced pre-treatment anxiety in chemotherapy patients by an average of 24%, with patient-reported satisfaction rates of over 90%. Patients specifically cited the sense of "escape" and the ability to "be somewhere else" during waiting periods as the key reported benefit - language that maps almost exactly onto the design intention of CWT's Digital Forest Calming Room.

Center for Wellness Technology (CWT)'s Digital Forest Calming Room - A Local Application

The Digital Forest Calming Room being developed at the Center for Wellness Technology in downtown St. Paul represents a non-clinical application of the same VR mechanisms documented in the research above - specifically, the attentional and physiological effects of immersive nature-based environments.

Nature-based VR has its own growing evidence base. A 2018 study by Riva and colleagues (Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking) found that 10 minutes of nature VR (forest, ocean, mountain settings) produced significant reductions in cortisol levels (a physiological marker of stress), heart rate, and self-reported anxiety compared to a neutral indoor VR environment. A 2020 study by Anderson et al. (Frontiers in Psychology) specifically tested virtual forest environments against guided audio relaxation and found equivalent stress reduction - suggesting VR nature immersion produces outcomes comparable to established low-tech relaxation methods, with the added dimension of presence.

"Patients in the Indovina 2017 study described the VR experience as giving them a place to 'be somewhere else.' That is not a metaphor. For a cancer patient waiting between an infusion and a scan, being somewhere else - even virtually - has measurable physiological effects."

The Calming Room is designed for exactly this use case: cancer patients with long waits between treatments, caregivers managing cumulative stress, and post-hospital patients in short-term recovery who benefit from a drop-in, no-referral-needed intervention between clinical appointments. Unlike a full clinical exposure program, it requires no therapist to operate session-by-session - making it a scalable, low-barrier entry point supported by the research reviewed above.

What the Research Shows - and What It Doesn't

The evidence is not uniform across applications. The honest summary by condition:

- **Anxiety and phobias**: Strong randomized controlled trial evidence, multiple meta-analyses, effect sizes comparable to or exceeding in-vivo exposure. Considered evidence-based by APA Division 12 clinical psychology standards.
- **PTSD**: Strong pilot and open-trial evidence, particularly for veterans and combat PTSD. Fewer large RCTs; the most rigorous evidence remains at the controlled trial stage. Considered probably efficacious.
- **Substance use disorders**: Consistent cue-reactivity validation; emerging controlled trial evidence for craving reduction and relapse prevention. Larger, longer-term RCTs needed to establish standard-of-care status.
- **Chronic pain**: Highly replicable in procedural and acute pain settings; strongest effects for attentional immersion during painful procedures. Evidence for chronic pain management is more mixed.
- **Stress reduction and nature-based VR**: Growing evidence base; particularly strong for pre-procedure anxiety in cancer populations. Cortisol and heart rate findings are consistent. Considered well-supported for adjunct use.

As with any tool in mental health care, results vary by condition, by program design, and by how well the VR experience is integrated into a broader treatment plan. A 2021 systematic review by Dellazizzo and colleagues (Psychological Medicine) analyzed 44 RCTs and found that VR interventions produced significantly better outcomes when delivered alongside - rather than instead of - therapist contact, reinforcing that VR is most powerful as a complement to, not a substitute for, the therapeutic relationship.

Practical Considerations

- **It's a tool, not a standalone treatment**. VR interventions work best when guided by a trained clinician who can interpret responses and adjust the plan. Self-directed VR apps exist but lack the therapeutic relationship that makes exposure-based approaches effective.
- **Cybersickness is real**. A meaningful minority of users - estimates range from 5–40% depending on content and headset quality - experience nausea, disorientation, or headache. Session length, content design, and hardware quality significantly affect incidence.
- **Cost and infrastructure**. Consumer headset costs have dropped below $500, but building a clinically validated content library, staff training, and technical support infrastructure still requires meaningful investment.
- **Not universally appropriate**. Certain conditions - severe dissociation, active psychosis, some seizure disorders, and acute suicidal ideation - require caution or exclusion. Clinical screening protocols are not yet standardized across programs.

VR's real promise in mental wellness is precision: giving clinicians a way to create exactly the right level of challenge, at exactly the right pace, for a specific person's recovery. As headsets become lighter, cheaper, and more widely available, or immersive environment build-up, VR is likely to move from a niche clinical tool to a standard option alongside talk therapy, medication, and peer support - one more way of meeting people where they are, in a space that feels real enough to matter, but safe enough to practice in.

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Original Article at The AI Journal

THE NEXT AI ADOPTION GAP IS NOT ACCESS—IT IS AGENCY

Composer and interdisciplinary artist Cong Liu on helping non-technical users move from passive AI consumption to meaningful creation

Artificial intelligence has never been easier to access. Anyone can open a chatbot, generate an image or experiment with video in a matter of minutes. Yet access to a tool does not necessarily give someone the confidence, context or judgment to use it meaningfully.

For independent composer, songwriter and interdisciplinary artist Cong Liu, this is becoming one of the most important questions in AI adoption: once the technology is available, who is actually able to turn it into a form of expression, communication or participation?

Liu's perspective developed through an unusual path. His doctoral work explored how visual information could be translated into sound, mapping qualities such as hue, brightness and saturation onto pitch, timbre and dynamics. Generative AI later let him run that process in reverse—turning sound, language, emotion and imagination into images, animation and visual narratives.

