



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



# Civic Engagement and AI: The Role of Public Libraries

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**MD TECH CONNECT 2024**

**THE UNIVERSITIES AT SHADY GROVE, DECEMBER 12, 2024**

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# Introduction (1)



- ▶ Increasing use of AI in society, including social welfare, policing, and education
- ▶ Evidence of bias in services, especially the risk of harming marginalized communities in public services
- ▶ Efforts to strengthen regulations and governance for AI has focused on engaging citizens
- ▶ However, participation from marginalized communities, requires intentional and inclusive design, alongside capacity-building tools and specific resources for engagement
- ▶ Public libraries may facilitate inclusive public participation in AI initiatives by:
  - Providing digital literacy, ensuring digital inclusion and equity
  - Offering collaborative spaces to discuss local issues
  - Ensuring a safe environment for marginalized communities

# Introduction (2)



- ▶ Research goal:
  - To understand the role of public libraries in fostering critical and inclusive civic engagement in Artificial Intelligence (AI) initiatives
  
- ▶ Research questions:
  - What role may public libraries play in increasing knowledge about AI in the community?
  - How may public libraries foster inclusive civic engagement in AI initiatives?
  - What are the opportunities, threats, benefits, and challenges of public libraries leading inclusive civic engagement in AI initiatives?
  
- ▶ Research funded by Institute of Museum and Library Services. We are partnering with the Urban Libraries Council



# AI Projects: Urban Libraries Council



DIGITAL EQUITY

## Leadership Brief: Explorations of Generative AI for Library Systems

OCTOBER 2023

### ABOUT THIS LEADERSHIP BRIEF

Artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming the previously impossible to be possible. This Leadership Brief looks to position the library as a resource for the practical and responsible application of generative AI. By providing the current context of AI usage and exploring the implications of cutting-edge AI technologies, the brief sets the stage for integration of generative AI capabilities in library services and functions.

► Generative AI and Libraries.



URBAN  
LIBRARIES  
COUNCIL

## LEADERSHIP BRIEF:

The Role of Libraries as Public Spaces in Countering Misinformation, Disinformation, and Social Isolation in the Age of Generative AI

### INTRODUCTION

The increasing reliance on digital platforms for information sharing and social interaction brings both advantages and challenges to our daily lives, local communities and global culture. Benefits include faster access to information and more opportunities for exchanging ideas. However, challenges include difficulties in verifying information, the spread of misinformation and disinformation, and potential negative effects on real-life social connections.

► Mis/disinformation, Social Isolation, AI and Libraries.

# Project Work Plan

- ▶ Mapping exercise
- ▶ Four case studies (interviews and focus groups): Frisco Public Library, Queens Public Library, Roanoke Public Library, Palo Alto City Library
- ▶ National survey of residents
- ▶ Deliverables and workshops
  - Four case studies reports
  - Comprehensive project report
  - Practitioners' Guide
- ▶ Dissemination (throughout the project)



# First Activity - Mapping Exercise: Aim



- ▶ Purpose: To identify the AI-related programs and services public libraries are currently offering
  
- ▶ Guiding questions:
  - What are the main types of AI programs/services offered in public libraries?
  - What is the purpose of the AI programs/services and who are the intended users?
  - What are the main components of the AI programs/services?
  - Do the AI programs/services include individuals from marginalized communities and address the potential negative effects of AI systems?

# First Activity - Mapping Exercise: Data Collection



- ▶ Data collection approach:
  - Search ALA, ULC, IFLA publications to identify popular library programs
  - Review websites of the Urban Library Council (ULC) 173-member list
  - Broader Internet search with keywords to identify additional cases
  
- ▶ Data collection between November 2023 and February 2024
  
- ▶ 109 cases in total (97 from the US, 12 from Canada)
  
- ▶ Inductive approach to classify the cases: 1) purpose of AI programs, 2) targeted participants, 3) partnerships, and 4) content of the program

# First Activity - Mapping Exercise: Results (1)



- ▶ Increasing awareness of AI: Different types of programs organized to present basic information about AI. These programs help the community in understanding the definition of AI, applications of AI, and its benefits and challenges to society
- ▶ Providing training on AI: Include sessions for adults, teens, and kids to learn how to use AI applications and learn coding for AI. Most popular AI application in training programs is ChatGPT



