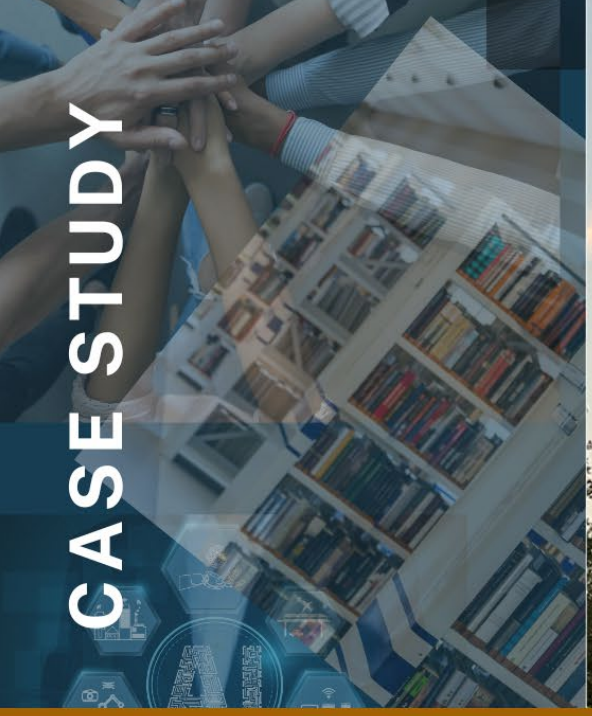

CASE STUDY

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES: The Case of Frisco Public Library

CENTER FOR TECHNOLOGY IN GOVERNMENT
UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

URBAN LIBRARIES COUNCIL

Empowering Communities: Public Libraries, Inclusive Civic Engagement, and Artificial Intelligence

The Case of Frisco Public Library

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Table of Contents

Empowering Communities: Public Libraries, Inclusive Civic Engagement, and Artificial Intelligence 1

Table of Contents 1

Introduction 1

Background 2

- Context of the Community 2
- Frisco Public Library 3

AI Programs in the Library 4

- Increasing Awareness 4
- Building Competencies 5
- Future Plans to Improve the Offer of AI-related Programs and Services 6

Benefits of introducing AI Programs 8

- Benefits to Community Members 8
- Benefits to the Library 9

Costs of Introducing AI-related Programs 10

- Main Costs 10

Challenges of Introducing AI-related programs 12

- Main Challenges 12
- Current Strategies to Address the Challenges 13

Lessons Learned 14

- Start Small 14
- Continuously Build Internal Expertise 14
- Focus on Community 14
- Strategic Communications and Marketing 15

Final Remarks 16

Empowering Communities: Public Libraries, Inclusive Civic Engagement, and Artificial Intelligence

The Case of Frisco Public Library

Introduction

The Center for Technology in Government at the University at Albany, State University of New York (CTG UAlbany), partnered with the Urban Libraries Council to conduct this case study on the Frisco Public Library (FPL). This research is part of the three-year project, Empowering Communities: Public Libraries, Inclusive Civic Engagement, and Artificial Intelligence, funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (grant no. LG-252719-OLS).

In today's digitized world, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become popular in various industries to assist, or even replace, human actions and decision-making. Despite its potential benefits, the pervasive use of AI systems has urged discussions on the many different types of risks that they entail, and particularly on the AI-related societal and ethical implications, which include human bias and therefore the risk of perpetuating structural inequalities and particularly harming marginalized communities.

Although scholars and practitioners prescribe public engagement in AI to better identify potential harms, improve the quality of datasets, and better address community needs, there are no clear strategies to engage communities in AI initiatives, nor is there obvious availability of spaces where this engagement may take place. Based on CTG UAlbany's previous research on the role of public libraries in improving open government ecosystems and in developing smart communities, we argue that public libraries are trusted learning spaces and community partners that may lead initiatives on critical and inclusive civic engagement in AI.

In this context, this project aims to understand the role of public libraries in fostering critical and inclusive civic engagement in AI initiatives, including their design, implementation, governance, and evaluation. The project is guided by three key research questions: 1) What role may public libraries play in increasing knowledge about AI in the community? 2) How may public libraries foster inclusive civic engagement in AI initiatives? 3) What are the opportunities, threats, benefits, and challenges of public libraries leading inclusive civic engagement in AI initiatives? Project results will be shared as one comprehensive report of current practices, four case studies, and one Practitioners' Guide that will provide specific

suggestions to public libraries on how to become active in helping their patrons to become more knowledgeable about AI and engage in AI initiatives.

