

IMPACT REPORT



# NEIGHBORHOOD EDITIONS

Cool/Scary AI x DC Public Library · Spring 2026

FROM THE ORGANIZERS

# To our neighbors,

Thank you for joining us at Mt. Pleasant, Woodridge, or Anacostia — or for picking this up after the fact. Either way, this is yours.

Between February and April, Cool/Scary AI and DC Public Library held three neighborhood conversations about how AI is showing up in everyday life across Washington. No product demos. No breathless predictions. Just neighbors talking to each other at small tables.

Something shifted across those three months. In February, the room argued about what the word “AI” even means. By March it was dependency — what we lose when the tools get easy. By April, neighbors arrived with specifics: copyright, jobs, and their kids’ classrooms.

That isn’t three separate conversations. That’s a city getting fluent.

Share it with a neighbor. Argue with it. Bring it to the next one.

With gratitude,

**Chelsea Kirkland and Yonah Gaber**, DC Public Library

**Ben Childers**, Cool/Scary AI



# THE SERIES AT A GLANCE

**Dates:** February 24, March 25 and April 29, 2026 · **Locations:** Mt. Pleasant, Woodridge and Anacostia Neighborhood Libraries · **Partners:** Cool/Scary AI x DC Public Library · **Format:** A short AI primer, three to four community takes from DC residents, then small-group table conversations · **Admission:** Free, no registration barriers

## MAIN TAKEAWAY

DC residents aren't afraid of AI. They're afraid of what we'll stop doing for ourselves.

Asked point-blank whether AI is scary, one Woodridge table answered “not at all.” The same rooms worried about kids’ resilience, about thinking processes being taken away, about the skills that erode when the need to make things disappears. The fear here wasn’t of the technology’s power — it was of atrophy. Of judgment, of craft, and of the connections we make when we need other people to get something done.

Every table at every event opted in to sharing what they said. That consent, freely given, is the quiet finding: people engage seriously with AI when they are treated as participants rather than subjects.



# THREE NEIGHBORHOODS

What each room came to talk about.

## Mt. Pleasant

FEBRUARY 24

Three community takes: AI and aging in place, an analyst's boon and a creative's nightmare, and why "AI" isn't a useful term. Tables landed on AI as an assistant with the human still deciding — and on the word itself as a marketing label that obscures what a product actually does.

## Woodridge

MARCH 25

Three takes: Is AI that scary? AI's efficiency has a cost. AI doesn't let you take shortcuts. One table answered the first question "not at all" — then spent the night on the second: dependency, siloed people, kids' resilience, and the skills that vanish when nobody needs to build anything.

## Anacostia

APRIL 29

Four takes: what you need to know about AI, copyright and artists, jobs, and the future of education. The most concrete room of the three. Copyright dominated — the line between using AI on your own ideas and passing off its output as your work, and who can afford to fight that in court.



# WHAT DC SAID

## Keep the human deciding

Every neighborhood arrived here. AI as an assistant with the person still making the call; verify what it hands you; “cannot be asleep at the wheel.” This wasn’t technophobia — it was the posture of people who intend to use these tools.

## Creative work is where the line gets drawn

Art makes us human. Training on creators’ work without consent was the recurring objection — alongside a subtler one: using AI to edit and design removes the reasons we used to work alongside other people.

## “AI” is a word that hides things

It collapses machine learning, generative tools and prediction into a single marketing label. Mt. Pleasant said so outright. Anacostia’s version was plainer: what you put in determines what you get out.

## Efficiency has a social cost

Siloing, isolation, eroded skills, and the worry that children lose the resilience that comes from struggling with something. As one Woodridge table put it: the fight to survive isolates us.

## Education is where this gets settled

The hope: AI that makes you ask more questions. The fear: thinking processes taken away. Higher education can build critical thinking, or mental dependency — and the room was clear that which one we get is a choice somebody is making right now.



WITH THANKS

# THANK YOU, DC

## PARTNER



## SPONSOR



DC Public Library — Mt. Pleasant, Woodridge and Anacostia Neighborhood Libraries

Serving as civic infrastructure for accessible, neighborhood-level programming that meets residents where they are. Special thanks to Chelsea Kirkland and Yonah Gaber, whose vision for the library as a space for community-driven AI learning made this series possible.

## COOL/SCARY AI

A national series of community-centered conversations about AI's real impact, produced by Stratovation Partners.

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