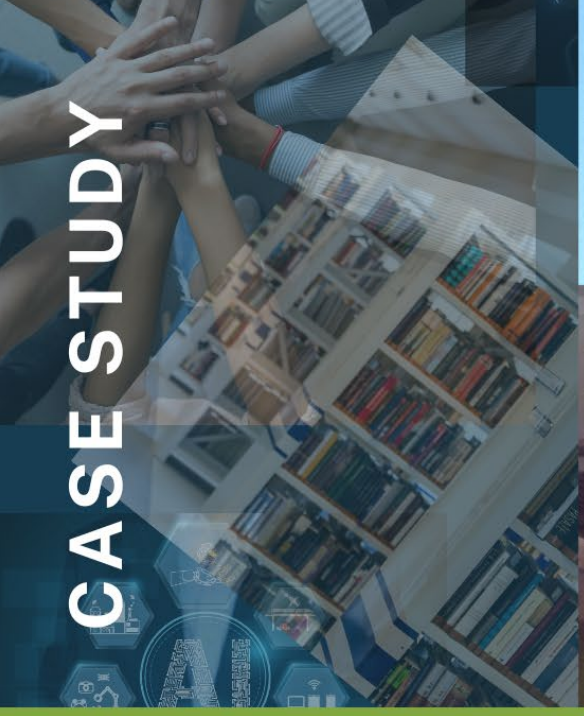

CASE STUDY

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES: The Case of Palo Alto City Library

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

The Case of Palo Alto City Library

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The Case of Palo Alto City 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 Palo Alto City Library (PACL). 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 specifically harming marginalized communities.

Although scholars and practitioners prescribe public engagement in AI to better identify potential harms, improve the quality of datasets, and address community needs, there are no clear strategies to engage communities in AI initiatives nor 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 governments ecosystems and in developing smart communities, we argue that public libraries are trusted learning spaces and community partners that may lead critical and inclusive civic engagement in AI initiatives.

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 reports, 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 in public libraries that are members of the Urban Libraries Council. Based on the programs identified, the research team selected Palo Alto City Library (PACL) as one of the four cases because they were one of the first libraries to introduce AI initiatives in the form of robotic programs for youth as well as AI storytelling workshops for adults. For this case study, the CTG UAlbany team reviewed the library documents and interviewed library staff and external partners. The research for this case was conducted in October 2024. In total, the team interviewed eight current and former library staff members, and one external partner involved in providing AI programs in the library. The research team interviewed staff members from different departments in the library to get a comprehensive understanding of AI programs, with interviews lasting between one and two hours. 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 Palo Alto City Library, outlining their benefits to the community, associated costs, and challenges in implementation. It also describes some strategies they employed to address and overcome these barriers.

Background

Context of the Community

Palo Alto, located 35 miles south of San Francisco, is often referred to as the "Birthplace of Silicon Valley." The city is home to major technology companies such as HP, VMware, and PARC (formerly Xerox PARC), as well as Stanford University, making it a hub for technology and innovation. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2020, Palo Alto had a population of approximately 68,572 residents, characterized by a highly educated and relatively diverse community. Nearly 75% of the population holds a bachelor's degree or higher. The population is predominantly White (48.5%) and Asian (35.4%), with smaller percentages of Hispanic, Black, and multi-racial individuals. Additionally, Palo Alto boasts a high median household income of $194,782. Overall, Palo Alto is characterized by a highly educated and relatively affluent community, bolstered by a strong presence of technology and innovation companies alongside prestigious educational institutions.

Palo Alto City Library

The Palo Alto City Library (PACL) operates five branches, with its first branch established in 1956. Today, these branches include the Children's Library, College Terrace Library, Downtown Library, Mitchell Park Library, and Rinconada Library. Guided by its mission to connect a “diverse community through knowledge, resources, and opportunities” while nurturing “innovation, discovery, and delight” (PACL, 2024), the library has continuously evolved to meet the changing needs of the community and adapt to technological advancements. In 2022, the Palo Alto City Library earned a 5-star rating from the *Library Journal’s Index of Public Library Service*, the highest recognition for public libraries. This rating is based on per capita library use, including materials circulation, library visits, event attendance, and usage of public computers and Wi-Fi.