In the first phase of the project, the CTG UAlbany team conducted an environmental scan of AI programs offered by public libraries in the United States. Based on the programs identified, the research team selected FPL as one of the four cases because it offers extensive education programs and activities on AI, including hands-on workshops on using tools like ChatGPT and Canva. The library also provides resources on AI, covering topics from ethics to robotics. For this case study, the CTG UAlbany team reviewed the library documents and interviewed library staff and external partners involved in providing AI programs in the library. The research team interviewed nine library staff members from different departments in the library to get a comprehensive understanding of AI programs as well as two external partners involved in providing AI programs in the FPL. Each interview lasted about one hour. The interviews focused on understanding the current and future AI programs, civic engagement in AI initiatives, as well as the benefits, costs, and challenges associated with implementing AI programs in public libraries.

This report presents an overview of the past and current AI programs offered by the FPL, outlining their benefits to the community members and library, associated costs, and challenges in implementation. It also describes some strategies they employed to address and overcome these barriers. Finally, this report presents lessons learned from delivering AI programs in a library setting.

Background

Context of the Community

The FPL operates in Frisco, Texas, which has a rapidly growing, highly educated population of approximately 247,000 residents. The demographic composition of Frisco is diverse, with nearly half of the population (48%) identifying as White, over a quarter as Asian, 11.5% as Hispanic, and 8.8% as Black or African American. The median household income exceeds $140,000, and less than 5% of the population lives below the poverty line, reflecting the area's relative economic stability. Educationally, more than 65% of residents aged 25 and older have attained a bachelor's degree or higher education. In general, Frisco is a thriving, technology-savvy, and relatively affluent community with a highly diverse population. It makes this city a potential setting for innovative AI-related programs in the Frisco Public Library.

Frisco Public Library

Founded in 1991, the FPL began as a small operation run by volunteers who managed book checkouts, shelving, and organized the city's first children's summer reading program. In 2023, the library moved into a repurposed rocket factory. At 158,000+ sq ft, FPL provides a much larger space to accommodate its growing services. Since the move, the library has become a cornerstone of the community, welcoming over 1,000,000 visitors and circulating more than 3,000,000 items each year.

Rooted in the mission statement "Inspire intellect, curiosity, and imagination in every visitor that interacts with us," FPL proposed four major steps to meet the evolving needs of the communities it serves in its latest strategic plan for 2015 to 2025. These steps include: 1) continuing to improve service areas valued by the community, 2) increasing awareness of library services, 3) expanding services to meet current and future population needs, and 4) strengthening organizational health to ensure greater fiscal flexibility. These strategies reflect that FPL aims to serve as a dynamic and community-centric resource that effectively meets changing needs and increases community members' awareness of library services.

Among these FPL's strategies, Strategy 1 focuses on technological enhancement, where technologies are expected to be crucial complements to improving services valued by the community. The strategic plan outlines the goal of ensuring the library has a current and effective technology platform. To achieve this goal, FPL actively collaborates with the City of Frisco's Information Technology Department to identify and address necessary technology needs through regular meetings that discuss emerging requirements and monitor the status of ongoing technology projects.

Moreover, FPL actively pursues technology-driven patron services, considering technology to be "mission-critical" both for direct service to patrons and as a tool for staff. Some relevant activities at FPL include the establishment of makerspaces offering advanced technology like 3D printing, laser cutters, and audio/visual creation tools, as well as investing in a mobile-responsive "virtual branch" to enable convenient service delivery to mobile devices. Overall, FPL's strategic plan depicts a landscape that incorporates emerging technologies into library services to provide both traditional and cutting-edge offerings efficiently, while striving to be a technology leader and partner in the community.

AI Programs in the Library

In 2018, the FPL offered its first AI activity for patrons. Using an existing Google product, the AIY Voice Kit, the library built their Basic AI classes, which led to packaging up the kits as take-home AI Maker Kits. The AI Maker Kits enabled individuals with basic Python programming skills to learn how to code for voice-activated smart speakers. FPL's AI Maker Kits and accompanying classes received the Top Innovator in Customer Experience award for library AI projects in 2019. Since then, FPL has continued to offer AI-related activities to its patrons.