# First Activity - Mapping Exercise: Results (2)

## Increasing Awareness

### Lectures & Courses

- AI for Communities, Brooklyn Public Library & San Mateo Public Library

### Seminars & Conversations

- Building the World We Want, New York Public Library

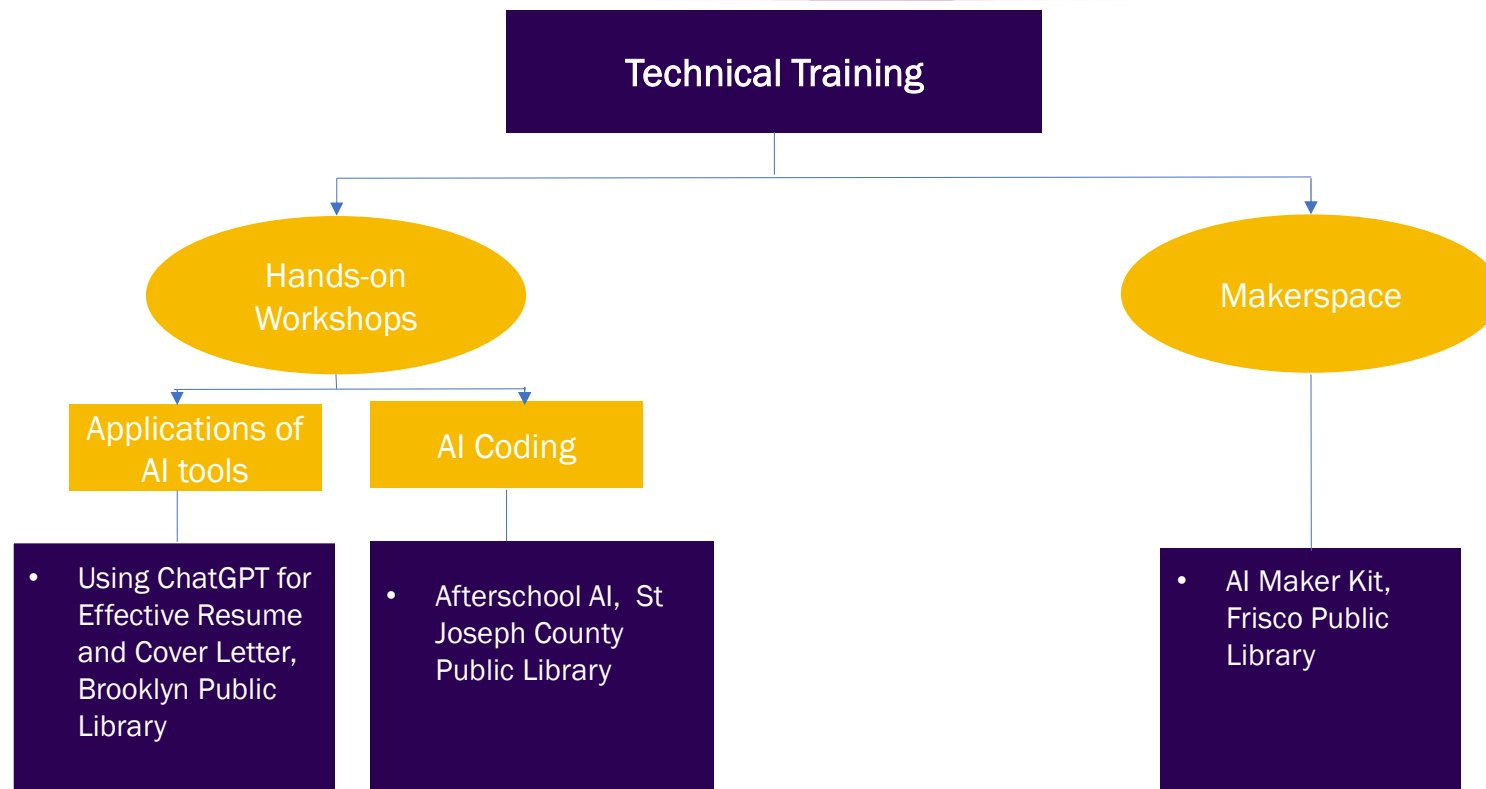
### Exhibitions

- The Laughing Room, Cambridge Public Library

### Podcasts

- Hitchhikers Guide to AI Galaxy, Knox County Public Library

# First Activity - Mapping Exercise: Results (3)



# AI Programs: ULC Member Libraries



New York  
Public  
**Library**

AI Governance & Policy  
New York Public Library: AI Seminar

- ▶ "Building the World We Want: AI and Global Governance" (2023).
- ▶ Addressed risks in inequality, privacy, and human rights with global experts.

