



AI Readiness & Implementation:

A Practical Guide for SBDC Consultants

Where Are You in Your AI Journey?

AI is changing how businesses operate, but not everyone is at the same stage. Some are just **starting to explore** AI, while others are **already using it daily in their consulting process**.

No matter where you are, the goal is to **take the next step forward** without overcomplicating things.

Created by the West Central Minnesota SBDC

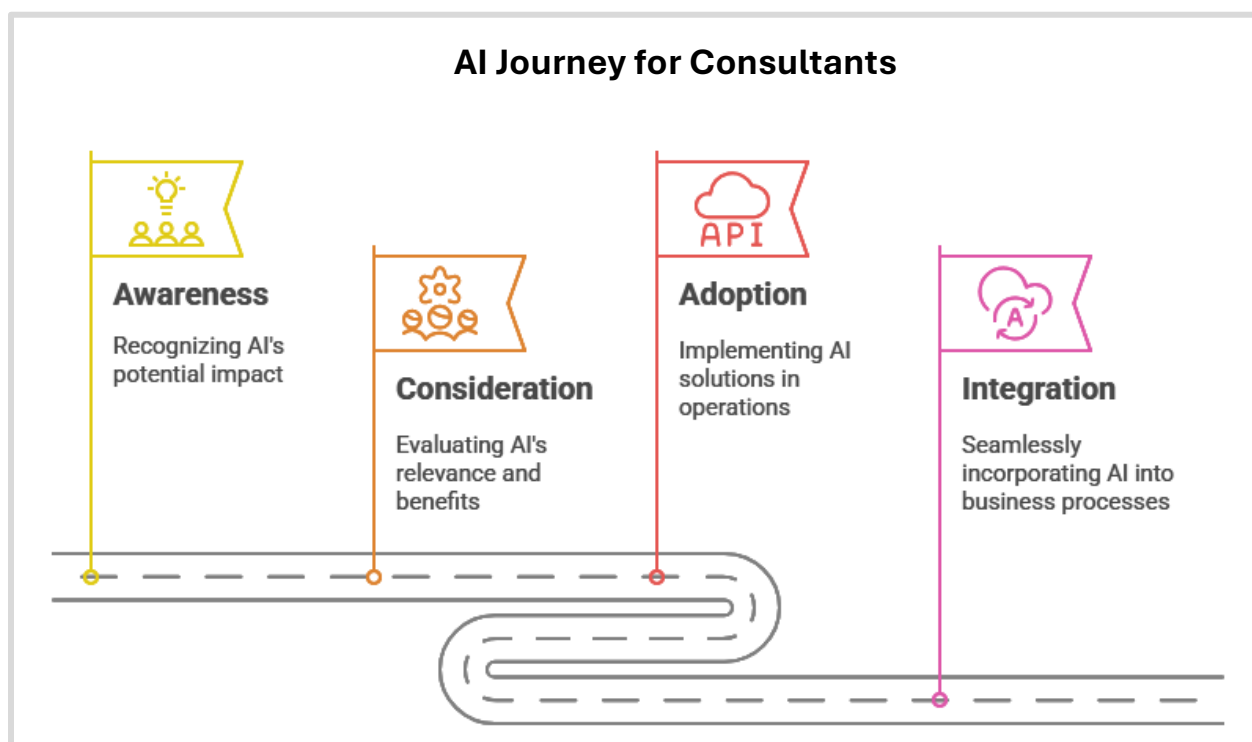
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How This Guide Works

- ◆ **Simple Profiles:** Find the description that sounds like you.
- ◆ **Real-World Insights:** Learn from other business owners' experiences.
- ◆ **Clear Next Steps:** Take action with easy, straightforward guidance.

As you read through the stages, take a few notes. Write down where you see yourself today — and one or two small actions you can take next.



Read ahead for more info on each stage, you might even find yourself in more than one stage of adoption, that's ok!

One Step at a Time

- ✓ Understand where you are.
- ✓ Take one step forward.
- ✓ Build AI into your process, one move at a time.

Your journey starts now.

1. **Awareness:** "I Know AI Exists, But I Don't Use It in My Consulting."