Increasing Awareness

Recently, FPL developed and launched outreach events in the library called AI Pop-ups to raise patrons' awareness about AI. These pop-ups are informal sessions designed to organically engage patrons. Basically, pop-ups encourage people to come, experience, and showcase the different things that have been done using AI technologies. These events usually take place in high-traffic areas, such as the library lobby, without prior marketing or registration for patrons.

To enhance patrons' AI competencies, FPL offers a series of AI-focused classes that serve as entry points for those interested in learning about AI technologies. These classes are not intended to be technical deep dives; rather, they are designed to provide participants with a basic overview of AI concepts. Moreover, these classes include tool-specific overviews that demonstrate how AI is integrated into everyday life and how it can be used more intentionally.

The introductory classes emphasize broad explanations of AI, how it works, how to get started, and how it is already integrated into everyday tools like voice assistants, Google Maps, and Waze. This foundation helps demystify AI for participants, enabling them to recognize that many of the technologies they already use are powered by AI.

The library staff is responsible for preparing and delivering AI pop-ups using resources such as mobile carts, monitors, and laptops to provide brief demonstrations or discussions lasting about 45 minutes. The pop-ups have flexible formats and can incorporate one-on-one consultations or group presentations. Patrons can explore AI tools firsthand, ask questions, and receive guidance on enhancing their understanding through other AI library resources.

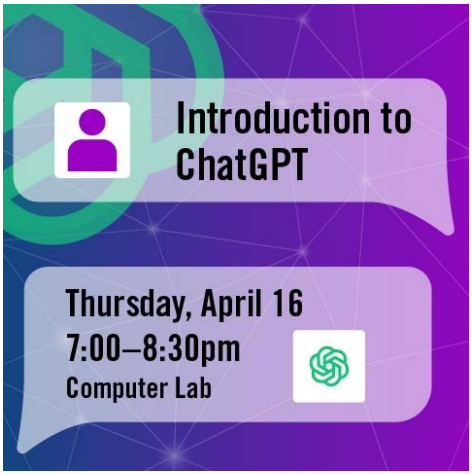
FPL considers the pop-ups as an AI-related program that gives a chance to inform interested patrons about additional AI learning opportunities available at the library.

The FPL has offered several AI pop-ups covering a range of topics to introduce key concepts. Demonstrations and discussions showcase how AI can create visual art, compose music, and write literature. One session demonstrated how to distinguish between AI-generated images and those created by humans, while another pop-up illustrated how to create illustrations with AI tools. These sessions on AI-generated art, music, and literature also provide opportunities for critical reflection on AI's impact on human creativity, employment, and copyright. Some pop-ups explored the intersection of AI and personal well-being, utilizing AI tools and applications related to mental and physical health and self-care. Another pop-up focused on AI genealogy tools that assist users in tracing family histories and building genealogical profiles. Additionally, a pop-up spotlighted AI for education, highlighting tools like Magic School, an AI platform that helps educators generate lesson plans and study materials.

Building Competencies

The FPL offers hands-on workshops intended to train the community in applications of AI tools. Some of these workshops include Copilot AI Essentials, Intro to ChatGPT, Career Planning with AI, and Online Safety: Scams and AI. It also offers an AI for All workshop, which allows participants to explore AI tools like ChatGPT and Canva.

Additionally, the FPL offers many classes focused on specific tools, which are practice-oriented, introducing platforms like ChatGPT, Claude.ai, Gemini, Perplexity, and Adobe Firefly. Participants learn what these tools can do, how to use them effectively, and how to write prompts that yield useful or creative results. Some sessions center around the artistic and expressive applications of AI, such as creating images, composing music, generating videos, or preparing food recipes.



Held in the library's computer lab, these classes combine short presentations with hands-on practice, allowing patrons to try the tools themselves. The library staff responsible for the class provides examples of prompts and guides patrons as they explore the tools independently. The classes are primarily designed for beginners and the general public. For example, FPL offers an AI for Life hands-on workshop showing how to incorporate AI into people's daily lives. Other hands-on activities, such as learning how to use ChatGPT, include different on-demand topics, such as introduction to

prompt engineering for generative AI, research and writing using generative AI tools, and pair programming with AI.

Moreover, FPL also offers AI coding-related workshops, namely Rocky AI Robot, which teaches participants how to write code in Python or use a visual code editor to control the robots. This type of technical training gives the opportunity for the participants to work with AI and a deep learning engine. Additionally, participants also have the opportunity to learn coding using machine learning as well as vice versa and image recognition. Finally, FPL offers AI Maker Kits, allowing people aged 18+ to explore AI using Google's AIY Voice smart speaker. This training enables participants to use their Python coding skills to customize and build upon existing AI skills and products.

