

OSSERVATORIO

# Redefining the library experience: shaping future engagement with communities

by Lynn Silipigni Connaway, Lesley A. Langa

## Introduction

Libraries are continually evolving to meet the changing needs of their communities<sup>1</sup>. However, the rapid pace of technological advancements and shifting societal expectations have created significant challenges for library leaders and staff. This paper addresses these challenges by synthesizing the findings from a 2023 survey conducted on Redefining the library experience in partnership between the OCLC Global Council<sup>2</sup>, OCLC Research, and OCLC Market research teams. The results provide insights into the ways library leaders and staff expect the library experience to evolve over the next decade. The findings shared in this paper provide actionable insights that can empower library professionals to enhance their services, foster community engagement, and ensure the long-term relevance of their institution.

In the last several years, the OCLC Global Council had selected an area of focus concentrating on topics of interest to libraries around the world from all library types.

LYNN SILIPIGNI CONNAWAY, OCLC, e-mail: [lconnaway@gmail.com](mailto:lconnaway@gmail.com)

LESLEY A. LANGA, OCLC, e-mail: [langal@oclc.org](mailto:langal@oclc.org)

Last website consultation: March 1<sup>st</sup> 2025

The authors want to thank Peggy Gallagher and Joanne Cantrell, OCLC Market Analysis, for their assistance in the development and dissemination of the focus group interview and survey questions and analysis of the findings. We also would like to thank Erica Melko, Senior Project Coordinator, Product Marketing, OCLC, for her editorial expertise and Christina Rodrigues, formerly of OCLC, for her excellent project management skills for keeping the project on track.

1 Lynn Silipigni Connaway, [et al.], *New model library: pandemic effects and library directions*, with a foreword by Janice Welburn. Dublin (OH): OCLC research, 2021, <<https://doi.org/10.25333/2d1r-f907>>; *Library 2035: imagining the next generation of libraries*, edited by Sandra Hirsch. Lanham (Maryland): Rowman & Littlefield, 2024; Marie Palmer, *Study of future public library trends & best practices*, «Public library quarterly» 41 (2022), n. 1, p. 8-107, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2020.1868224>>.

2 OCLC's Global Council is the predecessor to the Leaders Council, it's current governance structure. See <<https://www.oclc.org/en/membership/councils.html>> for information about the OCLC Leaders Council.

AIB studi, vol. 64 n. 3 (settembre/dicembre 2024), p. 441-461. DOI 10.2426/aibstudi-14134

ISSN: 2280-9112, E-ISSN: 2239-6152 - Copyright © 2024 Lynn Silipigni Connaway;

Lesley A. Langa



Each area of focus included activities that provided opportunities for professionals at all levels of their careers to participate and add their voices and ideas to the conversation. The Redefining the library experience topic responded to a renewed emphasis on shifting expectations on how libraries shape user experiences around library spaces, programming, and collections for the present and future. The resulting survey gathered insight into the ways library leaders and staff expect changing library experiences to create more meaningful engagement and positive impacts within their community.

The survey respondents shared their thoughts about their future planning for the library experience. The research team analyzed the survey responses to provide ideas on how to drive change in libraries during the next decade. The survey findings are organized in this paper into three primary categories of experiences: collections, engagement, and work experiences<sup>3</sup>.

### Literature

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the literature on the evolving role of libraries, highlighting key trends and practices that are reshaping library services and community engagement and offering readers valuable insights into the future direction of library experiences. Recently, this has included a renewed emphasis on proactively shaping experiences around library spaces, programming, collections, and staff development<sup>4</sup>.

Acting as receivers and actors for change within communities requires ongoing evolution of staff training, programming, and collections supported by community involvement and engagement. For ten years, USA and Canadian libraries have focused on community expectations and needs through developing stronger relationships with local partners to enact «positive community change»<sup>5</sup>. Training and resources for library staff are available through a variety of targeted programs, such as continuing education provided by USA state libraries, WebJunction, and the American Library Association's Libraries Transforming Communities program<sup>6</sup>. These learning experiences demonstrate a broad curricula addressing the adoption of new technologies and programming that focus on recent trends, such as generative AI, and ongoing topics, such as building a new library, managing stress, and customer service.

In preparation for the survey in this study, OCLC Research conducted three focus group interviews with select Global Council members in June and July 2022 to identify future planning taking place since the pandemic<sup>7</sup>. What are the trends that libraries are responding to now and what are they considering for the future? To our

<sup>3</sup>These experiences were based on the New model library framework. See <<https://www.oclc.org/research/publications/2021/oclcresearch-new-model-library.html>> for more information about this framework, project, and findings.

<sup>4</sup>M. Palmer, *Study of future public library trends & best practices* cit.

<sup>5</sup>American Library Association, *About libraries transforming communities (LTC)*, <<https://www.ala.org/tools/librariestransform/libraries-transforming-communities/about-ltc#:~:text=Libraries%20Transforming%20Communities%3A%20Accessible%20Small,better%20serve%20people%20with%20disabilities.>>. *Study of future public library trends & best practices* cit.

<sup>6</sup>WebJunction, <<https://learn.webjunction.org/>>. American Library Association, *About libraries transforming communities (LTC)* cit.

<sup>7</sup>Peggy Gallagher [et al.], *Redefining the library experiences summary report*. Dublin (OH): OCLC unpublished, 2023.

interviewees, their vision of the library of the future is a community hub, one that acts as a crossroads for discovery, learning, and collaboration. Hybrid services are redefining the service model for libraries with necessary in-person reference, information and technology literacy, and in-person programming alongside open content, controlled digital lending and streaming services. One librarian noted doing all of these at once tends to shift priorities, though a library's NorthStar should always be the user: «you can't put technology over the person».

The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) 2024 Trends Report<sup>8</sup> and a study conducted by Marie Palmer from 2022 on behalf of the Squamish Public Library system in British Columbia, Canada<sup>9</sup> report on shifting trends that confirm findings from the focus group interviews. In the IFLA report<sup>10</sup>, Dezuanni and Osman document two simultaneous changes occurring in the information environment: a diversity in information resources and knowledge systems, expanding the resources available to users, and a growing distrust in institutions, journalism, and government. As outgrowths of the social justice wave that impacts communities and societies, these two colliding movements present a challenge to libraries standing at the crossroads between trust, information access, and education. Palmer's study<sup>11</sup>, focused on trends affecting public libraries, notes that centering inclusion in shared spaces and collections and through partnerships helps build a shared trust between users and staff. The political winds that affect libraries start with local connections and community issues before spilling over to the national or international stage. Building community and belonging, decreasing social and cultural isolation, is a unique role for libraries globally<sup>12</sup>. The library as the community hub varies depending on the community, which is supported by the findings of this study.

