

Masterclass Handout

AI as Assistive Technology

Slide 1: AI as Assistive Technology

A Practical Stack for Entrepreneurs with Disabilities

Alva Cardona · Founder & CEO, Cromus.ai

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Slide 2: Why I'm the one teaching this

I'm Alva Cardona, founder and CEO of Cromus.ai — and I'm building this the same way most of you are.

Fifteen years

Enterprise SEO, technical content systems, and AI-native infrastructure across pharma, healthcare, and Fortune 500 companies.

Founder

Cromus.ai — a deterministic substrate that scores and governs AI workflows before they ship.

Open-source author

I write and maintain open specifications the community uses: SKILL.md, ETHOS.md, and MEMORY.md.

Currently in

Nasdaq Milestone Circles. I'm bootstrapping this, like most of you.

Publicly neurodivergent

I build in the open about how I actually work, so the tools and habits here are ones I rely on every day.

Slide 3: AI readiness

Three anonymous questions. No email required — this just helps me tailor the rest of the session.

1. How are you working with AI today?

- Worker/collaborator
- Builder
- Strategic advisor
- All of these

2. What kind of problem could AI solve for you right now?

- Operational

- Creative
- Research
- Technical/build
- Strategic decisions
- Customer-facing

3. Is AI assistive technology for entrepreneurs? (1 - Not really to 5 - Absolutely)

Slide 4: Accelerators & Funding

Programs and money set up specifically to help founders like you get started.

Accelerators & Founder Programs

2Gether-International — <https://2gether-international.org>

Accelerator for founders with disabilities: cohorts, Venture Labs, fellowships, investor intros, and a mentor network.

NDI Small Business Hub — <https://www.nationaldisabilityinstitute.org>

Business planning, financial education, access to capital, and benefits planning.

Synergies Work — <https://www.synergieswork.org>

An 8-week accelerator with coaching, plus an advanced scaling track.

Remarkable — <https://remarkable.org.au>

Disability-tech accelerator for assistive AI, accessibility, health tech, and aging tech — seed funding, mentors, and investor access.

Funding & Grants

Neurodiverse Entrepreneurship Program

Microgrants, an accelerator, and mentorship for neurodivergent founders.

Transform Business Grant

For disabled, LGBTQ+, BIPOC, and justice-impacted founders, plus a year of mentorship.

National Association for the Self-Employed — <https://www.nase.org>

Growth Grants of up to around \$4,000.

Grants.gov & SBA — <https://www.grants.gov>

Federal search portals — many disability-specific opportunities run through state and nonprofit partners.

Slide 5: Mentorship, Community & Learning

Free people and training to help you keep going.

Mentorship & Community

NDI — <https://www.nationaldisabilityinstitute.org>

A peer-mentoring network for disabled entrepreneurs.

2Gether-International — <https://2gether-international.org>

A strong global network of disabled venture founders.

Learning Resources

U.S. SBA — <https://www.sba.gov>

Free training on planning, contracting, finance, marketing, exporting, and certifications.

SCORE — <https://www.score.org>

Free mentors, plan reviews, workshops, financial modeling, and pitch prep.

Organizations worth following — NDI · 2Gether-International · Synergies Work · Remarkable · SCORE · SBA

Slide 6: Why so many disabled founders choose this path

8.3% vs 4.1%

Unemployment — people with disabilities vs. without. Roughly twice as likely to be unemployed.

Source: BLS, 2025

9.1% vs 5.9%

Self-employment among those working — disabled people are 50%+ more likely to choose self-employment.

Source: BLS, 2025

Common barriers

- Inaccessible workplaces
- Transportation
- Hiring discrimination
- Inflexible schedules
- Benefit cliffs (SSI/SSDI)
- Health conditions needing accommodation

Fewer than 3% of Vocational Rehabilitation case closures end in self-employment — the support to build a business is still rare, and that's part of why this session exists.

Slide 7: Every founder makes decisions in seven buckets

01 Build

02 Plan and run

03 Reach and sell

04 Support

05 Measure

06 Orchestrate

07 Govern

Slide 8: Free credits you're sitting on right now

What Azure is

Microsoft's cloud — the servers and services you rent instead of buying your own. AWS and Google Cloud are its main competitors.

What the credits are

Through Microsoft for Startups and NDI's Microsoft partnership, eligible founders can access up to \$120,000 in Azure credits via the Global Social Entrepreneurship program. Confirm exact amounts with Laura Thrasher and the NDI Small Business Hub team.

Why it matters

Those credits can cover hosting, AI APIs, and infrastructure for free for months — the costs that stop most founders before they start.

Slide 9: Match your business to the right Azure services

Pick the type of business closest to yours to see what fits.

Mobile App

Building an app people use on their phone.

Azure OpenAI Service

Add AI features like chat, summaries, and assistance.

Azure Functions

Run backend logic without managing servers.

Cosmos DB

Store your app's data so it scales as you grow.

App Service

Host your app's backend reliably.

Wheelchair Robotics

Building connected hardware and assistive devices.