Additionally, some staff are developing age-appropriate lesson plans, including those for younger students, children, and first graders, which will be offered in the future. Participants include students in elementary, middle, and high school, and 50+, many of whom are African American and Indian.

Although the number of classes remains limited due to the volume of library traffic and overlapping computer lab sessions, the demand has been high, averaging 20 participants per class. Additionally, FPL has subscribed to several learning platforms, providing patrons access to AI-related courses on LinkedIn Learning, Udemy, and Gale classes.

Future Plans to Improve the Offer of AI-related Programs and Services

The library plans to continue expanding its offerings to meet patrons' interests. The future initiatives outlined by library staff demonstrate a proactive and adaptive approach to programming, particularly focusing on enhancing technology, education and strengthening community engagement. It was mentioned that there are plans to integrate AI into existing classes, such as Microsoft Office and 3D design workshops, by utilizing tools like Microsoft Copilot and other AI applications. Additionally, there is a commitment to developing new AI-related classes in response to the increasing community interest and strong attendance in these subjects. Furthermore, staff expressed a desire to revisit foundational skills such as coding with the goal of providing more advanced technical content as demand grows, especially the demand for coding skills.

Future plans also involve broadening outreach and strengthening community ties. Proposed ideas include visiting local schools and institutions, hosting pop-up events to capture public interest, and tailoring programs for specific audiences, such as Spanish-speaking small business owners. Staff also noted the potential for increased collaboration through public-private partnerships to bring subject matter experts into the library.

Upcoming programming will feature the next level of Generative AI Application Exploration, which demonstrates how to make AI work effectively for various tasks and needs. The "Building AI Services" class will examine the AI design process and the use of APIs to build on ChatGPT. The "Paper AI" class will explore the design principles behind creating AI apps and services, expanding on the previous class while utilizing paper prototyping to illustrate these principles. Data Science and AI will concentrate on using AI tools to easily analyze data and generate business insights.

Coding classes will explore AI by teaching coding languages and generating various types of code. Additionally, students will be able to compare different AI applications to observe what each produces as part of the learning process. The current C++ classes will also expand, incorporating maker kits for guests to check out. Game coding with C++, Code Car for beginners in C++, and Coding Piano C++ for beginners will introduce fun musical elements to enhance learning and build knowledge.

Other activities will feature the AI Speed Dating Class, showcasing 10-12 AI applications and their strengths while providing around a dozen prompts for each to practice with class attendees. Classes will support the makerspace by utilizing AI to generate CAD designs (especially for 3D printing) and create vectors for laser cutters. Co-Pilot classes will also be offered from the viewpoint that the city of Frisco is an adopter of the Co-Pilot application.

Lastly, future work includes building and hosting workshops targeted to teachers with the purpose of empowering them to embrace the use of AI in their lessons to decrease the digital divide between students going into college who are using AI versus not using AI after high school.

Benefits of introducing AI Programs

According to the library staff, the AI programs offered have benefits to the community members as well as the library. The following sections briefly explain these benefits.

Benefits to Community Members

The library staff believe that AI programs offer two main benefits to the community. First, programs provide patrons with updated, relevant, and accurate information about AI, significantly increasing the knowledge that participants have about AI in an accessible, accurate, and practical way. Programs help participants develop a foundational understanding of AI concepts, including what AI is, how it works, and its limitations. This foundational literacy enables individuals to use AI tools more effectively and responsibly. Several staff members emphasized that many patrons initially have only a vague or superficial idea of AI, often lacking the deeper knowledge needed to frame questions or interpret AI systems‘ responses correctly.

Further, these programs also play a crucial role in reducing fear and anxiety surrounding AI. Participants often arrive with misconceptions shaped by media portrayals that frame AI as threatening or overly complex, which makes them hesitate to learn and use AI. Through hands-on learning and clear explanations, the library helps to demystify AI by offering simple, relatable examples of its helpfulness instead of intimidation. This reassurance not only helps them in reducing their anxiety about AI but also further fosters greater confidence and curiosity, enabling community members to approach AI with an open and informed mindset.

The classes and AI pop-ups play a significant role in demystifying AI. They reduce fear and misconceptions by making the technology feel less intimidating and more familiar, ultimately increasing access to AI.

