

Pulse of the Library 2026



Foreword

Just four years after the public introduction of ChatGPT, artificial intelligence has changed how students learn, how researchers work and how information is discovered and used. For libraries, AI marks a continuous shift along with a set of hard choices about when to adopt, when to hold back and how to protect academic integrity and library core values.



Oren Beit-Arie

Senior Vice President, Strategy
& Innovation, Academia &
Government, Clarivate

The findings in Pulse of the Library 2026 reveal a sector that is navigating this change with curiosity, caution and, in some areas, resistance. While adoption of AI continues to grow, most libraries remain in the early stages of their journey. What stands out in this year's research is not simply the pace of adoption, but the widening gap between libraries choosing to experiment, learn and build confidence with AI and those taking a wait-and-see approach, whether by choice or because resources are limited.

The data suggest that technology alone is not the determining factor. Libraries reporting the greatest progress are more likely to have clear governance, defined strategy and investment in staff development. The evidence shows that responsible institutional AI adoption is less about the tools and more about the organizational foundations that support their use.

At the same time, the environment around libraries is evolving rapidly. Students, researchers and communities are increasingly turning to AI-powered tools as part of their everyday information-seeking behavior. This presents a challenge to libraries to uphold their role as trusted guides to knowledge and “meeting users where they are” to explore how AI can enhance discovery, support learning and improve operational efficiency.

The findings also highlight the reality that librarians are being asked to do more with less. Many respondents describe increasing workloads,

expanding responsibilities and ongoing resource pressures. In this context, AI should not be viewed as a replacement for professional expertise, but as a tool that can help library staff focus more of their time on the uniquely human skills that remain at the heart of the profession: critical thinking, research support, information stewardship, teaching and advocacy.

Progress does not require large-scale transformation but can be made in small steps with responsible adoption and governance. Libraries might consider applying AI to specific challenges, establishing clear governance and/or building staff confidence through practical experience. There is a significant correlation between structured governance and depth of AI implementation: among the small group of libraries actively implementing AI, 51% have joint library and IT governance, signaling the importance of successful governance and interdepartmental collaboration.

As libraries continue their AI journey, their greatest strength remains unchanged: a commitment to trust, evidence and service to their communities. Those principles will be just as important in the age of AI as they have been throughout the history of libraries.

We hope the insights in this report inspire meaningful dialogue, confident decisions and purposeful progress – empowering each library to shape an AI journey that reflects its unique mission while combining ambition with responsibility.

Contents

04	Executive summary
05	What's changed since 2025?
06	Introduction
07	Survey methodology and demographics
08	Findings
23	Conclusion and recommendations
25	Clarivate: Academic AI you can trust

Executive summary

The Pulse of the Library 2026 report draws on insights from more than 1,800 librarians globally, representing academic, public and national libraries. 2026 represents the third installment of this research, building on research since 2024, and offers an up-to-date view on how libraries are adapting to rapid change, in particular considering AI, open science and the evolving value of the library.

1.8K

librarians responded,
representing academic,
public and national
libraries worldwide.

The picture has shifted since 2025, when the data showed a sector at the start of its AI journey. This year's findings reveal a growing divergence: some libraries are deepening their engagement with AI, while others remain cautious and at the earlier stages of implementation. The 2026 data provide deeper insight into what separates the two.



What's changed since 2025?

AI adoption is deepening cautiously, but the momentum seen in 2025 has begun to level off

AI confidence increased marginally in 2025 but has stalled in 2026. 33% of libraries remain in the exploration and evaluation stage, though the share reporting no plans to implement has fallen from 37% in 2024 to 30% in 2026. Movement into later stages of implementation is limited: only 3% of libraries report active implementation, little change from 2% in 2024, while library users are adopting AI at a much faster pace. The United States remains the most cautious region and are less likely to adopt AI.

Strategy, governance and AI literacy are associated with AI progress, but most libraries lack all

Among libraries already evaluating or implementing AI, 49% have no defined strategic position on AI as an entry point to information and research and 28% have no structured decision-making process. Governance structure matters: 51% of libraries in active implementation operate under joint library and IT governance, against 26% of the sample overall. Structured AI literacy support follows the same pattern, though most

staff still build these skills independently. For some libraries, an undefined position is a deliberate stance.

A gap is emerging between libraries' ambitions and the tools they are using

Improving staff productivity is now the leading AI objective (58%), ahead of streamlining administrative processes and improving content discovery. Yet only 18% of libraries report their primary AI use as staff-facing, likely reflecting which tools are currently most mature and available rather than a mismatch in priorities.

Concerns are shifting toward trust and reputational risk

As libraries engage more deeply with AI, concern has moved from predominately budget constraints toward ethics and reputational risk: privacy and security (64%), misinformation (60%) and bias or discrimination in AI outputs (50%) have all risen since 2024. Concerns peak among libraries at the initial implementation phase, suggesting concerns intensify with engagement rather than deter it.

Budget and geopolitical pressure is shifting regionally, not easing overall

Pressure has eased in the United States, only 29% reporting geopolitical pressure down from 50% in 2025, and the United Kingdom but intensified in Asia and the Rest of the World. Asia is now more than twice as likely as average to report the most severe budget cuts (8%). Open educational resources (OERs) continue to grow in importance, while open access (OA) collections face a more cautious outlook.

A real signal of frontline strain

Librarians describe being stretched thinner on capacity, absorbing responsibilities beyond their traditional remit and being asked to do more with less. Advocacy and communicating the value of the library is now one of the single largest areas of expected role growth (39%). This pressure may be contributing to the AI readiness gap: libraries may understand AI and see its potential but not have the capacity to implement it effectively.

Introduction

AI is now common in the daily life of students and researchers, and by extension, librarians. HEPI's Student Generative AI Survey 2026¹ found that 95% of U.K. undergraduates use AI in some form, and 94% use it to help with assessed work. Our user experience research² shows that among students surveyed year-on-year, AI use for school assignments has increased from 45% in 2024 to 95% in 2026, while the share reporting that AI is restricted at their institution (34%) has stayed the same. This shift presents libraries with a more urgent question than a year ago: whether they can keep pace with a user base that is increasingly reliant on using AI.

As our Pulse of the Library 2025 report identified, libraries were showing cautious progress in AI adoption, though persistent gaps remained in

confidence and supported AI literacy development. This progress has continued in 2026, although confidence has stalled and implementation remains slow across much of the sector. As identified in the HEPI report, the gap between how quickly users have moved and how carefully libraries are following is now the central tension of this year's research.

Our 2026 survey marks the third year of this trend analysis, revisiting the core questions of AI adoption, confidence and professional development and seeks to identify the factors driving successful implementation. Alongside this, 2026 explores the wider landscape of open science, evolving library missions and the impact of geopolitical and economic pressures

"I would like to maintain trust by showing the library's position as one that continues its traditional direction: taking responsibility for collection development, carefully creating metadata that enables users to discover the information resources provided, and having staff respond to users sincerely. At the same time, the library should not distance itself from the trend of users increasingly turning to online information sources and AI, and should continue to explore the necessary responses."

