



Public library

A **public library** is a library, most often a lending library, that is accessible by the general public and is usually funded from public sources, such as taxes. It is operated by librarians and library paraprofessionals, who are also civil servants.

There are five fundamental characteristics shared by public libraries: (1) they are generally supported by taxes (usually local, though any level of government can and may contribute); (2) they are governed by a board to serve the public interest; (3) they are open to all, and every community member can access the collection; (4) they are entirely voluntary, no one is ever forced to use the services provided; and (5) they provide library and information services without charge.^[1]

Public libraries exist in many countries across the world and are often considered an essential part of having an educated and literate population. Public libraries are distinct from research libraries, school libraries, academic libraries in other states and other special libraries. Their mandate is to serve the general public's information needs rather than the needs of a particular school, institution, or research population. Public libraries also provide free services such as preschool story times to encourage early literacy among children. They also provide a quiet study and learning areas for students and professionals and foster the formation of book clubs to encourage the appreciation of literature by the young and adults. Public libraries typically allow users to borrow books and other materials outside the library premises temporarily, usually for a given period of time. They also have non-circulating reference collections and provide computer and Internet access to their patrons.

Public library



Central Library, Milwaukee, Wisconsin



Kilgore Central Library, Kilgore, Texas



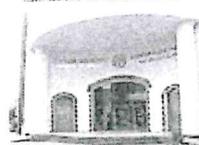
Bibliothèque, Adrar, Algeria



Main Public Library, Taoyuan, Taiwan



Biblioteca Vasconcelos, Mexico City, Mexico



Public library, Maadi, Egypt



Interior of the Central Library, Tampere, Finland



Entrance of National Library, Tehran, Iran

Overview

The culmination of centuries of advances in the printing press, moveable type, paper, ink, publishing, and distribution, combined with an ever-growing information-oriented middle class, increased commercial activity and consumption, new radical ideas, massive population growth and higher literacy rates forged the public library into the form that it is today.

Public access to books is not new. Romans made scrolls in dry rooms available to patrons of the baths, and tried with some success to establish libraries within the empire. Public libraries existed in the Roman Empire by the 1st century BC.

In the middle of the 19th century, the push for truly public libraries, paid for by taxes and run by the state gained force. Matthew Battles states that:

It was in these years of class conflict and economic terror that the public library movement swept through Britain, as the nation's progressive elite recognized that the light of cultural and intellectual energy was lacking in the lives of commoners.^[2]

3 Public libraries were often started with a donation, or were bequeathed to parishes, churches, schools or towns. These social and institutional libraries formed the base of many academic and public library collections of today.^[3]

The establishment of circulating libraries in the 18th century by booksellers and publishers provided a means of gaining profit and creating social centers within the community. The circulating libraries not only provided a place to sell books, but also a place to lend books for a price. These circulating libraries provided a variety of materials including the increasingly popular novels. Although the circulating libraries filled an important role in society, members of the middle and upper classes often looked down upon these libraries that regularly sold material from their collections and provided materials that were less sophisticated.

Circulating libraries also charged a subscription fee. However, these fees were set to entice their patrons, providing subscriptions on a yearly, quarterly or monthly basis, without expecting the subscribers to purchase a share in the circulating library. This helped patrons who could not afford to buy books, to be able to borrow books to read, and then return. This also created a more popular demand, as book fees were growing, and more books were being copied. Circulating libraries were very popular; the first one was located in 1725, in Edinburgh, Scotland, by Allan Ramsay.

4 Circulating libraries were not exclusively lending institutions and often provided a place for other forms of commercial activity, which may or may not be related to print. This was necessary because the circulating libraries did not generate enough funds through subscription fees collected from its borrowers. As a commerce venture, it was important to consider the contributing factors such as other goods or services available to the subscribers.^[4]

The Malatestiana Library (Italian: *Biblioteca Malatestiana*), also known as the Malatesta Novello Library, is a public library dating from 1452 in Cesena, Emilia-Romagna (Italy). It was the first European civic library,^[5] i.e. belonging to the Commune and open to everybody. It was commissioned by the Lord of Cesena, Malatesta Novello. The works were directed by Matteo Nuti of Fano (a scholar of Leon Battista Alberti) and lasted from 1447 to 1452.

History

Early history



The first libraries consisted of archives of the earliest form of writing – the clay tablets in cuneiform script discovered in temple rooms in Sumer,^{[6][7]} some dating back to 2600 BC.^[8] They appeared five thousand years ago in Southwest Asia's Fertile Crescent, an area that ran from Mesopotamia to the Nile in Africa. Known as the cradle of civilization, the Fertile Crescent was likewise the birthplace of writing, sometime before 3000 BC. (Murray, Stuart A.P.) These first libraries, which mainly consisted of the records of commercial transactions or inventories, mark the end of prehistory and the start of history.^{[9][10]}

Things were very similar in the government and temple records on papyrus of Ancient Egypt.^[7] The earliest discovered private archives were kept at Ugarit; besides correspondence and inventories, texts of myths may have been standardized practice-texts for teaching new scribes.

Persia at the time of the Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BC) was home to some outstanding libraries that were serving two main functions: keeping the records of administrative documents (e.g., transactions, governmental orders, and budget allocation within and between the Satrapies and the central ruling State)^[11] and collection of resources on different sets of principles e.g. medical science, astronomy, history, geometry and philosophy.

A public library was established in Rome by the first century BC, in the Atrium Libertatis (see History of libraries § Classical period and Gaius Asinius Pollio § Later life). However, the first major public library is said to have been established in Athens by Pisistratus in the sixth century BC (see Library of Alexandria § Historical background), and by the end of the Hellenistic period, public libraries are said to have been widespread in the Eastern Mediterranean (see Library of Alexandria § In antiquity).

