EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Libraries of all types are developing rapidly to take advantage of technological advancements and to meet the changing needs of communities across the nation. Many people in positions of power, however, do not yet understand the expanded roles and capabilities of modern libraries nor recognize the extent to which libraries can be catalysts for opportunity and progress. As a result, the nation severely underinvests in libraries. To reverse this trend, library allies must unite around shared long-term policy goals—specifically ones that pragmatically align to political and economic realities—and work together to educate and influence decision makers.

This National Policy Agenda for Libraries provides a vital framework for library advocates so that the community can engage actively in policy conversations with a strong, consistent voice. The vision for this collaborative national policy effort is to change perceptions of libraries from "obsolete" or "nice to have" to "essential," and to earn libraries a seat at the table during decision making. Libraries can be viable solutions for many pressing national challenges if they are involved early enough in discussions about capacity and implementation. We encourage library entities to fashion their policy priorities under the rubric of this national policy agenda so that we may build shared momentum.

Led by the American Library Association Office for Information Technology Policy, this agenda was developed in concert with major library organizations that serve on a Library Advisory Committee for the Policy Revolution! initiative. Funding for this project is provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as part of a three-year grant that also supports efforts to deepen national stakeholder engagement and increase library policy advocacy capacity.

Making the Case: Libraries are Essential

Libraries represent a critical national infrastructure that engages communities and delivers services, including the access to information that is the lifeblood of our country's knowledge economy. An explosion of new communications technologies and channels creates the illusion of unlimited resources. But in truth, our knowledge pipeline and the public interest likely face dangerous choke points and inequities if thoughtful and balanced policies do not prevail.

Libraries are singular in their mission to provide all people with the unbiased and relevant information and essential services that drive opportunity and progress. The role they play in preserving our free and democratic society is unique, and therefore libraries are essential to existing and new national policies.

Further, libraries are embedded in communities and campuses nationwide, making them a natural partner for the development and delivery of pragmatic solutions to pressing issues, including veteran reintegration, early childhood development, STEM education and health literacy. The policy positions that follow are a road map for the robust activation of a full spectrum of library services in alignment with national priorities.

Policy Focus: Build Capacity

Libraries deliver essential services that extend well beyond books and media. The nation derives economic and operational efficiency and effectiveness by using national library infrastructure and the services it provides, rather than reinventing such a network to deliver services (e.g., jobs centers, computer labs, or data repositories). The following policy goals will ensure libraries have the necessary capacity to strengthen and connect communities through existing and new programs.

EDUCATION AND LEARNING

- Increase awareness and understanding among policy decision makers that libraries are deeply engaged in education and learning for all ages:
    - Students in K-20 schools are guided by teacher-librarians and research specialists in the pursuit of their homework and research

o Libraries are broadening their support of continuing education through new mechanisms enabled by technology
o Literacy, a long-time focus of libraries, expands to include digital literacy that enables people to become proficient in new technologies such as maker spaces, 3D printers, and big data
o Libraries provide a wide array of services that includes summer media and technology camps, afterschool enrichment and tutoring services, and STEM programming
- Achieve new funding sources and capacity-building partnerships with public and private entities to improve student achievement and seamlessly upskill lifelong learners

EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- Increase recognition of libraries as economic drivers and expand support for libraries' efforts to provide job skills training and small business support, among other programs
- Seek funding for libraries under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and establish stronger partnerships with federal agencies including the Small Business Administration and the Department of Commerce, and non-governmental groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

- Increase recognition of libraries as a vital public health resource
- Formalize and expand support for library programs that help Americans live longer and healthier lives, especially efforts that enable preventative and proactive self-care

GOVERNMENT INFORMATION SERVICES

- Increase recognition of libraries as a critical bridge between e-government services and residents with inadequate internet access or digital skills
- Formalize and expand support for libraries as a point of delivery for government services and point of access for public information

HERITAGE AND HISTORY

- Gain recognition of libraries as principal stewards of the massive and complex collection of digital resources that comprise our nation's collective memory, expanding this responsibility from the physical world
- Position libraries to lead the development and implementation of a national strategy for digital preservation

Providing Reach: Libraries Connect Communities

Because libraries are deeply embedded in communities across the nation, they are uniquely positioned to provide specialized support to groups facing particular challenges. Libraries can add significant value to policies that seek to reach:

- Veterans and military families
- Older Americans
- New immigrants
- Rural Americans

Policy Focus: Advance the Public Interest

Libraries have long been champions of free and equitable access to information and education. This role is more important than ever before in this era of rapidly changing information policy and new digital ecosystems. The following policy goals will ensure libraries continue to defend and advance the public interest. Addressing these policy issues will have broad public benefits that stretch beyond libraries.

FUNDING

- Gain recognition of the significant role libraries must play in the digital revolution

- Increase public and private library funding and modify existing national-level programs to include policies that specifically designate libraries as eligible funding recipients

COPYRIGHT AND LICENSING

- Broaden the national copyright conversation from its focus on piracy to encompass creativity, innovation and the needs of the entire country
- Increase intensity of collaboration with alliances and coalitions, such as the Re:Create coalition
- Secure improved accommodations for people with print disabilities with the development and diffusion of digital formats nationally and internationally

DIGITAL CONTENT SYSTEMS

- Continue to explore new infrastructure models that enable sharing and discovery across libraries of all types, as well as communities and cultural institutions
- Champion new digital infrastructure investments, such as those represented by Institute of Museum and Library Services' National Digital Platform grant program

PRIVACY

- Guide and participate in debates and conversations about privacy within a changing digital landscape
- Advocate for policies that safeguard the privacy of library users and provide people with improved understanding and control over how their personal information is used and what they receive in exchange

BROADBAND ACCESS, ADOPTION AND USE

- Advocate for affordable access for all libraries to high-speed broadband infrastructure
- Continue efforts to take full advantage of and expand opportunities provided by modernized E-rate and other federal programs supporting fast, fair and neutral wired and wireless networks

LIBRARY-RELATED FUNCTIONS IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

- Increase productive ties among relevant government units that provide oversight or support for libraries or for the public's access to information
- Research alternative models, such as the Ministry of Culture and Communications in France, and propose potential applications for the United States

INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS

- Secure increased investments in the preparation of library staff and other information professionals for the new challenges of a digital age
- Reorient existing training of information professionals to align more closely with national priorities and community needs

Let's Meet the Challenge

Libraries enjoy considerable goodwill among national decision makers and influencers. Thus, we are in a good starting position but must expand understanding of libraries' significant modern capabilities and potential to those in power. This basic communications challenge is in addition to advocating specific policy proposals. We can do it, but it will take concerted efforts from a broad swath of the library community to be successful.

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For Further Information

This document is the executive brief of the full National Policy Agenda for Libraries. The complete document is available online at **http://www.ala.org/advocacy/sites/ala.org.advocacy/files/content/pdfs/NPAforLibraries1.pdf**

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