These programs also assist patrons in becoming more efficient and discerning users of digital tools. They help individuals grasp how different software functions, identify potential risks, and make informed decisions about whether and how to use AI tools. Introductory classes and interactive pop-ups are especially valuable in breaking down complex tools into digestible content, thereby empowering patrons to integrate AI into their daily lives in meaningful and cautious ways. Second, the library's AI initiatives contribute significantly to building digital literacy skills that can be applied to their personal and professional lives. By witnessing firsthand how AI can be applied in everyday contexts, participants are empowered to explore its potential in meaningful and actionable ways.

Through these programs, participants acquire practical skills, such as basic coding and practical use of generative AI tools, which are relevant not only for everyday tasks but also to enhance participants' ability to conduct research, solve problems, and explore new technologies. Engaging with AI tools and computer-based learning activities improves participants' overall comfort with technology, which in turn strengthens their computer skills and professional capabilities. As participants become more familiar with digital tools, they are better prepared for job-related tasks, making these programs a crucial avenue for workforce development.

Further, by introducing AI concepts in an approachable and practical manner, these programs help ignite participants' desire to continue exploring and developing their digital skills independently. This engagement process not only encourages self-directed learning but also empowers individuals to take ownership of their technological education.

Benefits to the Library

Library staff believe these AI programs have also significantly benefited the library in different ways.

First, these programs have drawn new visitors, who initially utilize the library for workspace or resources and later become interested in the available classes. As they learn that the library offers relevant and timely programming around AI, their usage of library services has extended beyond their original intent. This change deepens their engagement with the institution and positions the library as a vital hub for continuous learning and digital skill-building. It shows that the library is not only a place for the community to get books, but also a place to learn new technologies, and particularly about AI. As in the past, the library serves as a safe and trusted space to bridge the digital divide around AI.

In addition to new patrons, these programs have allowed the library to connect with individuals and groups it had not reached before. In this respect, FPL has witnessed an increase in volunteers, who have shown interest in collaborating in educational offerings, broadening the library's network and collaborative opportunities.

Second, through their programming, FPL has stayed current with societal and technological trends, positioning the library as an institution that cares about what is happening in the world at large and reinforcing its leadership as a forward-thinking institution that not only responds to but also educates the public about AI, effectively using public resources to provide meaningful services. This approach is crucial for maintaining public trust and in changing the perception of the library as outdated or merely focused on traditional book lending. But, further, it strengthens the library's public image and reputation in the community. This increased visibility and relevance foster public pride and trust, reinforcing the library's role as a central and reliable source of information and education.

AI-related programs also enhance institutional credibility and stakeholder support, including support from funders and city officials. By staying ahead of technological trends and serving as a local leader in raising awareness and training about AI, the library not only meets community needs but also earns recognition at the municipal level. As noted in the interviews, being one of the few city departments actively engaging with AI has attracted positive attention from leadership, strengthening the library's influence and potential to secure continued support. This public acknowledgment bolsters the library's ability to advocate for its work and maintain its status as a valued civic asset

Costs of Introducing AI-related Programs

Main Costs

The main cost that FPL has incurred is in resources. As a result of introducing AI-related programs, FPL has both technology-related costs and personnel costs. Technology costs include the hardware and infrastructure required to support these programs as well as the purchase of licenses for software. On one hand, to support effective use of AI tools, the library must ensure robust, building-wide Wi-Fi coverage without weak spots, which requires continuous investment in high-quality connectivity. These are considered essential yet unavoidable "hard costs" necessary for maintaining reliable access. Furthermore, the library must provide a sufficient number of powerful public computers for patrons who do not bring their own devices. It means that in addition to the robust connection, the library needs to ensure that there is a sufficient number of computers available, which are equipped with advanced software that supports AI applications beyond standard office packages.

On the other hand, investments in software are also needed. Instructors need a license or subscription to specific AI tools for demonstration and instructional purposes. But, also,

since classes that teach about the use of AI tools or coding are free and open to the public, during those activities, staff also need to guarantee that the needed software can also be used for free by participants. Further, in making decisions about what tools to teach, they often make sure that participants are still able to explore and use AI tools after the class without needing to subscribe to the licenses. In this respect, the library prioritizes free or low-cost tools that foster accessibility and sustainability for learners.

Personnel costs include opportunity costs of maintaining and retaining expertise in implementing and developing AI-related programs. Typically, FPL requires well-educated and well-trained staff to deliver these AI programs to the community. Since most librarians typically do not have an information engineering or computational science background, most staff involved in AI programs need to undergo additional training in AI, such as completing LinkedIn Learning courses. Although some of these trainings are free, there are opportunity costs related to the time allocated for the training as well as the time needed for preparation, setup, instruction, and takedown of classes and additional activities.