Historian Yahya of Antioch (d. 1066) reported that the Fatimid Caliph Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (r. 996–1021) financed and established libraries open to the public, where anyone, even the simple non-specialists, could choose whatever books they wanted and have them copied by public scribes, free of charge.^[12] However, as with many of his other decisions, Al-Hakim later ordered this policy to be reversed.^[12]

In Cesena, Italy, the first community-run public library, the Malatestiana Library, was established in 1447, provided both secular and religious texts in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and was fully open to all members of the public.

Another early library that allowed access to the public was Kalendars or Kalendaries, a brotherhood of clergy and laity who were attached to the Church of All-Halloween or All Saints in Bristol, England. Records show that in 1464, provision was made for a library to be erected in the



Thomas Bodley founded the Bodleian Library in 1602 as an early public library.

separated into parts so that readers could rent a section of the book for some hours instead of a full day.^[26] This allowed more readers could have access to the same work at the same time, making it more profitable for the circulating libraries.

Much like paperbacks of today, many of the novels in circulating libraries were unbound. At this period of time, many people chose to bind their books in leather. Many circulating libraries skipped this process. Circulating libraries were not in the business of preserving books; their owners wanted to lend books as many times as they possibly could. Circulating libraries have ushered in a completely new way of reading. Reading was no longer simply an academic pursuit or an attempt to gain spiritual guidance. Reading became a social activity. Many circulating libraries were attached to the shops of milliners or drapers. They served as much for social gossip and the meeting of friends as coffee shops do today.^[35]

Another factor in the growth of subscription libraries was the increasing cost of books. In the last two decades of the century, especially, prices were practically doubled, so that a quarto work cost a guinea, an octavo 10 shillings or 12 shillings, and a duodecimo cost 4 shillings per volume. Price apart, moreover, books were difficult to procure outside London since local booksellers could not afford to carry large stocks.^[36]

Commercial libraries, since they were usually associated with booksellers and also since they had a greater number of patrons, were able to accumulate greater numbers of books.

The United Public Library was said to have a collection of some 52,000 volumes – twice as many as any private-subscription library in the country at that period.^[37] These libraries, since they functioned as a business, also lent books to non-subscribers on a per-book system.^[38]



Biblioteka Zaluskich, built in Warsaw in the mid-18th century

Despite the existence of these subscription libraries, they were only accessible to those who could afford the fees and to those with time to read during the daylight. As stated by James Van Horn Melton, "one should not overstate the extent to which lending libraries 'democratized' reading" since "they were probably less important for creating new readers than for enabling those who already read to read more." For many people, these libraries, though more accessible than libraries such as the British Library, were still largely an institution for the middle and upper classes.^[26]

India

In A.D 1820, the State Central Library, Kerala started functioning in Trivandrum, India, which is not only India's first public library but also the first such institution outside of Europe. However, there had come into being a whole network of library provisions on a private or institutional basis. Subscription libraries, both private and commercial, provided the middle to upper classes with a variety of books for moderate fees.

Private-subscription libraries

Private-subscription libraries functioned in much the same manner as commercial subscription libraries, though they varied in many important ways. One of the most popular versions of the private-subscription library was the "gentlemen only" library. The gentlemen's subscription libraries, sometimes known as proprietary libraries, were nearly all organized on a common pattern. Membership was restricted to the proprietors or shareholders, and ranged from a dozen or

two to between four and five hundred. The entrance fee, i.e. the purchase price of a share, was in early days usually a guinea, but rose sharply as the century advanced, often reaching four or five guineas during the French wars; the annual subscription, during the same period, rose from about six shillings to ten shillings or more. The book-stock was, by modern standards, small (Liverpool, with over 8,000 volumes in 1801, seems to have been the largest), and was accommodated, at the outset, in makeshift premises—very often over a bookshop, with the bookseller acting as librarian and receiving an honorarium for his pains.^[39]



The Linen Hall Library was an 18th-century subscription library. Pictured in 1888, shortly before its demolition.

The Liverpool subscription library was a gentlemen-only library. In 1798, it was renamed the Athenaeum when it was rebuilt with a newsroom and coffeehouse. It had an entrance fee of one guinea and annual subscription of five shillings.^[40] An analysis of the registers for the first twelve years provides glimpses of middle-class reading habits in a mercantile community at this period. The largest and most popular sections of the library were History, Antiquities, and Geography, with 283 titles and 6,121 borrowings, and Belles Lettres, with 238 titles and 3,313 borrowings.^[41] The most popular single work was John Hawkesworth's *Account of Voyages ... in the Southern Hemisphere* (3 vols) which was borrowed on 201 occasions. The records also show that in 1796, membership had risen by 1/3 to 198 subscribers (of whom 5 were women) and the titles increased five-fold to 4,987. This mirrors the increase in reading interests. A patron list from the Bath Municipal Library shows that from 1793 to 1799, the library held a stable 30% of their patrons as female.^[42]

It was also uncommon for these libraries to have buildings designated solely as the library building during the 1790s, though in the 19th century, many libraries would begin building elaborate permanent residences. Bristol, Birmingham, and Liverpool were the few libraries with their own building.^[43] The accommodations varied from the shelf for a few dozen volumes in the country stationer's or draper's shop, to the expansion to a back room, to the spacious elegant areas of Hookham's or those at the resorts like Scarborough, and four in a row at Margate.^[44]

Private-subscription libraries held a greater amount of control over both membership and the types of books in the library. There was almost a complete elimination of cheap fiction in the private societies.^[45] Subscription libraries prided themselves on respectability. The highest percentage of subscribers were often landed proprietors, gentry, and old professions.^[46]