Minoru Yamada

Senior Library Administrator, Aichi Shukutoku University Library, Japan

¹HEPI Student Generative AI Survey 2026: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/HEPI-Report-199-Gen-AI-Survey-2026.pdf>

²Students are Sprinting Ahead: <https://about.proquest.com/en/blog/2026/students-dont-want-ai-to-think-for-them/>

Survey methodology and demographics

The survey was hosted online from April 22 to May 18, 2026. In partnership with *Library Journal*, Clarivate promoted the survey to academic, national and public libraries through email, listservs, website pop-ups and social media. It was also shared directly by key stakeholders. To ensure accessibility, the survey was available to complete in English, Simplified and Traditional Chinese, Korean and Japanese languages.

In total, 1,876 responses were analyzed after data cleaning, supported by 20 qualitative interviews. The demographic profile of respondents differed when compared to 2025: 65% represented academic libraries, a decrease from 77% in 2025; 57% of respondents were located in the United States, an increase from 46% in 2025. 89% of public library respondents are from the United States. Public library findings in this report should therefore be read as reflecting the perceptions of U.S. public libraries specifically, rather than public libraries globally.

Methodology note:

The findings in this report reflect the full 2026 sample. Readers interested in how a specific finding varies by library type, region or role can explore the interactive data here: [Pulse of the Library 2026 microsite](#)

65%

of respondents represented academic libraries.

57%

of respondents came from the United States.

Findings

As a reminder, findings throughout this section often reflect the overall sample, with year-on-year comparisons heavily influenced by sample composition. For breakdown by library type, region or role, visit: [Pulse of the Library 2026 microsite](#)

Confidence in understanding of AI has stalled, while adoption deepens cautiously

Confidence in AI concepts and terminology has not grown since 2025. The average confidence score remains 3.2 out of 5, with the distribution almost exactly mirroring that of 2025.

Libraries are beginning to engage more deeply with AI tools, with respondents moving slowly into moderate deployment (13% in 2026, up from 5% in 2024). The “no plans” or “not actively pursuing” segments have shrunk from 37% in 2024 to 30% in 2026, showing more libraries are entering the funnel. However, 33% of libraries continue to sit at the exploration and evaluation stage. There has been little movement into active implementation, which stands at 3%, compared with 2% in 2024.

33%
of the libraries
continue to sit at
the exploration and
evaluation stage

Figure 1: Academic Library: Where does your library currently stand in terms of implementing AI tools and technologies? (2024 / 2025 / 2026)

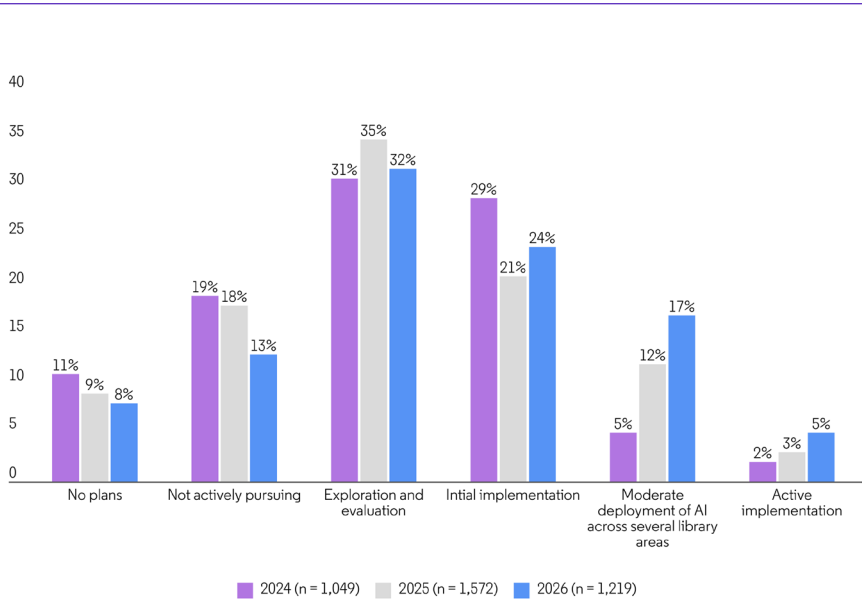
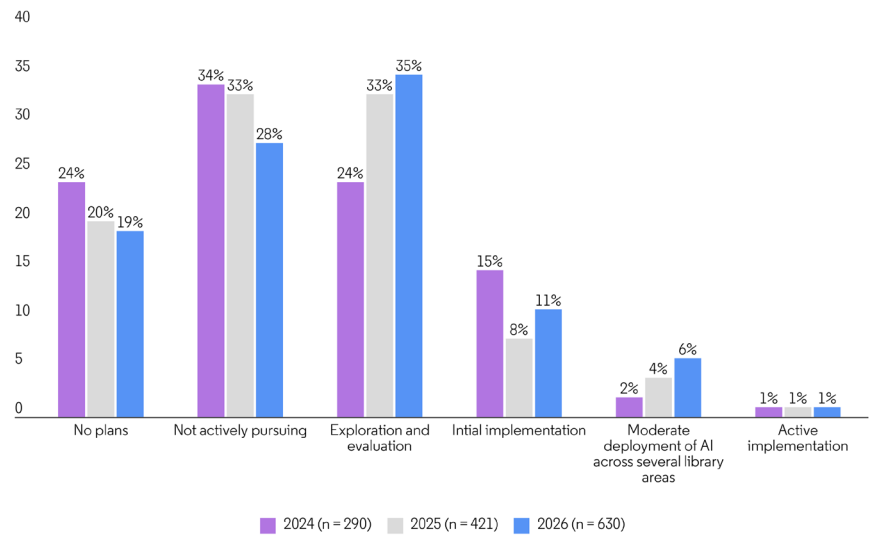


Figure 2: Public Library: Where does your library currently stand in terms of implementing AI tools and technologies? (2024 / 2025 / 2026)



46% of academic libraries report initial, moderate or active implementation, a gradual increase from 37% in 2024.

Public libraries show a different pattern: 47% of public libraries report “no plans” or “not actively pursuing” (down from 58% in 2024) and 35% at the exploration and evaluation stage. More public libraries are evaluating AI, but with very little movement in the later stages of implementation since 2024.

Viewing adoption by region, Mainland China shows the deepest AI adoption, with those moderately or actively deploying AI more than doubling since 2024, from 13% to 28% in 2026, the highest of any region.

The share of Mainland China libraries reporting no plans or not actively pursuing AI has fallen from 24% to 14%. Asia shows a similar trajectory. The United States continues to be more hesitant in adopting AI, with those in moderate or active implementation only growing from 5% in 2024 to 11% in 2026, the lowest of any region, and those reporting no plans or not actively pursuing AI remaining stable (36%, compared to 38% in 2024).

Matching the pace of change on the user side

While library confidence and implementation are moving slowly, user behavior has accelerated. Our own user experience research³ shows that among students surveyed globally year-on-year, AI use for school assignments has increased from 45% in 2024 to 95% in 2026, while the share reporting that AI is restricted at their institution (34%) has stayed the same. User behavior is significantly outpacing institutional policy.

A similar pattern to the Clarivate global survey is evident in the United Kingdom. HEPI's Student Generative AI Survey 2026⁴, based on 1,054 full-time U.K. undergraduates, found generative AI use is now the norm: 95% of students now use AI in some form, 94% specifically for assessed work. HEPI's findings also point to a gap in institutional support: only 36% of students feel encouraged by their institution to use AI and only 38% say they are provided with AI tools.