IoT Hub

Connect and manage your devices securely.

Digital Twins

Model your devices virtually to test and monitor them.

Stream Analytics

Process sensor data in real time.

Machine Learning

Train models that make your device smarter.

Community Hub

Building a platform where people gather and connect.

Communication Services

Add chat, voice, and video to your platform.

Cognitive Search

Let members find what they need quickly.

Content Safety

Keep your community safe from harmful content.

Static Web Apps

Host your front end fast and for free to start.

Slide 10: More business types, more services

Two more common paths founders in this room are building.

Healthcare Assistance

Building a service that handles sensitive health information.

Health Data Services

Store and exchange health data in standard formats.

Communication Services (with HIPAA BAA)

Message and call patients under a signed HIPAA agreement.

AI Language

Understand and organize medical text.

Confidential Computing

Keep sensitive data protected even while it's being used.

Smartphone Accessories

Building physical accessories that pair with phones.

IoT Central

Manage your fleet of accessories from one place.

Azure Sphere

Keep your connected hardware secure by design.

Azure DevOps

Ship firmware and software updates smoothly.

Static Web Apps

Host companion web pages for your product.

Slide 11: Build

Decision: Pick one for vibe-coding speed, and one for production when you outgrow it.

Replit — <https://replit.com>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE · Alva's Pick]

Build and ship apps from your browser, no setup required.

Why: Fastest way to go from idea to a live, hosted app with AI help built in.

Cursor — <https://cursor.com>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

AI code editor built for people who write real software.

Why: Best when you're ready to move from prototype into a serious codebase.

Windsurf — <https://windsurf.com>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

Agentic AI editor that plans and edits across your project.

Why: A strong alternative to Cursor if you want a more autonomous coding partner.

v0 by Vercel — <https://v0.dev>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

Describe a UI and get working React and Tailwind code back.

Why: Great for quickly generating front-end screens you can drop into a project.

Lovable — <https://lovable.dev>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

Chat your way to a full-stack web app.

Why: Friendly on-ramp for non-coders who want a complete app fast.

Google AI Studio — <https://aistudio.google.com>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

Free playground for building with Google's Gemini models.

Why: A no-cost place to prototype AI features before you commit to infrastructure.

Slide 12: Plan and run

Decision: Pick one workspace tool and one execution tool — don't conflate the two.

Notion — <https://notion.com>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE · Alva's Pick]

One flexible workspace for docs, notes, and databases.

Why: A single home for everything you're thinking about and writing down.

Obsidian — <https://obsidian.md>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

Local-first notes that link your ideas together.

Why: For founders who want their knowledge stored privately on their own device.

Linear — <https://linear.app>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

Fast, focused issue tracking for building products.

Why: Keeps execution tight when you have real work to ship.

Asana — <https://asana.com>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

Project and task management for small teams.

Why: A friendly way to track who's doing what and by when.

Trello — <https://trello.com>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

Simple boards and cards to organize anything.

Why: The lowest-friction way to see your work move from to-do to done.

Granola — <https://granola.ai>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

AI notepad that turns your meetings into clean notes.

Why: Captures decisions so you don't lose them between conversations.

Slide 13: Reach and sell

Decision: Pick one scheduler, one CRM, one email sender, and one newsletter.

HubSpot — <https://hubspot.com>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE · Alva's Pick]

Free CRM to track every contact and deal.

Why: A generous free tier that grows with you as you start selling.

Cal.com — <https://cal.com>

[OSS]

Open-source scheduling you can fully control.

Why: Let people book time with you without back-and-forth email.

Calendly — <https://calendly.com>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

The classic, simple way to share your availability.

Why: The easiest scheduler to set up in a couple of minutes.

Resend — <https://resend.com>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

Developer-friendly email sending.

Why: Reliable transactional email for confirmations and receipts.

Beehiiv — <https://beehiiv.com>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

Newsletter platform built for growth.

Why: A polished home for building an audience over time.

Gamma — <https://gamma.app>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

AI-powered decks, docs, and pages.

Why: Turn rough notes into a presentable pitch in minutes.

Slide 14: Support

Decision: Pick one chat tool and one async video tool.

Crisp — <https://crisp.chat>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

Live chat and inbox for talking to customers.

Why: Answer questions on your site without hiring a support team.

Tawk.to — <https://tawk.to>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

Free live chat widget for any website.

Why: Completely free chat when budget is tight.

Zoho Desk — <https://zoho.com/desk>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE · Alva's Pick]

Help desk to organize support requests.

Why: Keeps customer issues from slipping through the cracks.

Loom — <https://loom.com>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

Record your screen and voice to explain things.

Why: Answer once on video instead of typing the same reply again.

Tella — <https://tella.tv>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

Polished screen and camera recordings.

Why: Make async updates that look professional with little effort.

Google Meet — <https://meet.google.com>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

Simple, reliable video calls.

Why: A no-cost way to hop on a live call with a customer.

Slide 15: Measure

Decision: Pick one product analytics tool and one privacy-friendly site analytics tool.