Towards the end of the 18th century and in the first decades of the 19th century, the demand for books and general education made itself felt among social classes generated by the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution.^[47] The late-18th century saw a rise in subscription libraries intended for the use of tradesmen. In 1797, there was established at Kendal what was known as the Economical Library, "designed principally for the use and instruction of the working classes."^[48] There was also the Artizans' library established at Birmingham in 1799. The entrance fee was 3 shillings, and the subscription was 1 shilling 6 pence per quarter. This was a library of general literature. Novels, at first excluded, were afterwards admitted on condition that they did not account for more than one-tenth of the annual income.^[39]

Public libraries in North America developed from the 18th century to today; as the country grew more populous and wealthier, factors such as a push for education and desire to share knowledge led to broad public support for free libraries. In addition, money donations by private philanthropists provided the seed capital to get many libraries started. In some instances, collectors donated large book collections.^[63]

The first modern public library in the world supported by taxes was the Peterborough Town Library in Peterborough, New Hampshire. It was "established in 1833".^[64] This was a small public library. The first large public library supported by taxes in the United States was the Boston Public Library, which was established in 1848 but did not open its doors to the public until 1854.^[65]

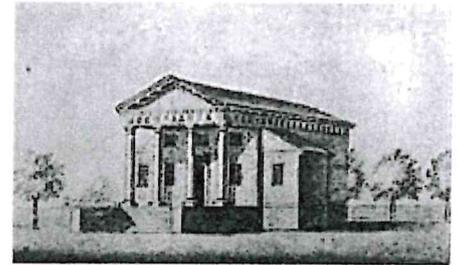


Illustration of Redwood Library and Athenaeum in 1768

The Redwood Library and Athenaeum was founded in 1747 by a group led by Abraham Redwood.^[66] It was the first library in Rhode Island and the oldest lending library in America. Over half of its volumes were lost when it was used as the British Officers Club during the Revolutionary War. An effort was made to replace the original collection. Over 90% of the volumes lost were returned. The library is still in use.^[67]

A total of 1,689 Carnegie libraries were built in the United States between 1883 and 1929, including some belonging to universities. By 1930, half the American public libraries had been built by Carnegie.^[68]

Federal library legislation supporting public libraries has been a focus of the American Library Association, Washington Office.^[69]

Democracy within the life of libraries in the 20th and 21st century has been explored in the essay, "Libraries, Democracy, and Citizenship: Twenty Years after 9/11."^[70]

Other countries

The first public library in Australia was the Melbourne Public Library (now the State Library of Victoria), which opened in 1856, just a few years after their introduction into Britain. This was however purely a reference library. In September 1869, the New South Wales (NSW) government opened as the Free Public Library, Sydney (now the State Library of New South Wales) by purchasing a bankrupt subscription library. In 1896, the Brisbane Public Library was established. The library's collection, purchased by the Queensland Government from the private collection of Justice Harding. In 1935 the Free Library Movement was established in New South Wales advocating for free public libraries to be supported by municipal authorities.^[71] A similar movement was established in Victoria within a couple of years.^[72]



Library in the rural town of Gonohe, Aomori, Japan

"New Zealand was, by the third quarter of the nineteenth century, a veritable paradise for readers, with the formation of public libraries following closely on the heels of the settlers as they spread across the country."^[73]

Pre-Independence libraries in India have been discussed by R.K. Bhatt and K. Kandhasamy.^[74]

Eugène Morel, a writer and one of the librarians at the Bibliothèque nationale, pioneered modern public libraries in France. He put forward his ideas in the 1910 book *La Librairie publique*.^{[75][76]}

Mexican public libraries trace their origins to convent and monastery libraries in the sixteenth century, but the first modern public library dates from 1758 when the Biblioteca Turriana—named after its founder and donors, the three cathedral canons Luis Antonio Torres Quintero, Cayetano Antonio de Torres Tuñón, and Luis Antonio de Torres Tuñón—was established at the Mexico City Metropolitan Cathedral. Liberal governments seized its holdings in 1867 to establish the National Library.

Japanese public libraries greatly expanded in the 1950s with the Library Law.^[77]

Services

Book borrowing and lending

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The main task of public libraries is to provide the public with access to books and periodicals. The American Library Association (ALA), addresses this role of libraries as part of "access to information"^[78] and "equity of access";^[79] part of the profession's ethical commitment that "no one should be denied information because he or she cannot afford the cost of a book or periodical, have access to the internet or information in any of its various formats."^[80]



A municipal library in Prague

Libraries typically offer access to thousands, tens of thousands, or even millions of books, the majority of which are available for borrowing by anyone with the appropriate library card. A library's selection of books is called its *collection*, and usually includes a range of popular fiction, classics, nonfiction and reference works, books of public interest or under public discussion, and subscriptions to popular newspapers and magazines. Most libraries offer quiet space for reading, known as reading rooms. Borrowers may also take books home, as long as they return them at a certain time and in good condition. If a borrowed book is returned late, the library may charge a small library fine, though some libraries have eliminated fines in recent years. About two-thirds of libraries now provide access to e-books and digital or digitized periodicals as well as printed books.^[81] Many libraries offer assistance to borrowers, to select books, through specialist Readers' Advisory Services librarians.^[82]

Public libraries also provide books and other materials for children. These items are often housed in a special section known as a children's library and attended to by a specialized children's librarian. Child oriented websites with on-line educational games and programs specifically designed for younger library users are becoming increasingly popular. Services may be provided

for other groups, such as large print or braille materials, books on tape, young adult literature and other materials for teenagers, or materials in other than the national language (in foreign languages).^[83]

Libraries also lend books to each other, a practice known as interlibrary loan. Interlibrary loan allows libraries to provide patrons access to the collections of other libraries, especially rare, infrequently used, specialized and/or out-of-print books. Libraries within the same system, such as a county system, may lend their books to each other, or libraries in different states may even use an interlibrary loan system.