Where students turn first may have significant implications for libraries. Our user experience research asked students where they typically start a research project: 31% go straight to a general AI assistant such as ChatGPT, Claude or Gemini. Just 10% start at their institution's library website or database. Only 1% ask a librarian.

31%

of students start a research project in a general AI assistant such as ChatGPT, Claude or Gemini.

"Students are going to use tools like ChatGPT and Claude anyway, so I'd like to see a way for those tools to route them back to ProQuest databases and the library's resources, the way Google Scholar lets us connect users to our holdings. I'd like to be able to tell students, 'Yes, you can use Claude, and it will still get you back to the library.' That keeps library databases valuable instead of making them obsolete."

Scott Cohen

Library Director, Jackson State Community College, U.S.

³Students are Sprinting Ahead: <https://about.proquest.com/en/blog/2026/students-dont-want-ai-to-think-for-them/>

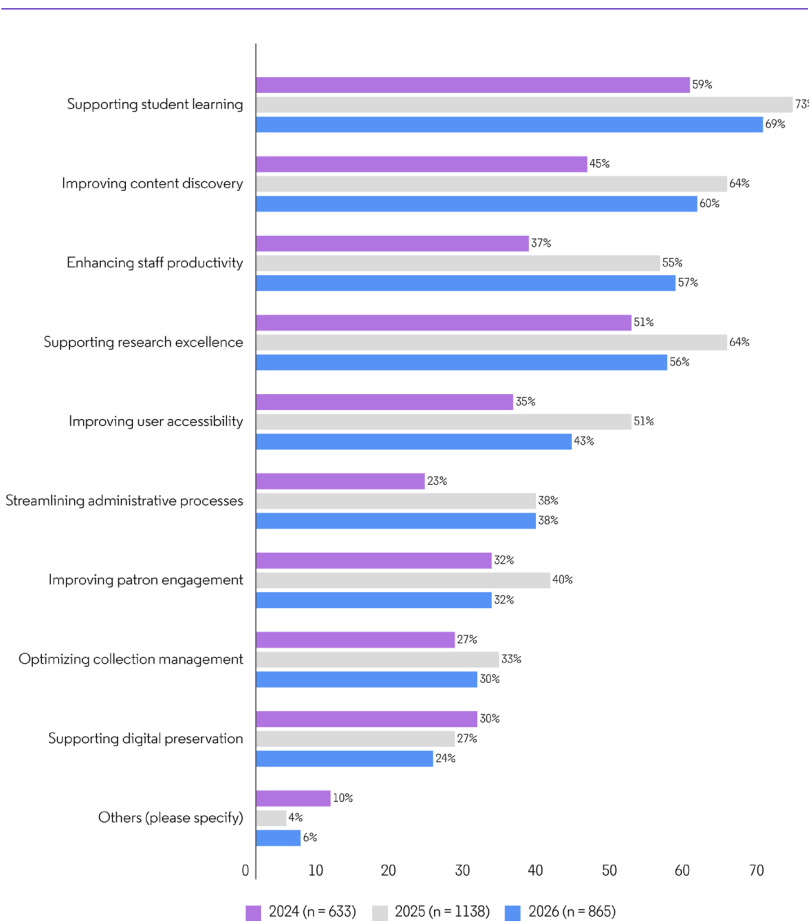
⁴HEPI Student Generative AI Survey 2026: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/HEPI-Report-199-Gen-AI-Survey-2026.pdf>

Our research shows that students critically evaluate AI-generated content: they report fact-checking their work and, most often, say they want a trusted source of information. Asked in an open-ended question what an ideal AI tool for learning would help them do that current tools don't, one theme rose clearly above the rest: trusted, verifiable academic support, with sources that are authentic and verified in real time. Libraries are well placed to close that gap but need to adapt to the AI space quickly to serve a user base that is increasingly reliant on AI and looking for support and guidance from their institution.

Libraries are focusing on improving productivity with AI

For the first time, staff productivity is the single most-cited objective for AI (58%, up from 40% in 2024). Alongside it, streamlining administrative processes (38%, up from 25%) and improving content discovery (53%, up from 45%) are the only three objectives to show sustained growth since 2024. Together, these findings indicate a growing focus on efficiency.

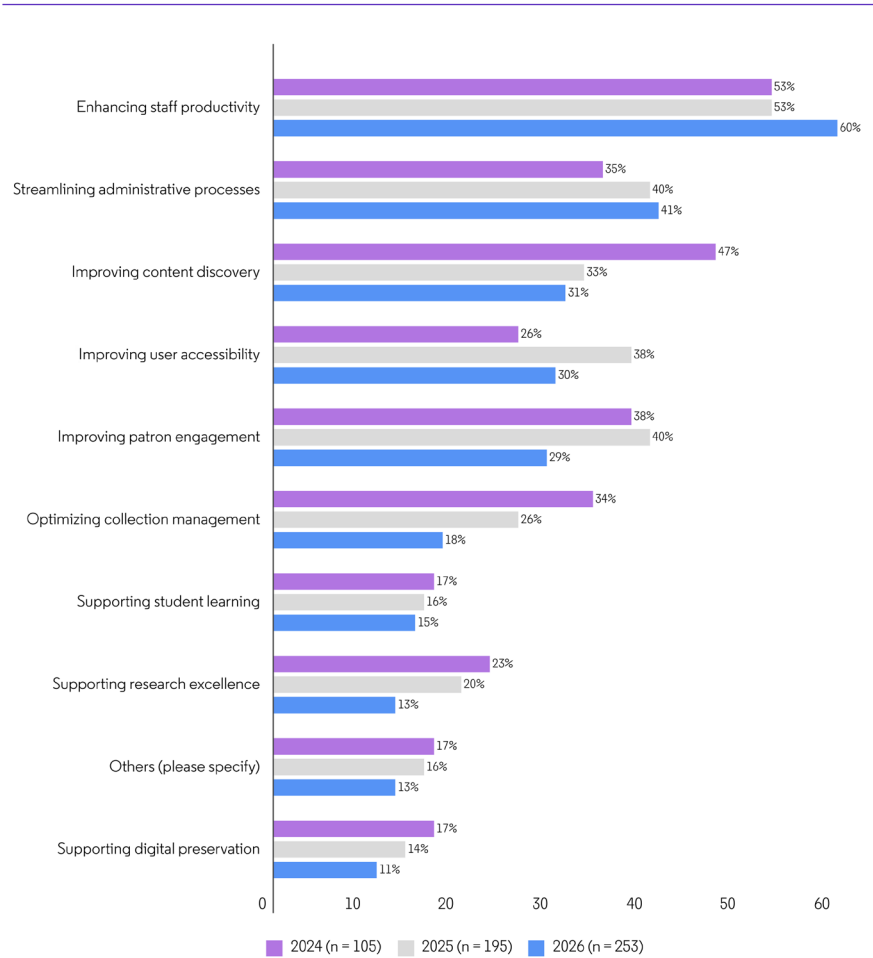
Figure 3: Academic Library: If your library is actively evaluating, implementing or running AI tools, what are the primary objectives? (2024 / 2025 / 2026)



"We're experimenting with Claude and AI Assist. We're also really trying to look at how we can help those that are depositing their works with us and doing the first round of metadata, be more accurate in depositing that metadata. So together with the other national and state libraries, we're looking at more videos, more ways of reaching people and more flexibility in our systems to do that initial checking. In terms of how we can pull it together and do.... retrospective improvements to the catalogue. We've got lots of records that have been created over 100 years of high variability. And one of the things we're starting to do is analysis to see how descriptions for access or descriptions for authors, focusing on our state's authors. We did that for almost a million records at the end of last year, which was a major piece of work... it's really paid off."