# AI Programs: ULC Member Libraries

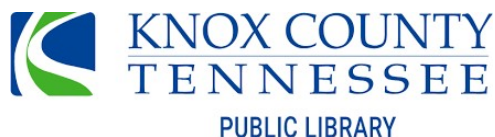
BOSTON  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY



## Engaging Teens with AI Boston Public Library: AI Decoded Lecture

- ▶ Partnered with the Mayor's Office for a creative AI workshop.
- ▶ Teen-focused program exploring AI's societal role and ethical considerations.

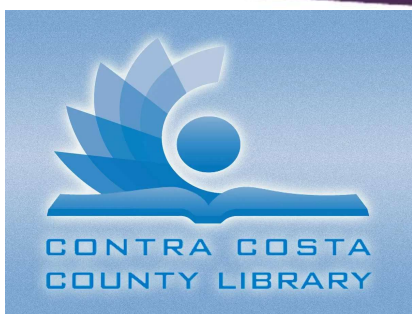
# AI Programs: ULC Member Libraries



## Demystifying AI Knox County Public Library: AI Podcast Series

- ▶ "Hitchhiker's Guide to the AI Galaxy" (2023).
- ▶ Explored AI basics, ethical challenges, and practical applications.

# AI Programs: ULC Member Libraries



## AI for Genealogy Contra Costa County Library: AI for Family History

- ▶ Workshop on digitizing and documenting family history with AI.
- ▶ Tools for photo restoration and digital storytelling.

# First Activity - Mapping Exercise: Results (4)

Universities



- Inviting experts for talks and workshops
- Collaborating with research centers for courses and exhibitions

Nonprofits



- Partnering for one-off events on AI
- Leveraging resources designed by nonprofits

Businesses



- Inviting industry experts for lectures and workshops

Government



- Offering courses jointly with public libraries
- Sponsoring AI events

# Second Activity – Case Studies: Aim and Data Collection



- ▶ Purpose: In-depth examination of the programs and services offered by the public libraries of Frisco (TX), Queens (NY), Palo Alto (CA), and Schaumburg (IL)
  
- ▶ Selection of public libraries according to five criteria:
  - Size
  - Geographic diversity
  - Current AI programs and services
  - Population diversity
  - Research access
  
- ▶ Data collection approach: Qualitative methods:
  - ▶ Between 9 and 14 in-depth interviews with public library staff and external partners
  - ▶ Two focus groups with patrons



# Second Activity – Case Studies: Preliminary Results (1)



- ▶ Benefits for libraries:
  - Attracting more patrons
  - Creating stronger linkages with the community (e.g., helping schools on STEM courses)
  
- ▶ Benefits for the community:
  - Raised awareness about AI:
    - Accurate information about AI
    - Curiosity about innovative technologies
  - Development of new skills:
    - AI literacy
    - Technical skills

## Second Activity – Case Studies: Preliminary Results (2)



- ▶ Costs of providing AI-related programs and services:
  - Technology-related costs: Infrastructure, software, and necessary licenses
  - Training
  - External speakers
  
- ▶ Challenges of providing AI-related programs and services:
  - Diverse demands from patrons with varying backgrounds (including different knowledge about AI)
  - Reaching individuals hesitant to engage with new technologies
  - Uneven levels of knowledge about AI among staff members → Lack of collaboration within the library

# Conclusion



- ▶ Public libraries have started to offer AI programs with the purpose of raising awareness and providing technical training
- ▶ Current programs and partnerships by public libraries can be leveraged by government agencies (and other stakeholders) to design participatory mechanisms in AI initiatives to receive feedback
- ▶ However, public libraries must expand AI programs:
  - Tailor programs for marginalized communities
  - Collaborate with local government
  - Design public participation opportunities
- ▶ They must also invest in AI internally:
  - Have a shared approach to AI
  - Raising awareness about AI among library staff
  - Use AI internally to enhance existing programs and services

# Thank You!



Center for Technology in Government (CTG UAlbany)  
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