The selection, purchase and cataloging of books for a collection; the care, repair, and weeding of books; the organization of books in the library; readers' advisory; and the management of membership, borrowing and lending are typical tasks for a public librarian, an information professional with graduate-level education or experience in library and information science.^[84]

Privacy

In the United States, libraries are responsible for supporting the First Amendment and how it relates to their facilities through policies such as the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights. The right to freedom of speech and information is significant to public libraries; one way of upholding this doctrine is to protect the privacy of all patrons that belong to a library. The concept of confidentiality is important because the First Amendment may be violated if a patron's information could possibly be shared.^[85] Patrons may not feel free to check out certain materials for fear it would later be revealed. Members of society need to be reassured that even if they borrow controversial or embarrassing materials, their privacy will be upheld.^[86]

Some libraries require staff to talk about confidentiality or direct the patron to literature on the subject when creating a new library card for patrons.^[87]

Digital engagement

Part of the public library mission has become attempting to help bridge the digital divide. As more books, information resources, and government services are being provided online (see e-commerce and e-government), public libraries increasingly provide access to the Internet and public computers for users who otherwise would not be able to connect to these services. They can also provide community spaces to encourage the general population to improve their digital skills through Library Coding Clubs^[88] and Library makerspace. Almost all public libraries now house a computer lab.^[89] Internationally, public libraries offer information and communication technology (ICT) services, giving "access to information and knowledge" the "highest priority".^[90] While different countries and areas of the world have their own requirements, general services offered include free connection to the Internet, training in using the Internet, and relevant content in appropriate languages. In addition to typical public library financing, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and business fund services that assist public libraries in combating the digital divide.^[91]



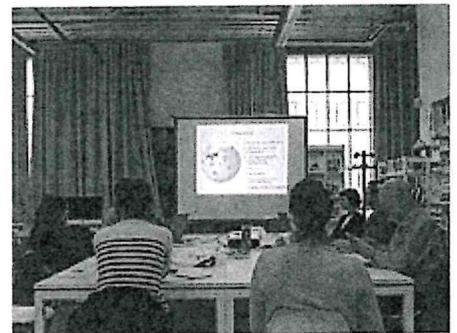
Fort Worth Central Library
Computer Lab

In addition to access, many public libraries offer training and support to computer users. Once access has been achieved, there remains a large gap in people's online abilities and skills. For many communities, the public library is the only agency offering free computer classes, information technology learning and an affordable, interactive way to build digital skills. As of 2012, 91% of libraries offer free wireless Internet to their patrons; 76% offer e-books for borrowing; and 90% offer formal or informal technology training.^[81] A significant service provided by public libraries is assisting people with e-government access and use of federal, state and local government information, forms and services.

In 2006, 73% percent of library branches reported that they are the only local provider of free public computer and Internet access.^[92] A 2008 study found that "100 percent of rural, high poverty outlets provide public Internet access."^[93] Access to computers and the Internet is now nearly as important to library patrons as access to books.^[94]

Classroom and meeting space (8)

Public libraries have a long history of functioning as community centers or public spaces for reading, study and formal and informal public meetings. In 1898, Andrew Carnegie, a prominent library philanthropist, built a library in Homestead, Pennsylvania, where his main steel mills were located. Besides a book collection, it included a bowling alley, an indoor swimming pool, basketball courts and other athletic facilities, a music hall, and numerous meeting rooms for local organizations. It sponsored highly successful semi-pro football and baseball teams.^[95] Even before the development of the modern public library, subscription libraries were often used as clubs or gathering places. They served as much for social gossip and the meeting of friends, as coffee shops do today.^[96] Throughout history, public libraries were touted as alternatives to dance halls or gentleman's clubs, and frequently built, organized and supported because of their equalizing and civilizing influence.



Wikipedia edit-a-thon at BLI:B, a public library in Brussels

Today, in-person and on-line programs for reader development, language learning, homework help, free lectures and cultural performances, and other community service programs are common offerings. The library storytime, in which books are read aloud to children and infants, is a cultural touchstone. Most public libraries offer frequent storytimes, often daily or even several times a day for different age groups. Some libraries have begun offering sensory storytimes for children and adults on the autism spectrum. Sensory storytimes give patrons "more ways to process information", especially considering people on the autism spectrum ^[97] are concrete thinkers and/or might have sensory issues to fluorescent lightning or ambient noise other patrons might not notice.^[97]

One of the most popular programs offered in public libraries is "summer reading" for children, families, and adults. Summer reading usually includes a list of books to read during summer holidays, as well as performances, book discussions or other celebrations of reading, culture and the humanities. Many libraries offer classes to the community such as tech clinics where patrons can bring in laptops and electronic devices and receive one on one attention in solving their problems and learning how to use them.

Libraries may also offer free or inexpensive meeting space for community organizations and educational and entrepreneurial activity. The addition of makerspaces in libraries (this is usually referred to as community outreach), beginning with the Fayetteville Free Library in 2011, offers the potential for new roles for public spaces and public libraries.^[98] Attendance at library programs increased by 22% between 2004 and 2008.^[99]