The Palo Alto City Library has been the recipient of multiple competitive grants from the Institute of Museums and Library Services, the Pacific Library Partnership, and the Friends of the Palo Alto Library. These grants have supported various innovative initiatives, including the development of a robotics program, the creation of digital labs, and the enhancement of digital resources, such as access to eBooks from O’Reilly and streaming classical concerts on Medici.tv.

As a result of pandemic building closures and to align with the goals outlined in its 2018-2021 Strategic Plan to “leverage technology to integrate the library into the lives of community members,” the library established its presence on online platforms like YouTube, Twitch, and Zoom to host virtual events. Under this strategic plan, the Palo Alto City Library aimed to help its patrons stay informed on emerging technologies and trends, as well as to offer diverse resources to library users for creating content and meeting their evolving digital literacy needs.

AI Programs in the Library

Since 2017, PACL has introduced several initiatives to increase awareness and to build competencies related to AI technologies for the community. AI initiatives at PACL began with a robotics program, Robo Dojo, for which in 2019 the library received a Top Innovator Award from the Urban Libraries Council, but has now expanded to include a range of programs from lectures to a comprehensive digital lab.

Increasing Awareness

One important way to raise awareness in the community is by allowing patrons to interact with robots. In 2017, PACL unveiled Dewey, a humanoid robot built on the NAO platform,[1] designed to interact with patrons by answering questions and providing information using application programming interfaces (APIs), such as *The New York Times* Best-Seller List and library event APIs. According to library staff, Dewey utilized machine learning and natural language processing to simulate human-like interactions. To improve its conversational abilities, the library also experimented with tools from platforms such as Facebook and Google. Dewey, made possible through a Pacific Library Partnership Innovation Grant in 2017, marked the library's pioneering step into AI initiatives.

Building on these initial robotics initiatives, PACL launched an innovative project featuring FarmBot, a robot designed to perform agriculture tasks. This project is a collaboration with a Girl Scouts group, Space Cookies, where the team built the FarmBot from scratch by assembling multiple parts, including wires, sensors, and chips. With a combination of different robotic components and software, FarmBot could autonomously sow seeds, water plants, and eliminate weeds. More importantly, the library also integrated FarmBot with humanoid robots, like Elsie, via APIs. In doing so, Elsie could issue commands to FarmBot to water plants, showcasing the interplay of different AI-based components. This was a powerful way to raise awareness in the community about the potential of robots and AI, particularly the use of natural language to issue commands.

[1] The NAO platform is a humanoid robot platform developed by SoftBank Robotics (formerly known as Aldebaran Robotics). NAO robots feature a variety of sensors, cameras, microphones, and speakers, and are widely used in educational, research, and interactive applications.

In addition to programs involving robots, PACL has hosted seminars and conversations about AI. For example, in October 2023, they hosted a conversation on *AI in Higher Education* with Dr. Anthony Chow, Director of the School of Information at San Jose State University. The discussion examined both potential benefits and challenges of AI in academia, addressing concerns such as the risks of undermining critical thinking, spreading misinformation, and reinforcing data biases. At the same time, the session underscored the transformative potential of AI across various fields when applied ethically and responsibly. The event was recorded, with the video available on the library website.

Also, motivated by the library's effort to apply AI in their workplace, some of the library staff involved in AI programs were invited by Palo Alto City staff to share their expertise on integrating AI tools, such as ChatGPT, into their daily activities. The library organized an hour-long workshop that provided an introduction to AI, explained its main functions, and demonstrated its practical applications. In addition, the staff addressed potential concerns, such as societal and ethical implications. A similar workshop was conducted at the Palo Alto Art Center, helping staff of the community services department to explore how to use generative AI software, such as ChatGPT, on marketing tasks to rewrite promotional text and materials for different audiences and to generate tailored social media posts. The library also hosted an AI event at a local senior center as part of its ongoing digital literacy program with them. During the lecture, library staff introduced AI concepts to senior participants, helping them understand its potential applications. This session was part of the regular activities organized with the senior center to teach essential skills to help them navigate digital tools, including eBooks.

