

CASE STUDY



EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES: The Case of Queens Public Library



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

The Case of Queens Public Library

Authors

Zong-Xian Huang
Mila Gascó-Hernández
J. Ramon Gil-Garcia
Femi Adelokun
Brooks Rainwater

For More Information

Center for Technology in Government, University
at Albany (CTG UAlbany)
UAB 120
1400 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12222
P: 518.442.3892
F: 518.442.3886
ctginfo@albany.edu www.ctg.albany.edu
<https://ctgimlsai.ctg.albany.edu/> (Project Website)

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Table of Contents

- Introduction.....4
- Background.....6
 - Context of the Community.....6
 - Queens Public Library.....6
- AI Programs in the Library 8
 - Increasing Awareness..... 8
 - Building Competencies.....9
 - Promoting Civic Engagement 10
 - Future Plans to Improve the Offer of AI-Related Programs and Services 10
- Benefits of Introducing AI Programs 12
 - Benefits to Community Members 12
 - Benefits to the Library 13
- Costs of Introducing AI-Related Programs 14
- Challenges of Introducing AI-Related Programs..... 15
 - Main Challenges..... 15
 - Current Strategies to Address the Challenges..... 16
- Lessons Learned..... 17
 - Collaborating with External Organizations..... 17
 - Serving Diverse Populations with Customized Programs..... 17
 - Improving Staff Expertise in AI Technologies 17
 - Resources Seeking..... 18
- Final Remarks 19

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 Queens Public Library (QPL). 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 replicating 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 affecting 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 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 Queens Public Library (QPL) as one of the four cases because they have introduced several AI programs for community members, including a five-week course named "We Are AI". In this case study, the CTG UAlbany team reviewed

various library documents and interviewed library staff and external partners. This research was conducted in October and November 2024. In total, the team interviewed 15 library staff members. The research team interviewed staff members from different departments in the library to get a comprehensive understanding of AI programs, with each interview lasting 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 Queens Public 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

The Queens Borough, where the Queens Public Library (QPL) primarily operates, is characterized by a dense and highly diverse population. According to the latest census data, the borough has a population of approximately 2.4 million people, with a racial and ethnic composition that includes roughly 28% Hispanic or Latino residents, 27% Asian, 25% White (non-Hispanic), and 17% Black or African American residents. More than half (55.4%) of residents speak a language other than English at home, with the three primary languages being Spanish, other Indo-European languages, and Asian and Pacific Islander languages. The median household income is around \$82,000; yet, about 13% of the population lives below the poverty line, highlighting significant economic disparities within the community. Educationally, approximately 35% of residents aged 25 and older have attained a bachelor's degree or higher. Overall, QPL serves a community with diverse racial and cultural backgrounds, including patrons who may face economic challenges, reflecting the library's critical role in addressing varied needs within the borough.

Queens Public Library

Established in 1896, the Queens Public Library (QPL) is one of three primary public library systems serving New York City (the other two are the New York Public Library and the Brooklyn Public Library). QPL comprises 62 branches across the borough of Queens. According to QPL's own statistics, in 2023, QPL circulated more than 7,700,000 books and digital materials, served more than 710,000 active cardholders, provided more than 700,000 computer sessions, offered more than 50,000 events and activities, and employed more than 1,400 full-time and part-time staff.

In its latest strategic plan (2018-2023), QPL highlights five goals as guiding principles for its development: 1) advancing literacy and lifelong learning through outstanding collections and services, 2) delivering exceptional customer experiences with world-class staff, 3) strengthening Queens Public Library's role as the center of community life, 4) expanding and facilitating access to enhanced digital content and technology, and 5) providing inspiring, safe, and functional spaces for the public and staff. These goals reflect that QPL aims to serve as a safe and trustworthy institution that not only connects community members in physical spaces but also provides patrons with digital access to connect virtually.

Among these goals, goal number four (4) relates to the future application of AI, underscoring the potential for innovative digital services that improve user experiences and broaden accessibility. Aligned with this goal of facilitating digital content and technology,

QPL proposes two strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing its digital offerings and technological accessibility. The first initiative focuses on offering user-friendly access to enhanced digital resources, including expanding the reach of Queens Public Library through digital platforms, continuously improving the library’s website to provide streamlined access to digital content and information about programs and services, and providing customized recommendations for collections, programs, and services tailored to individual users’ needs. The second initiative centers on expanding the availability of new technology and e-content. To achieve this, QPL plans to provide enhanced and ongoing technology training for both staff and customers, offer sandbox sessions where staff and customers can gain hands-on experience with new technologies and e-content, and expand opportunities for special needs and immigrant populations to access technology, audiobooks, and non-English language content.