Both the IFLA and Palmer's studies note that new information consumers are turning first to digital materials and looking for ways to create content to post online while seeking out the equipment available to them to create media and art in shared spaces<sup>13</sup>. This supports the idea that physical materials are less in demand than digital, therefore, public library spaces can be repurposed for community gatherings<sup>14</sup>. Student study groups, community activists, local hobbyists, and readers' circles are also using communal spaces in libraries in lieu of community centers or churches<sup>15</sup>. Some public library systems are leaning into this shift, adding fewer print and physical materials for reading when planning and constructing new library buildings with theaters, multipurpose spaces and outdoor gardens or learning environments<sup>16</sup>.

**8** M. Dezuanni; K. Osman, *IFLA trend report 2024: phase 1* cit. M. Palmer, *Study of future public library trends & best practices* cit.

**9** M. Palmer, *Study of future public library trends & best practices* cit.

**10** M. Dezuanni; K. Osman, *IFLA trend report 2024: phase 1* cit.

**11** M. Palmer, *Study of future public library trends & best practices* cit.

**12** M. Dezuanni; K. Osman, *IFLA trend report 2024: phase 1* cit.

**13** *Ibidem*. M. Palmer, *Study of future public library trends & best practices* cit.

**14** M. Palmer, *Study of future public library trends & best practices* cit.

**15** M. Dezuanni; K. Osman, *IFLA trend report 2024: phase 1* cit. M. Palmer, *Study of future public library trends & best practices* cit.

**16** M. Palmer, *Study of future public library trends & best practices* cit.

Libraries that cannot build new are expanding their programs and services beyond the four walls of the library into the community at pop-up locations such as schools, bus depots, and shopping centers<sup>17</sup>. While bookmobiles and books-by-mail programs have a long history, the expansion of digital materials, digital subscriptions via third-party applications, and pop-ups push «services in the environments where our users live, learn, and work»<sup>18</sup>. Outreach is a core service offered in libraries as user demand for changing space and technology evolve.

As Quigley, et al, explain, academic library users are concerned with access and discovery of library materials<sup>19</sup>. Re-evaluating collections, focusing on the diversity of materials and the inclusion of marginalized voices, has impacted acquisitions and collections management practices as well as community demand<sup>20</sup>. Notably in the USA and Canada, challenges to the DEIA-focus on acquisitions and collecting has impacted the relationship between the campus community and non-campus community. The tension in how to supply campus demand with materials that suit their educational needs, while also protecting students and professors from backlash is ongoing<sup>21</sup>. The demand for increased discovery of these materials, and information literacy education around academic publishing, rises alongside the diversification of library<sup>22</sup> collections, as the means for delivery continue to widen with the increase of open access journals. Open science and open research policies in the USA require that academic institutions make their results and data freely available, though how to do that, what support it requires, and how best to connect researchers with these services in the library are uneven and disjointed<sup>23</sup>.

In addition to offering materials both physical and digital, reconfiguring space inside the building and creating new space outside the building, users are turning to libraries to learn skills and tasks. «Skills and abilities are becoming more complex» note Dezuanni and Osman highlighting that the digital divide, social isolation, and the quick development of generative AI can be overwhelming and challenging for both technology-inclined users and technology-isolated ones<sup>24</sup>.

During the pandemic, availability of technology from the library and digital materials eased social isolation and literacy decline, but many users that lacked access to broadband and information technology relied on trained library staff for assistance<sup>25</sup>.

17 *Ibidem*.

18 Lynn Silipigni Connaway, *The library in the life of the user: engaging with people where they live and learn*. Dublin (OH): OCLC research, 2015, p. 4 <<http://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/2015/oclcresearch-library-in-life-of-user.pdf>>

19 Brian D. Quigley [et al.], 2024 *Top trends in academic libraries: a review of the trends and issues*, 2024 <<https://crln.acrl.org/index.php/crlnews/article/view/26379/34322>>.

20 *Ibidem*.

21 *Ibidem*.

22 *Ibidem*.

23 *Ibidem*.

24 M. Dezuanni; K. Osman, *IFLA trend report 2024: phase 1* cit. M. Palmer, *Study of future public library trends & best practices* cit.

25 Gretchen Corsillo, *Libraries and literacy: a natural connection*, «Public libraries magazine», (Nov.-Dec. 2024), p- 8-9. M. Palmer, *Study of future public library trends & best practices* cit.

Hybrid experiences combining technology literacy with in-person instruction is one example of the library of the future<sup>26</sup>.

Expansion into educational programming and skill building also strengthened in-person services. Language learning, passport applications, voter registration and new citizen courses available through the library connected community members with social and civic services<sup>27</sup>. New partnerships with organizations offered users access to legal experts, museums, local business leaders, health services organizations and Indigenous communities for consultations inside the library and sometimes at external events<sup>28</sup>. Despite political shifts that bring about misinformation and distrust in public institutions, libraries sitting at the crossroads of education and access to services are still widely used by many community members. Libraries see their role as affecting positive community change by being connectors to other agencies for education, food insecurity, housing, and emergency preparedness where the library can serve as a safe space, a distribution center, and a workshop location all at the same time<sup>29</sup>.

Beyond traditional materials and services, users visit libraries to browse, engage with hobbyist groups and check out items from the library of things<sup>30</sup>. The library of things is typically a collection of lending items that are skill-oriented or entertainment, including anything from musical instruments to blood pressure machines, to board games<sup>31</sup>. Leisure activities and meeting spaces are a valuable third space in communities that are declining<sup>32</sup>. Libraries as community hubs provide accessible and valued space for creativity and learning to flourish. Connections made in-person between library users through knowledge sharing and a sense of belonging are irreplaceable, and during the pandemic, proved to be invaluable<sup>33</sup>.

Both now and in the future, library staff must consider the needs of their community and how to meet those needs through expanding their skillset and toolkit. In the focus group interviews conducted for this study, participants suggested that library workflow should consider a function-based organizational structure, one that relies less on subject matter expertise or the specialization within the master's in library and information

26 L. S. Connaway [et al.], *New model library* cit.

27 Lynn Silipigni Connaway [et al.], *The public library research agenda*. Dublin (OH): OCLC research, 2023 [unpublished]. L. S. Connaway [et al.], *New model library* cit.

28 Brooke Doyle [et al.], *The library serves as an amplifier and connector in the community it serves' : building bridge to legal assistance*. In: *How public libraries build sustainable communities in the 21st century*, edited by K.C. Williams-Cockfield, B. Mehra. London: Emerald group publishing, p. 17-26. M. Palmer, *Study of future public library trends & best practices* cit.

29 B. Doyle [et al.], *The library serves as an amplifier and connector in the community it serves' cit.*

30 Kara Reuter [et al.], *From alone to together alone: using data to delivery value*, «Public libraries online», 1 August 2021 <<https://publiclibrariesonline.org/2021/08/from-alone-to-together-again-using-data-to-deliver-value/>>. M. Palmer, *Study of future public library trends & best practices* cit.

31 Matthew Gunby, *Library of things shapes dialogue on library collections*, «Public libraries online», 12 May 2015, <<https://publiclibrariesonline.org/2015/05/library-of-things-shapes-dialogue-on-library-collections/>>.