He has since brought that approach into public AI education. In an introductory workshop organized through Asian Media Access, the Asian American Business Resilience Network and Digital Synergy, Liu showed participants how to move from

an idea, a piece of music or a written narrative into AI-generated imagery, animation and music videos. He later served as a guest instructor in an advanced AI/VR and digital-experience cohort organized by Asian Media Access, helping participants connect generative media with sound, storytelling, immersive design and audience experience.

His work has also extended into multilingual public communication and an upcoming conference discussion on generative AI and mental wellness.
We spoke with Liu about the difference between AI access and AI agency, what non-technical learners reveal about adoption, and why faster generation must still be balanced by human judgment.

Your interest in AI developed from an earlier project involving perception. How did that lead you toward generative AI?

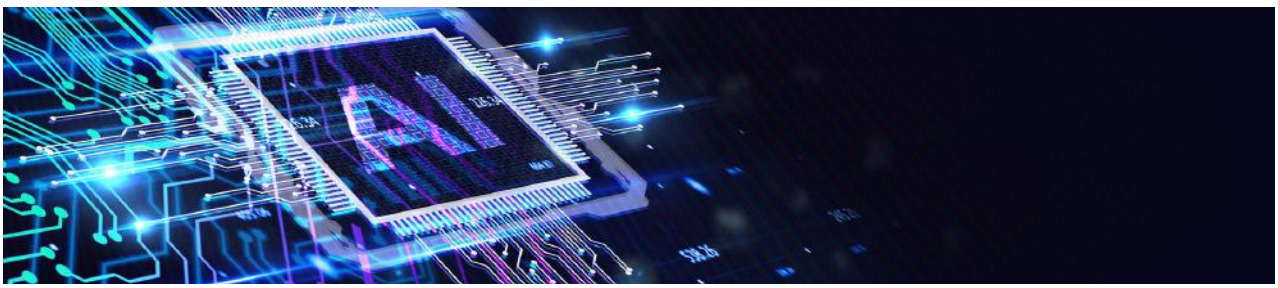
The starting point was personal.

I am color-blind, so I have always been conscious that perception is not universal. Something that appears clear and consistent to one person may be experienced differently by someone else.

As a composer, I understood sound as my most natural language. For my doctoral work, I explored whether color could be translated into sound, connecting visual qualities such as hue, brightness and saturation with musical ones such as pitch, timbre and dynamics.

The purpose was not simply to build a technical conversion system. I was interested in whether one form of perception could become accessible through another.
When generative AI became more available, I realized I could explore a related process in the opposite direction. My earlier work moved from visual information into sound. AI allowed me to investigate how sound, language, emotion and imagination could become visual.

For me, AI did not create the question. It gave me a new way to explore a question I already had.



You make a distinction between giving people access to AI and giving them agency through AI. What is the difference?

Access means a person can open the tool. Agency means the person understands how to use it in relation to an idea, a need or an experience of their own.

Many people technically have access to AI, but they may still not know where to begin. They may not understand how to turn a vague thought into a process, how to evaluate the output or how to move from an isolated result toward something coherent.

They can generate an image, but they may not yet feel that they are creating.

That difference matters. AI agency includes the ability to make choices, reject outputs, revise ideas and understand why a particular result does or does not communicate the original intention. It also includes the confidence to question the technology. People should not feel that an AI-generated answer is automatically better than their own judgment.

The next stage of adoption cannot be measured only by how many people have accounts or how often a tool is opened. It should also be measured by whether people gain a meaningful new ability to express, create and participate.

What did your first public AI media workshop teach you about the real barriers to adoption?

The workshop was designed for participants who did not necessarily have a technical background.

I did not begin with coding, model architecture or complicated terminology. I began with something the participants already had: an idea, a piece of music, a story or an image in their imagination. From there, we explored how that starting point could become a prompt, how a prompt could become an image, and how a group of images could develop into animation or a short music video.

What I learned was that the first barrier was often not technical ability. It was the belief that AI belonged to technical people.

Once participants understood that they could begin with their own knowledge and experiences, their relationship with the technology changed.

I also noticed differences across age groups. Younger participants often experimented quickly and were comfortable trying multiple directions. Some middle-aged and older participants were more cautious at the beginning, but they also brought years of experience, memory and ideas into the process. For some of them, AI was not simply a new tool—it became a new creative direction.

AI adoption is often a confidence challenge before it becomes a technology challenge.

AI can produce large amounts of material very quickly. How do you distinguish meaningful creation from simple generation?

Generation is fast. Meaning still requires judgment.

AI can produce ten images, ten musical ideas or ten versions of a scene in a very short time. But having more material does not automatically create a stronger work.

My background in composition has shaped how I think about this. In music, not every sound belongs in the final piece. The composer has to make decisions about structure, timing, contrast, development and silence. AI-assisted creation works in a similar way.

The creator still has to ask what the work is trying to communicate, which outputs support that purpose and which should be removed. Individual images may look impressive but fail to form a coherent narrative. A visually strong sequence may still have poor pacing. Music and animation may each be effective on their own yet feel disconnected when combined.

That is why I do not see prompting as the entire creative process. Prompting begins the conversation, but selection, editing, sequencing and revision give the result meaning.

AI can shorten the distance between imagination and experimentation. It does not remove the need for artistic intention.

You later worked with an advanced AI/VR visual-storytelling cohort. Was there a moment that changed how you understood AI's value?

The advanced cohort moved beyond generating individual images or short clips. Participants had to think about narrative structure, visual continuity, sound, animation, immersive environments and the experience of the audience. They were learning how to move from isolated outputs toward a more complete digital experience.

