

THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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Abstract

The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups. It is a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women. In this age of technology public library faces a U turn, but keeping the basic motto intact public library must run with the new technology in order to endure in the present circumstances. However there should be a balance between the ancient and nascent approach towards public library as both are alive.

Keywords: Public library, Knowledge, Technology

Freedom, Prosperity and the Development of society and individuals are fundamental human values. They will only be attained through the ability of well-informed citizens to exercise their democratic rights and to play an active role in society. Constructive participation and the development of democracy depend on satisfactory education as well as on free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture and information.

Publiclibraryagatewayto knowledge

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Thus Public library must accomplish national and local governments' support since Public Library is the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. The Public Library shall in principle be free of charge. The public library is the responsibility of local and national authorities. It must be supported by specific legislation and financed by national and local governments. It has to be an essential component of any long-term strategy for culture, information provision, literacy and education.

To ensure nationwide library coordination and cooperation, legislation and strategic plans must also define and promote a national library network based on agreed standards of service. The public network must be designed in relation to national, regional, research and specific libraries as well as libraries in schools, colleges and universities.

The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, gender, religion, nationality, language or social status. Specific services and materials must be provided for those who cannot, for whatever reason, use the regular services and materials, for example linguistic minorities, people with disabilities or people in hospital or prison.

All age groups must find material relevant to their needs. Collections and services have to include all types of appropriate media and modern technologies as well as traditional materials. High quality and relevance to local needs and conditions are fundamental. Material must reflect current trends and the evolution of society, as well as the memory of human endeavor and imagination. Collections and services should not be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship, nor commercial pressure.

Clear policy must be formulated, defining objectives, priorities and services in relation to the local community needs. The public library has to be organized effectively and professional standards of operation must be maintained. Cooperation with relevant partners - for example, user groups and other professionals at local, regional, national as well as international level - has to be ensured.

Services have to be physically accessible to all members of the community. This requires well situated library buildings, good reading and study facilities, as well as relevant technologies and sufficient opening hours convenient to the users. It equally implies outreach services for those unable to visit the library.

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The library services must be adapted to the different needs of communities in rural and urban areas. Outreach and user education programmes have to be provided to help users benefit from all the resources.

The librarian is an active intermediary between users and resources. Professional and continuing education of the librarian is indispensable to ensure adequate services.

The basic responsibility of a public library

The following key missions who relate to information, literacy, education and culture should be at the core of public library services:

1. Creating and strengthening reading habits in children at an early age;
2. Supporting both individual and self conducted education as well as formal education at all levels;
3. Providing opportunities for personal creative development;
4. Stimulating the imagination and creativity of children and young people;
5. Promoting awareness of cultural heritage, appreciation of the arts, scientific achievements and innovations;
6. Providing access to cultural expressions of all performing arts;

7. Fostering inter-cultural dialogue and favoring cultural diversity;
8. Supporting the oral tradition;
9. Ensuring access for citizens to all sorts of community information;
10. Providing adequate information services to local enterprises, associations and interest groups;
11. Facilitating the development of information and computer literacy skills;
12. Supporting and participating in literacy activities and programmed for all age groups, and initiating such activities if necessary.

Public library service in digital age

In current scenario most of the services we can avail if we just have a smart phone. Keeping this in mind now a day public library is providing online panel of library staff members about various services that libraries do offer or might offer in the future, they are considered to be libraries' strengths.

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By keeping one common theme intact that is libraries' role as a community center, and their connection to patrons and other local institutions remained as it was in the past.

Basic strength of public library is lying between their ties to the community, and the relationships build with the users. That should be main focus, and should drive how to develop programs and services in the future. They are very aware of what is happening locally and have research services and books to meet that demand which cannot be avail from net. Public libraries are very good at partnering with nonprofits, schools, and businesses, which raises the awareness of the importance of literacy in the community. It expands our reach. Libraries should focus on literacy (all kinds), partnerships, 21st Century skills, community needs (health, etc.), and providing welcoming spaces where people can gather.

A warm, welcoming and friendly space is hard to find these days, and the public library has the remarkable opportunity to become a community gathering place in communities where such a space is sorely missing. Public libraries continue to be the place where community members can come together to learn, socialize, meet, do business, and educate their children. All libraries must do this very well and should continue to focus on this strength.

One of the public library's strength can be providing entertainment. It is found that most patrons are looking for fiction books, audio books, DVDs. Public libraries are a community center for local information and camaraderie, like a general store. In general stores people are often isolated from one another, and the library provides a place to exchange ideas of all sorts. Public libraries can excel at providing a social hub for any community: that is free Wi-Fi, free cards, access to interlibrary loan services, or simply a warm, well-lit place to get out of the weather and feel safe.

In public libraries providing access to books was often cited, but the broader theme was one of providing access to information, in every form. A public library is a community buying coop. Very few people can afford access to so many resources on their own. Strength of public library is connecting the community with technology and knowledge. The library is the meeting point of knowledge and information; it is a place where creativity can be nurtured.

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Patrons here are not judged or graded, but come in and are free to access all the library has to offer. Libraries should continue to offer all means of giving access to knowledge that they currently offer (books, CDs, DVDs, computers, eBooks) and stay on top of new ways to access knowledge (iPods, cloud computing, software tools, etc.)

In addition to simply providing access to information, many public librarians said that libraries' strengths lie in literacy efforts that help people find and use that information on their own; this included not only early childhood literacy efforts and reading programs for children and teens, but also helping patrons learn how to use computers, e-readers, and other devices. One of biggest services and strengths is helping those who do not have a computer at home and/or are unfamiliar with computers and need assistance. Libraries have become the community 'tech help' center. They also help patrons find government documents on the web. Often this is the only place where these documents are available. They also help patron search for jobs and fill out online job applications. This clearly justifies the significance of public library now.