Programming

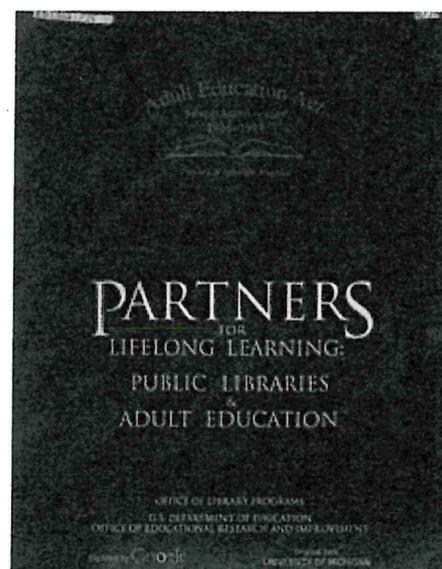
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While in the past libraries were merely buildings to house their collections, most now utilize their space to offer programs or clubs regularly. Although some libraries will have similar programs with different names, such as book club, writing club or computer programs, most programs will differ based on the specific library and the community they serve. New studies have shown that librarians must research what their specific community needs, "because communities differ, however, the ways libraries implement these services differ as well. The [example of service response] offered at one library may vary significantly from [the same example] offered by another library. The differences are perfectly appropriate if they result from a tailoring of services to address local needs."^[100] Websites like Pinterest have numerous ideas for creating programs for local patrons, while the website Instructables has DIY tutorials, complete with pictures, which is helpful for libraries on a budget. "Programs in the humanities and the arts that encourage people to think and talk about ethics and values, history, art, poetry, and other cultures are integral to the library's mission."^[101]

Adult programs

Adult library programming in the United States initially had strong ties to adult education and adult literacy.^[102] Margaret E. Monroe traced these connections on the 25th anniversary of the U.S. Adult Education Act which was part of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964.^[103]

The American Library Association supported the "Adult Services in the Eighties" (ASE) project which replicated an earlier ALA 1952-53 survey, *Adult Education Activities in Public Libraries* by Helen Lyman Smith.^[104] The ASE project was conducted to provide planning for new directions for adult library services.^[105] Sources on the scope of adult services include "Where Would We Be without Them? Libraries and Adult Education Activities: 1966-91",^[106] "Twenty-First Century Public Library Adult Services",^[107] *Adult Programs in the Library*,^[108] and *Designing Adult Services Strategies For Better Serving Your Community*.^[109] A national study of public library service to older adults was conducted in 2015.^[110]



Public Libraries and the Adult Education Act. 25 years.

The New York Public Library offers over 93,000 programs to its patrons every year at its 87 different branches. Adult programs include Excel classes, writing club, adult coloring club, chess club, knitting club, and a jewelry making class.^[111]

The Albuquerque Bernalillo County Library has an adult coloring club, a crochet/knitting/sewing club, a gardening club, a bead and string class, and a bilingual computer class.^[112]

The Tampa–Hillsborough County Public Library System has 31 branches that offer the usual book clubs and writing clubs for adults. However, they also offer an early morning walking club, chair yoga classes, beginning computer classes, genealogy classes, walk-in tech help, and a coffee and French talk class.^[113]

Teen programs

The Orange County Library System offers numerous teen activities such as a Maker/DIY program, Audio Equipment Training, Sewing classes, Knitting classes, ESL classes, and Chess club.^[114]

The Springfield Greene County Library has writing and book clubs as well as a tech training class, board game nights, movie nights, craft classes, and a My Little Pony club.^[115]

The Pikes Peak Library District has math tutors for their teen patrons. They also offer writing and book clubs, a Dungeons & Dragons club, a coding lab, an anime club, guided meditation, and an occasional Super Smash Bros. Tournament.^[116]

Children's programs

The Belmont Public Library offers an array of children's programs including story times for various age groups, concerts, music classes, puppet shows, a maker club, and sing-along Saturdays.^[117]

The Saratoga Springs Public Library also has numerous story times as well as Yoga for children, parent/child workshops, Spanish workshops, a read-to-a-dog program, and a Kindness club.^[118]

The Chelmsford Public Library has a plethora of story times for ages birth to preschool. They also offer baby yoga, stay and play time, toddler rhyme time, a dads and donuts day, and an annual Gingerbread Festival.^[119]

Diversity

A significant goal of American libraries is to become more culturally diverse throughout the country. Public libraries are an equal access facility and want to make everyone feel welcome no matter their religion, race, ethnicity, sex, or financial status. To accomplish this goal, libraries are striving to find ways in which to make both staff and the library programs they provide more culturally sensitive.

A starting point for most libraries is to find out the demographics in which they are located. Once the library system learns more about the community they serve, they can start building a collection and programs around it. Another suggestion from multiple experts says to hire staff that represents the society that the library is located in order to better relate and serve members of that society.

By making culturally diverse programs, a library can be inviting to many members of the community. A few ways libraries accomplish this goal are by providing programs which are inclusive to many different cultures such as having lectures or events in different languages, including celebrations and holidays that are diverse, and by inviting speakers and authors from different cultures to come and talk.^[120]

Research assistance

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Librarians at most public libraries provide reference and research help to the general public. This can include assisting students in finding reliable sources for papers and presentations; helping the public find answers to questions or evidence in a debate; or providing resources related to a specific event or topic. Reference assistance is usually provided through a reference interview which is usually conducted at a public reference desk but may also be conducted by telephone or online. Reference librarians may also help patrons develop an appropriate bibliography or works cited page for an academic paper. Depending on the size of the library, there may be multiple reference desks that deal with different topics. Large public, academic or research libraries may employ librarians that are experts in specific topics or subjects. Often the children's section in a public library has its own reference desk. At a smaller library, circulation and reference may occur at the same desk.



