

Digital Equity Intervention Proposal

The emergence and proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI) over recent years “holds extraordinary potential for both promise and peril” (Exec. Order No. 14110, 2023). AI can benefit users by simplifying workflows, automating tedious tasks, and even provide real time language translations (Shaner, 2024). It also has great capacity for harm, though, from reinforcing societal biases (Velez, 2025) to recommending adding glue to pizza (Kelly, 2024).

Because AI reflects societal biases, it has often exhibited ageism by discriminating against older adults. AI has been found to discriminate against older job applicants (Pole, 2024) and misdiagnose older adults (van Kolfschooten, 2023), and AI tools have been developed without considering accessibility for older adults (Schlomann et al., 2021). Increasingly, AI is being leveraged by scammers to defraud people, particularly older adults.

Scammers leverage AI for a variety of fraudulent activities, including identity theft, financial fraud, social engineering, and online deception (Leong et al., 2024). Tech support scams and romance scams are other AI-enhanced scams that are becoming increasingly prevalent (Herrera et al., 2024). Additionally, generative AI can be used to clone voices and create deepfakes, meaning that scammers can impersonate authority figures, celebrities, and even loved ones to convince people to offer financial assistance (Napal, 2024).

Older adults are already more susceptible to scams than younger groups (James et al., 2014), with adults over 60 reporting losing substantially more money to scammers, despite being less likely to report (Federal Trade Commission, 2024). Napal (2024) suggests that older adults may be particularly vulnerable to AI scams due to the added level of personalization from voice cloning. The FTC found that adults over 60 are more than five times more likely to lose money to a tech support scam, and 53% more likely to lose money to a loved one impersonation scam

(Federal Trade Commission, 2024). The correlation between susceptibility to scams and age is compounded by negative correlations with income, social support, and cognition (James et al., 2014). Older adults are more susceptible to all scams, but even moreso with AI-enhanced scams. Older adults with low socioeconomic status, reduced cognition, or scant social support are a vulnerable population at high risk of being victimized by AI scams.

Public libraries serve as pillars in their communities and safety nets for vulnerable populations. They have a vested interest in bridging the digital divide and fostering digital literacy. As accessible community hubs devoted to serving all, public libraries could be an ideal place to reach and educate older adults about the dangers of AI-enhanced scams.

Proposed Solution: Scam Smart Seniors Initiative

A public library-led outreach and education program grounded in digital equity and community engagement could help older adults recognize and defend against AI-enhanced scams. Research shows that older adults are highly motivated to participate in AI literacy education, though they prefer a hands-on learning style where they can directly interact with AI applications (KanJie et al., 2025). The researchers recommend emphasizing practical benefits and structuring education around real-life scenarios to bolster participants' comprehension and motivation (KanJie et al., 2025). With this in mind, Scam Smart Seniors (SSS) will incorporate a workshop series where each workshop includes a scenario, a guided AI interaction, a hands-on activity, and a group discussion. For example, a workshop on voice cloning would include listening and comparing real and AI voice clips, or a workshop on phishing emails would include comparing real and AI-generated phishing emails and identifying the tells.

In addition to the interactive workshop series, SSS will include the following:

- Drop-in hours where patient and approachable (KanJie et al., 2025) library staff offer 1-on-1 support, with special “Bring Your Scam” days to review suspicious emails, calls, and texts.
- A resource toolkit with guides on how to identify and avoid AI scams, who to call if you get scammed, and examples of real versus fake digital content.
- A peer ambassadors program, where participants can engage with and learn with their peers in a collaborative learning environment (KanJie et al., 2025).
- A public awareness campaign through flyers, posters, social media, and local network tv and local radio, with empowering, not fear-based language.

To ensure that Scam Smart Seniors operates through an equity and justice-centered framework, all materials will be formatted with universal design principles, such as plain language, large fonts, and visual aids. Fostering an accessible, non-intimidating learning environment will help a vulnerable population reclaim their agency in digital spaces and help bridge the digital divide.

Intended outcomes of the Scam Smart Seniors initiative include the following:

- Reduced scam victimization from hands-on identification and prevention strategies.
- Increased digital confidence through direct engagement with tools in a safe space.
- Older adults feel empowered by being recognized as capable, curious learners instead of victims.
- Stronger community connections through co-learning and peer support.

Implementation Plan¹

Below is an example step-by-step implementation plan for launching the Scam Smart Seniors initiative at a public library:

¹ LIS 650: Leadership and Management in Information Organizations with Dr. Reyna provided the author with knowledge on how to create a step-by-step implementation plan, identify key stakeholders, and evaluate impact.

1. Planning & Preparation (1-3 months)
 - a. Form a project team and assign roles.
 - b. Secure funding.
 - c. Identify and secure community partners, like senior centers, AARP, or the North Carolina DOJ.
 - d. Develop curriculum and workshop content with hands-on modules, interactive components, and take-home toolkits with accessible language and design.
2. Promote & Pilot (2 months)
 - a. Promote initiative through a public awareness campaign.
 - b. Pilot the first workshop session.
 - c. Collect feedback from the session and refine as needed.
3. Full Launch (6 months)
 - a. Host monthly interactive workshops.
 - b. Start weekly drop-in hours.
 - c. Launch peer-learning program.
 - d. Distribute toolkits around the community.
4. Evaluation (1 month)
 - a. Track and analyze outcomes.
 - b. Review feedback.
 - c. Expand and update content.

Key stakeholders for this initiative include:

- Public library staff, who will serve as project coordinators, workshop facilitators, and outreach managers. They will require training on AI tools and scams.

- Participants, who will serve as the primary audience and feedback providers.
- Community partners, who can help with outreach, training, facilitating, and resources.

Resources needed for success include:

- Technology and equipment: tablets or laptops, projector, speakers, access to AI tools
- Educational materials: toolkits, visual guides, slide decks and scripts for facilitators
- Staff time and training: time off-desk to prepare and run workshops, training on AI tools
- Funding: sources could include the library operating budget, Friends of the Library, local nonprofits, or grant funds
- Outreach and marketing materials: flyers, press releases, segments on local tv and radio stations

Evaluating the success of this initiative will include measuring direct learning outcomes as well as larger community impact. Participants will be given pre- and post-workshop self-assessments, where they will reflect on their confidence and knowledge gain. Participants will also be asked to provide feedback about how the program could be improved. In terms of community impact, the public library will collaborate with the county public health department on their county-wide community health assessment. Adding questions about AI scam victimization and familiarity with AI scams and tools could help determine if the Scam Smart Seniors initiative had a noticeable impact.

Conclusion

Older adults, particularly those with low socioeconomic status, cognition, and social support, are at an increased risk of falling victim to AI-enhanced scams. As seniors continue to lose more money to investment scams (34% increase), business imposters (16% increase), and romance scams (16% increase) (Federal Trade Commission, 2024), public libraries can work to

bridge the protection gap and promote digital equity in their local communities by adopting the Scam Safe Seniors initiative.

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