Roxanne Missingham
Director, Collections and Chief Librarian,
State Library Victoria, Australia

Figure 4: Public Library: If your library is actively evaluating, implementing or running AI tools, what are the primary objectives? (2024 / 2025 / 2026)



These objectives differ depending on library type.

Academic libraries are broadening their objectives:

Staff productivity (57%, up from 37% in 2024) and administrative streamlining (38%, up from 23%) have both increased sharply, but without displacing student learning as the primary objective (69%). The average number of objectives has also risen, from 3.49 in 2024 to 4.14 in 2026. This suggests that academic libraries are adding efficiency goals to their existing priorities rather than replacing them.

Public libraries are narrowing their objectives to focus on operational efficiency:

Staff productivity is their leading objective by a wide margin (60% in 2026), followed by administrative streamlining (41%) and content discovery (31%). Unlike academic libraries, the average number of objectives selected has fallen every year (3.08 in 2024 to 2.62 in 2026). Public libraries therefore appear to be concentrating on a smaller, more practical set of goals for AI.

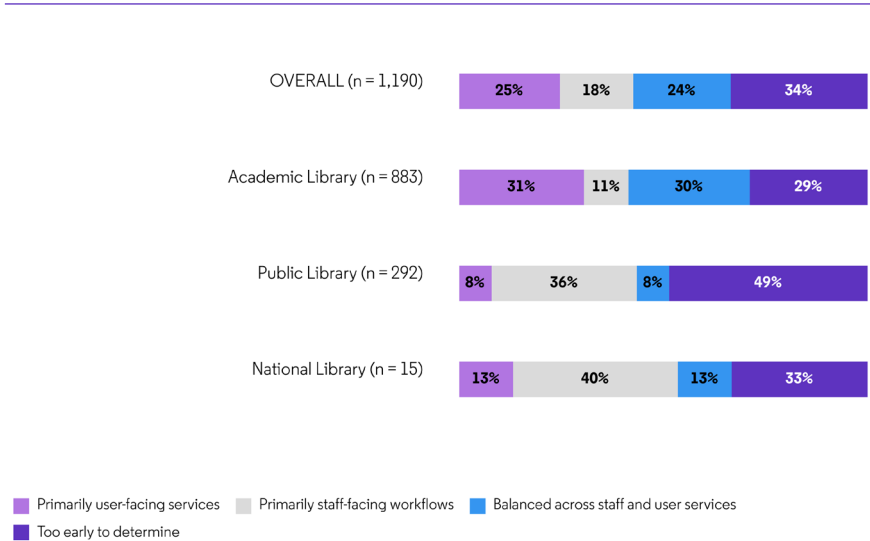
"AI is creating value across the library’s overall administrative operations. Looking ahead, although this will depend on the university’s overall policy, I am paying attention to the direction of generating rich metadata for the discovery of information resources."

Minoru Yamada
Senior Library Administrator,
Aichi Shukutoku University Library, Japan

The AI tools libraries use may not directly align with their objectives:

Staff productivity is what libraries want most from AI tools in 2026, but it seems the tools available to deliver it may not have caught up. Staff-facing AI workflows are prioritized less than user-facing tools. Only 18% of respondents say their AI use is primarily staff-facing, compared with 25% primarily user-facing and 24% balanced across both. Where a balanced approach was selected, user-facing services were significantly more likely to be in the “currently active” and “piloting” stages than the staff-facing workflows.

Figure 5: Where is your library currently placing the greatest emphasis on its use of AI (n = 1,190)



Libraries prioritizing staff productivity are more likely to report staff time saved as an impact of AI initiatives. This suggests that the objective is achievable, although the tools and workflows needed to deliver it may not yet be widely available.

An independent study of academic library workflows, commissioned by Clarivate and conducted by Emerging Strategy⁵, based on interviews with 11 library professionals across eight institutions, provides insight into this. Productivity gains from AI are real, but concentrated in specific, well-defined workflows. The core finding of this study is that AI changed where the effort was spent, with libraries implementing AI to reduce manual labor at specific points in a workflow while retaining accountability for outputs.

⁵Academic AI Impact Study: <https://clarivate.com/academia-government/blog/new-study-libraries-cut-manual-workflow-time-by-30-to-60-with-academic-ai/>

Only
18%
of libraries place the greatest emphasis on staff-facing workflows, even though 58% stated staff productivity was a primary objective.

"In the future, I would like to see AI move beyond simply generating answers and play a greater role in detecting system anomalies, securely managing user data and usage records, and diagnosing access issues related to electronic resources. Greater transparency is also essential, enabling users to verify the sources and evidence behind AI-generated information."

Jaewan Jo
Librarian (Acquisitions/IT Service),
Honglik University Library, South Korea

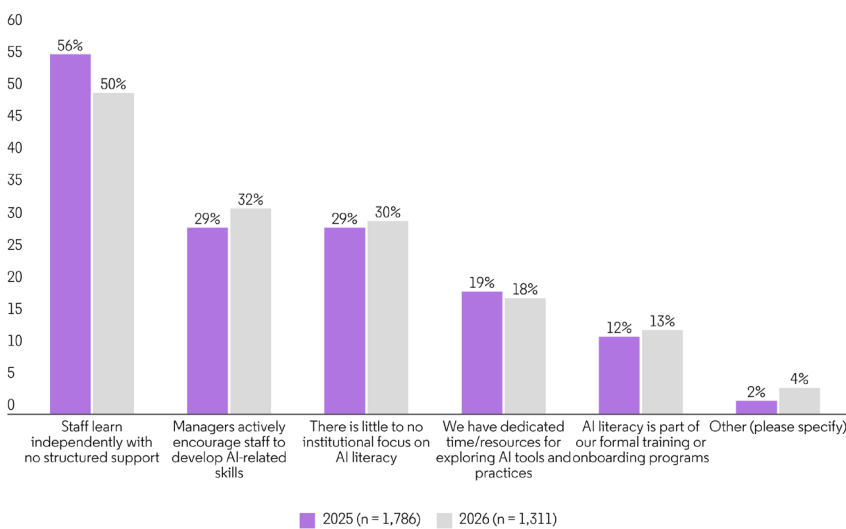
What predicts progress in AI implementation?

Libraries with both a defined AI strategy and a structured decision-making process report significantly stronger impact and more advanced implementation than those without. Yet 49% of libraries actively evaluating or implementing AI still have no defined strategic position, and 28% have no structured decision-making process at all. There is a clear correlation between structured governance and depth of AI implementation: for libraries actively implementing AI (n = 39), 51% have joint library and IT governance.