Building Competencies

PACL has implemented several AI-focused initiatives to build competencies of community members. The library first introduced hands-on experiences with AI through interactive robots and coding workshops. Following the success of Dewey, the fist robot, the library introduced Elsie, a humanoid robot based on a Misty platform.[2] They organized interactive programs like "Show and Tell" sessions, where children could engage with the robots by asking questions such as, “What time is it now?” and playing interactive games. These programs also included coding workshops for children aged 11 and up, where participants learned basic coding concepts to program the robot’s movements, such as performing dance moves like dabbing or flossing. During the pandemic, when in-person workshops were paused, the library also adapted by offering coding resources online through platforms like YouTube.

In addition to humanoid robot programs, PACL also developed a flying drone coding tutorial for beginners in collaboration with San Jose State University, particularly targeting teenagers and young adults. In the drone program, participants learned basic programming techniques to coordinate multiple drones to take off and land in a synchronized pattern. Moreover, by attaching LED lights to the drones, the program enabled participants to control the drones' light flashes, thereby creating a light show with a drone swarm. With the integration of APIs, the drones were also able to interact with the humanoid robots to perform pre-defined tasks.

The library introduced an innovative AI Storytelling Workshop, which used different AI tools to foster creativity among adults and teens. Specifically, the workshop was developed using three free AI tools: ChatGPT, Stable Diffusion, and ElevenLabs. The workshops, designed for teens and adults, aimed to make AI accessible to everybody and inspire their imagination

[2] The Misty platform is an open robotics platform developed by Misty Robotics. It contains a trove of programming tools like Python, C#, and HTTP API endpoints to enable developers to build custom applications and functionalities for Misty robots. Misty robots feature customizable eyes, voice, and movements that allow developers to craft engaging and interactive social experiences.

about its potential uses. Participants for storytelling workshops were prompted to generate stories using ChatGPT and collaborate to refine and enrich the stories using other AI tools. They created videos based on the stories to share and discuss. These videos were also uploaded on the library Reboot Room's YouTube channel. The library conducted three workshops on AI storytelling, two of them were at the library and one was in a retirement community in downtown Palo Alto. According to a blog post on the library's website, these sessions also provided insights into the potential benefits of AI technologies, as well as the challenges they pose to society.

The library has also introduced other AI tools to patrons through its Vintage Media Lab (VML) sessions, held every Wednesday. The Vintage Media Lab aims to help patrons preserve information in old media formats, such as photographs, home movies, vinyl records, and cassettes. Patrons bring in items like VHS tapes and slides to digitize and discuss potential uses of AI, such as image correction or restoration. Additionally, VML users have learned about more advanced AI applications, like tools that can animate photos of deceased relatives. According to the library staff, while many participants are aware of AI, they often have little hands-on experience with it. These sessions frequently spark engaging conversations between patrons and librarians about the role of AI in their lives.

One of the library staff members has also used open resources in sessions to introduce children to AI concepts. For instance, the AI lessons on Code.org, introduce foundational knowledge and inspire children's critical thinking about AI — have been presented to children to enhance their interest and understanding of AI. Other resources, such as Google's Quick Draw and Teachable Machine, have been introduced and integrated into programming for children. In these programs, children learn about how the machine-learning algorithm uses datasets to predict what users are drawing and how these algorithms can be taught to classify images, sounds, and body positions, thereby forming children's understanding of computer vision.

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

The library currently does not have any specific AI initiatives planned for the future, but the staff is exploring several ideas, which include both initiatives about raising awareness and building competencies, mainly through hands-on workshops. One of them includes featuring AI activities such as augmented story time, web-based virtual reality rooms, and use of robots during the 10th anniversary celebration of one of the library branches. Another prominent idea is to initiate an AI help desk or workshops to assist people when they experience challenges with AI tools. The aim is to help users identify possible challenges in using AI tools, such as problems with prompt structures. Relatedly, the staff is interested in having local large language models demos for patrons so they can use the tools on local computers instead of cloud-based systems.