32 K. Reuter [et al.], *From Alone to Together alone* cit.

33 Mariam Keshvari; Mehrdad Cheshmeh Sohrabi, *Visualization of hot topics and global trends in community librarianship (with an emphasis on the role of public libraries)*, «Public library quarterly», 43 (2024), n. 5, p. 577-602, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2024.2315363>>.

science degrees. With function-based workflows, library staff can share responsibilities to cover gaps in the event of an illness or prolonged absence. The lack of these skills, or the inability to hire for them, impacts a library's ability to serve their community now and will certainly come to affect their offerings and services in the future<sup>34</sup>.

### Methodology

To gather input on how library leaders and staff envision the future of their libraries, several data collection methods were used. Focus group interviews were conducted with library leaders, managers, and front-line staff. Based on the findings from these focus group interviews and the literature, an online survey was developed.

Three focus group interviews with select Global Council members were conducted in June and July 2022. One of the focus group interviews was conducted in person with eleven participants at the ALA 2022 Annual Meeting in Washington, DC on 24 June 2022<sup>35</sup>. The other two focus group interviews were virtually conducted on 14 and 18 July 2022. There was a total of ten participants in the two virtual focus group interviews: six participants in the 14 July 2022 focus group interview and four in the virtual 18 July 2022.

The focus group interview questions were:

**Q1.** It's 2032, a community member has visited your newly built library that just opened and writes a glowing review of their experience – **what kind of things do you hope they say in their review?**

**Q2.** Knowing that not everyone in the community visits the physical library, **how does the community engage with your library in an online or virtual space?**

**Q3.** When you built your new library in 2032, you were given the opportunity to staff the library however you wanted. **What does your staffing look like?**

**Q4.** It's 2032, and your users have more resource and delivery options through the library than ever before. **What can they do in 2032 that they couldn't do in 2022?**

**Q5.** Again, it's 2032, a community leader (if a public library) or campus leader (if academic library) shares with you their surprise and delight with all the different ways they've encountered «the library» while out in the community/on campus. **How and where do you hope those encounters happen?**

**Q6.** Now we want you to think big. What is the primary role of the library in 2032 and how is that role different or the same from today?

Based on the findings from the New Model Library<sup>36</sup>, the themes identified in the literature<sup>37</sup>, and the focus group interviews conducted for this study, the online survey was developed. The themes addressed in the survey include community engagement, collaboration among libraries and other community agencies, innovative library offerings and programs, and staff training and development to meet communities' changing expectations and needs.

The survey was drafted in September and October 2022. It was pretested and revised in October 2022 based on comments and suggestions from pre-testers. The survey was

**34** M. Dezuanni; K. Osman, *IFLA trend report 2024: phase 1* cit. M. Palmer, *Study of future public library trends & best practices* cit.

**35** Lesley A. Langa [et al.], *Global Council 2023 area of focus: redefining the library experiences delegate discussion group summary*. Dublin (OH): OCLC research unpublished, 2022.

**36** L. S. Connaway [et al.], *New model library* cit.

**37** See the literature discussed in the Literature section above.

finalized in English and translated into five languages – Dutch, German, International French, International Spanish, and Italian – in November and December 2022.

An invitation to participate in the survey was shared with OCLC Global Council Delegates on 09 January 2023, who were encouraged to share the survey link within their networks. Invitations to participate in the survey also were sent via email to several of OCLC’s Marketing Cloud opt-in lists and were shared with previous IFLA/OCLC Fellows, in person at OCLC member events, online through the OCLC Community Center and through OCLC social media channels such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Promotional language for the survey was offered in the six languages mentioned above. Survey respondents could select the language of their choice from a dropdown menu before responding to the survey.

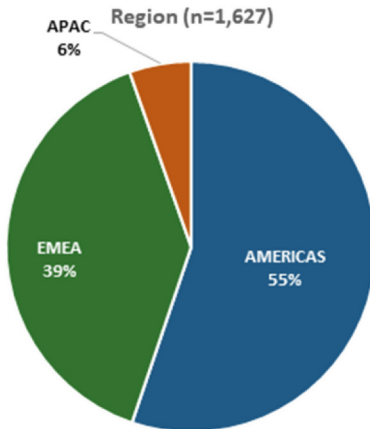
The survey was disseminated from 09 January 2023 – 31 March 2023. One thousand six hundred twenty-seven respondents from 77 countries/territories completed or partially completed the survey.

The survey asked the respondents to think about their future plans and where they expected services, technology offerings, physical space, staffing, community engagement, and partnerships would evolve in the next five to ten years. Respondents could select if they expect:

- Future services, programs, or staffing to increase
- Future services, programs, or staffing to stay the same
- Future services, programs, or staffing to decrease
- Services, programs, or staffing that are not offered currently but the library plans to in the future
- Services, programs, or staffing that are not offered currently, and the library does not plan to in the future
- Are not sure how services, programs or staffing would change in five to ten years.

*Respondents by region and type*

More than half (55%) of the respondents are from the Americas (AMER) region; 39% are from the Europe, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) region; and 6% are from the Asia Pacific (APAC) region. See Figure 1.



**Figure 1 – Response Rates by Major Regions**

Respondents from eighteen countries represent the Americas region, with most responses

from the United States (n=716) and Canada (n=79). The EMEA respondent base is made up of 43 countries/territories, with the largest group of respondents in France (n=129), Germany (n=110) and Spain (n=108). The Asia Pacific respondent base is comprised of 16 countries/territories, with the most responses coming from Australia (n=23).

*Respondents by library type*

Just more than half (52%) of the respondents are from academic (or education) libraries. See Figure 2.

Among the academic library respondents, 46% are from college/university/higher education/research libraries, 3% from community college libraries, 2% from school libraries (K-12), and 4% from other education libraries. Nearly a third (30%) are from public libraries and 18% are from other library types.

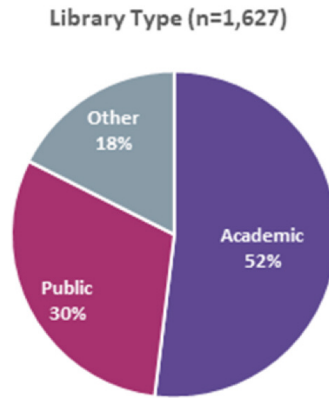


Figure 2 – Response Rates by Major Library Type

The responses by library type within the three regions are quite similar for all library types, except for public library and other library type responses from the APAC Region. Only 11% of the responses from the APAC Region were from public libraries, which is much less than percentages of responses from the AMER (33%) and EMEA (29%) regions. Thirty-three percent of the responses from the APAC region were from other library types. This is a greater percentage response rate for this library type than from the AMER (14%) and the EMEA (21%) regions. See Figure 3.