One student in that program especially stayed with me.

The student was not naturally comfortable expressing ideas directly or verbally. That did not mean the ideas were missing—the creative thinking was there, but putting the full concept into words was difficult.

AI-generated imagery gave the student another starting point. Instead of having to explain everything first, the student could create an image or a visual sequence, show it to others and respond to what appeared. The work could then be discussed, revised and gradually developed.

The images became a form of communication.

AI did not give the student the idea. The idea was already there. AI gave it a form that could be shared.

That experience connected with my earlier work in perception. My doctoral project had explored another channel for experiencing color. In the cohort, I saw how AI could also provide another channel for expression.

Why should community AI adoption matter to the wider technology industry?

Because communities should not only be consumers of systems designed by other people.

When AI adoption is discussed, the conversation often focuses on infrastructure, software, efficiency or workforce productivity. Those are important, but adoption also depends on language, cultural context, confidence, time and the availability of meaningful guidance.

A tool can be technically available and still feel inaccessible. People may not see their own experiences reflected in the examples. They may not know how AI applies to the work they already do. They may also hesitate to question the output because they assume the technology understands more than they do.

Community-based learning creates an opportunity for people to experiment earlier, ask questions and apply AI to their own stories, creative practices and communication needs.

This also matters to the technology industry because real users often reveal problems that are not visible in controlled demonstrations. They show where instructions are confusing, where cultural assumptions fail and where the system does not support the way people actually communicate.

Access is not only about whether the tool is available. It is about whether people feel able to use it with purpose.

What changes when generative AI is used in public-facing or health-related communication?

The level of responsibility changes.

In one recent project, I worked on songs and AI-assisted visual media for a multilingual public-health effort on extreme-heat safety. The purpose was not simply to create an attractive AI video. The information needed to be understood, remembered and acted upon.

Music and lyrics can help organize instructions into a sequence. Animation can show changes in physical condition. Visual storytelling can make information more immediate for people who may not engage with a long written explanation.

But the same tools can also introduce risk. A generated image may illustrate a symptom incorrectly. A translation may be linguistically accurate but culturally unnatural. A character may appear to recover too quickly, which could unintentionally suggest that a serious condition is no longer urgent.

Those details matter.

AI helped support parts of the creative and production process, but it could not take responsibility for factual accuracy, cultural context or public trust. Those required human review, professional feedback and repeated revision.

AI can accelerate communication, but it cannot be accountable for the message.

You are scheduled to speak about generative AI and mental wellness. Where do you see genuine potential, and where should the limits be?

I am interested in the possibility that creative AI tools can help people express experiences that are difficult to communicate directly.

Some emotions do not begin as clear sentences. They may be experienced as pressure, fragmentation, rhythm, color, movement or an imagined environment. For someone who finds direct verbal expression difficult, creating an image, a sound or a visual metaphor may offer another starting point for communication or reflection.

The student in the advanced cohort is one reason this question matters to me. The visual material did not replace the student's thinking—it gave that thinking a way to become visible.

At the same time, the limits must be stated clearly.

AI is not a therapist. It should not replace diagnosis, professional mental-health treatment or human care. Systems can produce emotionally convincing language without understanding a person's actual condition. They may also reinforce bias, mishandle cultural context or create a false sense of emotional authority.

The potential value is in supporting expression, reflection and creative participation—not in pretending that a model can replace a trained professional or a trusted human relationship.

What should the next stage of human-centered AI adoption look like?

I believe it should move beyond simple generation.

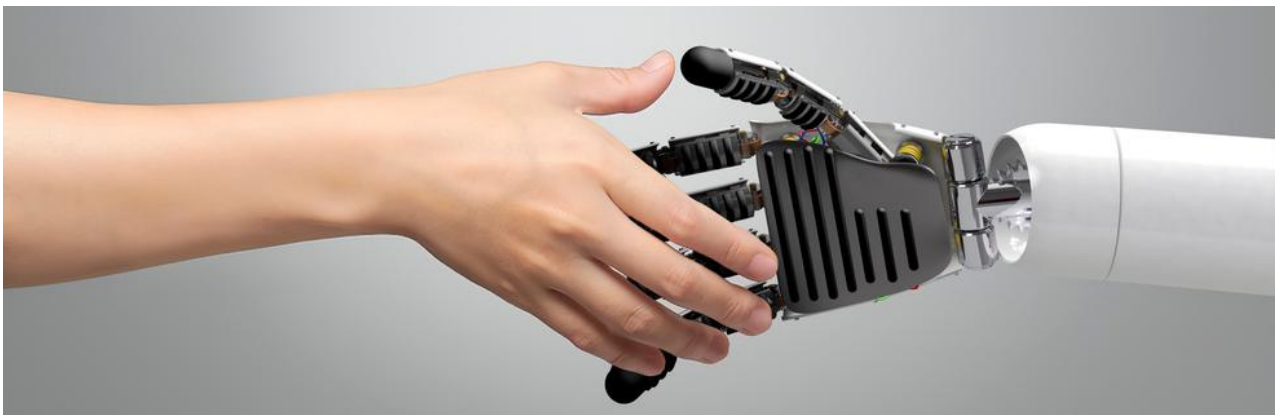
AI systems are becoming increasingly multimodal, but the important question is whether they will also become more meaningful, more controllable and more responsive to the ways different people perceive and communicate.