Staff skills also have an impact on how successfully libraries can implement AI tools. Independent, self-directed

learning remains the dominant mode for libraries to learn AI skills, though this has declined from 56% in 2025 to 50% in 2026. This decline is not reflected in an increase in institutional support: the share of libraries offering dedicated time and resources, or formal training is unchanged from 2025. The data shows what works: structured support for AI literacy, whether manager encouragement, dedicated time, or formal training, is consistently associated with both higher confidence and deeper implementation of AI, yet most libraries still leave staff to build this capability on their own.

Figure 6: To what extent does your library (or institution) support AI literacy development for staff? (2025 / 2026)



This is not a problem that is unique to libraries. EDUCAUSE’s 2026 survey of AI use in higher education work⁶ found a similar gap between adoption and institutional support. 94% of respondents used AI tools for work, but only 54% were aware of any policy or guidance meant to govern that use. This is framed as a significant risk, with potential consequences for data privacy and security. Libraries face a similar challenge: staff are learning independently and using the same tools in different ways, without centralized governance setting out acceptable use.

⁶EDUCAUSE The Impact of AI on Work in Higher Education: <https://www.educause.edu/research/2026/the-impact-of-ai-on-work-in-higher-education>

For libraries actively implementing AI,

51%

have joint library and IT governance.

"What we've got to do is keep learning and be able to use that in a very, very smart way... whether it's linked data, whether it's AI. Every second year there should be something that is challenging us."

Roxanne Missingham
Director, Collections and Chief Librarian,
State Library Victoria, Australia

Libraries in the United States are less likely to adopt AI

Across many of the measures included in the survey, respondents from the United States report more cautious approaches to AI.

Strategy and governance:

45% of libraries from the United States say it's too early to determine where they're placing emphasis in their AI use, against 34% overall. For almost every use case measured, libraries in the United States were less likely to report "currently active" or "piloting". 60% of libraries from the United States have no defined strategic position on AI, against 49% overall. U.S. libraries were also less likely to have joint library and IT governance in place (19% against 26% overall).

Professional development:

Investment in training follows a similar pattern, with the United States more likely to report no institutional focus on AI literacy (38% against 30% overall) and less likely to offer formal training or manager encouragement.

Open science:

Only 6% of United States libraries have a defined open metadata policy, the lowest share of any region, and the United States is the least likely to consider open educational resources important (27% rank "very important" against 32% overall) and least optimistic about the role of open access collections going forward (16% rank "very important" against 22% overall).

Respondents from the United States present a significantly different concern profile than other regions. They report lower concern about budgets and funding pressure and greater concern about policy, bias, misinformation and geopolitical pressure.

Given that the United States makes up 57% of the 2026 sample, several of the headline sector-level findings are heavily influenced by the cautious nature of this region. For example, respondents from the United States account for roughly two-thirds of the 49% of libraries reporting no defined strategic position.

When we isolated the data for United States academic libraries, the trends were similar to the overall United States data highlighted in this section.

Asia and Mainland China have pulled ahead of other regions

Where 2025 framed Mainland China as an emerging region with promise, the 2026 findings indicate that Mainland China has progressed further and is now among regions reporting the most advanced implementation and clearest governance structures.

Both Asia and Mainland China report the greatest strategic clarity of any region, with 30% and 41% respectively focusing on a balanced approach of actively maintaining their own AI environment, as well as making library content and services available directly in external services such as ChatGPT, Gemini or Claude (against 19% overall). Both regions also report a lower likelihood of having no structured decision-making process in place (Mainland China: 13% and Asia: 13% against 28% overall).

Mainland China's workforce data may explain why the pace appears different, with 50% of respondents saying their workforce is already experiencing AI-driven transformation,

likely accounting for the region's elevated anxiety around AI and technology (37% selecting this as a top challenge against 10% overall).

Asia and the Rest of World remain the strongest advocates for open access and open educational resources, both more likely to anticipate growth in these resources and collections over the next 3-5 years. Asia's picture is more complicated: optimism and budget pressure exist side by side. 21% of Asian libraries expect their open access budget to grow by 25% or more (against 8% overall), yet 30% also report that funding cuts have significantly impacted their open access collections strategy (against 18% overall).

"There is also the potential to integrate AI tools into specific subject services, enabling subject librarians and users to access relevant information with greater precision and personalization."

Liu Liu

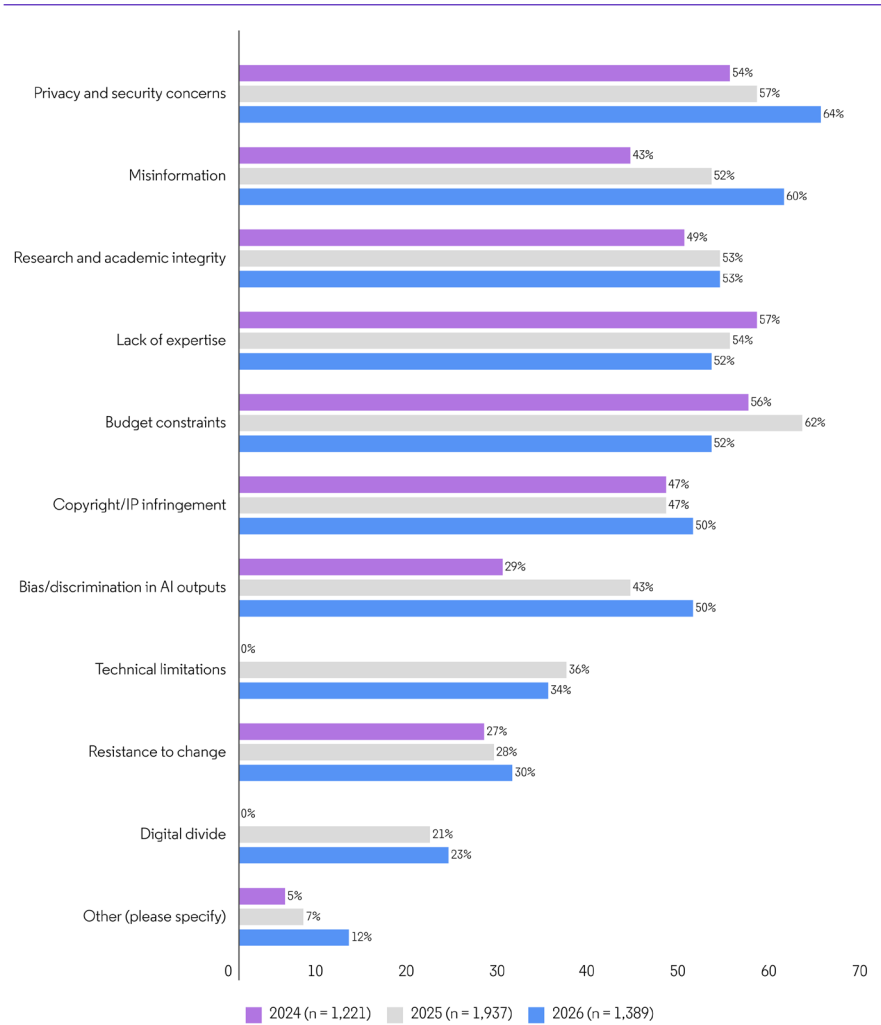
Head of the Information Consulting Department,
Wannan Medical University Library, Mainland China

Concerns around AI grow alongside engagement

As libraries engage more deeply with AI, their concerns have shifted from resource constraints toward ethics and trust. Privacy and security (64%), misinformation (60%) and research and academic integrity (53%) are now the top concerns overall, overtaking budget constraints and lack of expertise. This shift may partly reflect the greater representation of the United States and public libraries, both of which place more emphasis on these concerns.