Library Type	Total (n=1,627)	AMER (n=898)	APAC (n=88)	EMEA (n=641)
Academic	52%	53%	56%	50%
Public	30%	33%	11%	29%
Other	18%	14%	33%	21%

Figure 3 – Responses by Major Library Type and Region



## Findings and discussion

### *Collections experiences*

This section addresses the ways respondents are evolving their collections to meet the diverse needs of their communities. The Collections experiences section covers the delivery of physical materials, highlighting the methods respondents are adopting to ensure accessibility and convenience for their users. It also explores the delivery of electronic materials, emphasizing the growing importance of digital resources in today's information landscape. Finally, this section examines in-person services, online services, and technology offerings for users, showcasing how libraries are integrating traditional and modern approaches to enhance user experiences and engagement.

### Delivery of physical materials

As libraries continue to evolve to meet user needs, the methods for delivering physical materials also are shifting. This section delves into the enduring role of traditional branch locations alongside the growing importance of community-based delivery options, reflecting how respondents are adapting to ensure broader access and convenience.

In total, respondents globally expect traditional branch locations to continue to deliver physical materials (43%) followed by 24% expecting home, office, or dormitory delivery to stay the same. Eleven percent of respondents indicate that direct delivery by the library to users will stay the same and a similar percentage (10%) expect staffed pop-ups, booths, or tables at partner or community locations to remain constant. A larger percentage (17%) expect increases in the physical delivery of materials to staffed pop-ups or booths at community locations. See Figure 4.

Comparing regions, the Americas (AMER) are driving the increase in delivery of physical materials to staffed community locations (21%) with 15% of Asia-Pacific (APAC) library respondents expecting an increase and 10% of Europe, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) library respondents expecting increase in physical material delivery to community locations.

Twelve percent of respondents worldwide expected increases via three methods of delivery in the next five to ten years: via direct delivery of materials by the library to users, via mailing materials to homes, offices, or dormitories and via availability at traditional branch locations (12% for each method). Roughly equal percentages of respondents expect these increases in every region. For direct delivery by library to users, 12% of AMER respondents expect an increase, 18% of APAC respondents expect an increase, and 11% of EMEA respondents expect an increase. Mailing materials to homes, offices, or dormitories, 13% of AMER respondents expect mailing delivery to increase, 14% of APAC respondents expect mailing delivery to increase, and 9% of EMEA respondents expect mailing delivery to increase. Thirteen percent of AMER respondents, 10% of APAC respondents, and 10% of EMEA respondents expect an increase in physical material delivery at traditional branch locations.

Across all regions, most respondents indicate their libraries do not currently offer nontraditional delivery of physical items via drones and robots, or via third party consumer delivery services such as DoorDash, Uber or Lyft and do not have plans to implement these services either. In AMER and EMEA, more than 70% of respondents indicated that they do not offer these services, nor do they plan to offer them. In APAC, just over 50% of library respondents reported not currently having these services with no plans to offer them. However, a small percentage of APAC respondents indicated they anticipate offering nontraditional service methods in the next five to ten years (6% for drones, 13% for consumer delivery services).

Total respondents (n=1,541)

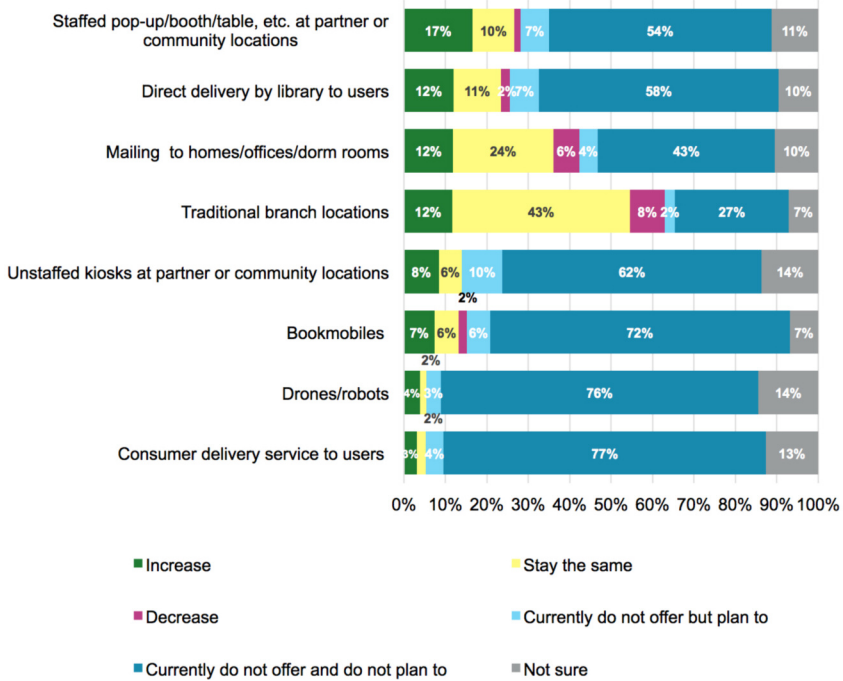


Figure 4 – Anticipated Change in 5-10 Years for Libraries Globally: Delivery of Physical Materials

Overall, the delivery of physical materials is expected to remain the same. However, services offered in-person are expected to change in particular ways:

- Academic library respondents are preparing for support services and education-related services based on community needs:

An academic library respondent in Australia stated that they want the library to be regarded as «A trusted partner in teaching, learning and research».

- Respondents globally are expecting to provide technology instruction to connect users with services more in the future:

An academic library respondent in Argentina shared they «are producing audio-visual content of tutorials on information and media literacy. At the same time, we also began to form a corpus of podcast episodes, talks and conferences for students and information professionals».

### Delivery of electronic materials

As digital access continues to shape user expectations, libraries are expanding how they deliver electronic materials to ensure convenience and accessibility. This section explores the anticipated growth of key digital delivery methods, highlighting trends in streaming services, email, and mobile apps, and how respondents worldwide are adapting to meet evolving user needs.

Respondents were presented with three ways of delivering electronic materials and were asked how they anticipate each would change in the next five to ten years. Forty-six percent of total respondents expect an increase and 13% expect delivery to stay

the same for delivering electronic materials by streaming services. For email delivery, 40% of respondents expect an increase with 34% expecting delivery to stay the same. Thirty-nine percent of respondents expect an increase in mobile app delivery and 13% of respondents expect mobile app delivery to stay the same in the next five to ten years. Few expect these ways of delivering electronic materials will decrease (streaming services decrease for 1% of respondents, email delivery will decrease for 4% of respondents, and mobile app decrease for 1% of respondents, respectively).

Among the respondents who do not currently offer these electronic materials delivery methods, approximately a tenth or fewer expect to offer them in the next five to ten years (streaming services at 6%, email delivery at 3%, and mobile app delivery at 12%, respectively). More than a tenth does not plan to offer steaming service delivery (19%), email delivery (12%), or mobile app delivery (20%). Nearly a tenth or more are not sure how these ways of delivering electronic materials will change in the next five to ten years.