Public libraries can be the destination for parents with young children, both for entertainment and education. By providing early literacy for kids, providing help for students of all ages, providing information and pleasure reading and viewing for adults and seniors. Public libraries are the poor man's university. They provide literacy, and outreach, and research, and job and career assistance, and assistance to small businesses, and so many other essential services to the community and society.

Guiding principle of public library

Hence what is the main mission of public libraries—what libraries' "guiding principle" should be as they faced new circumstances and considered various changes? It is to offer knowledge and information to the community through books, online resources, programs and to encourage a life-long love of reading whether for education, enlightenment or entertainment.

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Public libraries should be about educating the public to survive in today's world. That involves not only the basic literacy that comes with books, but also a digital literacy to interact with the government and economy as it becomes increasingly paperless.

Public libraries should be the social hub of the community and to do that the customers have to be able to use cell phones in the library, congregate around computers, sit and visit, laugh out

loud and be noisy. The main part of the library should be devoted to this and quiet spaces should not be in any open areas, but should be in smaller cubicles.

To help their communities become the best they can be, by addressing community deficiencies. It's much more than focusing on 'reading' literacy. Public libraries should be unbiased information facilitators.

The public library should be the disseminator of reference materials, reading materials and the provider of computer access to the general public. The guiding principle should be to keep abreast of all ways to get info to the public and to provide it free of charge. The library should always provide programs to introduce young readers to the world of literacy and research and to meet the communities' needs for information, acculturation, literacy and personal contact. So the guiding principle should be 'access.' to provide access to the world of information and entertainment.

In my opinion, the idea of connection is what is most important. Public libraries are here to help people find their place in the community, provide access to information and services, and help people connect through the stories they love.

Concluding remarks

There are certain things public libraries should change in order to going forward. Many spoke of a need to be more flexible, to adapt to new technologies and open the library to more activities. Others felt that some libraries were chasing new technology trends and programming at the expense of their core competencies.

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We need to stop holding on to collections trying to have the breadth and depth that we had in the earlier. What people want now is different, and how they access it is different. We have to give up on being the 'archival public library' and move toward instant services.

We are at a crossroads in our area where we are dealing with an older generation who doesn't mind change as long as they can still check out the books they want and the new generation who wants and needs updates which we cannot afford always.

As our population ages, Public libraries to focus of special services to seniors—hearing devices, viewing devices, help services like carrying books to their cars, grabbers to get books off shelves, computer classes directed to seniors, programming specific to seniors, have walkers and wheelchairs available.

It seems that many Public libraries are struggling with an identity crisis, the next and newest thing to offer patrons around the corner. Our staffs sometimes feels pushed and prodded to offer so many services with limited staff space and time.

Public libraries should concern about the constant demand to 'keep up with technology'. There will always be another device, another way to access the information, and Public library is

now in a position where it is like a salesman, not a library. So stop trying to be all things to all people. Find out what communities want from and provide that service.

Another thread was making libraries more accessible and welcoming to more members of the community: that is public library need to change the concept of the library as a restricted, quiet space—we bustle, we rock, we engage, but so many people in the community do not know this. Library workers should look for more ways to seek patrons out. Everyone needs help but no one wants to ask. Public library should engage the digital natives. Promote online services more. Promote libraries place as a neutral space. Promote the added value of professional.

Some libraries believe that customers should come to the library—we can't wait] for folks to come in to our buildings. We have to be extremely proactive and get out into our communities to show all the services we offer to support our communities.

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Public librarians should reach out to school librarians, academic librarians, special librarians in the community as all libraries and library personnel in many ways have common goals of providing unbiased information, promoting reading, promoting learning, promoting community, etc. We can do all of this better together rather than trying to do it separately.

Libraries need to be more in the face of the public. There are thousands of people out there who have never been encouraged to use the library, who think it is just for scholars and computer users. Libraries are not good at marketing their resources and services. People don't know what the library offers. The library is not on many people's radar. That is one of the biggest problems at public library.

Along the same lines, several library staff members said that they felt the current layout of most libraries was an impediment to patrons, who are often confused by the Dewey Decimal system and may have difficulty finding or browsing for books:

“Libraries should explore other ways to organize our materials .Our goal is to make our resources easy to find. Libraries need to look at modern ways to do that. Libraries should look at what barriers (rules) we have that impede the use of our resources.

Public library should move patrons from concept of using library to absorb information to patrons who can use the library for creative expression. Several librarians also said that their goal for future innovations would be to reach patrons in the community, to bring library services to them. This included book drops around the community, kiosks, transportation to and from the library, and expanded.

The aged persons however not personally excited about the technology. They are considered dinosaurs sometimes, but they have their own reservations based upon their own experiences about the need for privacy, possibility of identity theft, social media problems. The younger generation will live like this probably forever, not especially concerned about negative issues at all. On that note, aged person would enjoy learning and watching more real-life

examples of various apps for mobile devices. With time, some of old-timers will probably relate to some of it, just like they have adjusted to computers But Public library should balance between two patrons as both are equally important.

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If public librarians had wanted to teach people how to make stuff, they would have been a teacher. Libraries are more about helping people learn for themselves. They set them on the path of learning, but do not hold their hands walking down the road. Public libraries need to train themselves to be more knowledgeable about the new formats of digital material to survive.

I think I am a bit old-fashioned. I am in no way against automation or e-materials, [but] I do not think it is our job to push them on the communities. I want them available. I want people to be comfortable with them and be able to utilize them through our offerings. I do not want to empty the library of hands-on material because automated materials are available unless I know/believe automation is the best option. Look at the LPs coming back. How can we say hands-on materials are a thing of the past?"

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Vol: 7

Issue: 1

May 2019

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