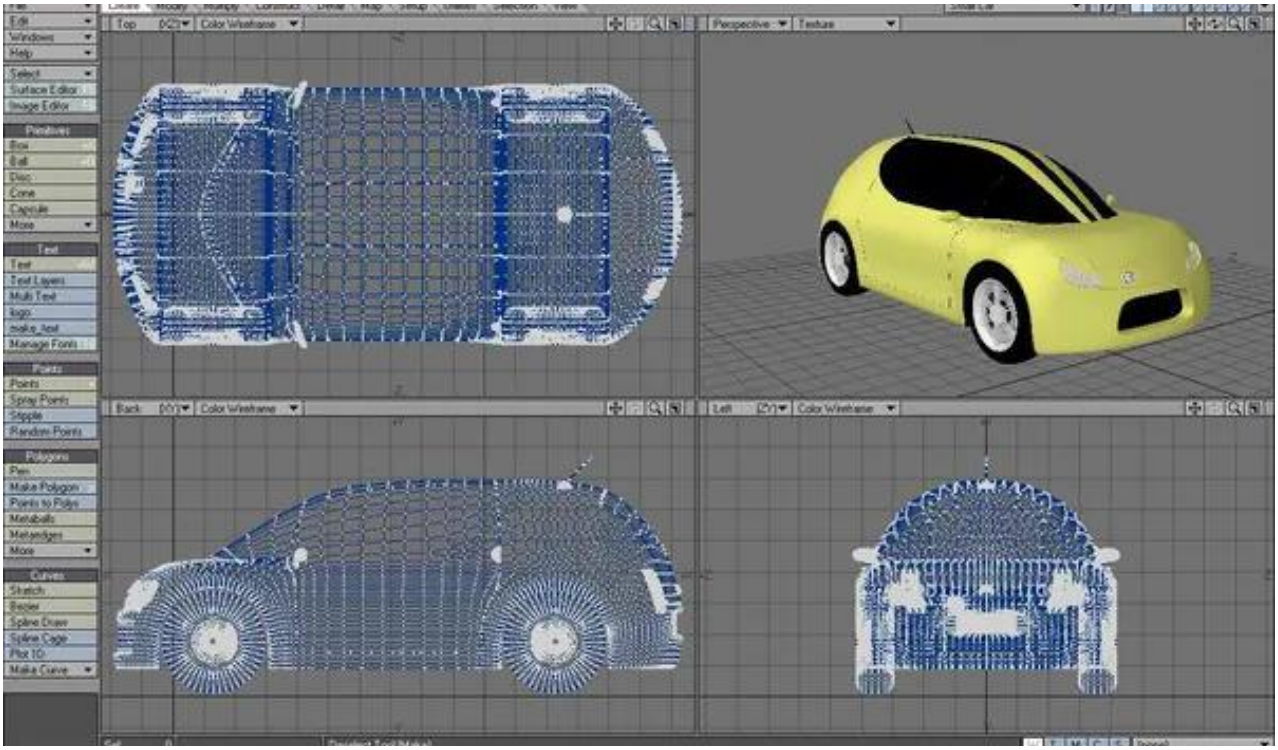
I am interested in systems that can work across sound, image, movement, language and immersive space. I also want to see tools that let users make more intentional choices rather than simply accepting the first generated result.

Human-centered AI should not flatten cultural or individual differences. It should make room for them. That means involving non-technical users earlier, designing for different forms of expression and helping people understand both the possibilities and the limitations of the technology.

The most meaningful future of AI is not one in which machines express more on our behalf. It is one in which more people gain the ability to express what was already inside them.

That is what I mean when I describe AI as a bridge.





FROM SKETCH TO 3D IN MINUTES: HOW MIT'S NEW AI SYSTEM COULD TRANSFORM ENGINEERING DESIGN

Columnist - Vivek Ekarat

Imagine This…

Imagine drawing a simple sketch of a car part on paper. Instead of spending hours rebuilding that sketch inside complex Computer-Aided Design (CAD) software, an intelligent AI system instantly converts it into a detailed 3D model ready for testing, simulation, or even 3D printing.

This futuristic workflow is becoming a reality thanks to researchers at the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)**, who have developed a groundbreaking framework called **GIFT (Geometric Inference Feedback Tuning)**. Their research has the potential to revolutionize how engineers, designers, architects, and manufacturers create products.

Rather than replacing engineers, this technology acts as an intelligent assistant that learns from its own mistakes and continuously improves the quality of the designs it produces.

Why Is This Research Important?

Every modern product begins with a digital design.

Whether engineers are creating:

- ✈️ Aircraft components
- 🚗 Automobile parts
- 📱 Consumer electronics
- 🏠 Home appliances
- 🏥 Medical devices

they first build a **CAD (Computer-Aided Design)** model.

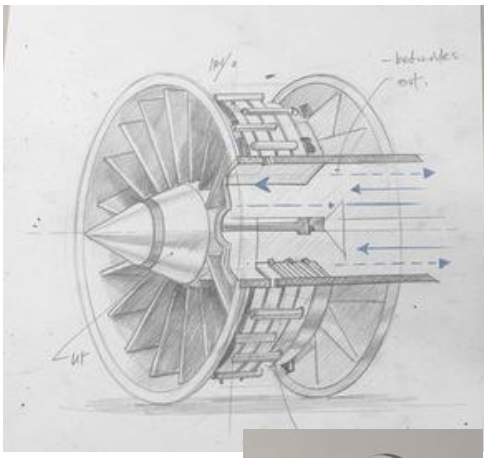
A CAD model is much more than a picture. It contains precise dimensions, mathematical geometry, and engineering instructions that allow manufacturers to produce real products.