Roughly 50% of respondents indicated an increase in different electronic delivery methods in different regions. Fifty-two percent of respondents from the AMER region expect streaming services to increase, whereas 43% of respondents in the APAC region anticipate streaming service to increase followed by 38% of EMEA library respondents. Email delivery is expected to increase for 50% of APAC respondents, 40% of AMER respondents, and 38% of EMEA respondents. The largest expected increase in mobile app delivery is expected by 49% of APAC libraries, followed by 42% of EMEA libraries expecting mobile app delivery to increase, and 35% of AMER libraries expecting mobile app delivery to increase. See Figure 5.

These responses indicate an expected increase in the delivery of electronic materials via different modes. This corresponds with the expectations that online services also will increase.

Total respondents (n=1,531); AMER (n=859); APAC (n=80); EMEA (n=603)

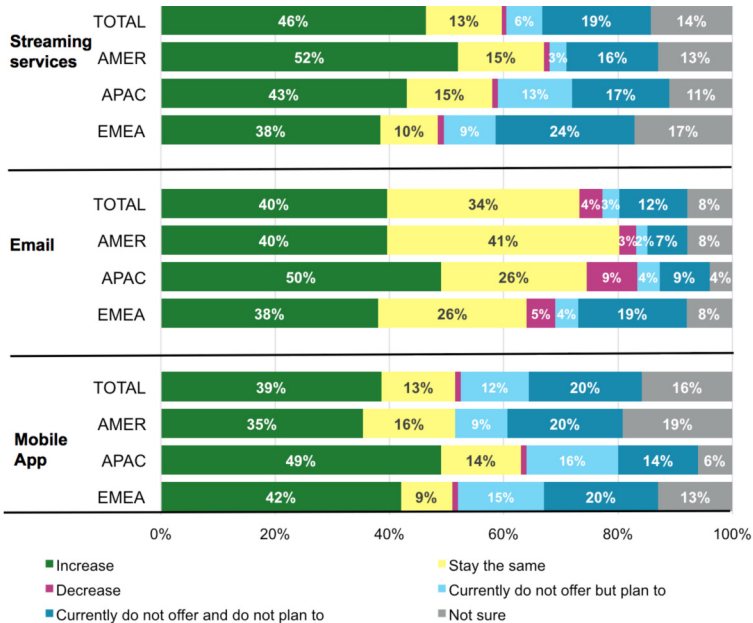


Figure 5 – Anticipated Change in 5-10 Years: Delivery of Electronic Materials for Libraries Globally and by Region

### In-person services

As respondents plan for the future, they anticipate expanding key in-person services to meet changing community needs. Support for open science, education, and technology instruction are among the top priorities, with notable differences in expectations between academic and public library respondents, as well as across global regions. This section examines these anticipated shifts, their connection to staffing trends, and the challenges respondents may face in adapting to new service demands.

Respondents were presented with nine in-person services and were asked how they anticipate each would change in the next 5 to 10 years. Two-fifths or more of total respondents reported an expected increase in services that support open science and open research (49%); education (46%) and technology instruction (42%) in the next 5 to 10 years. This includes academic and public library respondents, with a larger portion of academic library respondents (66%) expecting increases to support open science compared to 20% of public library respondents. Equal percentages of academic and public library respondents expect to see increases in education services (49% of academics, 49% of publics) and technology instruction (41% of academics, 48% of publics). A higher percentage of APAC respondents expect to see an increase in open science (63%), education (56%) and technology instruction (51%) in-person services when compared to AMER and EMEA respondents. Nearly 50% of APAC respondents also reported an expected increase in personalized recommender in-person services compared to 25% of AMER respondents and 33% of EMEA respondents.

This corresponds with responses about staffing changes in the next five to ten years. Focusing on open science and research is expected to increase by 55% of academic library respondents. Academic library staff may not be prepared to currently meet community needs for open science and research, but they anticipate doing so in the future. The expectation that open science and research will continue to increase is noted by four of 13 countries in the IFLA Academic and Research Library Country Trends Report<sup>38</sup>. The ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee also notes open science and reproducibility as trends in North American academic libraries in 2024<sup>39</sup>. Users are encountering more online services that require training or assistance. Similarly, OCLC survey respondents expect increases in staff responsibilities for emerging technologies (43%) and user experience (47%) in the next five to 10 years. Respondents also indicate that the shift in their responsibilities is going to increase their areas of focus to multiple specialties and services (50%).

EMEA survey respondents reported at 45% or higher that they do not offer in-person services for school or education support, non-traditional library material circulation (e.g., the library of things, cookery, sewing machines, tools), skill development and employment services, services to immigrants, or professional services. Approximately a tenth also do not expect to offer these in-person services in the next five to ten years.

Roughly one-third of AMER and APAC respondents do not offer in-person services for school or education support (37% AMER, 31% APAC), non-traditional library materials (33% AMER, 39% APAC), skill development and employment services

**38** IFLA, *IFLA ARL 2022 Country annual trend report*, 2022, <<https://repository.ifla.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/06fba304-61db-4cbe-96f4-9bf3ac15c136/content>>.

**39** Brian D. Quigley, [et al.], *2024 Top trends in academic libraries* cit.

(34% AMER, 23% APAC), services to immigrants (43% AMER, 32% APAC), or professional services (44% AMER, 35% APAC). Approximately a tenth does not expect this to change in the next five to ten years.

Roughly 240 respondents answered an open-ended question about additional in-person services. Of those, twenty percent reported offering in-person services specifically for research and reference support and tutoring or mentoring for students. Nearly a tenth or more offer in-person events/programming (15%), makerspace/creation/fabrication services (10%) and in-person information literacy (9%).

### Online services

As libraries continue to evolve, they are expanding their online services to meet the growing demand for digital access to research, education, and support services. Virtual reference assistance, open science initiatives, and online education are among the most anticipated areas of growth in the coming years, with many respondents planning to enhance their offerings in these key areas. The following section explores these trends in detail, highlighting regional variations and the specific services respondents expect to expand.

Virtual reference assistance is the most anticipated change in the next 5-10 years with 54% of respondents reporting that they expect an increase in this service. Nearly half expect open science and open research support (48%) and online education, such as information literacy (46%), to increase. The following quote from a University Librarian in the USA articulates the anticipated increase for academic libraries to support open science and the implications of this:

With the [USA government] data guidelines for open science, we anticipate more infrastructure needs there and potentially integration with the research office and outreach to departments.

Online technology instruction is the next most anticipated change for 40% of the respondents.

Approximately 40% or more of survey respondents in each region indicated that virtual reference assistance, online services that support open science and open research, online education and online technology instruction are expected to increase. In AMER, 53% expect virtual reference to increase, 43% expect open science to increase, 46% expect online educational services to increase, and 38% expect online technology instruction to increase.

In APAC, 67% expect virtual reference assistance to increase, 54% expect open science and open research to increase, 62% expect online education to increase, and 48% expect online technology instruction to increase. In EMEA, 52% expect virtual reference assistance to increase, 55% expect open science and open research to increase, 44% expect online education to increase, and 42% expect online technology instruction to increase.

