



GLOBAL VISION DISCUSSION

Report of Law Libraries Section meeting
*How a united library field can tackle the
challenges of the future*

Based on discussion held by Zoom on July 6, 2017,
and on comments submitted online.

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Introduction

During July 2017, four members of the Standing Committee of the IFLA Law Libraries Section participated in a virtual (Zoom) conversation about how a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future. Four other SC members participated in the discussion of the Global Vision questions by providing their answers in written form. This report is therefore based on the contributions of eight individuals, who represent four countries (Canada, Australia, Singapore, and United States). These individuals are employed primarily in academic law libraries, with one participant from a government law library organization. Together they represent over 231 years of library experience.

A vision for libraries

We affirm that libraries are a necessary component of literate, informed, and participative societies. Libraries have a mission to be accessible sources of authentic, objective information, where people come to find the truth. Law libraries have a particular responsibility to provide equitable and permanent public access to authentic legal information, which is a necessary requirement for a just and democratic society worldwide. When we look at the future, we understand that it is necessary to promote understanding and cooperation among all libraries in the global library community, to carry out our important mission and to promote access to justice and the rule of law.

The core values of libraries (Q4):

- 1. Access: provision of equitable and open access to recorded knowledge, information, and creative works in a variety of formats.*
- 2. Authenticity: being trusted as a source of authentic information, including government and legal information. Law Libraries facilitate access to justice and the rule of law.*
- 3. Preservation: preserving, archiving, and acting as memory institutions and good stewards of information, to communicate knowledge to future generations.*
- 4. Advocacy: support for intellectual freedom, free flow of information and ideas, and privacy rights of users.*
- 5. Service: exemplary, patron-focused service to communities, showing commitment to information literacy and respect for diversity and individuality.*

Comments:

Libraries are exceptionally good at (Q5):

1. *Organization and information management: collecting, organizing, providing access to, and preserving information.*
2. *Advocacy: standing up for and protecting the rights of users (freedom of expression and privacy) and of content creators and publishers.*
3. *Representing diverse viewpoints: providing information that represents a range of perspectives and experiences, striving for impartiality to meet the needs of all members of the community.*
4. *Teaching: assisting and instructing library users with their information needs, both in-person (in physical space of library facilities) and virtually.*
5. *Innovation: using technology creatively to help information seekers by finding, evaluating, organizing, creating, communicating, and preserving all types of information.*

Comments:

Libraries should do more of (Q6):

1. *Be a community hub: offer comfortable physical spaces where people come together to interact, access and share information, collaborate, and create.*
2. *Be a laboratory: encourage innovation and experimental use of information technology.*
3. *Promote economic/job growth and development: be business incubators and provide information and tools for growth of economies and sustainable development.*
4. *Affirm position as trusted source: promote relevance and value to communities of librarians as impartial and knowledgeable guides to reliable and authentic information sources.*
5. *Speak out...resist censorship and provide information representing diverse genres, ideas, and expressions and reflecting a broad range of viewpoints and cultures. Embrace advocacy role. Stand for truth and a variety of viewpoints. Be politically astute and perceptive.*

Comments:

Libraries should do less of (Q7):

1. *Operating in silos: need instead to work together and to explore collaboration and partnerships within and outside the library field.*
2. *Self-censoring: using impartiality as an excuse to not take a stand on issues when appropriate.*

3. *Follow customs of the past without question: continue to maintain outdated procedures and restrictions. Be hesitant to try new things and take risks. Being reluctant to allow organic development and to adapt naturally. Being too controlling.*
4. *Create barriers for users: staying within physical walls and maintaining outdated restrictions on use of resources.*
5. *Fail to recognize and discontinue activities that no longer are relevant or have an impact.*

Comments:

Decisions on “what to do less of” depend on the individual library and the needs of its users. Vendors have taken over a lot of technical services and librarians seem to be struggling to find a role, so they are jumping to take on whatever roles they can to be relevant in the organization. There has been a move to preserve the institutional knowledge/archives over commercial information. Work is undertaken to update the library website and to do various analytics to argue the relevance and usefulness of the library and its space, while print resources are being discarded. As digitization progresses, the need for physical spaces is being called into question.

Challenges and solutions

The main challenges to society (Q8):

1. *Impact of the Internet on society: growth of the Internet has created great opportunities but has also brought new problems. Digital divide—Internet access is not equally available to all--need to provide for access to technology and the information infrastructure to gain access to information. For others, there is easy availability of online information but less concern with authenticity.*
2. *Diminished respect for authentic information: web-based demagoguery and propaganda has taken hold. People losing will and ability to separate true information from fake news. Result: erosion of authority and privacy. Loss of a sense of history. People have become tribal and fragmented, and can no longer seem to find common ground for the public good.*
3. *Literacy, including information literacy: in many places around the globe learning, knowledge, and education must be encouraged. Improvement needed in terms of schooling, ability to read, ability to speak several world languages (so language does not become a barrier to access to information).*
4. *Economic inequality and poverty: available economic resources to provide for mass learning and education programs for all are lacking in many places around the globe.*
5. *Disruption in political landscape: Resistance to globalization and the rise of human rights abuses. Need for protection of human rights and the rule of law. Need for encouragement and promotion of social values. Encourage political/government will and commitment to provide for social and educational programs.*

Comments:

Use of the Internet has led to a major shift in how governments make legal information available—from print to digital format. Along with that change, governments need to ensure that law is easily accessible, trustworthy, and available for future generations. The 2016 IFLA Statement on Government Provision of Public Legal Information in the Digital Age addresses the important issues of equitable, no-fee access, technology-based authentication, and long-term preservation and accessibility.