Before manufacturing begins, engineers use CAD software to perform virtual tests such as:

- Crash simulations
- Stress analysis
- Heat resistance testing
- Durability analysis
- Aerodynamic simulations

Creating these CAD models manually requires significant time and expertise.
This is where Artificial Intelligence can dramatically accelerate product development.

The Challenge with Existing AI



Today's Vision-Language Models (VLMs) can understand images and text remarkably well.

For example, they can look at a picture of a mechanical object and generate code that attempts to recreate it.

However, there is one major problem.

Generating perfect CAD code is extremely difficult.

Even a tiny programming mistake can prevent the entire 3D model from being created.

Researchers found that most AI systems can produce code that is almost correct, but “almost” is not enough for engineering.

One small error can make the model unusable.

Introducing GIFT

The MIT research team created a new framework called **Geometric Inference Feedback Tuning (GIFT)**.

Unlike traditional AI training methods, GIFT does something very clever.

Instead of relying only on massive human-created datasets, it allows the AI to **learn from its own mistakes.**

This means the system continuously becomes smarter without requiring engineers to manually create thousands of additional training examples.

How Does GIFT Work?

The process can be explained in five simple steps.

Step 1: AI Receives a 2D Design
The system begins with:

- a drawing
- an image
- or a design accompanied by text.

Step 2: AI Creates Multiple CAD Programs
Instead of generating only one answer, GIFT asks the AI to create many possible CAD programs simultaneously. For example, it may generate ten different solutions.

Step 3: GIFT Evaluates Every Solution
The framework checks whether each generated CAD program can actually run correctly.

Some programs work perfectly. Some are completely wrong. Many are **nearly correct**.

Step 4: Learning from Near-Misses
This is where GIFT becomes unique.

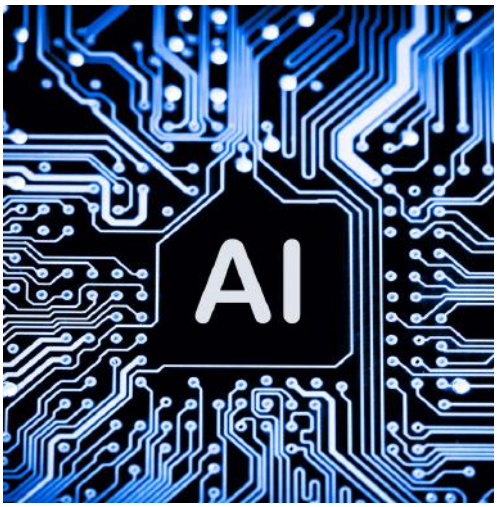
Instead of discarding almost-correct answers, it repairs them.

Those corrected examples become valuable new training data.

Rather than saying, “You failed.” the system says, “You were close. Here’s how to fix it.”

Step 5: AI Improves Itself
The corrected solutions are added back into the training dataset. As the cycle repeats, the AI gradually becomes more accurate and reliable. This entire process happens automatically without requiring human engineers to manually label new data.

Why Is This Better Than Traditional AI Training?



Traditional AI systems require enormous datasets created by human experts.
Collecting engineering datasets is:

- expensive
- time-consuming
- difficult
- often limited by intellectual property restrictions.

GIFT solves this problem by allowing AI to generate much of its own learning material.

The researchers call this model-aware data augmentation, because the training data is specifically designed around the model’s own weaknesses. Instead of creating random variations, GIFT generates examples that directly help the AI overcome its mistakes.

Faster and More Efficient

One of the most impressive findings from the research is computational efficiency. Compared to competing approaches:

- GIFT generated more accurate CAD programs.
- It required only about **20% of the computational power** used by many existing techniques.
- The resulting 3D models more closely matched the correct engineering designs.

This means companies could reduce both computing costs and development time.

Real-World Applications

The impact of GIFT extends across many industries.

- **Automotive Engineering**: Designers could quickly transform concept sketches into fully testable vehicle components.
- **Aerospace**: Aircraft manufacturers could generate and evaluate multiple wing or engine designs much faster.
- **Product Design**: Companies could rapidly prototype consumer products before investing in physical manufacturing.
- **Medical Engineering**: Customized implants and medical devices could be designed more efficiently.
- **3D Printing**: Designs could move from concept to printable models in significantly less time.

Learning Without Human Corrections

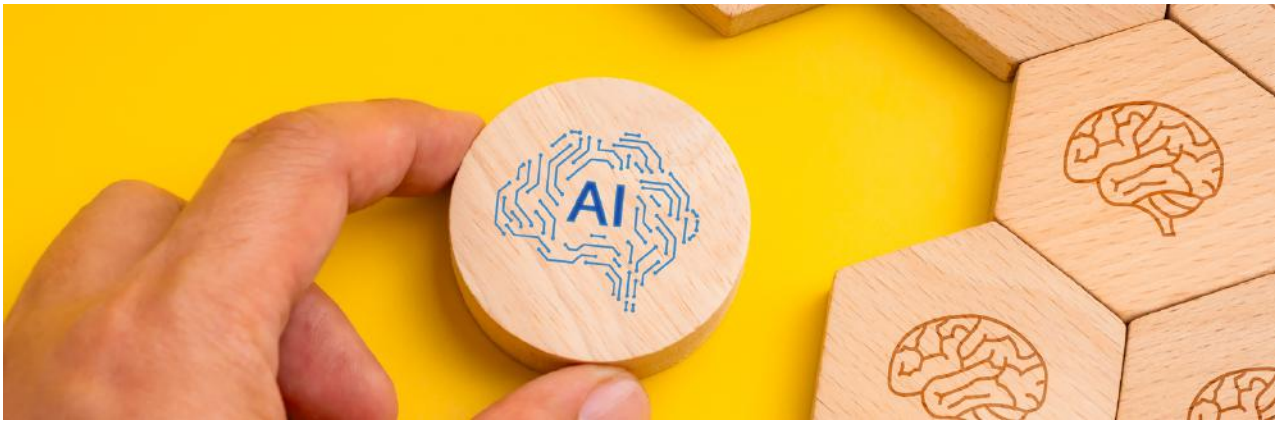
Perhaps the most exciting aspect of this research is that the system improves itself. Most AI systems depend on humans to correct mistakes. GIFT instead uses intelligent feedback to repair its own errors and convert failures into learning opportunities. This resembles how humans improve skills through practice and reflection.