Other ideas include having introductory AI programs for tweens and older patrons. These classes could focus on what AI is, its practical uses in daily life and some of the potential concerns. Patrons could use these in specific activities in their lives, such as managing finances or organizing tasks. In addition, staff suggested teaching people how to critically evaluate AI tools and their outputs, in addition to general AI literacy.

Benefits of introducing AI Programs

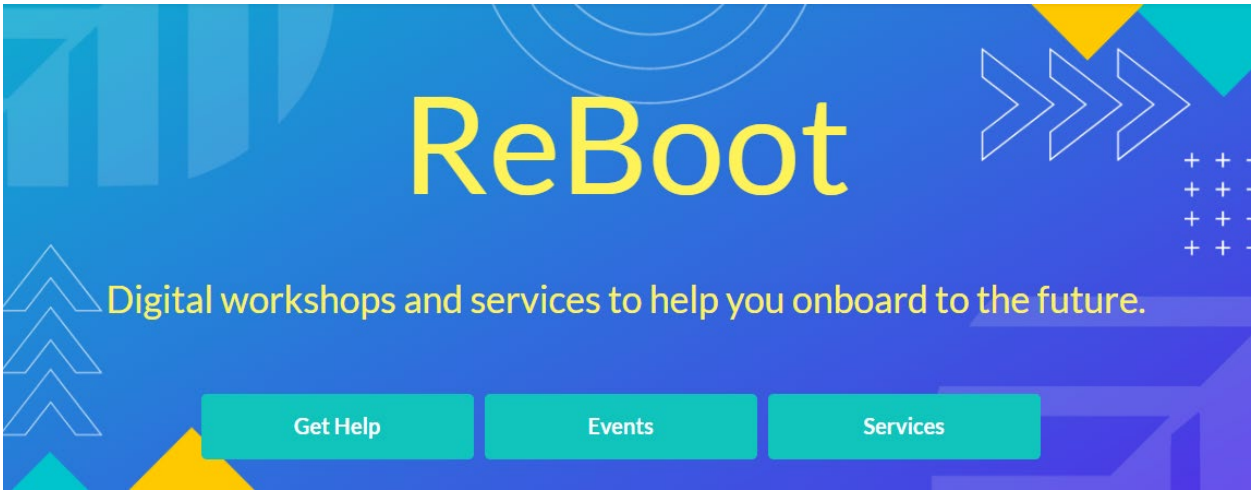
According to the library staff, the AI programs offered have benefits to the community members as well as the library. The following sections briefly explain these benefits.

Benefits to Community Members

The library staff believe that AI programs offer numerous benefits to the community. First, because participants in these programs are usually aware of AI as an emerging technology but have limited understanding of its specific capabilities, workshops and interactive sessions help them gain deeper insights into the potential of AI. These sessions do not only facilitate hands-on learning but also encourage open discussions that help demystify AI. Feedback from participants reveals that community members are intrigued and excited about AI but also have fears surrounding AI and its implications. By taking part in the library's interactive programs, they get more information about AI, which helps them address their concerns.

Second, the library's AI initiatives contribute significantly to building digital literacy skills. Programs like AI storytelling workshops and virtual reality (VR) sessions offer participants hands-on experience with cutting-edge tools. For example, storytelling workshops teach patrons how to use platforms like ChatGPT and ElevenLabs to create stories and videos. Similarly, VR sessions broaden participants' mindsets about using AI tools by showcasing features of specific technologies that participants had not previously considered. Described by library staff as "aha moments," these VR sessions challenge participants' preconceived assumptions about how technologies work and encourage them to actively leverage these tools. Such experiences empower patrons to proactively explore the potential of AI tools and equip them with practical skills and confidence for navigating AI technologies.

Third, the library has positioned itself as a hub for AI exploration by offering curated resources, knowledgeable staff, and connections to external materials and experts. Beyond providing programs and tools, the library serves as a safe and supportive space where patrons can explore AI, identify their interests, and engage with some of these emerging technologies. By combining educational programs with access to expert guidance and resources, the library empowers community members to understand both the opportunities and challenges presented by AI.