When comparing academic library respondents to public library respondents across all regions, more than 40% of academic respondents expect virtual reference assistance (62%), open science (67%), online education (59%) and online technology instruction (47%) to increase. Public library respondents in all regions expect virtual reference assistance (39%), online education (31%), online technology instruction (31%), online personalized recommender services (35%), and online school or education support (31%) to increase.

### Technology offerings for users

Respondents indicate they continue to enhance their technology offerings to support digital access, learning, and innovation. As institutions evaluate their future technology needs, many anticipate growth in shared infrastructure, device circulation, and emerging services like makerspaces and virtual reality labs. This section illustrates how respondents expect these offerings to change over the next 5 to 10 years and what that means for their communities.

Respondents were presented with five (5) technology offerings and were asked how they anticipate each would change in the next five to 10 years. More than half of total respondents anticipate the following technology offerings to either increase or remain the same in the next five to 10 years:

- shared infrastructure for institutional repository/digital archives (45% increase; 13% stay the same);
- device circulation/rental (42% increase; 20% stay the same) and
- in-library-use computer terminals/laptops (33% increase; 36% stay the same).

Fewer than a tenth currently do not offer these technology offerings but plan to (8%, 8%, and 3%, respectively) and a fifth or fewer currently do not offer and don't plan to (16%, 21%, and 6%, respectively). In-library-use computer terminals/laptops are technology offerings with the highest propensity to decrease – nearly a fifth (18%) anticipate a decrease in this offering compared to just 4% for device circulation/rental and 1% for shared infrastructure for institutional repositories/digital archives.

More than a quarter of total respondents either see an increase or no change in offering makerspace/creation/fabrication services (32% increase; 10% stay the same) and virtual reality labs (19% increase; 4% stay the same); few anticipate a decrease (1% each). A little more than a tenth currently do not offer these technology offerings but plan to (13% each) and approximately a third do not offer and don't plan to (32% and 39%, respectively).

### *Engagement experiences*

Respondents are reimagining their physical spaces to better support collaboration, learning, and community engagement. As demand for flexible, technology-enabled environments grows, respondents are adapting by creating spaces for meetings, group work, and educational programs. These shifts reinforce the library's role as a vital community hub, providing dynamic spaces that accommodate evolving user needs.

### Physical space for meeting or collaborative work

Fifty-nine percent of respondents globally anticipate the offering of physical space designated for meetings/collaborative work will increase; 23% feel it will remain the same and just 3% feel it will decrease. Few (5%) say they currently do not offer this type of physical space but plan to; 5% do not offer space designed for meetings or collaborative work for users and don't plan to; and 6% are not sure. Results are similar among respondents in each region.

Academic library respondents (66%) are more likely to anticipate physical space designated for meetings/collaborative work will increase in the next 5 to 10 years compared to public library respondents (55%) and other library type respondents (42%). Few anticipate this physical space will decrease (4% academic; 1% public and 6% other). See Figure 6.

A quote from an academic library director in Spain encompasses the variety of space use anticipated:

Greater variety of spaces. Transformable spaces. Greater place to simply be. Increase of rooms for small groups and also of communal spaces for group work.

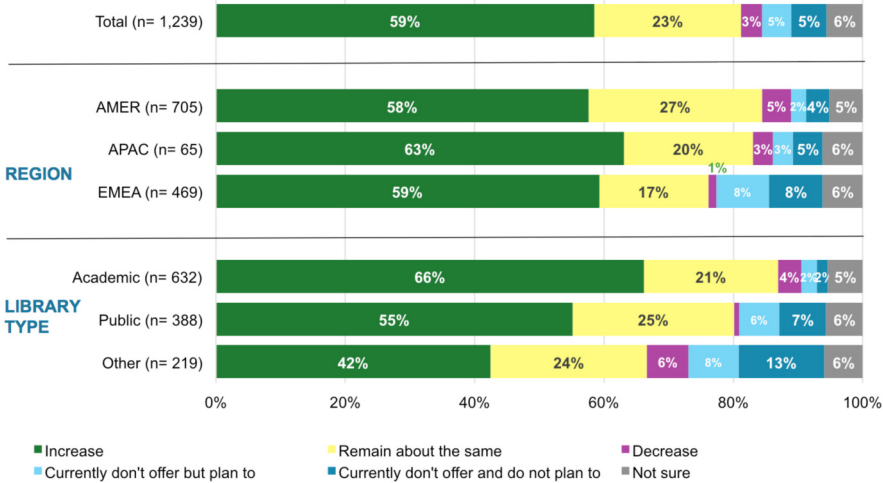


Figure 6 – Anticipated Change in 5-10 Years for Libraries Physical Space for Meetings/Collaborative Work Globally and by Region

Among those who provided a response to an open-ended question about the most significant ways physical space will change (n=388), nearly a third (32%) say nearly a third (32%) of these respondents say their library’s physical space will have collaborative, technology-enabled space or rooms for meetings, classes, collaboration, creation, etc. Fifteen percent (15%) plan for separate rooms or modular/flexible space for collaborative work and quiet rooms. More than a tenth will be adding a new building or modernizing/renovating/expanding their current building (13%) and are moving items to storage/reorganizing to make space (11%).

Just under a tenth will add more reading/quiet/study space (9%) and hybrid spaces – pods/private space for virtual events (telehealth, classes, interviews) (8%).

Six percent (6%) of respondents report that other departments have or will claim the space, resulting in the loss of space. Five percent of respondents report having limited or no space and no funds to expand.

Physical space for meeting and collaborative work is a core in-person service offered by libraries that today requires multipurpose space with modular and flexible furniture <sup>40</sup>. An academic library director in Italy reiterated this in the online survey reporting, «I would like [headquarters] to include consultation rooms for self-study but also spaces for study in groups or for meetings[...] I believe it is necessary, [...] as requested by the students, to be able to offer wider spaces for study and comparison between users».

Teaching, community meetings and in-person services can all be performed inside the library in quiet or closed meeting rooms, but the type of service dictates

40 M. Palmer, Study of future public library trends & best practices cit.

the type of furniture required. Renovations to older libraries are not possible for all, though more than a tenth of respondents who responded to an open-ended question about anticipated changes in library space (n=388) indicate they will be adding a new building or modernizing and expanding their current building (13%) in the next five to ten years. Eleven percent indicated they are moving physical materials into storage to reorganize the internal space of the library, or to clear out areas for new meeting spaces.

The future in-library experience will continue to expand traditional services for library users through continual adaptation of the librarian's knowledge and training and the library's physical space. Delivering materials and services to users via traditional methods supports the value and trust that they place on the library as a community asset and partner in bridging information gaps. It also supports the role of library staff who provide materials and services that connect their communities with lifelong learning, social services and education.