COMPUTER CLASSES

Intro To AI

This class will introduce the basics of Artificial Intelligence and its practical use in daily life. Topics will include how to use AI tools for tasks such as creating resumes and boosting productivity with virtual assistants. This introductory session will provide hands-on experience with accessible AI tools, showing how AI can be a helpful resource in both personal and professional settings.

You can register by visiting in person or by calling (718) 465-6779. This program is funded by New York City Council Member Nantasha Williams.

DATE & TIME

Jun 4, 1:00pm - 3:00pm

[Add to calendar](#) ▼

LANGUAGE

English

How To Attend?

In-Person

LOCATION

South Hollis

204-01 Hollis Avenue, South Hollis, NY

11412

(718) 465-6779

[Get directions to event.](#)

AUDIENCE

Adults, Kids(0-5), Kids(6-11), Seniors,

Teens

AI Programs in the Library

QPL offers several AI programs designed to increase awareness and build competences to meet some of its strategic goals, such as advancing literacy and lifelong learning through outstanding services and expanding and facilitating access to enhanced digital content and technology. These initiatives began with lectures providing basic information about AI but later expanded to other types of programs covering additional topics, such as robotics programs and workshops on generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT and Google Gemini). The offerings on AI are growing in alignment with the increasing interests and demands from patrons, and library staff are starting to design more practice-oriented courses that assist their patrons in responding to the quick development of AI. To ensure access for patrons living in different areas, QPL is designing both online and in-person courses held in multiple main branches, including the Central Library and the branch at Flushing.

Increasing Awareness

To align with the mission of promoting public education for its patrons on emerging AI technologies, the library hosts lectures and courses designed to raise awareness and understanding of AI. By offering these introductory programs on AI, the library aims to educate patrons with digestible information to help them make sense of AI on an everyday basis.

One of the most interesting initiatives aimed at raising awareness about AI is the “We Are AI” course, a five-week, in-person course that offers introductory information on AI technologies and their applications. The development of the “We Are AI” course can be traced back in 2018, when a Mayor’s Task Force was established to examine and make recommendation on the use of automated-decision systems (ADS) in the government of New York City. As one of the collaborators in the task force, QPL hosted a public hearing to collect comments on public concerns and perspectives regarding AI systems. During this process, library staff acknowledged the increasing demand for information about AI and its applications. As a result, in partnership with the Center for Responsible AI at New York University’s Tandon School of Engineering and Peer-to-Peer University (P2PU), the “We Are AI” course was born to empower community members to understand and have a voice in the development and implementation of AI, enabling them to critically evaluate the use of AI by organizations and, in particular, by government agencies.

Launched on March 24, 2022, QPL hosted two public sessions of the course after conducting a test run with their staff. The program consisted of a five-week, in-person course covering five specific modules: 1) What is AI: an introduction to AI and algorithms, including how algorithms work, their definitions, and their relationship to AI; 2) Learning from Data: a discussion about how machines learn from data and machine-learning-based

classifiers that make predictions by assigning labels to observations; 3) Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Decides: an exploration of ethical and moral concerns associated with AI, such as the example of self-driving car incidents and the Trolley Problem; 4) All About That Bias: an emphasis on algorithmic bias resulting from dirty data and poor predictions; and 5) We Are AI: an evaluation of a real-world ADS use case involving the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) Child Welfare Child Risk and Safety Assessments tool.

In addition, QPL offers multiple introductory lectures teaching the basic information of generative AI. For example, the course “Demystifying AI and ChatGPT for Beginners” provides an overview of this emerging technology so patrons may enhance their understanding of these applications and the logic behind them. These programs are designed for patrons without a technical background and often showcase examples of everyday AI use to help them grasp the concepts more easily.

Building Competencies

QPL offers a series of workshops that introduce attendees to generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT and Google Gemini. With an emphasis on building patrons’ competencies, the main goal of these interactive workshops is to enhance adults’ career and professional development. For instance, in the ChatGPT series, sessions concentrate on various applications related to career development, such as job searches, resume writing, and productivity enhancement. Moreover, recognizing that some patrons are foreign-born, certain workshops are conducted in languages other than English to ensure greater accessibility and inclusivity.