Benefits to the Library

Library staff members believe these AI programs have also significantly benefited the library by modernizing its services, enhancing its reputation, and attracting new patrons. Traditionally, public libraries have served as hubs for knowledge, but this role has evolved with the times and the needs of the community. At PACL, offering AI-focused programs allows the library to adapt to technological advancements while introducing patrons to emerging tools such as AI, VR, and robotics. This reinforces the role of the library as a knowledge hub for learning and innovation, ensuring continued engagement with the community. The

programs are particularly relevant in Palo Alto, where the affluent community values innovative experiences offered by the library. For instance, while story time for children is a common feature in libraries, PACL's use of robots during story time sessions makes the experience appealing to patrons. The use of robots for these programs has also allowed the library to create inclusive initiatives, such as story time for children on the spectrum.

Second, by offering innovative programs, the library has strengthened its public image and aims to attract new demographics. According to the staff, AI programs have the potential to draw in audiences who might not normally visit the library, such as young professionals in their 20s. Currently, many patrons use the library for their children, Wi-Fi access, or printing needs. However, by introducing AI and robotics programs, the library hopes to appeal to a broader audience, particularly young adults and professionals. One staff member noted a common participation gap in library usage: the library sees engagement from youth, teens, and tweens, followed by a decline until people reach their 30s or 40s, often as parents. Programs involving AI, VR, and robotics provide an opportunity to re-engage this demographic group (young patrons in their 20s) and attract individuals who may not typically consider visiting a library.

Library staff also benefits from AI programs. First, as part of the AI initiatives, the library organizes internal workshops for staff to demonstrate the AI tools. This sparks interest among staff as they also want to use the tools and apply them to their work and other activities. These tools can help staff see the benefits of AI as well as have the opportunity to use AI in some tasks that are tedious and mundane to free up time for more engaging, challenging, and fun work.

Costs of Introducing AI-related Programs

Main Costs

At PACL, the main costs of introducing AI program depend on the type of AI technology used. For example, when using existing hardware as well as free AI tools, the cost of designing and offering an AI program is usually relatively low. This has been the case for programs that use ChatGPT, ElevenLabs, and Stable Diffusion for AI storytelling workshops. Additionally, the library's investment in a digital lab, The Reboot Room, has played an important role in supporting AI programs. This project was made possible through funding from various grants, including one from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The lab provides essential infrastructure, such as computers and other equipment, enabling the implementation of AI-based programs in PACL.

However, costs increase as advanced technologies or upgrades are needed. For instance, although tools like ChatGPT are initially free, the library opted to enhance its services by

subscribing to ChatGPT Plus. Similarly, the library upgraded the graphics card on a computer to support game streaming. The more significant technology-related expenses stem from the robotics program. While the initial purchase of robots is often covered by grants, ongoing operating costs, such as annual maintenance and API subscriptions, are not.

Beyond technology expenses, staffing costs are another major consideration. Offering AI programs may require hiring new staff or improving skills among existing team members through workshops and training sessions. At PACL, staff often devote their time to learning new technology tools and developing robotics programs. Additionally, the library may need to support professional development by covering travel expenses for staff attending relevant conferences or courses, adding to the overall costs of AI programs.

Challenges of Introducing AI-related programs

Main Challenges

The library faces several challenges in designing, implementing, and sustaining its AI programs. While some of these difficulties stem from resource constraints discussed in the previous section on costs, additional challenges are observed around patron participation in AI activities and securing staff support and expertise for delivering these programs.

One of the main challenges in implementing AI-related programs is related to the financial and human resources required for the effort, as these are the main costs. PACL staff are intentional about their programs and try to leverage existing resources in the library as well as free tools available online to offer the programs. However, some activities do require additional costs, which can lead to difficulties in implementing AI programs. Similarly, the library has been fortunate in having staff members with advanced technical skills that allows them to code for robots and offer other AI programs. However, the staff shared that they must keep investing in learning new skills to offer these AI programs. In addition, the limited resources also bring the challenge of balancing different programs. Even though AI programs are important, the library has other regular programs, such as English as a Second Language

(ESL) classes, which compete for resources. So, balancing the needs of the community with the available resources is not always easy.

