# GLOBAL VISION DISCUSSION

# Report of the Government Libraries Section meeting

*How a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future*

June 2017

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# Introduction

On June 1st-25th 2017, on Basecamp, 11 librarians participated in a conversation about how a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future. Together we represent 222 years of library experience.

The majority of library types represented were (unsurprisingly) government/national. Participants had also worked for and managed a range of other libraries including academic, public, private and not-for-profit. Participants came from both developed and developing countries and all corners of the globe.

Due to the global diversity of the section the obvious choice for the discussion was to hold it on Basecamp over several weeks, which has also been used for another GLS project. This allowed participants to join the virtual conversation at a time of their choosing. Responses by email were also accepted.

# A vision for libraries

Libraries enable literate, informed and participative societies. When we look at the future, according to the debates on Basecamp, this means that in tomorrow's world, libraries will be increasingly recognised as a source of accurate, impartial information. Librarians will work collaboratively with other librarians, professions and users to maximise their influence and reach.

## The core values of libraries (Q4):

1.  Promote access to quality, authoritative information and knowledge - for all.
2.  Facilitate learning for all ages.
3.  Support knowledge based decision making and research.
4.  Empower and serve all users and citizens equally.
5.  Professionalism - demonstrating integrity, impartiality and neutrality.

**Comments:**

The group reached a reasonable consensus on the above. Variants included "service orientation" and "equality of engagement and respecting diversity".

## Libraries are exceptionally good at (Q5):

1.  Sharing/providing information/knowledge to save time.
2.  Customer engagement and empathy to help users find the right information.
3.  Organising knowledge to preserve collections.
4.  Promoting information literacy - Facts Matter campaign.
5.  Providing safe space for learning, study and dialogue.

**Comments:**

Literacy was a popular theme (including "Facts Matter" campaign supported by CILIP) with one comment being "people who are working in library and information services have a great knowledge of information literacy - there is huge potential to utilize it". This question also attracted a range of other thoughts besides the above top five. Concerning preservation of collections, one contributor felt we were actually too good at "holding onto books that never get read or borrowed!". Notably, cataloguing and classifying was only explicitly mentioned by one person, this is reflected in the answers to Q7.

## Libraries should do more of (Q6):

1. Marketing/promotion and outreach to new and current users.
2. Advocacy and engagement with government and senior (non-librarian) leaders.
3. Continuing professional development to innovate and embrace emerging technology.
4. Breaking down silos by information brokering and aligning library strategy to the wider organisation.
5. Establish partnerships with other libraries/institutes.

**Comments:**

There was overwhelming agreement on the first two of the above.

## Libraries should do less of (Q7):

1. Cataloguing everything.
2. Working in silos and unnecessarily restricting access.
3. Concentrating on processes/administration striving for perfection - good enough is ok.
4. Lack of visibility.
5. Fearing change rather than embrace opportunities.

**Comments:**

There was a lot of agreement on the above, notably the feeling that cataloguing processes needed to be rethought.

# Challenges and solutions

## The main challenges to society (Q8):

1. Lack of dialogue (eg. Echo-chamber websites) causing ignorance and prejudice and lack of dialogue.

2. Inequitable access to information, concentrated in a few multinationals.

3. Digital illiteracy creating a digital divide.

4. Sustainable development.

5. Need for information literacy to combat misuse of technology and fake news.

**Comments:**

Notably, all respondents saw fake or lack of access to information as societal challenges.

## The main challenges to libraries (Q9):

1. Funding.

2. Visibility and the library as a physical space.

3. Fake news and the decline of contextual reading.

4. Prioritisation of limited resources.

5. Relevance, particularly to new generations.

**Comments:**

Although the above is a fair reflection, this question produced the most diverse range of thoughts and responses, partly reflecting personal circumstances of respondents. It was notable that an African respondent identified a very specific set of challenges:
· Reaching out to all the communities to the lowest unit,
· translation of information into local languages for all to access,
· low internet bandwidth in Africa,
· less appreciation of libraries and inclusion in the National Development Plans,
IFLA should be aware that challenges will vary by sector and country although of course there will be common themes.

Other mentions included staff retention, professional changes, and the need to "develop new and accepted pathways to provide information (e.g. Austin, Texas, Public Library will have kitchens in its new main library building to demonstrate cooking with local chefs, food, good health, etc. as well as a library marketing tool. This is a different pathway for the delivery of information but was quite a challenge to get approval and public acceptance)".

## The main professional challenges (Q10):

1. Advocacy and lobbying - working, explaining and engaging with non-librarians, managers and leaders.

2. Keeping up with technology - lack of technical expertise.

3. Reduced staffing but increased workload.

4. Training - need for practice over theory and keeping up to date with CPD.

5. Gaining senior leadership buy-in to speak on behalf of the profession.

**Comments:**

Keeping up with change was a consistent theme here.

# How a united library field can make a difference

## How should a united library field help meet the challenges identified (Q11)?

1. Collaborate to identifying global challenges, with respect to different library sectors and regions.

2. Concentrate on advocacy and lobbying.

3. Better networking and resource sharing.

4. Better liaison between libraries and library schools to enhance IT training and intern opportunities eg. In Africa.

5. Align Global Vision with UN SDGs; revise it regularly and promote in collaboration with international bodies.

**Comments:**

Thoughts were quite varied depending on the location of the respondent - above is a fair representation.

## The characteristics of a united library field (Q12):

1. United lobbying position.

2. International engagement and interchange of ideas.

3. Inspiring leaders - not necessarily librarians.

4. Professional ethics and common standards.

5. Networking with GLAM* industries.

**Comments:**

* Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums.
A variety of other characteristics were considered, including "powerful brand", "valued profession", and need to promote a campaign focused on "Facts Matter". Whilst a united lobbying position was considered most important, it was also felt that characteristics of different library sectors must also be recognised - not every library is a public library.

## The focus of a united library field (Q13):

1. Better advocacy for all libraries promoting their added value.

2. Better networking and co-operation between all library sectors and similar organisations eg. GLAM.

3. Co-operation between libraries/library associations in developed/developing countries - exchanges, promoting recognised professional qualifications.

4. Engage and work with international organisations and across governments to develop best practice and common approaches (eg. UN SDGs).

5. Professional ethics and standards.

**Comments:**

Themes of advocacy and networking were both often mentioned. Knowledge Quarter in London suggested as a good example of establishing networking opportunities with other GLAM partners.

# A global conversation

This report is created in an interactive process, in Basecamp on June 1st-22nd 2017. It is part of a global conversation initiated by IFLA on how a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future.

Over the course of two years (2017-2018), IFLA will involve as many librarians and others as possible in this global conversation. Participants are encouraged to continue the conversation in their own networks and organization and share the results with IFLA. At the end of 2017, the first results of all the workshops and online discussions will be turned into a *Global Vision Report*, which in turn will be adapted into concrete strategies, processes and work programmes in 2018.

To learn more about the global conversation, and download supporting materials to support your own activities, visit globalvision.ifla.org.

Stay tuned for news about the IFLA Global Vision discussion following #iflaGlobalVision and make sure to cast your vote in August when the online voting platform is available on https://globalvision.ifla.org/.