These AI tool workshops are rooted in QPL’s Job and Business Academy, which is dedicated to preparing the public for employment and career advancement. Both foundational and advanced technical skills essential for thriving in today’s job market are offered to equip patrons for job advancement. For example, patrons can begin with basic skills, such as using Microsoft Suite applications like Excel and Word, where they learn practical technical skills at an introductory level. For those seeking more specialized knowledge, advanced courses are available on topics such as Python programming, HTML coding, Canva design, and using ChatGPT effectively. By offering this diverse range of courses, QPL ensures that patrons of varying skill levels and professional aspirations can benefit from these educational opportunities.

In addition to the generative AI courses that primarily target adults, other AI-related programs, such as STEM robotic programs targeting kids and teenagers, are designed to build younger audiences’ competencies. These robotic programs are associated with and supported by existing STEM courses previously offered by QPL. By using robots, these programs aim to spark children’s and teens’ curiosity, encouraging them to explore STEM fields. Since these programs are currently in a pilot phase, staff members responsible for

them are actively building connections with school districts, collecting feedback from teachers and parents to articulate a suitable curriculum for engaging programming.

To better promote these STEM robotic programs, the library has created a new position, the STEM Coordinator, to oversee their development and implementation. The library's Information Technology (IT) department, along with external vendors, is also involved in developing the program curriculum and piloting ways to integrate robots into QPL's services. This includes potential extensions such as using robots to recommend books to readers, further enhancing the library's interactive and educational offerings. By combining educational services with AI-powered robotic technologies, these programs reflect QPL's commitment to providing cutting-edge STEM programming to its community.

Promoting Civic Engagement

As describe above, in 2018, a Mayor's Task Force was established to examine and make recommendation on the use of automated-decision systems (ADS) in the government of New York City government. QPL was one of the members of this task force and, as such, it hosted a public hearing to collect comments, public concerns and perspectives regarding AI systems. Although the library has not promoted any similar types of initiatives in the last few years, this public hearing can be considered a way of promoting civic engagement in relation to AI.

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

Building on the foundation of current AI-related programs, managers and staff at QPL have envisioned a variety of expansions for AI programs that the library can offer in the future. First, leveraging the current strengths and advantages of generative AI courses, the library is considering promoting AI projects targeted at youth, rather than focusing solely on adult populations interested in job-seeking and professional development. As generative AI becomes increasingly integrated into classroom settings, the library is exploring ways to view generative AI tools as opportunities rather than challenges for teenagers.

In practice, this could involve courses specifically focused on generative AI literacy, encouraging discussions with young adults on critical questions, such as how these tools work, what their limitations are, and where users may encounter ethical or functional guardrails. Another potential idea related to promote generative AI within the youth is an AI project that combines visual artwork with environmental themes. This potential plan would not only teach teens how to use AI to create art but also integrate social awareness and advocacy with AI initiatives.

Moreover, offering AI tools workshops at a more advanced level is the next step that QPL plans to undertake. Currently, the library provides a wide range of introductory courses related to AI tools and other digital software, but these courses are primarily independent and introductory. Looking ahead, library staff noted that future courses focused on AI tools could include advanced plugin functions that integrate AI into various aspects of users' needs. For instance, workshops could explore leveraging AI for social media to build personal brands or using AI integrations within popular software such as Microsoft Office, Google Apps, and Canva.

In addition to generative AI courses, the expansion of robotic programs is another area of future investment for QPL. The introduction of humanoid robots in the library represents a new milestone in the robotic programs QPL has already implemented. Building on the pilot of these robotic initiatives, staff members envision expanding beyond tabletop robotics to incorporating humanoid robots capable of interacting with patrons and responding to staff. This advancement would provide an interactive and immersive experience, enhancing the educational and engagement opportunities offered through robotic programs.



ADULT PROGRAM, GENERAL

Demystifying Artificial Intelligence And ChatGPT

This digital literacy class will introduce you to artificial intelligence and ChatGPT. Learn tips for effective communication with ChatGPT and what to be wary of when using it. This class is for anyone who wants a basic overview of this evolving technology.