Furthermore, labor is often perceived as the primary or sole cost associated with AI programming. In this respect, according to some of the interviewees, even when training expenses are minimal, the strain on staff time remains considerable, particularly in settings where staff are already juggling multiple responsibilities. This underscores the need for meticulous planning and resource allocation to ensure AI programs remain sustainable without overburdening personnel.

Challenges of Introducing AI-related programs

Main Challenges

FPL faces several challenges in offering AI-related programs. One of the main challenges in implementing AI-related programs has to do with resources (human, financial, technical) required for the effort, as these are the main costs. For example, personnel-related challenges impact the library's ability to offer AI programs. In this respect, staff's availability (in terms of time) is key. Designing the activities as well as developing syllabi is time consuming, particularly when there is little knowledge about AI among the staff. For example, according to library staff, one activity may require about ten hours of planning and additional time for teaching. There is limited staff time availability, which requires being careful about the number of activities that can be offered as well as about time allocation. Staff time is identified as the most limited and valuable resource, requiring careful prioritization among competing responsibilities. It is not possible to assign FPL's entire team to AI-related programs without neglecting other essential services that the community expects.

In addition, the lack of expertise and experience about and with AI is another *important personnel-related* challenge. Some library staff expressed hesitation and self-doubt regarding their own knowledge, which can undermine their confidence in engaging with patrons or leading discussions and, therefore, in communicating effectively about AI topics and tools with patrons and the community in general. This knowledge gap has further implications. For example, it hinders the library's ability to design and deliver AI-focused content, which among others includes creating syllabi, ensuring the accuracy of instructional materials, and training other staff members to engage in informed conversations about AI. The shortage of AI-literate staff limits the scalability and quality of programming, highlighting the need for targeted professional development or external partnerships to address this expertise gap.

The library also faces technical challenges that are related to the high cost of paid subscriptions to AI tools. Because of these costs, FPL tends to prioritize the use of free versions, which often limit functionality and instructional effectiveness. In this respect, instructors may not be able to demonstrate the usability of the AI tools, which may limit the possibility not only for the instructors but also for the participants to explore other features that the AI tools offer. Furthermore, without institutional subscriptions, staff and patrons may be unable to fully explore or demonstrate the capabilities of AI tools, which diminishes the effectiveness of library programming.

Additionally, there is a second set of challenges identified during this study. These are challenges associated with the rapid evolution of AI as a technology. AI tools change quickly; further, it is difficult to anticipate where AI is headed or how it will ultimately impact society,

which means that content created for a class or an activity may become outdated in just a month. As a result, staff need to constantly revise presentations, update information, and be informed about the latest developments. This ongoing cycle of learning and content revision puts a significant strain on staff. This dynamic environment complicates program planning and delivery, making it challenging to maintain consistency and quality in instructional offerings. This challenge also has implications for future programing. As the library staff shared, it is difficult to decide next steps in terms of what tools they should be focusing on and experimenting with.

Lastly, it also becomes challenging to reach diverse populations and address their varying needs. Even *though* the City of Frisco is categorized as a more affluent area, there are still some communities in this area that have low-income households. According to library staff, it is often difficult to reach underserved communities, such as those existing in land-*leased* neighborhoods, who might not be aware that the programs offered are free, or that they can obtain a library card and attend sessions as needed.

Current Strategies to Address the Challenges

FPL has already initiated measures to tackle the aforementioned challenges. First, in terms of resources, the library is investing in internal capacity-building, such as providing staff, especially new facilitators, with presentation training opportunities, which allows them to get the knowledge about AI that they need, but also to build comfort and confidence in leading classes. FPL also seeks affordable solutions to address financial constraints. In addition to simple actions, such as utilizing existing public computers for instruction or subscribing to platforms that staff can later use to create tailored classes, FPL has tapped into external funding sources. This includes applying for grants, approaching local businesses, reaching out to other city groups, or seeking support from agencies, such as workforce commissions, which might be able to assist them in searching for funding and building partnerships with other organizations. Furthermore, the library seeks local businesses willing to provide expertise to support its programs. These efforts help supplement constrained municipal budgets and sustain programming.