On a side note, the challenge of ensuring enough resources for the community was intensified during the pandemic when the decline in city's revenue led to a reduction in the library's budget. Not only were the branches closed during the pandemic, the number of staff available to deliver services was also reduced. The library navigated the challenge by moving programs online. But initiating new programs and working on new ideas became challenging during the pandemic.

Another challenge is securing staff support for AI initiatives. While leadership and some staff members are on board with introducing AI programs for the community, there are others who are less enthusiastic. One library staff member noted that a few colleagues were disinterested in participating, as they did not see the relevance of AI in their work and assumed that this was also the case for library patrons. However, the tech team believes that all staff could benefit from AI, particularly in terms of having the necessary knowledge and skills to better assist patrons. Additionally, there is often a lack of consensus among library staff when it comes to undertaking major AI programs and services, making it difficult to get everyone aligned in relation to the same goals.

There are also concerns about potential backlash from the community due to the many uncertainties surrounding AI technologies and applications. The PACL is funded through taxpayer money, so it is critical that it carefully considers the needs of the community. This is especially important in Palo Alto, where library staff recognize that patrons are highly active in holding government institutions accountable. In this respect, some patrons question the library's role in offering AI-related classes, as they primarily view it as a place to borrow books. In such cases, library staff must clarify that the library is taking a neutral stance on technology, focusing on helping patrons understand and use it while providing a balanced view of its potential advantages and disadvantages.

Current Strategies to Address the Challenges

The library has addressed the challenges by ensuring resources, engaging in partnerships, and being more intentional about the programs being offered. The library prioritizes leveraging publicly available resources to minimize expenses. For AI initiatives, it relies on free versions of tools whenever possible, while for robotics programs, staff seek out free resources to help manage ongoing expenses, such as API-related costs. To fund larger

initiatives, such as the Reboot Room and the overall robotics program, PACL pursues grants from federal and local sources. For example, the library undertook a multi-year project to create the Reboot Room, a digital lab with state-of-the-art technology equipment and classroom area that allows the library to easily design new programs without the need for additional technology. The classes are now designed keeping in mind that the room is available for AI programs. Additionally, the library is in the process of hiring more staff to address the shortages.

Partnerships with external organizations also play a key role in sustaining the library's AI programs. For example, when the library acquired an agricultural robot called FarmBot, it partnered with *Space Cookies*, a high school robotics team founded in 2006 as a collaboration between NASA and the Girl Scouts to inspire and prepare future technology leaders. This partnership was essential, as FarmBot required outdoor farm activities for proper implementation. The team assembled the robot, worked on it every Sunday, and developed ways for FarmBot to interact with other robots in the library. Collaborating with *Space Cookies* was critical to successfully implement and sustain the FarmBot program.

The library also partners with San Jose State University (SJSU) to deliver a variety of technology-focused initiatives. In October 2023, the Director of SJSU's School of Information gave a presentation on the use of AI in higher education. Additionally, the library hosts an internship program where SJSU students spend their summer collaborating on technology projects, including robotics. Moving forward, the library is exploring an expanded partnership with SJSU to have students facilitate workshops in the Reboot Room, such as running AI software that requires more advanced infrastructure.

Lastly, in order to avoid the potential backlash from the community and be more aligned to its needs, the library is trying to be more intentional about the programs they offer. They try to focus on the needs and interests of the community to develop each of the programs so there is more participation. It is not always possible to identify the priorities for the community, but the library leadership and many staff members try to focus on this identification and explicitly address some of the main interests and concerns of the community.

Lessons Learned

This section reflects on the PACL experience of implementing AI programs to share insights, including success and challenges to highlight key takeaways and actionable recommendations.