Looking Ahead

The researchers believe this is only the beginning. Future versions of GIFT may teach AI not only to generate correct geometry but also to create designs that are:

- easier to manufacture
- stronger
- lighter
- cheaper
- more energy efficient
- environmentally sustainable.

Eventually, engineers may simply describe a product in natural language, and AI could generate multiple production-ready designs within minutes.



My Perspective

The development of GIFT represents a significant step toward making Artificial Intelligence a true engineering partner rather than just an automation tool.

Instead of replacing human creativity, this technology enhances it by handling repetitive design tasks while allowing engineers to focus on innovation and problem-solving.

What makes this research especially exciting is its emphasis on **learning from mistakes**. This principle mirrors how humans naturally learn and improve. By enabling AI to recognize, correct, and learn from its own errors, MIT researchers have introduced a more efficient and practical approach to AI-assisted engineering.

As industries continue embracing digital manufacturing, intelligent CAD generation systems like GIFT could dramatically reduce design time, lower development costs, and accelerate innovation across countless fields.

Conclusion

MIT's GIFT framework demonstrates that the future of engineering is not simply about faster computers it is about smarter learning.

By enabling AI models to improve themselves through their own successes and failures, GIFT transforms ordinary image-to-CAD generation into an adaptive learning process.

As this technology matures, the journey from a simple 2D sketch to a fully functional 3D engineering model may soon take only minutes, opening new possibilities for designers, engineers, manufacturers, and innovators around the world.

The future of product design has become faster, more intelligent, and remarkably more creative.

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- *GIFT: Bootstrapping Image-to-CAD Program Synthesis via Geometric Feedback*.

June 26~28

2026 HMONG INTERNATIONAL FREEDOM FESTIVAL

Hosted by the Cambodian American Partnership of Minnesota, Cambodian Day at the St. Paul Landmark Center celebrated Cambodian culture through traditional music, dance, crafts, cuisine, and interactive activities. The event welcomed community members of all ages to experience Cambodia's rich cultural heritage while promoting cultural appreciation and cross-cultural connections. Photo Courtesy: Mpls.St.Paul Magazine and The United Hmong Family, Inc.

July 25

CULTURAL HERITAGE DAY 2026

Hosted by the Hindu Society of Minnesota, Cultural Heritage Day 2026 brought families and community members together to celebrate diverse cultures, traditions, and heritage. The event featured cultural performances, art exhibits, food, a community lunch, and other activities that encouraged cultural appreciation and community connection. Photo Courtesy: Hindu Society of Minnesota

July 31 ~ August 2

PANDA FEST - TWIN CITIES

Panda Fest hosted its second Twin Cities festival at Mall of America's North Lot, bringing together Asian food, culture, and entertainment for a three-day celebration. The festival featured more than 200 Asian street food dishes, live cultural and contemporary performances, vendors, interactive activities, and family-friendly experiences celebrating the diversity of Asian cultures. Photo Courtesy: JW Marriott Minneapolis Mall of America

August 6

TWIN CITIES R!SE COMMUNITY CARNIVAL

The Twin Cities R!SE Community Carnival brought families and neighbors together for an evening of food, games, music, and community connection. Asian Media Access joined the event to share multilingual resources and educational materials, including information about community health and nutrition programs in English and Hmong.

August 7~9

ASIAN STREET FOOD NIGHT MARKET

The Asian Street Food Night Market brought the community together for a weekend celebrating Asian food, culture, and entertainment. The event featured more than 80 food and merchandise vendors, live cultural performances, a local farmers market, family activities, and a variety of Asian cuisines and traditions. Photo Courtesy: Asian Street Food Night Market

VERIZON SMALL BUSINESS DIGITAL READY $10,000 NATIONAL GRANT

Digital Ready grants are back. Apply for $10,000 grants, part of over $1M in total funding this year. You only have to apply once to be considered all year for a $10K grant, giving you more time to submit an application and take advantage of our courses and events.

Who can apply?
Owners of for-profit small businesses based in the United States, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Virgin Islands who are 18 or older may apply. Owners of multiple businesses may apply for one business only. See national grant FAQs for more information.

How do I apply?
Register and complete any combination of two eligible courses or events anytime in 2026 to unlock the grant application. Apply once to remain eligible for $10,000 grants awarded throughout the year.

When will I hear back?
Applications will be reviewed monthly from June through December 2026. Each month, 10 small businesses will be selected for grants. If you are not selected in a given month, your application will remain under consideration for the remainder of 2026. All applicants will receive a final decision by January 12, 2027.