Concerns peak at initial implementation, where librarians report an average of 5.3 concerns each, compared with 3.9 among those with no plans to implement AI. Libraries with no plans to implement AI are significantly less likely to report concerns with AI than those already exploring or implementing it. The pattern suggests that concerns become more salient as libraries engage more closely with AI, rather than concerns being what keeps libraries from implementing AI in the first place.

Figure 7: What are the primary concerns or challenges your library faces in adopting or scaling AI technologies? (2024 / 2025 / 2026)



"Users expect us to provide authoritative, credible sources, and faculty are already dealing with students turning in material that has been written by AI. Their concern is the lack of critical thinking and how to determine whether students are doing their own work. What would help is technology that can connect students back to trusted, verified data, but we're also going to have to work with faculty on this."

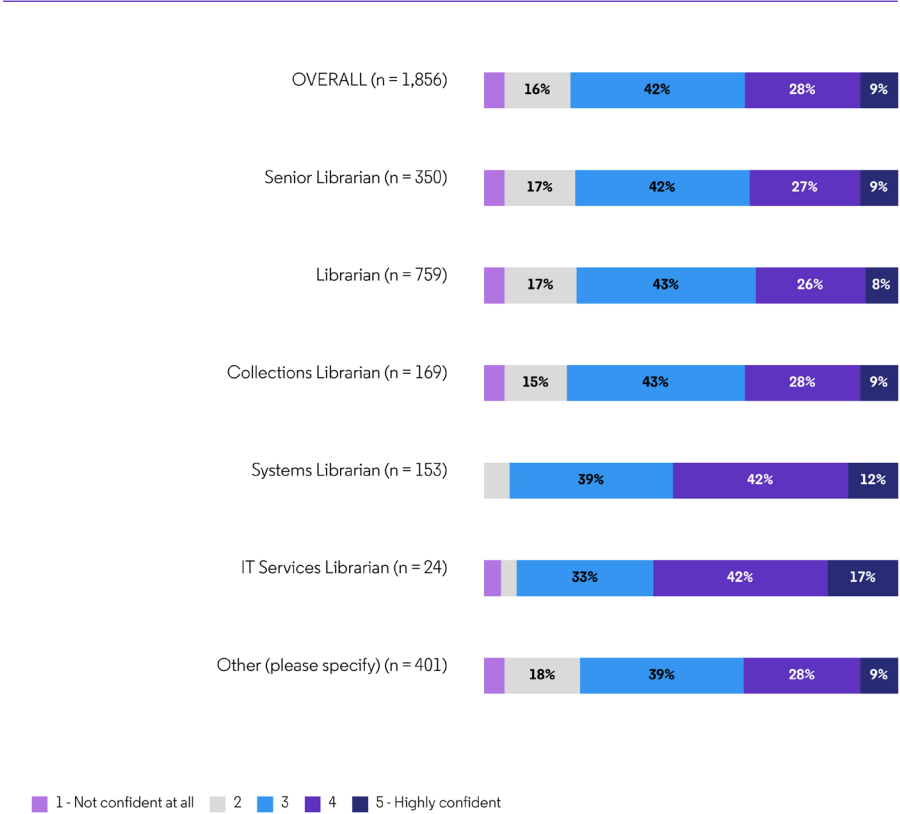
Scott Cohen
Library Director, Jackson State
Community College, U.S.

Role shapes both confidence in AI and how librarians see their jobs changing

General librarians report the lowest confidence in AI of all roles.

Within academic libraries, technical specialist roles (systems, collections and IT services librarians) consistently lead on confidence and implementation. Systems librarians report the highest confidence (3.59 out of 5), while general librarians, the largest cohort in this survey, report the lowest confidence (3.14 out of 5).

Figure 8: How confident do you feel in your understanding of AI concepts and terminology (by role)



Across the entire sample, this split carries through into how each role sees itself evolving, with 39% of libraries reporting that their role has evolved to include advocacy and communication of the value of the library. Systems librarians' growth is concentrated in technical or IT-related work (60%), a continuation of their existing remit. Similarly, librarians are more likely to see their role evolving toward teaching information literacy (37%), reflecting their traditional role as educators.

"I think there's a role for libraries to become stronger marketers... get out there about our collections."

Roxanne Missingham
Director, Collections and Chief Librarian, State Library Victoria, Australia

Role evolution maps to the specific pressure each library is facing: those citing technological impact of AI as their leading challenge report greater growth in teaching AI literacy, while those citing misinformation report greater growth in supporting critical thinking and community engagement.

Free-text responses point to a workforce under strain: rising workload paired with reduced staffing.

"There has not been increased importance of my role just increased workload."

Academic library,
Singapore

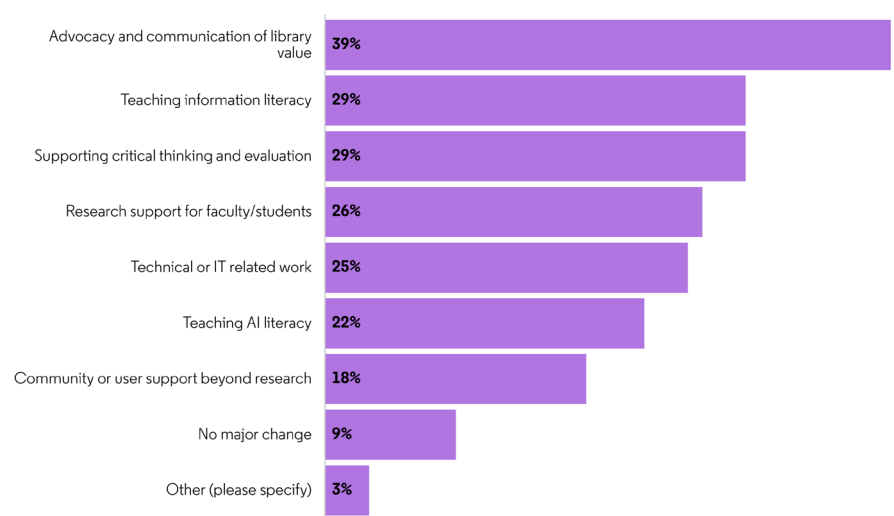
"Taking on multiples roles not connected to the library - managing internal faculty and student grants, managing the Honors Program, leading contract negotiations, etc."

Academic library,
United States

"I love working with students and I love their questions. I try to make myself as approachable as possible because I never, ever don't want a question. Librarians love this work. If you have a really good question, you might get swarmed. I always tell my students, 'I'm going to find your information by any means necessary, as long as it's legal.'"

Celina McDonald
Government Information
& Criminology Librarian,
University of Maryland, U.S.