### *Work experiences*

As library services increasingly shift online, the roles and responsibilities of library staff are evolving to meet new demands. Continuous professional development is essential to ensure staff are equipped with the skills needed to manage digital services, support emerging technologies, and foster information literacy. This section explores anticipated trends in staff training, education, and engagement, highlighting the growing emphasis on online learning, cross-training, and partnerships that extend the library's reach within communities and academic institutions. By adapting to these changes, library staff can continue to serve as trusted information sources and vital community hubs in the years ahead.

### Staff training and education for the online library

As library services increasingly shift to a digital-first approach, continuous staff training and professional development are essential to support this transformation. To effectively manage and deliver online services, library staff need to develop new skills, adapt to emerging technologies, and participate in ongoing educational opportunities. This section examines the anticipated rise in online training, cross-training across service areas, and the growth of virtual conferences and workshops—trends that reflect the changing demands placed on library staff in a digital landscape.

Keeping pace with the demand for online access in the library requires savvy and skilled library staff. Survey respondents believe that training for library staff in the next five to ten years will include online training and instruction (59%) and cross training in multiple service areas (50%) as well as an increase in online conferences and workshops (57%). These expected increases in cross training and online learning speak to the shift in workplace expectations during and after the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the expectation that training is largely available online<sup>41</sup>.

Though online training is the norm today and the expectation for the future, the educational requirements for library staff are expected to change. About a quarter of respondents expect a decrease in the number of staff with no advanced degrees (22%) or college/university degrees (27%) in the next five to ten years, while over a third expect an increase in staff with advanced degrees in library and information sciences (35%)

41 Stacey A. Aldrich; Jarrid P. Keller, *Future job descriptions 2035*. In: *Library 2035* cit., p. 155-159.



and non-library and information sciences (37%). This perhaps speaks to the higher level of demand for assistance from users with the shift towards online services.

Staff with relevant knowledge of open science and research will be critical for academic libraries in five to ten years. Forty-six percent of academic respondents reported that staff focused on emerging technologies is expected to increase. Academic library respondents also reported the highest expected increase (41%) for future staff that have non-library and information science advanced degrees. Sixty-seven percent of academic library respondents expect online support for open science and open research to increase. Sixty-three percent of them expect their staff to use technology to increase support for open science and open research. Emerging technologies that academic library staff are expected to increase their support for in the next five to ten years are data analytics and data visualization (60%), data management and curation (60%), collection analysis (55%) and service impact measurement (50%).

Electronic materials delivery via email, mobile app, or streaming service are expected to increase soon, and if a library does not offer these delivery methods, the respondents do expect to offer them. This is important as we evaluate how library staff are evolving to meet these needs. Thirty-nine percent of respondents noted that mobile app delivery is expected to increase in the next five to ten years alongside streaming services (46%) and email (40%). Shorter and smaller content via mobile apps is changing the way that most online information is presented to users<sup>42</sup>. The immediacy of electronic delivery via email and mobile apps is increasingly popular with users 18 to 29 years of age<sup>43</sup>. Apps are now commonly used to deliver news, language instruction, software skills and more<sup>44</sup>. The increase in online information and online delivery modes require new information literacy skills to evaluate and determine credibility of information.

Information literacy is a widely discussed global topic and is expected to increase by 46% of the respondents. Dezuanni and Osman note in the IFLA Trend Report that misinformation, its spread, and combatting it features as a persistent issue in the digital era during and post the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>45</sup>. The shift to mobile app and electronic delivery disseminates information farther and faster, making the spread of disinformation difficult to control. While immediate access to information alleviates social isolation, not all sources of information are trustworthy. Librarians are busier than ever by providing information technology training and information literacy courses<sup>46</sup>. Reaffirming the survey respondents' hope of their libraries being described in the next five to ten years as a trusted information source.

**42** Rebecca Leppert; Katerina Eva Matsa, *More Americans – especially young adults – are regularly getting news on TikTok*. Washington (DC): Pew research center, 2024, <<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/09/17/more-americans-regularly-get-news-on-tiktok-especially-young-adults/>>. M. Dezuanni; K. Osman, *IFLA trend report 2024: phase 1* cit.

**43** R. Leppert; K. E. Matsa, *More Americans – especially young adults – are regularly getting news on TikTok* cit.

**44** M. Dezuanni; K. Osman, *IFLA trend report 2024: phase 1* cit. M. Palmer, *Study of future public library trends & best practices* cit.

**45** *Ibidem*.

**46** *Ibidem*. R. Leppert; K. E. Matsa, *More Americans – especially young adults – are regularly getting news on TikTok* cit.

*Descriptions of the library in five to ten years*

The future vision for libraries emphasizes the importance of preparing staff to navigate the changes ahead. As libraries increasingly seek to position themselves as trusted information sources, flexible spaces for learning, and community hubs, equipping staff with the necessary skills will be critical. Survey responses shed light on how the respondents hope to evolve in the next five to ten years, underscoring the growing demand for staff training that supports digital services, community engagement, and innovative information delivery methods.

When asked to rank how they would like their library to be described in five to ten years, the majority of the survey respondents ranked 1) a trusted information source (37%); 2) a flexible space for learning, convening, and interacting with others (31%); and 3) a community or campus hub (22%) as their first choice. Being perceived as a trusted information source is paramount (37%) and aligns with IFLA's Trend Report noting that distrust and misinformation are increasingly affecting the ways library and government staff engage with their communities<sup>47</sup>. This provides a perfect opportunity for library staff to develop and adopt new ways for teaching and learning information literacy skills<sup>48</sup>. Mackey and Johnson describe a meta-literacy approach that is «an overarching and self-referential framework that integrates emerging technologies and unifies multiple literacy types...expands the scope of generally understood information competencies and places a particular emphasis on producing and sharing information in participatory digital environments»<sup>49</sup>. This approach enables learners to continuously adapt and reflect, developing critical thinking skills<sup>50</sup>.

The respondents also would like the library to be described as a flexible space for learning, convening and interacting with others (31%). An academic library survey respondent in Australia stated that they want the library to be «the go-to place in the community to connect and learn, whether in-person or online».

Space in the library for community meetings also is expected to increase among 59% of respondents solidifying public libraries as the community hub and third space<sup>51</sup>. This requires engagement with and commitment to the community, signaling that libraries are the crossroads for discovery and collaboration.

This is exemplified by the focus group interview participants who stated that they envision the library of the future as a community hub, one that acts as a crossroads for discovery, learning, and collaboration<sup>52</sup>. Outreach is a way for staff to develop and promote the library as a community or campus hub. While engagement activities within the library are often hybrid, it is external activities that are setting libraries apart as partners making a positive community impact.

Public library outreach has evolved quite significantly leading up to the pandemic, where many public libraries partnered with local governments and external social

**47** M. Dezuanni; K. Osman, *IFLA trend report 2024: phase 1* cit. M. Palmer, *Study of future public library trends & best practices* cit.

**48** Lynn Silipigni Connaway, *We are not alone: libraries making a stronger impact in a global community*. In: *Library 2035* cit., 63-68.