The main challenges to libraries (Q9):

- 1. Funding. Getting message out to funders. Lack of funding needed to maintain and expand the library's role. Funding is needed for the basics and to develop action plans and goals for projects and outreach. Financial shortfalls translate to lack of time, resources (people/items).*
- 2. Stereotypes. Overcoming outdated perceptions of libraries and librarians. Libraries need to be or to become a priority for government and their importance in the hierarchy needs to be understood. This may not currently be "on the radar" of the administration (city, organization, etc.).*
- 3. Social and technological disruption—transitioning to new circumstances Need to serve both in-person and remote users. Need to develop technological infrastructures that are user-friendly and intuitive.*
- 4. Access and Preservation. Preserving the digital and physical information-- Mass digitization projects & sharing digital collections-- International resource sharing. Licensing work in digital formats and copyrights--use and sharing of electronic resources.*
- 5. Formation of community connections. Example: law libraries finding appropriate ways to collaborate with outside groups, despite unique constraints in legal field.*

Comments:

Libraries need to secure funding to develop their spaces to be inviting for meeting, research and study and social purposes while at the same time serving a community of remote users via relevant technologies. While many users continue to see libraries as spaces and continue to use them as such, other users want to receive library services and expertise remotely. Will libraries be necessary in the future, with online information, robots, and artificial intelligence? Will community spaces take over?

The main professional challenges (Q10):

- 1. Having a clear institution mission/vision/mandate to keep the library moving forward while still confronting the day-to-day challenges of supervision. Obtaining funding for the library (or at least*

preventing cuts). Economic remuneration, pay scale. Adopting and implementing changes and incorporating these changes meaningfully in our information units.

2. Having to do more with less. Dealing with administration that does not value its people. Having “survival mode” mentality. Lack of trained and skilled personnel able to provide for the needs of the users and customize services to their researching skills.

3. Combating stereotypes and demonstrating the value of the library to parent institution. Librarians are continually being required to justify themselves and their work—and to show that the library is a vital & valuable part of the parent institution.

4. Keeping updated with latest technology and acquiring new knowledge and skills that an evolving profession requires. Also need to be monitoring trends in other sectors that may influence what libraries could do or provide opportunities.

5. Generational issues: knowledge transfer and succession planning. Staying connected.

Comments:

Other issues mentioned: Teaching the users to use and adopt new technologies and acquire new skills. Being able to demonstrate to users the impact and value of new technologies or methodologies to access information. Managers who are fixated with spaces and keen to dispose of printed materials.

How a united library field can make a difference

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

1. Change/expand curriculum in university library and information science programs—to better prepare future librarians.

2. Find strength in one voice through networking. Create a community across all types of libraries: school libraries, public libraries, community college libraries, university libraries, law libraries, library schools (SLIS), library organizations.

3. Use the potential of social media: adapt social media to functions and roles of the information centers and libraries.

4. Work with futurists and share information that will help us to plan to be part of the next information future and whatever technologies that future may bring.

5. Provide grant funding to libraries for information literacy programs and for access to justice programs.

Comments:

Discussion about library school curriculum included the following: Follow best practices in library school. Encourage library schools to teach required courses in the areas of government documents, civics, information policy, critical thinking (no more fake news) and social justice/access to justice. Provide an IFLA curriculum focus document in these areas for library schools to consider if such a document does not already exist. These courses would be helpful for librarians of any specialty. Teach more elective courses in law librarianship. teach more about advocacy and marketing so that librarians have the tools to fight for their library and their community.

The characteristics of a united library field (Q12):

1. *Transparency.*
 2. *Working together to advocate for and promote open access to information.*
 3. *IFLA acting as a strong advocate for librarians—advocacy by professional organizations of librarians to support members of the profession.*
 4. *Sharing a vision across types of libraries and their individual missions.*
 5. *Highly-developed personal networks.*
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Comments:

The focus of a united library field (Q13):

1. *Advocacy-- Promoting and advocating for professional development. Working with governments to create a unified vision, goals, and objectives--to promote and elevate the information field and to emphasize other issues, such as the importance of ensuring that the law of their countries is accessible, trustworthy, and available for future generations. Educating librarians to be advocates for their patrons and their communities with respect to human rights, access to justice, and economic growth and development*
 2. *Partnerships. Developing strong partnerships to promote libraries and library services around the globe. Broad collaboration that links colleagues in all types of libraries...academic, public, public schools, law libraries, library schools, library organizations...to work in partnership toward common goals.*
 3. *Core values and standards. Continue setting high professional and practice standards in the field of library and information science. Setting out standards and core values for practice across borders, unifying the practice across borders. Assist developing countries to set, adopt and implement professional and practice standards.*
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4. *Be leaders in preserving the digital record (for publishers, institutional depositories, the community) and facilitate/work towards a one stop shop, global retrieval system.*

5. *Have a united vision and promote this as the role of the profession.*

Comments:

A global conversation

This report was created in an interactive process by members of the IFLA Law Libraries Section during July 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](https://twitter.com/iflaGlobalVision) and make sure to cast your vote in August when the online voting platform is available on <https://globalvision.ifla.org/>.