Library Reference desk in Holman Library, Auburn, Washington

The Internet has had a significant effect on the availability and delivery of reference services. Many reference works, such as the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, have moved entirely online, and the way people access and use these works has changed dramatically in recent decades. The rise of search engines and crowd-sourced resources such as Wikipedia have transformed the reference environment. In addition to the traditional reference interview, reference librarians have an increasing role in providing access to digitized reference works (including the selection and purchase of databases not available to the general public) and ensuring that references are reliable and presented in an academically acceptable manner. Librarians also have a role in teaching information literacy, so that patrons can find, understand and use information and finding aids like search engines, databases and library catalogs: for instance, patrons who lack access to expensive academic subscriptions can be taught to Unpaywall to access open access literature easily.^[121]

Public and academic libraries in the US answer over seven million questions weekly.^[122] The Boston Public Library answers more than one million reference questions annually.^[123]

Reference collections

In addition to their circulating collection, public libraries usually offer a collection of reference books, such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, phone books and unique or expensive academic works. These books may not be available for borrowing, except under special circumstances. Reference books that are frequently used, such as phone books, may be housed in a special section called "ready reference".



Reading area in a Singapore public library

Some libraries also keep historical documents relevant to their particular town, and serve as a resource for historians in some instances. The Queens Public Library kept letters written by unrecognized Tiffany lamp designer Clara Driscoll, and the letters remained in the library until a curator discovered them.^[124] Some libraries may also serve as archives or government depositories, preserving historic newspapers, property records or

government documents. Collections of unique or historical works are sometimes referred to as special collections; except in rare cases, these items are reference items, and patrons must use them inside the library under the supervision or guidance of a librarian. Local libraries' special collections may be of particular interest to people researching their family history. Libraries that are focused on collecting works related to particular families are genealogical libraries and may be housed in the same building as a public library.

Many libraries—especially large, urban libraries—have large collections of photographs, digital images, rare and fragile books, artifacts and manuscripts available for public viewing and use. Digitization and digital preservation of these works is an ongoing effort, usually funded by grants or philanthropy. In 2005, the New York Public Library offered the "NYPL Digital Gallery" which made a collection of 275,000 images viewable over the web; while most of the contents are in the public domain, some images are still subject to copyright rules.^[125] Limited funding, copyright restrictions, a lack of expertise and poor provenance are barriers to the large-scale digitization of libraries' special collections.

Other services

Depending on a community's desires and needs, public libraries may offer many other resources and services to the public. In addition to print books and periodicals, most public libraries today have a wide array of other media including audiobooks, e-books, CDs, cassettes, videotapes, and DVDs. Certain libraries stock general materials for borrowing, such as pots, pans, sewing machines, and similar household items in order to appeal to a larger population.^[126] Collections of books and academic research related to the local town or region are common, along with collections of works by local authors. Libraries' storage space and lending systems may be used to lend a wide range of materials, including works of art, cake pans, seeds, tools and musical instruments.^[127] Similar to museums and other cultural institutions, libraries may also host exhibits or exhibitions.



Mobile library in Olinda,
Pernambuco, Brazil.

In addition to the extension of media variety and services, public libraries have been experimenting with different means to cater more specifically to their local patrons. One such program in California, Zip Books, works to provide books that libraries may not have in their collections for patrons who may be looking for them. Initially started as a pilot program in 2011 through an LSTA grant from the California Public Library system, the program works by patrons of partnered library districts initially making requests for books through Zip that their libraries does not possess. The libraries then purchase the books and have them sent directly to the patron requesting them. Then, once the patron has finished the books, they simply bring them to their local library, where the library will then incorporate them into their collection. Any libraries seeking to join the program can write out an application for their district to join Zip and their application then goes through a review process determined by need and the funding that is available. Funding is then distributed to members each year, with current members and libraries already on a waitlist taking first priority. This program, as of early 2022, has been expanded to 89 districts throughout California and any new applicants can apply for up to \$35,000 worth of books

in tangible formats. The maintenance of this program does fall onto the individual libraries and their librarians are then responsible for record keeping and managing the grant funds and their requests.^[128]

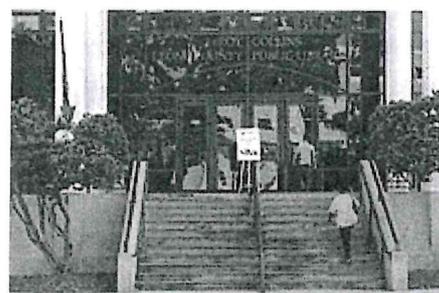
As more government services move online, libraries and librarians have a role in providing access to online forms and assistance with filling them out.^[129] For example, in 2013, American public libraries were promoted as a way for people to access online health insurance marketplaces created by the Affordable Care Act.^[130]

In rural areas, the local public library may have a bookmobile service, consisting of one or more buses or pack animals (such as burros, camels, donkey, or elephants) furnished as small public libraries, some equipped with Internet access points or computer labs, and serving the countryside according to a regular schedule. In communities that are extremely isolated or that have poor digital infrastructure, libraries may provide the only access to online education, telemedicine, or remote work. Libraries also partner with schools and community organizations to promote literacy and learning.^[131]

24-hour library access has been piloted in certain public libraries in North America, such as the Pioneer Library System's Norman Public Library in Oklahoma and Ottawa Public Library in Ontario.^[132] Such access may involve anywhere from a "library vending machine", in which print books are mechanically vended to (and dispensed from) patrons,^{[133][134]} to reduced staff during the night and early morning hours.