Secure funding for innovative programs

Introducing AI programs, especially involving advanced technologies, requires additional funding. Due to the high costs associated with some of the required infrastructure and equipment, public libraries could actively seek grants from both federal and local sources to support their programs. For its robotics initiative, the library received funding from the Pacific Library Partnership Innovation Grant in 2017 and the Python Software Foundation Grant in 2019, which enabled the acquisition of two robots for patron use. Overall, these grants could provide essential funding to launch robotics programs and other AI-related programs and services for the community. The funding can also be used to develop a dedicated space equipped with the necessary infrastructure for AI and other technology programs. In addition to external grants, libraries may also set aside a dedicated budget for technology projects, providing essential funding to support AI programs. Overall, financial resources are crucial for promoting and sustaining AI programs and other technological innovations.

Create a dedicated digital lab with AI infrastructure

Public libraries could create a dedicated space to expand on AI programs and other technological initiatives for the community. These spaces could offer a great variety of programs and services to patrons from restoration of old media to experimentation with AI tools, as well as access to equipment and resources, such as computers, gaming equipment, a recording studio, and various hands-on-workshops focused on emerging technologies. This dedicated space could be instrumental in enabling a library to expand its offerings in innovative areas, including AI and robotics programs, while efficiently allocating resources associated with infrastructure and equipment. By concentrating technology resources in one space, staff members can leverage the synergy between different programs, such as integrating robotics initiatives with other AI-driven projects. Moreover, creating a dedicated space for new and emerging technologies can minimize the need to repeatedly invest in basic infrastructure for new AI programs, allowing the library staff to focus more on program content and delivery rather than logistical and technical issues.

Build collaborations to bridge resource and expertise gaps

While public libraries could be successful in securing competitive grants, these funds often do not cover the ongoing operations and maintenance costs of equipment. To address this, libraries could build valuable collaborations with other organizations to help offset some of these expenses. For example, an internship program with a local university could provide additional personnel to support a robotics program. Through partnerships, libraries could experiment with emerging technologies, covering advanced tools such as virtual reality, flying drones, robots, and more. Specifically, by partnering with external groups that exhibit expertise in hardware and robotics building, public libraries could secure additional support to implement and sustain AI programs. That is, collaboration brings in complementary technical, human, and financial resources and helps fill the gaps for libraries to implement AI programs.