Apply Today >>

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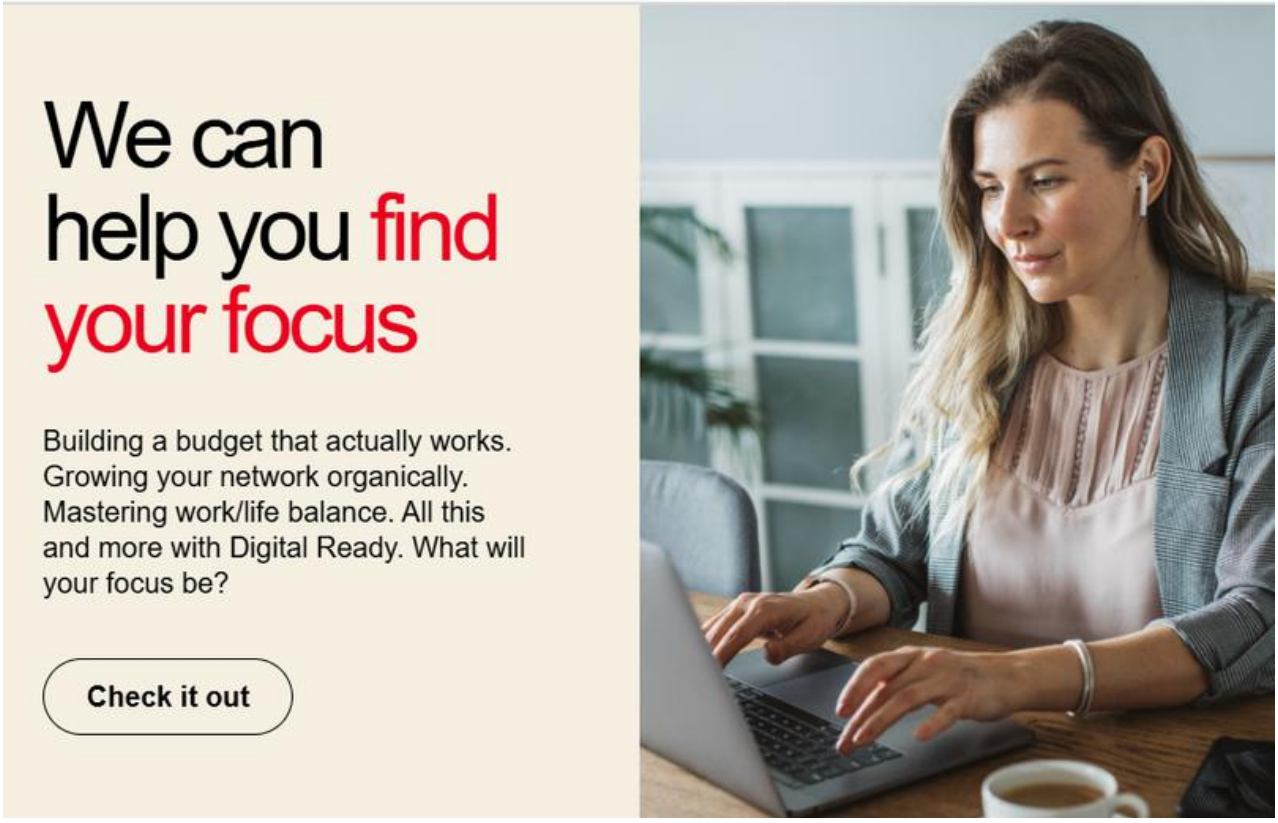

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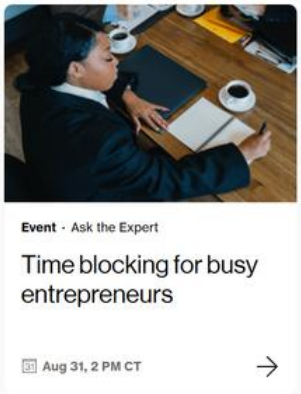