Libraries promote cultural awareness; in Newark, New Jersey, the public library celebrated African-American history with exhibits and programs.^[135] One account suggested libraries were essential to "economic competitiveness" as well as "neighborhood vitality" and help some people find jobs.^[131]

Libraries have an important role during emergencies and disasters, where they may be used as shelters, provide space to charge phones and access the Internet, and serve as locations for the distribution of aid, especially financial aid, which requires access to computers and the Internet.^[136] The U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency recognizes libraries as providing essential community service during times of disaster.^[137] Libraries have also had an increasingly important economic role during the recession, providing job search assistance, computer skills training and resume help to patrons.^[138]



FEMA Leon County Disaster Recovery Center, located inside the LeRoy Collins Public Library, Tallahassee, Florida

In response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, many libraries have begun offering remote and distance learning options for patrons.^[139]

Organization

The establishment or development of a public library involves creating a legal authorization and governing structure, building a collection of books and media, as well as securing reliable funding sources, especially government sources.^[140] Most public libraries are small, serving a population

of under 25,000, and are (or were) established in response to specific local needs.^[141] In *A Library Primer*, John Cotton Dana's 1899 work on the establishment and management of libraries in the United States, Dana wrote:

Each community has different needs, and begins its library under different conditions. Consider then, whether you need most a library devoted chiefly to the work of helping the schools, or one to be used mainly for reference, or one that shall run largely to periodicals and be not much more than a reading room, or one particularly attractive to girls and women, or one that shall not be much more than a cheerful resting-place, attractive enough to draw man and boy from street corner and saloon. Decide this question early, that all effort may be concentrated to one end, and that your young institution may suit the community in which it is to grow, and from which it is to gain its strength.^[142]

After being established and funded through a resolution, public referendum or similar legal process, the library is usually managed by a board of directors, library council or other local authority. A librarian is designated as the library director or library manager. In small municipalities, city or county government may serve as the library board and there may be only one librarian involved in the management and direction of the library. Library staff who are not involved in management are known in the United States and some other English-speaking countries as "library paraprofessionals" or "library support staff".^[143] They may or may not have formal education in library and information science. Support staff have important roles in library collection development, cataloging, technical support, and the process of preparing books for borrowing. All of these tasks may be referred to as *technical services*, whether or not they involve information technology.^[144] While the library's governing board has ultimate authority to establish policy, many other organizations may participate in library management or library fundraising, including civic and voluntary associations, women's clubs, Friends of the Library groups, and groups established to advise the library on the purchase and retention of books.

State and national governments may also have a role in the establishment and organization of public libraries. Many governments operate their own large libraries for public and legislative use (e.g., state libraries, the Library of Congress, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France). These governments can also influence local libraries by reserving formal recognition or funding for libraries that meet specific requirements. Finally, associations of library and information professionals, such as the American Library Association (ALA) and the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) help establish norms and standard procedures, secure funding, advocate at the state or national level and certify library schools or information schools.

Funding

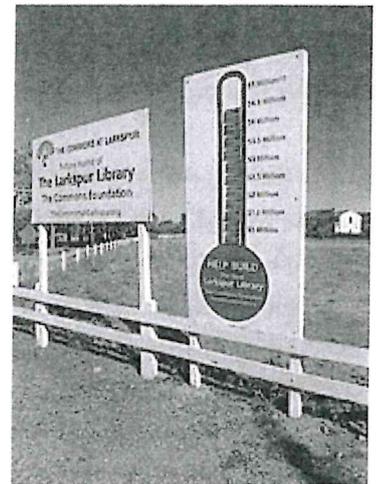
Public libraries are funded from a range of sources, the most significant of which is usually local or municipal funding.^{[145][146]} The citizens who use a local library support it via the city or county government, or through a special-purpose district, which is a local government body that has independent leadership and may levy its own taxes.^[147] Local funding may be supplemented by other government funding. For example, in the United States, the state and federal governments provide supplementary funding for public libraries through state aid programs, the Library

Services and Technology Act (LSTA) and E-Rate. In England, Local Authorities have a statutory duty to provide residents with a library service as set out in the Local Government Act 1974. State and local governments may also offer cities and counties large grants for library construction or renovation. Private philanthropy has also had a significant role in the expansion and transformation of library services, and, like other educational institutions, some libraries may be partially funded by an endowment. Some proactive librarians have devised alliances with patron and civic groups to supplement their financial situations. Library "friends" groups, activist boards, and well organized book sales also supplement government funding.

Public funding has always been an important part of the definition of a public library. However, with local governments facing financial pressures due to the Great Recession, some libraries have explored ways to supplement public funding. Cafes, bakeries, bookstores, gift shops and similar commercial endeavors are common features of new and urban libraries. The Boston Public Library has two restaurants and an online store which features reproductions of photographs and artwork.^[123] Pressure on funding has also led to closer partnerships between libraries, and between libraries and for-profit ventures, in order to sustain the library as a public space while providing business opportunities to the community.^[148] While still fairly uncommon, public-private partnerships and "mixed-use" or "dual-use" libraries, which provide services to the public and one or more student populations, are occasionally explored as alternatives. Jackson County, Oregon (US), closed its entire 15-branch public library system for six months in 2007, reopening with under a public-private partnership and a reduced schedule.^[149] Small fees, such as library fines or printing fees, may also offset the cost of providing library services, though fines and fees do not usually have a significant role in library funding. The decline of support from local governments has left libraries compensating at the expense of their patrons. In the article "Waking Up to Advocacy in a New Political Reality for Libraries", as early as the 1980s, libraries began charging fees and accruing fines for services rendered. These services included "printing, notarizing, scanning, photocopying, photo services, library cards for those who live outside of the service area, meeting room usage, document searches, inter-library loan, and e-book checkouts, and among many others".^[150]

Data shows disparities in private and public libraries, exemplifying that libraries in rural areas possess weaker technological infrastructures and fewer full-time employees holding the title of Librarian. Data shows that funding and service levels differ across and within states. Rural libraries tend to have smaller collections, lower bandwidth rates, less staff and fewer hours of operations. Access to high quality internet may be limited for lower-income individuals, ethnic minorities and rural residents.^[151] Due to underused libraries in less-advantaged communities, local governments have permanently closed libraries, affecting individuals that are less educated.^[152]

Although usage of public libraries has increased significantly in recent decades, libraries are under intense financial pressure and scrutiny.^{[153][154]} The American Library Association says media reports it compiled in 2004 showed some \$162 million in funding cuts to libraries nationwide.^[155] In 2009, 40% of states reported a decline in state aid for libraries.^[156] In 2012, Great Britain lost over 200 libraries to budget cuts, part of a general trend of fiscal austerity in Europe.^[157] However, there are signs of stabilization in library funding.^[158] As of 2012, funding for construction and



Funding meter sign for new library

IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 2022

Freedom, prosperity and the development of society and of 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.