Strategically, FPL aims to avoid the “bleeding edge” that could waste limited resources, while being at a point where it can still shape and inform trends without overextending itself. This “small swings” approach is supported by active outreach, both through digital platforms and

in-person engagement, to communicate the value of AI programs and ensure alignment with community needs. With this strategy, FPL not only serves as a place that offers programs and services to the community but also as a facilitator of digital literacy and technology development.

Lessons Learned

This section reflects on the FPL experience from implementing AI programs to sharing insights, including success and challenges, key takeaways, and actionable recommendations.

Start Small

Library staff emphasized that the biggest hurdle is often just getting started. AI can seem daunting and unfamiliar, but taking the first step, no matter how small, enables libraries to learn by doing, iterate quickly, and gradually build comfort and community relevance. Starting with small, practical initiatives, and not being afraid to try, experiment, and take risks, reflects a healthy attitude towards risk-taking. Ultimately, it is important to recognize the importance of making the effort to move forward and of integrating different elements in ways that respond to community interests and needs.

Continuously Build Internal Expertise

Staff development is vital, particularly to educate staff on emerging technologies that they have never experimented with before. Staff development may include training facilitators, enhancing one's understanding of AI, and treating AI knowledge-building like other forms of professional learning. The library may be able to utilize existing resources, which may often be free (e.g., LinkedIn Platform courses), to enhance staff's knowledge about AI technologies and foster confidence and improve instructional quality. Finally, well-trained and knowledgeable staff are better positioned to deliver AI-related programs effectively and to respond to patrons' needs.

Focus on Community

Programs succeed when they align with community needs and interests. Furthermore, programs need to be relevant to the community the library serves. Community members will not attend and participate in programs if these do not reflect their interests, regardless of whether they are delivered in-person or virtually. The library, therefore, needs to continuously assess and strengthen the level of relevance of its programs and services to effectively meet and serve its community. As a result, understanding the audience's educational background, curiosity, and comfort with technology is key to designing meaningful content. In addition, when libraries serve diverse audiences through their programs, including speakers of different languages, young people, adults, or professionals, as is the case with FPL, it is important to understand the specific needs of these different groups and design program

content accordingly. Furthermore, assessing the expected reach of each program helps ensure that resources are used effectively, even when programs are designed for smaller groups or specific audiences. Consequently, the library has to remain aware of its target groups and estimate how many people are likely to participate and be involved in a specific target audience in order to reach those who really need and can benefit from the programs.

Further, developing well-structured and level-appropriate curricula is essential to further strengthen and organize these programs and better support community learning outcomes.

In this context, curricula should be designed and tailored to the appropriate level for the target audience. Pop-up formats or informal demonstrations may not always be effective; instead, many communities may prefer structured sit-down sessions with clear objectives and hands-on practice, ideally in a computer lab or equipped space. Open conversations with the community may also be appropriate ways to raise awareness about AI, helping to build trust, demystify the technology, and encourage meaningful engagement.