PostHog — <https://posthog.com>

[OSS]

Product analytics to see how people use your app.

Why: Understand what's working inside your product, not just your marketing.

Plausible — <https://plausible.io>

[OSS]

Lightweight, privacy-first website analytics.

Why: Know your traffic without heavy tracking or cookie banners.

Umami — <https://umami.is>

[OSS]

Open-source, self-hostable web analytics.

Why: Full control of your analytics data at no cost.

Google Marketing Platform — <https://marketingplatform.google.com>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE · Alva's Pick]

Google's suite for analytics and advertising.

Why: The most widely used, free way to measure your site and campaigns.

Slide 16: Orchestrate

Decision: Pick one frontier model and one automation tool; stay curious about agents.

Claude — <https://claude.ai>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE · Alva's Pick · agentic]

A frontier AI model that's a thoughtful writing and thinking partner.

Why: Strong reasoning and a calm, helpful voice for daily founder work.

ChatGPT — <https://chatgpt.com>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE · agentic]

The most widely used AI assistant.

Why: A capable all-rounder that most people already know how to use.

GitHub Copilot — <https://github.com/features/copilot>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE · agentic]

AI pair programmer inside your editor.

Why: Speeds up coding once you're working in a real codebase.

Perplexity — <https://perplexity.ai>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE · agentic]

AI answer engine with cited sources.

Why: Research a question and get sources you can actually check.

n8n — <https://n8n.io>

[OSS · automation]

Open-source workflow automation.

Why: Connect your tools and let routine tasks run themselves.

Zapier — <https://zapier.com>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE · automation]

No-code automation between thousands of apps.

Why: The simplest way to wire your tools together without code.

Slide 17: Govern

Decision: Pick one password manager, one privacy policy, one secrets vault, and one AI governance layer.

LangChain — <https://langchain.com>

[OSS · Alva's Pick]

Framework for building and controlling AI applications.

Why: Gives structure to AI features so they behave predictably.

Termly — <https://termly.io>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

Generate privacy policies and compliance banners.

Why: Get the legal basics in place without a lawyer on day one.

Doppler — <https://doppler.com>

[FREE TIER AVAILABLE]

A secrets vault for your API keys and passwords.

Why: Keeps your credentials out of your code and safely in one place.

Cromus.ai — <https://cromus.ai>

[PAID · Alva's Pick]

A deterministic layer that scores and governs AI workflows before they ship.

Why: Checks your AI is behaving the way you intend before it reaches customers.

Vanta — <https://vanta.com>

[PAID]

Automated security and compliance monitoring.

Why: For when you need SOC 2 and trust for bigger customers.

Slide 18: From landing-page visitor to a tailored discovery call

Here's how the buckets connect for a founder just getting started.

01 Build

Replit hosts your landing page and a Google Form.

02 Plan and run

Google Forms and a Sheet capture the lead.

03 Reach and sell

Zapier watches the Sheet for new entries.

04 Support

HubSpot creates a tagged contact automatically.

05 Plan and run

A Notion discovery doc is ready for the call.

06 Orchestrate

Cromus' ICP Interview Script Generator skill fills it in.

Slide 19: Perks and programs you can claim today

Software, credits, and discounts set aside for early founders.

F6S — <https://www.f6s.com/software>

A large directory of free software deals and perks for founders.

LinkedIn Premium Perks — <https://www.linkedin.com/premium/>

Discounts and credits on tools bundled with LinkedIn Premium.

HubSpot for Startups — <https://www.hubspot.com/startups>

Up to 90% off HubSpot's CRM and marketing tools for eligible startups.

Google for Startups — <https://startup.google.com>

Programs, mentorship, and Google Cloud credits for early-stage founders.

Microsoft for Startups — <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/startups>

Azure credits and software — the path NDI founders can access.

Slide 20: What NDI + Microsoft actually unlock

NDI Small Business Hub

Guidance & mentorship

Plus archived webinars on staying on Social Security while self-employed, and turning hobbies into income.

Microsoft for Startups & Credits

Up to \$120,000 in Azure credits

Via the Global Social Entrepreneurship program. NDI flags these as something founders leave on the table.

AI & Accessibility Training

Microsoft AI Innovation Toolkit

Plus AI skills training designed for people with disabilities.

Support for Nonprofits

Accessibility & nonprofit programs

Discounted and donated tools for mission-driven organizations.

Slide 21: Build your stack

Pick one tool per bucket, then export your personalized My Stack as a PDF to take with you.

Slide 22: Thank you for being in the room

Cromus.ai Builder tier is free for one month — no card required (normally \$29/mo). Laura will share the signup link and coupon code right after the session.

Referral links

Replit — <https://replit.com/refer/aecardonac>

Claude Cowork — <https://claude.ai/referral/PRv1az7ZKw>

Contact

Email: aecardonac@gmail.com — <mailto:aecardonac@gmail.com>

Website: www.alvacardona.com — <https://www.alvacardona.com>

Medium: medium.com/@aecardonac — <https://medium.com/@aecardonac>

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