DATE & TIME
Mar 27, 6:30pm - 7:30pm
[Add to calendar](#)

LOCATION
Hillcrest
187-05 Union Turnpike, Flushing, NY 11366
(718) 454-2786
[Get directions to event.](#)

LANGUAGE
English

How To Attend?
In-Person

AUDIENCE
Adults, Kids(0-5), Kids(6-11), Seniors, Teens



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 AI courses have greatly benefited community members by enhancing their awareness of AI and introducing them to various AI tools, as described above. Specifically, these programs have benefitted community members by 1) providing accurate and educational information about AI, 2) enhancing information literacy to better evaluate the potential consequences of using AI, 3) developing the skills community members need to use AI effectively, and 4) fostering curiosity about innovative technologies, particularly among children and teenagers. In general, QPL's programs provide access to introductory and easily digestible information about AI, presenting factual and accurate information about the development and use of AI tools. By offering credible information about AI, community members benefit from a clearer understanding of how these technologies work, their potential implications, limitations, and even risks.

Further, QPL's programs result in improved digital and information literacy, addressing community members' misunderstandings and gaps in knowledge about AI. By offering AI-related programs aimed at demystifying AI and its applications, QPL helps patrons to better understand how to discern valid information regarding AI. With a balanced and informed understanding of AI (for example, avoiding extremes of fear that fully reject it or unrealistic expectations that overly depend on it), community members, can more effectively and comprehensively evaluate outcomes generated by AI in various contexts.

In addition, through the programs offered by QPL, community members are learning to effectively use AI tools, which allows them to use these tools in their lives. For example, patrons participating in the generative AI course for job seeking learn how to use AI to create resumes and proofread cover letters when applying for jobs. Thus, by participating in these programs, community members not only learn practical skills for using the software but also are provided with an understanding of what AI tools are available to address various tasks that may help them in different dimensions of their life.

Last but not least, the AI programs offered by QPL can spark curiosity among patrons about innovative technologies that are becoming increasingly important in the field of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). This sense of curiosity and interest in AI may motivate community members to seek more information about technology and AI, creating a positive cycle of continuous learning, which QPL strives to cultivate through its dedicated efforts.

Benefits to the Library

The benefits of offering AI programs to the library are also significant. One of the most important benefits from the perspective of library's staff is attracting new patrons who now demand more knowledge about emerging AI technologies. With the introduction of AI programs, QPL has established itself as a public education center that offers evolving learning opportunities, continuously informing its patrons about the latest developments in AI. More importantly, by offering these AI-related programs in an inclusive way – such as providing them in multiple languages and at different levels of expertise – the library not only reinforces its educational vision and mission of increasing access to information but, also, garners support and acknowledgment from the community it serves.

In addition, by providing these AI programs, QPL has become the route for patrons to learn and engage with emerging AI technologies, which improves the connection with the communities it serves and reinforces its role as an educational and information hub. For example, the library staff have been invited by the local church to deliver presentations on the implications of AI for clergy. With these efforts, the library can promote itself and create stronger linkages with the community, establishing itself as a valuable resource and an active actor in the community when it comes to AI.

Overall, from the library point of view, by offering AI-related programs, QPL is showing that the library is still a relevant space for 21st century learning: the introduction of AI-related programs assures patrons that the library is evolving to accommodate the technological and societal changes brought about by the use of AI.



Costs of Introducing AI-Related Programs

The main cost that QPL has incurred is resources. As a result of introducing AI-related programs, QPL has both technology-related costs and personnel costs. Technology costs include the purchase of licenses for software, as well as the hardware and infrastructure required to support these programs, such as computers and robots. For example, some vendors assist the library in building and developing AI-related services and programs that cannot be solely provided by the library, such as robotics programs, which introduce inevitable technology costs for the library. In addition, often, to run AI tools, QPL needs to invest in upgrading the existing infrastructure and software to ensure the community has access to high-quality technology, including upgrading laptops, programming platforms, and robots.

Personnel costs include maintaining and retaining expertise in implementing and developing AI-related programs. Typically, QPL requires well-educated and well-trained staff to deliver these AI programs to the community. Staff are essential in assisting patrons with installing programming software, troubleshooting issues in robotics programs, and designing the curricula for AI tools workshops. 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. In some cases, the library may set up new positions for AI-related programs. For instance, to offer robotic programs to teenagers and kids, the library plans to create a new position as STEM coordinator, which will be responsible for designing the new curriculum for these programs.