Figure 9: Which aspects of your role have increased most in importance over the past two to three years? (n = 1,192)



Senior roles show more strategic clarity, though confidence in AI has fallen

Respondents in senior roles appear more enthusiastic about AI and are less likely to say it's too early to determine where effort should be focused (27%, against 34% overall). Within academic libraries, those in more senior roles (Associate Deans of Library and Dean of

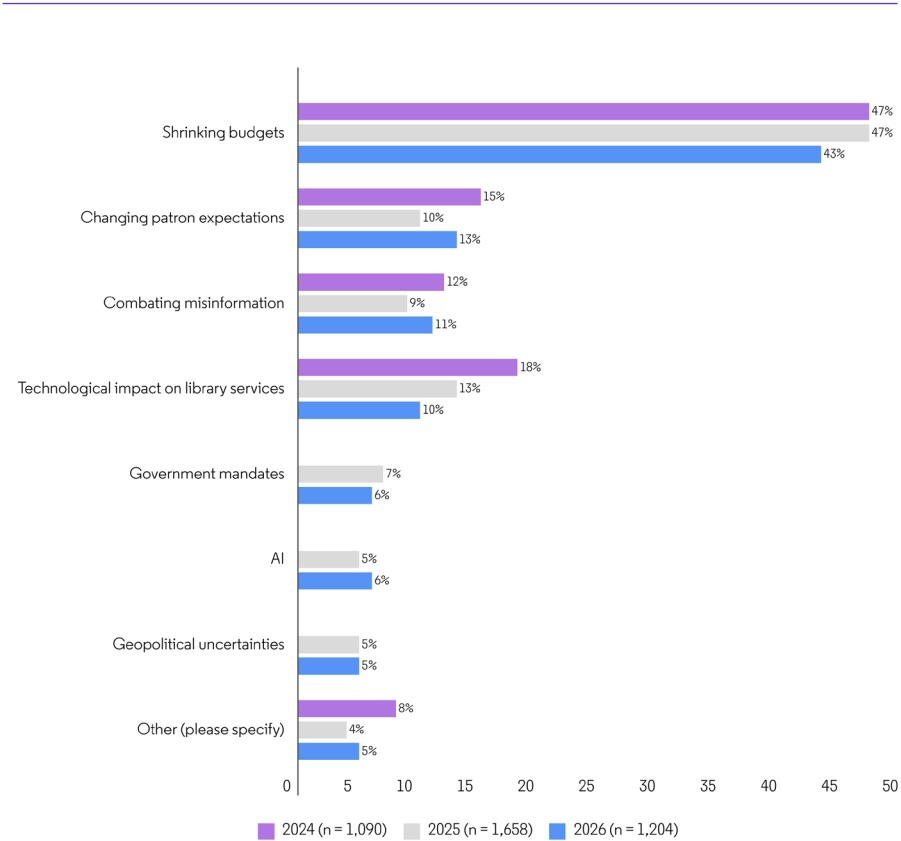
Library / Library Directors) show a peak in confidence in 2025 that has retreated in 2026. This strategic engagement could provide a foundation for more formal governance and clearer support for colleagues implementing AI.

External forces shape strategy

Budgets:

Budget pressure eased slightly this year but remains the top challenge for libraries (43%, down from 47% in 2024). Even so, respondents in Asia, Mainland China and the Rest of World reported greater-than-average budget pressure for open access collections.

Figure 10: What is the greatest challenge facing librarians today? (2024 / 2025 / 2026)



Geopolitical climate:

Fewer libraries report that the geopolitical situation is shaping how they prioritize collections, down from 53% in 2025 to 28% in 2026, even in the United States (29%, down from 50% in 2025). However, this does not mean that the underlying financial pressure has eased in all regions. On budget severity specifically, Asia remains significantly more likely than average to report the most severe budget cuts (8% stated 50%+ budget reduction, against 3% overall).

Open science:

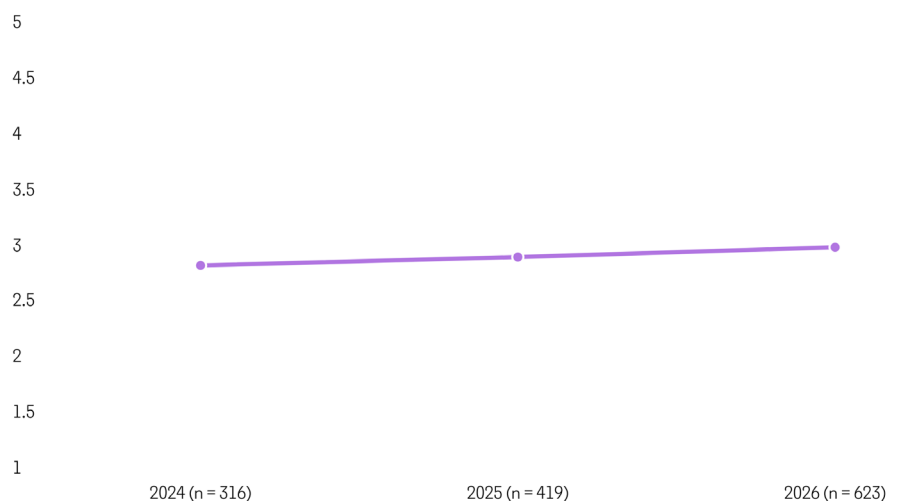
Funding pressure on open access collections remains high and unchanged across Asia, Mainland China and the Rest of World. The clearest relief, on every measure, is concentrated in the United States and United Kingdom, where “no impact” on budget has risen to 48% and 53%, up from 36% and 32% respectively in 2025. Those under the greatest financial pressure also place the highest value on open access collections.

Public libraries snapshot

Public library responses are heavily concentrated in the United States, which accounts for 89% of this group, yet the United States represents only around 4% of the world’s public libraries⁷. It is important to note that the public library findings here are not globally representative.

Confidence in AI concepts and terminology continues to build slowly, showing gradual improvement from 2024.

Figure 11: Average confidence of public libraries (2024 / 2025 / 2026)