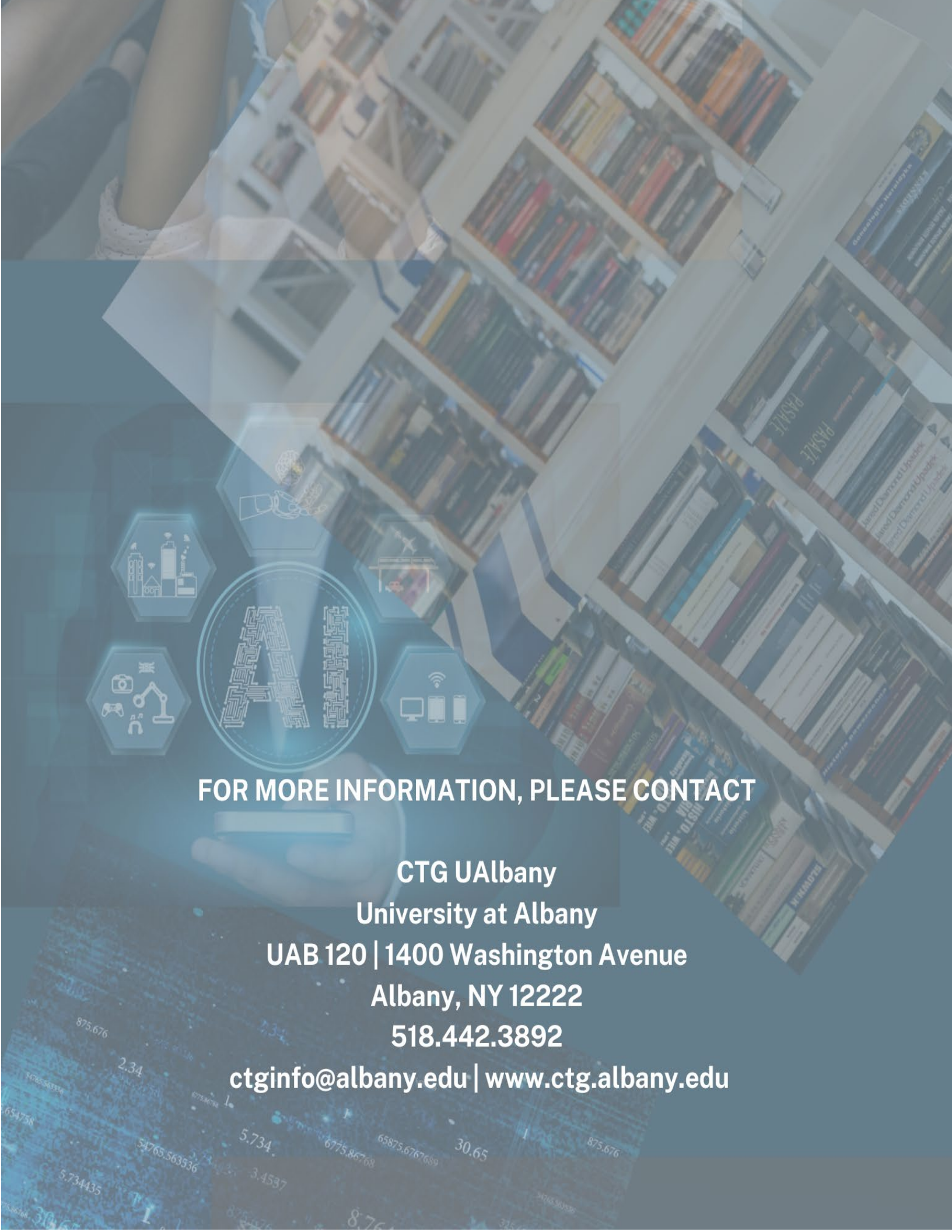
Strategic Communications and Marketing

Given the youth of AI-related programs, there may still be community members who are not familiar with the offering of a library. This promotion, as a part of a strategic communication and marketing effort, is crucial. Furthermore, because patrons may not automatically connect libraries with AI training and education, libraries need to actively market programs through various channels, websites, physical advertising, and social media. Additionally, libraries can promote their programs through outreach events, where the library's staff can communicate directly with community members and inform them about programs that may be relevant to their interests and needs.

Final Remarks

FPL offers various AI programs to the public, ranging from a series of pop-ups about AI to AI Maker Kits. This case study underscores the role of public libraries not just as repositories of knowledge but as active institutions within the communities they serve. By offering AI programs to the public, the library provides educational information, equips patrons with practical skills, and contributes to a more informed and engaged public. Moreover, these programs benefit the library by expanding its target populations and strengthening the linkages between the library and the community it serves, thereby fulfilling the educational vision and mission the library commits to. However, AI programs at FPL are not developed and implemented without costs and challenges. The costs include significant investments in technology, such as licenses for software, hardware, and infrastructure, as well as opportunity costs related to balancing learning about AI, offering AI-related activities, and keeping up with daily operational demands and responsibilities in the library. Additionally, there are other important challenges in terms of availability of financial resources and of dedicated space and equipment but, also, in terms of ensuring that programs meet the diverse demands of different ethnic and age groups. To overcome these costs and challenges, FPL requires leveraging existing resources and utilizing free and open-source AI tools as well as investing in internal capacity building. Collaborating with external partners and seeking multiple funding sources are also critical for ensuring the sustainability and inclusiveness of AI programs.

Overall, the experience at FPL stresses the importance of listening to community needs, starting small, building staff capacity, focusing on the community, and keeping up with AI trends. Though the library has positioned itself as a trusted and safe space to learn about and with AI, the library has yet to explore options for engaging community members around AI initiatives, beyond offering classes. Investing in active civic engagement in AI initiatives is still not taking place. However, the lack of civic engagement in AI initiatives is not unique to FPL. The environmental scan of AI programs in the US as well as the three additional case studies, conducted as part of this project, reveals an absence of such programs in most public libraries, but also a willingness to include civic engagement initiatives in the near future..



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