To be able to cover for these new costs, the library not only leverages existing resources but also expands its resource base. Specifically, librarians strive to find alternatives that are free and open source in order to reduce the fees for expensive software licenses and subscriptions. Further, QPL is also very active in securing multiple sources of funding. Although a significant portion of QPL's budget is allocated by the New York City and New York State governments, the library actively applies for grants and seeks other funding sources to support its new AI-related programs, such as grants from the National Science Foundation and funds from non-governmental organizations and private foundations.

Challenges of Introducing AI-Related Programs

Main Challenges

QPL faces several challenges in offering AI-related programs. First, given that QPL is one of the largest public library systems in the United States, it offers hundreds of programs every week. Thus, it is difficult to effectively market and make visible the new AI-related programs to community members, particularly when they are not familiar with AI. For example, based on staff members' observations, while participants' feedback on "We Are AI" program was generally positive, the number and technical content of these courses seemed to still be a bit challenging for some patrons who had limited prior knowledge of AI.

Further, it becomes challenging to reach diverse populations and address their varying needs. In this respect, and given that it operates in a highly diverse area, QPL faces the challenging and time-consuming task of determining the appropriate level of information or programs suitable for patrons with different requirements. This involves not only collecting feedback from various community groups but also assigning resources to meet these diverse needs. As a result, it is onerous to develop customized courses that cater to varying degrees of AI comprehension, different age groups, and diverse cultural backgrounds.

Second, resource constraints are also an important challenge faced by QPL, which impacts the library's ability to offer AI programs at more locations: although QPL has more than 60 branches across the Queens Borough, not all branches have sufficient resources or capacity to develop and implement AI programs. While the long-term goal is to expand AI programs to locations beyond major branches, additional resources are needed to allocate adequate staffing and funding to support the promotion and implementation of these AI programs.

Resource constrains also impacts the extent to which the library can hire experts in AI or train staff on the topic. Since the implementation of AI programs relies heavily on librarians' understanding and expertise in AI, the demand for staff training is constant and increasingly critical to program success. However, library staff may not have the time or energy to prioritize training due to issues like understaffing. Without unified and sufficient training for librarians on AI, it becomes difficult for the library to keep designing and offering AI programs.

Furthermore, in some situations, staff changes or turnover may exacerbate the challenges associated to the lack of staff expertise, resulting in a loss of knowledge about specific AI programs and hindering the sustainability of continuously offering similar AI programs in QPL. Due to this lack of expertise, the library needs to invite expert instructors or guest

speakers to offer these AI-related programs, which might incur additional costs in the form of honoraria or other fees.

Current Strategies to Address the Challenges

QPL has already initiated measures to tackle the aforementioned challenges. First, QPL is heavily investing in marketing strategies using a multi-pronged and multilingual approach that includes social media posts, email lists, website announcements, and printed materials to attract patrons' attention. Further, to maximize accessibility and inclusivity, multilingual informational materials have been created for flyers and posters distributed in areas where the primary residents are non-native English speakers. In addition, the library is collaborating with local organizations, such as the local health department and school districts, to distribute information about AI programs.

Second, collaboration with external partners, particularly experts on AI, is key. To address the challenge of limited expertise for offering AI-related programs, the library partners

with universities and research institutions that provide access to external experts who can share specialized knowledge on AI. For instance, QPL has developed partnership agreements with external collaborators — New York University and Peer-to-Peer University — for educational courses in the “We Are AI” program. These collaborations with external partners not only facilitates the development of AI-related programs but also secures additional resources for training the library staff on emerging AI technologies.

The library staff is encouraged to participate in coding workshops offered by external library associations, which is beneficial to bridging the gap in expertise for AI-related programs.



“We Are AI” Series By NYU Tandon Center For Responsible AI And Queens Public Library Helps Citizen Take Control Of Tech

Lastly, as mentioned before, QPL is actively seeking multiple sources of funding, which may mitigate the challenges associated with resource constraints. QPL aims to secure funding from both the public sector, such as city and state governments, and the private sector, including technology companies and foundations that support AI education. With more available financial resources, the challenges of understaffing can be alleviated to some extent.