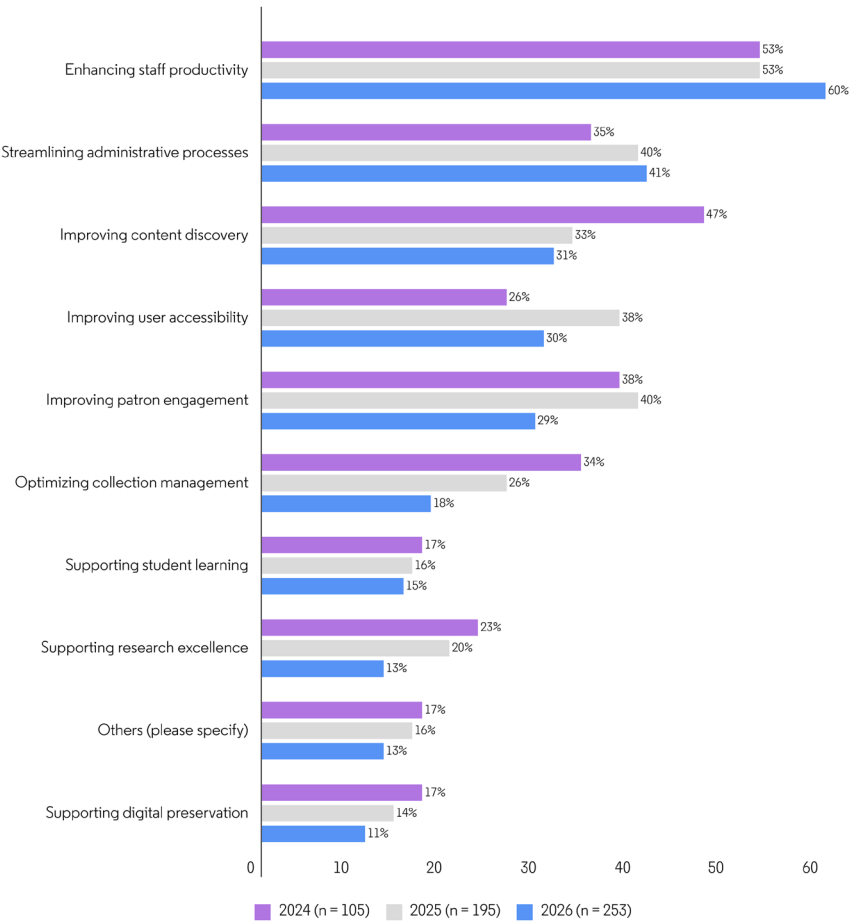


⁷IFLA World Library Map – Data Lab: <https://librarymap.ifla.org/datalab?librarytype=public>

67% of public libraries have no defined strategic position on AI and 37% have no structured decision-making process at all.

Public libraries are narrowing their AI objectives to prioritize operational efficiency. Staff productivity is the clear leading objective (60%), and the average number of objectives selected has fallen every year since 2024.

Figure 12: Public library: If your library is actively evaluating, implementing or running AI tools, what are the primary objectives? (2024 / 2025 / 2026)



Community engagement and social services remain the clear and consistent priority for public libraries (54%).

Library directors appear to be moving forward with implementation despite greater uncertainty about its outcomes. They report the most advanced implementation stage (moderate deployment: 13%, against 6% overall), driving the shift toward operational efficiency. Yet, their attitudes are moving in the opposite direction: they report the lowest confidence of any role within a public library (2.9 out of 5), with concerns about bias and discrimination almost doubling since 2024 (28% to 57%). Library directors are moving AI initiatives forward with a close eye on potential risks for their communities.

Recommendations

The greatest opportunity for AI adoption lies in the United States

The United States accounts for 57% of the sample and reports the lowest confidence, strategic clarity and prevalence of structured governance, indicating substantial scope for targeted support.

Look to Asia and Mainland China for guidance on strategy and implementation

Asia and Mainland China report some of the most advanced implementation and governance structures in the 2026 sample. Their approaches can inform structure and process, while libraries adapt

the substance to their own mission, users and quality standards. Peer support and shared practice can help libraries at earlier stages progress with greater confidence.

Address capacity, not just skills

General librarians report the lowest AI confidence of any role, but this sits within a wider pattern of rising workloads and reduced staffing. Training alone will not close the gap: staff also need protected time, practical support and the capacity to apply new skills. This is a support gap, not a willingness gap: they need the time and structured support to develop these skills.

AI vendors share responsibility for building trust

Libraries' caution is not reluctance to change: their concerns regarding privacy and security, misinformation and bias in AI outputs, have grown consistently since 2024. Vendors have a responsibility here too: demonstrating accuracy, addressing bias, explaining directly and being transparent about a tool's limitations and supporting independent evaluation. This transparency gives librarians the evidence to move from caution to confidence.

"I understand the perspective that AI tools can feel like they're undermining the profession or knowledge itself. But AI is here and we're not going to change that, so there's a better approach than simply complaining about it or saying, 'never use it'. We can create pathways for students and staff to understand that there are right ways and wrong ways to use AI tools. The tools shouldn't be used as a replacement for knowledge, but they can be useful as an advisor, a new lens on things and a starting point for important conversations."

Mike Kmiec

Product Lead Library, University of Otago Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka, New Zealand

A practical pathway for responsible AI adoption

The findings suggest that for libraries looking to implement artificial intelligence tools, a practical approach makes sense: pair strategic leadership with clear governance, focused experimentation and sustained support for staff.



Build shared understanding and capacity

Give staff and leaders a common grounding in what AI can and cannot do, including implications for privacy, security, bias, misinformation, academic integrity and sustainability. Provide practical learning, dedicated time and manager support, tailored to roles and real workflows.



Define the library's strategic position

Set out how the library will respond to publicly available AI tools as entry points for information and research, whether by developing internal services, integrating with external tools or combining both approaches.



Establish governance and guardrails early

Define ownership, approval processes, acceptable use, transparency, data protection, ethics and human oversight. Involve library, IT, legal, privacy, procurement and other relevant stakeholders; joint library and institutional IT governance is most closely associated with deeper implementation.



Start with focused needs

Select a small number of mission-aligned problems or workflow friction points where AI may add value, rather than adopting technology for its own sake.



Pilot in manageable ways

Test defined use cases with clear success criteria, decision points and human review. Measure changes in time, quality, user experience and risk.



Scale evidence-based practice

Expand applications that improve services, workflows or user outcomes without compromising trust or professional standards and revisit governance as technologies, risks and user behavior evolve.

Clarivate: Academic AI you can trust

Clarivate helps academic institutions use AI to advance research, strengthen learning and improve library productivity. Our solutions are grounded in authoritative academic content and deep domain expertise, and developed with a strong focus on responsible AI practices, transparency, security and user privacy.

Our approach to Academic AI

AI embedded in trusted solutions

We embed AI capabilities in the research, discovery and library solutions institutions already use, including Web of Science, ProQuest, Alma, Primo and Leganto. Our AI Assistants help users and library staff find trusted information, engage more deeply with content and boost productivity.

New AI-native solutions

We build AI-native solutions that open new possibilities for research, learning and library services. Solutions such as Web of Science Research Intelligence and Alma Specto use AI to generate insights, experiences and outcomes that were not previously possible.

Connecting to the wider AI ecosystem

AI is changing where research begins. Nexus Extend and Nexus Connect bring trusted library content, data and services into general-purpose AI tools, helping libraries remain visible and relevant.

Built on the Clarivate Academic AI Platform

The Clarivate Academic AI Platform provides a shared technology backbone for our AI solutions. It enables us to develop and deploy AI capabilities more quickly and consistently across our portfolio, with common approaches to trusted content, large language models, testing, security and governance.

Impact at scale

Clarivate AI solutions are already supporting academic institutions at scale, improving user engagement and helping libraries increase workflow capacity.

Learn more about our approach, solutions and commitment to responsible AI. [Explore Clarivate Academic AI.](#)

5,000+

institutions using
Clarivate AI Assistants

30-60%

less time spent on repetitive,
manual library tasks

1M+

unique active users

Up to 4x

greater engagement among
Research Assistant users

About Clarivate

Clarivate is a leading global provider of transformative intelligence. We offer enriched data, insights & analytics, workflow solutions and expert services in the areas of Academia & Government, Intellectual Property and Life Sciences & Healthcare.

For more information,
please visit www.clarivate.com