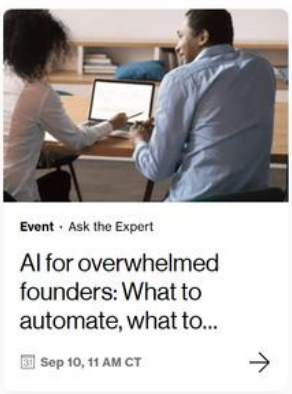

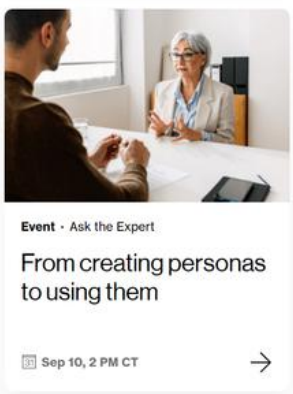

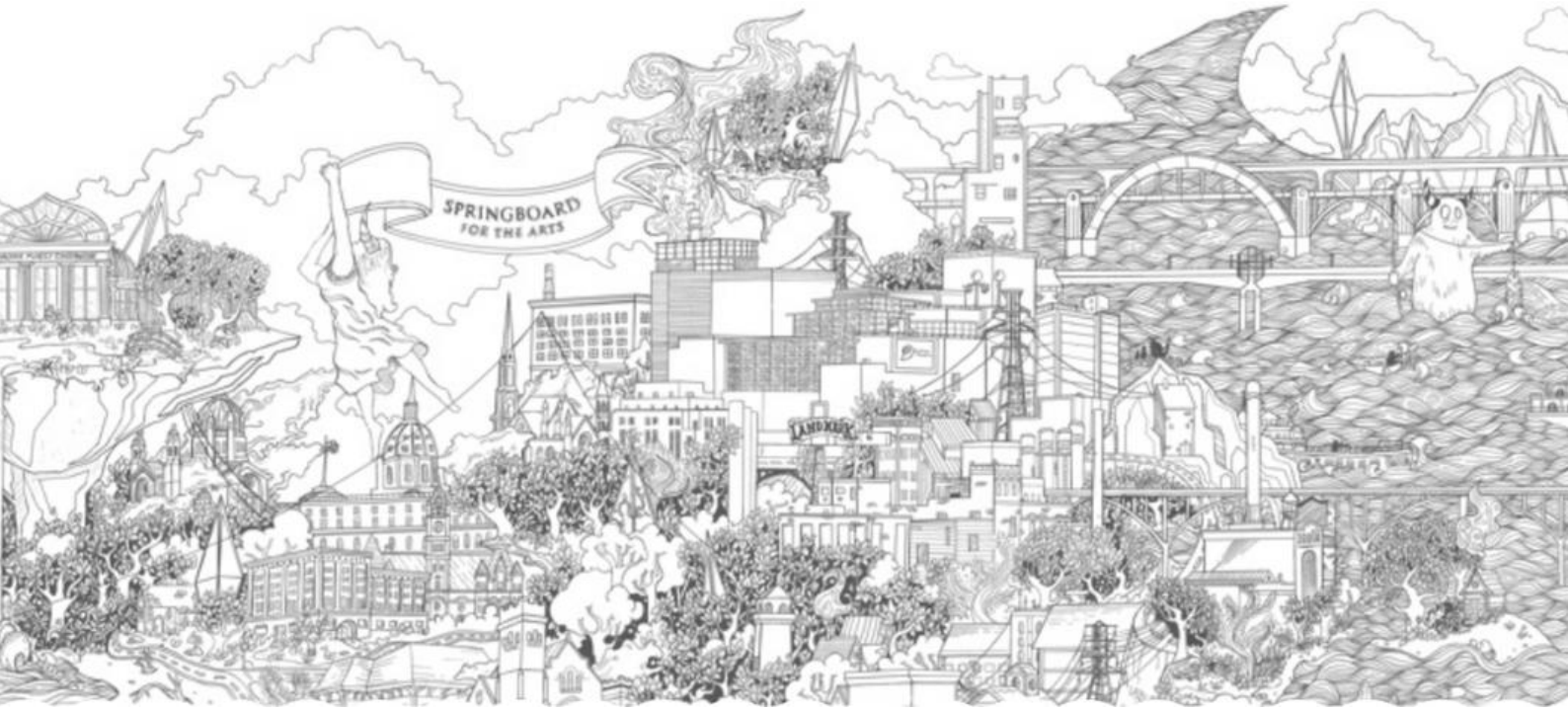

Springboard for the Arts Calendar of Events - Professional Development

- September 9, 2026 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM - Work of Art: Recordkeeping – Southern Minnesota
- September 11, 2026 12:00 PM – 4:30 PM - Professional Résumé Workshop and Clinic (In-person)
- September 21, 2026 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM - Work of Art: Career Planning

Learn more and register at: https://springboardforthearts.org/events/

Additional Resources

- Get connected to Artist Career Consultants here: https://springboardforthearts.org/professional-growth/career-consultations/artist-career-consultants/
- Work of Art Toolkit: https://springboardforthearts.org/woa
- Handbook for Artists Working in Community: https://springboardforthearts.org/artists-working-in-community/

Tax Tips from the IRS

- Here's what taxpayers need to know about business related travel deductions
- Companies who promise to eliminate tax debt sometimes leave taxpayers high and dry
- Get an Identity Protection PIN.
- Tax Resources for Members of the Military

August
25
3pm~4pm

AI AUTOMATION: SCALING YOUR STARTUP WITH INTELLIGENT WORKFLOWS

Business Webinar

LEARN MORE >>

August
26
12pm~1pm

PROFIT CENTERS: WHAT'S ACTUALLY MAKING YOU MONEY

Business Webinar

LEARN MORE >>

Sept
3
1pm~2pm

YOUR BRAND STORY: HOW TO BUILD A BUSINESS PEOPLE REMEMBER

Business Webinar

LEARN MORE >>

Sept
8
3pm~4pm

CAPITAL-READY IN THE AGE OF AI

Business Webinar

LEARN MORE >>

Sept
15
1pm~2pm

SHOW YOUR WORK: FOUNDER MILESTONE SHOWCASE

Business Webinar

LEARN MORE >>

Sept
16
2pm~3pm

THE B2B CUSTOMER ROADMAP: BUILD RETENTION-LED GROWTH

Business Webinar

LEARN MORE >>

Sept
17
1pm~2pm

HOW TO POSITION YOUR BUSINESS FOR GRANTS, PARTNERSHIPS AND INVESTMENTS

Business Webinar

LEARN MORE >>

Sept
22
1pm~2pm

TURN YOUR EXECUTIVE CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS INTO B2B REVENUE

Business Webinar

LEARN MORE >>

Contact Us

Email
lily.do@amamedia.org

Telephone
(612) 376-7715

Address
2418 Plymouth Ave N, Room 105,
Minneapolis, MN 55411

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