

**Campaign: Alphabet Inc. (Opening of Google Gemini Labs in LA Public Libraries)**

**EARNED MEDIA**

**OPINION: AI Access Is the Next Digital Divide—And We Can't Afford to Ignore It**

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## **OPINION: AI Access Is the Next Digital Divide—And We Can't Afford to Ignore It**

*By Sundar Pichai*

A few months ago, I met a group of students visiting one of our offices. They were curious, energetic, and already experimenting with AI in ways that surprised me. They were visiting to learn about some of our latest work with AI, and so I got to hear a lot about their experience with AI. They were using it to write stories, explain math problems, and even generate ideas for small projects. One student expressed that working with it felt like having a private tutor or a teammate during big projects.

But what struck me wasn't just what they could do; it was how uneven that experience is.

For more than two decades, we've worked to close the digital divide, expanding access to the internet, devices, and information. That work is far from finished. But today, a new divide is emerging, one that may prove even more consequential: access to artificial intelligence.

### **The Effects of the Divide**

AI is quickly becoming a foundational technology, shaping how we learn, work, and create. Students are already adopting it at a rapid pace. A recent Pew Research Center study found that **a growing share of U.S. teens are using AI tools for schoolwork**, with many saying it helps them understand material more effectively.

At the same time, access and understanding remain uneven. Research from Common Sense Media shows that while many teens are experimenting with generative AI, **they often lack guidance on how to use it responsibly or effectively**. Strikingly, a study by Ernst & Young found that Gen Z, who are not entering the workforce, score poorly on critically assessing and identifying shortfalls, such as when AI hallucinates and invents facts.

### **Where the Divide Lies**

The result is a growing gap—not just in who can use AI, but in who can benefit from it.

For some students, AI tools are readily available at home, integrated into their daily routines. For others, access is limited by resources, connectivity, or simply not knowing where to begin. In a country where **95% of teens have access to a smartphone**, access to technology may seem widespread, but access to meaningful, guided use of advanced tools like AI is far from equal (Faverio et al., 2025).

### **Why it Matters**

This gap presents significant implications because AI is not just another tool. It is a multiplier. It can accelerate learning, unlock creativity, and open pathways to opportunity. But like any multiplier, its impact depends on who has access to it, and significantly disadvantaging those who do not.

If we are not intentional, AI risks widening existing inequalities in education and economic mobility. Students who already have advantages will move faster, while those without access fall further behind.

### **How Can We Close the Divide**

Closing this emerging divide requires more than making technology available. It requires creating spaces where people can explore, learn, and build confidence using these tools. It requires meeting communities where they are, and partnering with institutions that have long served as trusted gateways to knowledge.

For generations, public libraries have played that role. Long before the existence of the internet, which allowed Google to organize the world's information, libraries were that place. They have provided free access to information, technology, and safe spaces for learning, regardless of background or income. Today, their role is evolving once again.

The next chapter of digital inclusion will not be defined by technology alone, but by how we make it accessible in the real world. It will depend on educators, community leaders, and public

institutions working together to ensure that AI is not something reserved for a few, but a resource for everyone.

At Google, we believe AI should expand what people can do and not limit who gets to do it. That means investing not only in the technology itself, but in the ecosystems that help people use it responsibly and effectively.

The question before us is not whether AI will shape the future. It already is. The question is whether that future will be inclusive. The point of technology has always been to advance humans, not certain people.

We have an opportunity and a responsibility to ensure that access to AI becomes a bridge—not a barrier. If we get this right, we can empower a generation of learners and creators not just to keep up with change—but to shape it.

Sundar Pichai is the CEO of Google and Alphabet and serves on Alphabet's Board of Directors.

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**Strategy Note:**

This opinion piece positions Google as a company with depth and social responsibility. It sets up their efforts naturally and authentically. Choosing to write a thought piece is one of the most organic PR strategies for the promotion of something that is already heavily driven by social responsibility. Given that Google is thought of as the leader of the internet, it lends itself nicely for the company to expand on this issue, which is being amplified with the emergence of AI. It positions the efforts with humility and shows that Google practices what it preaches. I was especially interested in humanizing the CEO by starting with an anecdote, yet adding facts and statistics to bring real gravity to the issue. It was also crucial to avoid mentioning the Google Gemini Labs, as I believed it would come across as overly promotional for a CEO to be aware of something that would likely be minute in the grand scheme of the many things the company does. This opinion piece strikes an important balance between authenticity and strategic campaign alignment.