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 underpins healthy knowledge societies through providing access to and enabling the creation and sharing of knowledge of all sorts, including scientific and local knowledge without commercial, technological or legal barriers.

In every nation, but especially in the developing world, libraries help ensure that the rights to education and participation in knowledge societies and in the cultural life of the community are accessible to as many people as possible.

This Manifesto proclaims UNESCO's belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture, inclusion and information, as an essential agent for sustainable development, and for individual fulfilment of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of all individuals.

UNESCO therefore encourages national and local governments to support and actively engage in the development of public libraries.

The Public Library

The public library is the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. It is an essential component of knowledge societies, continuously adapting to new means of communication to fulfil their mandate of providing universal access to and enabling meaningful use of information for all people. It provides publicly accessible space for the production of knowledge, sharing and exchange of information and culture, and promotion of civic engagement.

Libraries are creators of community, proactively reaching out to new audiences and using effective listening to support the design of services that meet local needs and contribute to improving quality of life. The public has trust in their library, and in return, it is the ambition of the public library to proactively keep their community informed and aware.

The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, language, social status, and any other characteristic. Specific services and materials must be provided for those users who cannot, for whatever reason, use the regular services and

materials, for example linguistic minorities, people with disabilities, poor digital or computer skills, poor literacy abilities 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, relevance to local needs and conditions, and reflective of the language and cultural diversity of the community are fundamental. Material must reflect current trends and the evolution of society, as well as the memory of human endeavour and imagination.

Collections and services should not be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship, nor commercial pressures.

Missions of the Public Library

The following key missions which relate to information, literacy, education, inclusivity, civic participation and culture should be at the core of public library services. Through these key missions, public libraries contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals and the construction of more equitable, humane, and sustainable societies.

- Providing access to a broad range of information and ideas free from censorship, supporting formal and informal education at all levels as well as lifelong learning enabling the ongoing, voluntary and self-conducted pursuit of knowledge for people at all stages of life;
- providing opportunities for personal creative development, and stimulating imagination, creativity, curiosity, and empathy;
- creating and strengthening reading habits in children from birth to adulthood;
- initiating, supporting and participating in literacy activities and programmes to build reading and writing skills, and facilitating the development of media and information literacy and digital literacy skills for all people at all ages, in the spirit of equipping an informed, democratic society;
- providing services to their communities both in-person and remotely through digital technologies allowing access to information, collections, and programmes whenever possible;
- ensuring access for all people to all sorts of community information and opportunities for community organising, in recognition of the library's role at the core of the social fabric;
- providing their communities with access to scientific knowledge, such as research results and health information that can impact the lives of their users, as well as enabling participation in scientific progress;
- providing adequate information services to local enterprises, associations and interest groups;
- preservation of, and access to, local and Indigenous data, knowledge, and heritage (including oral tradition), providing an environment in which the local community can take an active role in identifying materials to be captured, preserved and shared, in accordance with the community's wishes;
- fostering inter-cultural dialogue and favouring cultural diversity;
- promoting preservation of and meaningful access to cultural expressions and heritage, appreciation of the arts, open access to scientific knowledge, research and innovations, as expressed in traditional media, as well as digitised and born-digital material.

Funding, legislation and networks

Access to the public library building and services shall in principle be free of charge. The public library is the responsibility of local and national authorities. It must be supported by specific and updated legislation aligned to international treaties and agreements. It must be financed by national and local governments. It has to be an essential component of any long-term strategy for culture, information provision, literacies and education.

In the digital era, copyright and intellectual property legislation must ensure public libraries the same capacity to procure and give access to digital content on reasonable terms as is the case with physical resources.

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 library network must be designed in relation to national, regional, research and special libraries as well as libraries in schools, colleges and universities.

Operation and management

A clear policy must be formulated, defining objectives, priorities and services in relation to the local community needs. The importance of local knowledge and community participation is valuable to this process, and local communities should be included in decision-making.

The public library has to be organized effectively and professional standards of operation must be maintained.

Services have to be physically or digitally accessible to all members of the community. This requires well situated and equipped 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.

The library services must be adapted to the different needs of communities in rural and urban areas, as well as to the needs of marginalized groups, users with special needs, multilingual users, and Indigenous Peoples within the community.

The librarian is an active intermediary between users and resources, both digital and traditional. Sufficient human and material resources, as well as professional and continuing education of the librarian, to meet the challenges for now and in the future, are indispensable to ensure adequate services. Consultation by leadership with library professionals as to the quantitative and qualitative definition of sufficient resources should be undertaken.

Outreach and user education programmes have to be provided to help users benefit from all the resources.

Ongoing research should focus on evaluating library impact and collecting data, in order to demonstrate the societal benefit of libraries to policy makers. Statistical data should be collected long-term, as the benefits of libraries within society are often seen in subsequent generations.

Partnerships

Establishing partnerships is essential for libraries to reach a broader and more diverse public. Cooperation with relevant partners - for example, user groups, schools, non-governmental organisations, library associations, businesses, and other professionals at local, regional, national as well as international level- has to be ensured.

Implementing the Manifesto

Decision makers at national and local levels and the library community at large, around the world, are hereby urged to implement the principles expressed in this Manifesto.

18 July 2022