(Written by a consultant just starting to explore AI.)

I hear about AI all the time, but I haven't really used it in my consulting work. Sure, I've seen a few AI-generated ads, and I know people use ChatGPT, but I wouldn't call myself 'tech-savvy.' I help my clients with business fundamentals—marketing, finance, operations—not AI. I'm not sure how relevant it is for my role, and honestly, I worry it's **too complicated** or that it might replace what I do.

♦ **What I realized:** AI isn't here to replace consultants—it's here to help us work **faster and smarter**. I don't need to be an expert overnight, but I should at least know **what AI can do** so I can have conversations with my clients.

What I did to move forward:

- ✓ **I asked my clients** if they were using AI—turns out, some were already experimenting.
- ✓ **I tested a basic AI tool** (like ChatGPT or an AI writing assistant) just to see how it works.
- ✓ **I watched a short AI tutorial** on how it applies to small businesses (ASBDCs AI U!)

 **Your Next Step:** Pick **one** area of your consulting work (emails, reports, research) and test an AI tool for it. Don't overthink it—just **experiment**.

2. **Consideration:** "I've Used AI a Few Times, But Don't Have a Real System Yet."


(Written by a consultant who is researching AI but hasn't committed to a process.)

I've played around with AI tools, and I see the potential. I've used ChatGPT for brainstorming, and I've tested a few automation tools. But right now, **AI isn't part of my actual consulting process**—it's more of a side experiment. I don't know which tools are actually worth using long-term, and I don't want to waste time on things that won't make a real impact.

◆ **What I realized:** AI works best when it's built into **a process, not just a one-off tool**. If I'm going to use it effectively, I need a structured approach.

What I did to move forward:

- ✓ **I picked one AI tool** that solves a real pain point in my workflow (e.g., AI-powered transcription, content creation, or chatbots).
- ✓ **I set a goal** for AI use—if it could save me an hour a week, it was worth it.
- ✓ **I started recommending AI tools** to clients in areas I understood well (like marketing automation).

 **Your Next Step:** Choose **one AI tool** and make it part of your consulting workflow for **30 days**. Track whether it saves you time or improves your work.

3. **Adoption:** "AI is Part of My Consulting, But I Haven't Fully Optimized It."

(Written by a consultant actively using AI but not fully integrating it.)

AI has already made a difference in how I work. I use it to draft reports, research trends, and automate some repetitive tasks. I even help clients explore AI solutions. But right now, I know I'm **not using it to its full potential**. AI is still a **tool in my toolkit**, not something I rely on strategically. I want to take it further, but I don't know where to focus.

◆ **What I realized:** AI is most powerful when it's tied to **business outcomes**—not just saving time, but actually **increasing revenue, improving decision-making, and driving results** for clients.

What I did to move forward:

- ✓ **I created an AI workflow**—now, AI helps with lead generation, client reports, and content creation.
- ✓ **I started tracking results**—how much time I saved and whether AI improved my recommendations.
- ✓ **I trained my team and clients** so we all use AI in a structured way.

🚀 **Your Next Step:** Look at how AI is **already working** in your consulting. **Systematize it**—document your process, train your team, and find more ways to integrate it.

4. **Integration:** "AI is Fully Integrated into My Consulting Business."

(Written by a consultant who has fully integrated AI into their process.)

AI isn't just a tool I use occasionally—it's part of **how I deliver value** to clients. It helps me make better decisions, automate low-value tasks, and focus on **high-impact consulting work**. I don't see AI as a threat; I see it as a competitive edge. My clients trust me to help them adopt AI, and I stay ahead of trends to keep improving.

◆ **What I realized:** AI isn't just about saving time—it's about **elevating the role of a consultant** by providing deeper insights, more efficiency, and a better client experience.

What I did to move forward:

- ✓ **I built an AI-driven workflow** that runs smoothly across my consulting process.
- ✓ **I measure AI's impact**—how much time it saves, how much more I can offer clients, and how it drives business growth.
- ✓ **I stay updated on AI trends** so I can keep evolving my approach.

🚀 **Your Next Step: Refine your AI processes.** Train your clients, track AI's ROI, and explore **new AI strategies** to stay ahead.
