

Bridging the AI Divide

A Collaborative Framework for Critical AI Literacy in Public Libraries

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INTRODUCTION

The Community Workshop Series (CWS) is a student-led organization seeking to narrow the digital divide in local communities. Primarily serving older adults, CWS designs and teaches introductory tech classes in public libraries. These classes promote foundational digital literacy skills, giving patrons the agency to use technology effectively and safely.

Recent patron survey feedback indicated a high degree of interest in artificial intelligence (AI). The rise of generative AI has rapidly reshaped the information landscape, and access to AI tools are far from equitable. Users today face a number of barriers, from knowing what AI tools are available to using them effectively. Taking these barriers and local interests into account, CWS began designing an AI Basics course.

DEVELOPMENT

The AI Basics class was designed as a foundational introduction to generative AI. The anticipated audience was older adults with limited to no academic or professional exposure to AI. The course discusses practical usage skills as well as critical literacy topics. These include AI's strengths, limitations, safety, and ethical implications.

Guiding frameworks for the course include Human-Centered AI (HCAI), developed by Ben Shneiderman (2020), and UNESCO's *Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research* (Fengchun & Holmes 2023). These works emphasize equity and human agency in the use of AI tools.

CONTENT

- A 60-minute, five-module curriculum
- Delivered at 2 CWS partner public libraries and 1 nonprofit organization
- Evaluated through a pre/post Likert survey and qualitative feedback

60
MINUTES

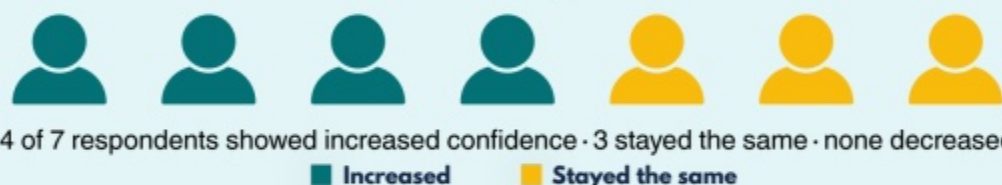
5
MODULES

3
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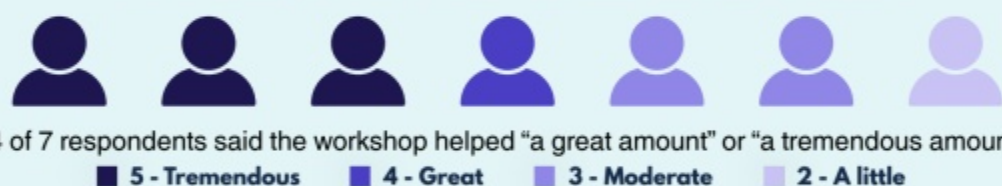


RESPONSE

Self-Rated AI Knowledge: Before → After



Workshop's Helpfulness: AI Ethics & Bias



n = 7 survey respondents (of ~17 total session participants; survey participation was voluntary)

- AI Basics attendance outpaced other CWS technology topics.
- Feedback directly requested more advanced content, including explicit comparisons across AI tools.

CONCLUSION

Participants' engagement throughout AI Basics reflects real interest in learning about AI among older adults. Prior studies (Barrie, 2021; Kanglie, 2025; Kaur, 2023) similarly report that older adults' have a desire for education about AI across multiple regions. We believe public libraries can particularly offer a collaborative, open space for building AI literacy and skills.

In the future we hope to:

- Expand AI Basics to all CWS partner libraries.
- Scale beyond in-person delivery.
- Offer an "AI Intermediate" series, covering copyright, AI and art, and data transparency.
- Compare features across specific AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT vs. Gemini vs. Claude).



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