Leverage staff expertise in AI technologies

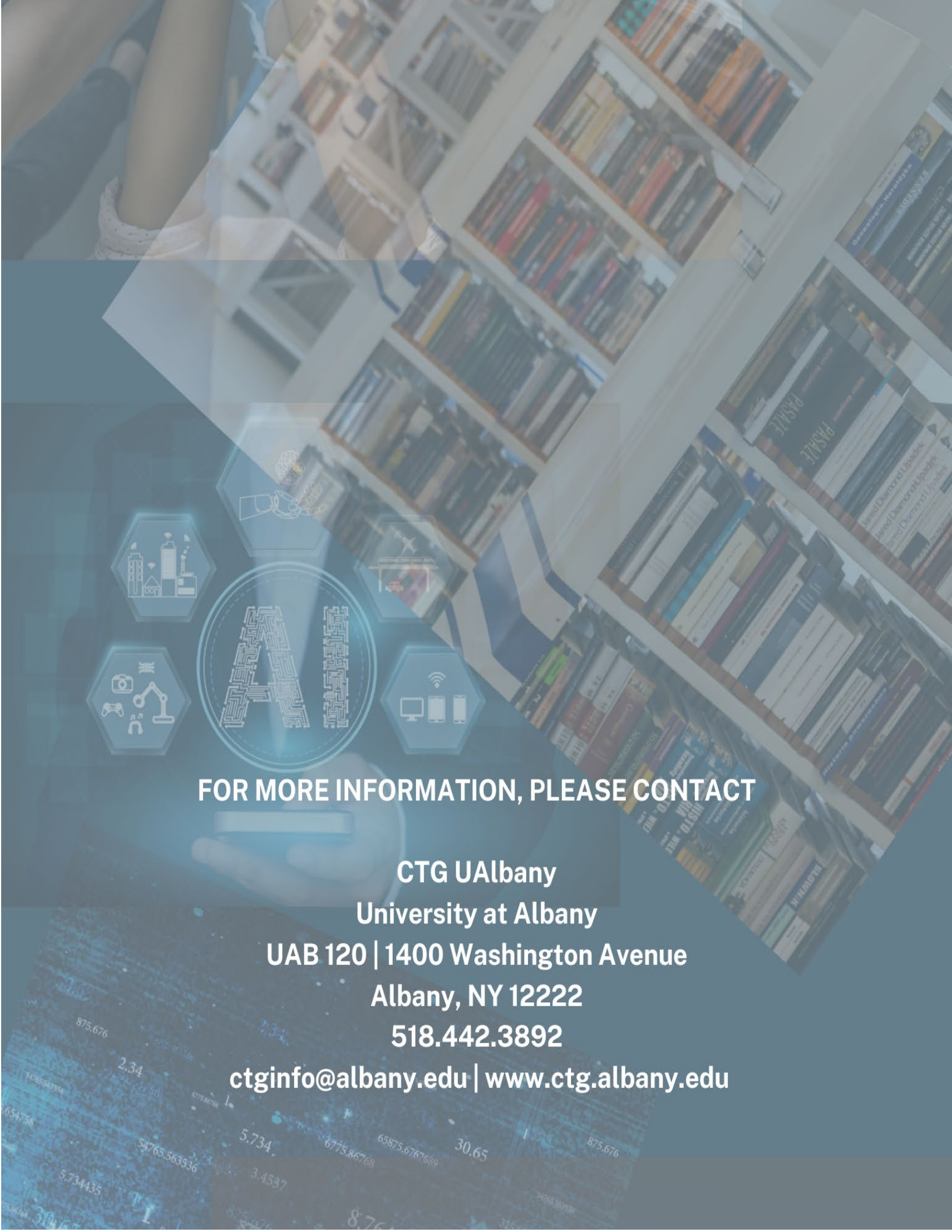
In addition to looking for external experts, public libraries can consider leveraging technology expertise among staff members to develop innovative AI programs. For instance, a staff member with expertise in coding and programming could be key to initiating a robotics program. This expertise could assist in operating robots as well as offering coding classes for children as part of the robotics program. Moreover, this internal expertise cannot only manage the technologies used in the library for programs and services, but also facilitate the grant application tasks, which are essential for expanding the library's technological offerings. Similarly, other educational backgrounds related to technology could make it possible to offer programs related to VR and specific AI tools. Since it is easier for these technology-savvy staff members to learn new technologies and then teach patrons, enhancing staff expertise could also be beneficial for expanding educational opportunities for the community. Overall, leveraging and empowering staff with relevant technical backgrounds can be a promising strategy for public libraries to initiate and sustain innovative AI programs. Staff's knowledge can drive program development, aid in securing resources, and foster community learning.

Final Remarks

The PACL has been recognized as a pioneer in offering innovative AI programs to community members. They were one of the first public libraries in the US to implement a robotics program and were recognized for their efforts when they won an award from the Urban Libraries Council in 2019. Since then, the library has continued to expand their AI programs to increase awareness and build competencies among its patrons. The library is not only focused on popular AI tools, such as ChatGPT (and other GenAI tools), but also on other technologies and applications that relate to AI, such as virtual reality and drones.

The AI programs at the PACL have benefited both the community as well as the library. On the community side, patrons are developing awareness of AI technologies as well as building competencies in using AI tools for creative purposes. Children are also learning coding skills in a fun way through the robotics program. In turn, these programs have also helped the library in enhancing its reputation within Palo Alto, where some community members are likely to visit the library for innovative programs. However, introducing and sustaining these programs involves several costs and the need to address challenges, mainly related to ensuring appropriate resources. The library has addressed some of the challenges by pursuing grants and collaborating with other organizations. However, balancing the needs of the community with limited resources compels them to be more intentional in developing certain AI programs.

Lastly, the library has yet to explore options for engaging community members around AI initiatives, beyond offering classes. Most of the discussions on AI are limited to the classroom where participants learn about the functions and potential implications of AI. Interviews with staff suggest that there have been interesting conversations with patrons on AI, but active civic engagement in AI initiatives is still not taking place. However, the lack of civic engagement in AI initiatives is not unique to Palo Alto. The environmental scan of AI programs in the US, 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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