Lessons Learned

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

Collaborating with External Organizations

Collaboration with external experts has proven to be useful and beneficial for QPL in implementing AI-related programs. While librarians at QPL possess general knowledge about AI that enables the library to offer some introductory courses independently, external partners with specialized knowledge can provide deeper insights and lead specific activities, such as discussions in the “We Are AI” program. Furthermore, collaboration with external organizations not only brings in content expertise but also enables community outreach. Serving the vast and highly diverse Queens Borough, QPL needs to collaborate with community-based organizations that have a strong presence in local communities to reach and engage patrons who may not be familiar with the library’s offerings. These community-based organizations include, but are not limited to, schools, senior centers, health organizations, and universities located within the served area.

Serving Diverse Populations with Customized Programs

Given the context of the served community, QPL explicitly recognizes the unique demands of its diverse population and enacts strategies to meet these customized needs. For instance, when the library offers AI-related courses in areas where non-English speakers are the majority, it adopts a multilingual approach in marketing and course delivery. Aligned with QPL’s vision, “We speak your language,” it is evident that providing information and resources in multiple languages is critical for reaching non-English-speaking populations. Additionally, different age groups are considered to have distinct demands, and the library differentiates curricula to offer tailored courses for various age groups. Robotics programs are designed for kids and teenagers, while resume-writing programs with generative AI are offered for adults. This reflects QPL’s adaptability in meeting the diverse needs of its community.

Improving Staff Expertise in AI Technologies

As a massive library system serving a densely populated metropolitan area with many branches, QPL requires numerous librarians, staff members, and part-time volunteers to support its various programs and services. Currently, many library staff members are unfamiliar with AI, and the knowledge of AI among staff is unevenly distributed. This

creates challenges for the library in providing more advanced AI programs to the public or expanding AI programs across different branches.

To address this, it would be beneficial for the library to provide basic and standardized training materials for staff, covering topics such as what AI is, how it works, and its potential applications in a library setting. Such training would not only equip library staff with foundational AI knowledge but also encourage them to think about potential AI projects that could be offered to the public in the future. Libraries can source these training materials from various providers, including their own internal resources, external partners, or library associations.

Resources Seeking

Resources, such as funding and personnel, are essential to offer AI programs to the public. Securing adequate and sufficient funding for AI programs is a recurring concern discussed by staff members at QPL. While city and state governments provide the major funding for QPL, the library is exploring various funding sources to support AI programs that require new infrastructure or additional staff. These efforts include seeking grants from private foundations and other government agencies, as well as cultivating and expanding recognition within the local community to attract additional funding and donations.

Moreover, retaining qualified staff who can develop and implement AI programs is equally crucial. Staff turnover can hinder the sustainability of AI programs, making it imperative to ensure stability in the workforce to maintain program continuity and growth. To offer more AI programs and services, libraries are expected to have higher demands for staff with basic AI expertise. Consequently, libraries need to invest more in the recruitment, selection, retention, and training of staff members. Developing strategies to secure both financial and human resources will be essential for libraries in effectively promoting and sustaining AI programs.



Final Remarks

QPL offers various AI programs to the public, ranging from a series of courses educating participants on AI and its societal implications to workshops on generative AI tools designed for career development activities. 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 QPL are not developed and implemented without costs and challenges. The costs include significant investments in technology, such as licenses for software, hardware infrastructure, and robotics equipment, as well as training and hiring specialized staff. Additionally, effectively marketing the new AI programs to unfamiliar patrons and ensuring that these programs meet the diverse demands of different ethnic and age groups pose further challenges. To overcome these costs and challenges, QPL requires leveraging existing resources and utilizing free and open-source AI tools. Employing a multi-pronged marketing strategy, collaborating with external partners, and seeking multiple funding sources are also critical for ensuring the sustainability and inclusiveness of AI projects.

Overall, the experience at QPL demonstrates that libraries have begun exploring their role in empowering patrons with new information, perspectives, and practical skills in the AI era. While current practices are still limited to enhancing awareness and building competencies, rather than fully engaging citizens in AI initiatives, the case of QPL represents a developing vision aimed at cultivating a more informed public about AI. Through accessible learning opportunities and educational programs, QPL's AI initiatives are expected to serve as a foundation for further civic engagement in AI initiatives. In this respect, QPL does not have to start from scratch. The public hearing it hosted a few years back to collect comments, public concerns and perspectives regarding AI systems may be a good starting point to think of future opportunities to promote civic engagement around AI.



For more information, please contact

CTG UAlbany

University at Albany

UAB 120 | 1400 Washington Avenue

Albany, NY 12222

P: 518.442.3892 | F: 518.442.3886

ctginfo@albany.edu | www.ctg.albany.edu