**49** Thomas P. Mackey; Trudi E. Jacobson, *Reframing information literacy as a metaliteracy*, «College and research libraries», 76 (2011), p. 62.

**50** *Ivi*, p. 62-63.

**51** Kara Reuter [et al.], *From alone to together alone* cit.

**52** L. A. Langa [et al.], *Global Council 2023 area of focus* cit.

services to connect users in need of help<sup>53</sup>. In the next five to ten years, 53% of public library respondents expect representing the library at community meetings to increase. Thirty percent anticipate extending the roles and responsibilities of public library staff by embedding them into social and civic services outside of the library. About half of public library survey respondents (48%) also reported an expected increase in collaborations and partnerships with food banks, rotary clubs, homeless shelters, and other local non-profit services. This is exemplified by a quote from a public librarian in the USA, who wrote,

We have collaborative programs with a job service for disadvantaged persons, we host programs for a non-profit art center, we have had food drives for local food banks and adoption and food drives for local animal shelters.

Academic library respondents report an expected increase in partnering across campus (57%), partnering with consortia (57%), partnering with research offices (52%), and representing the library at faculty, staff, and other meetings on campus (47%). Engagement activities that place library staff at the table when partners are building new systems and programming ensure that library users are not forgotten in the process. Academic library survey respondents expect serving on campus committees or working groups to increase (43%) or stay the same (44%) in the next five to ten years to embed library services in the functions of college-wide initiatives. Approximately a quarter expect to increase their assistance to citizen science projects (25%), representing the library at community meetings (23%), offering library services to non-library locations (22%), and serving on community boards not affiliated with the college or university (18%). Through partnering with consortia and library groups, academic library respondents expect to increase digital and physical materials for their users.

More than half of academic library respondents anticipate an increase for resource sharing (61%) and content buying (55%) in the next five to ten years, indicating expanded services for not only acquiring materials, but also for borrowing and sharing materials with other libraries and consortia. More than half of public library respondents (54%) anticipate an increase in resource sharing of physical and electronic materials as demand continues to soar for lending. This indicates an anticipated need for increases in collaborations for efficiency and cost. This is exemplified in a comment by an academic library respondent in Chile:

We have partnership with various entities: municipalities, public schools, foundations, other universities nationally and internationally, etc. This linkage will increase as we move towards a more interconnected society that seeks to give greater value to society as a whole to optimize and take advantage of the available resources and capabilities that are increasingly required in the various areas of content acquisitions, exchange of resources, use of capabilities, educational development, etc.

### Limitations of the study

This study did not use a random sample, but a purposive convenience sample using the snowball technique through multiple distribution channels. Although the results

<sup>53</sup> B. Doyle [et al.], *The library serves as an amplifier and connector in the community it serves* cit.

cannot be generalized, the large number of responses (1,627 from 77 countries/territories) provide a diverse international perspective from different library types primarily from the Northern and Western hemispheres.

### Conclusion and next steps

We have identified the expected changes library staff have reported in an international online survey. While these anticipated changes may occur, there will be other changes that were not anticipated but must be made because of new circumstances. «As with most institutions, they [libraries] grow, change and evolve as times and surrounding contexts change. This is what makes them vital, strong and ever responsive to the needs of their communities and clientele»<sup>54</sup>.

In order to be effective library leaders and staff will need to continue to listen, learn, and act. Being proactive, agile, and willing and able to change as the needs and expectations of the community change, will require continual staff training and development. It also will depend upon the desire to build relationships with colleagues, other libraries, consortia, members of the community, and other community and campus departments. As stated by Brian Mathews in 2012, «by focusing on relationship building instead of service excellence, organizations can uncover new needs and be in position to make a stronger impact»<sup>55</sup>.

There have been dramatic changes over the past decades in how libraries provide resources and services. Many of those have been further accelerated by the recent global pandemic. But every library «will be as unique, innovative, and representative as the communities they serve»<sup>56</sup>. Whether you see yourself reflected in these results—or are experiencing a very different set of changes—your vision can help shape the redefining of the library experience for your library and the profession as a whole.

Articolo proposto il 2 marzo 2025 e accettato il 6 marzo 2025.

---

**ABSTRACT** AIB studi, 64 n. 3 (settembre/dicembre 2024), p. 441-461. DOI 10.2426/aibstudi-14134  
ISSN: 2280-9112, E-ISSN: 2239-6152 - Copyright © 2024 Lynn Silipigni Connaway,  
Lesley A. Langa

---

LYNN SILIPIGNI CONNAWAY, OCLC, e-mail: lconnaway@gmail.com  
LESLEY A. LANGA, OCLC, e-mail: langal@oclc.org

### Ridefinire l'esperienza della biblioteca: dare forma al futuro coinvolgimento della comunità

Che si tratti di un campus universitario, di una scuola locale o di un quartiere metropolitano, le biblioteche stanno evolvendo continuamente il modo in cui interagiscono con i propri utenti per ottenere il massimo impatto all'interno delle loro comunità. Questa evoluzione ha recentemente incluso una rinnovata enfasi sulla definizione proattiva delle esperienze relative agli spazi della biblioteca, alla programmazione, alle collezioni e allo sviluppo del personale.

54 Joseph Janes, *The Janus library*. In: *Library 2035* cit., p. 7.

55 Mathews Brian, *Think like a startup: a white paper to inspire library entrepreneurialism*, «The chronicle of higher education», April 4TH 2012, p. 9 <<http://chronicle.com/blognetwork/theubiquitouslibrarian/2012/04/04/think-like-a-startup-a-white-paper/>>.

56 R. David Lankes, *There is no future of libraries. There are many*. In: *Library 2035* cit., p. 43-48: p. 43.

Condotte in collaborazione tra OCLC Global Council e i team di ricerca e analisi di mercato di OCLC nel 2023, sono state condotte interviste di focus group e un questionario è stato diffuso a livello internazionale in sei lingue. Le interviste di focus group e le domande del questionari hanno esplorato temi quali il coinvolgimento della comunità, la collaborazione e programmi innovativi che soddisfano le esigenze e le aspettative in continua evoluzione degli utenti della biblioteca. I risultati delle interviste di focus group e del sondaggio forniscono informazioni sui modi in cui i responsabili e il personale della biblioteca si aspettano che le esperienze di biblioteca in evoluzione creino un coinvolgimento più significativo e impatti positivi nei prossimi cinque-dieci anni.

**Redefining the library experience: shaping future engagement with communities**

Whether on a university campus, at a local school, or in a metropolitan neighborhood, libraries are continually evolving how they engage with their users to make the most impact within their communities. This evolution recently has included a renewed emphasis on proactively shaping experiences around library spaces, programming, collections, and staff development.

Conducted in partnership between OCLC Global Council and OCLC Research and Market Analysis teams in 2023, focus group interviews were conducted and a survey was disseminated internationally in six languages. The focus group interviews and survey questions explored themes such as community engagement, collaboration, and innovative programs that meet library users' continually evolving needs and expectations. The results of the focus group interviews, and survey provide insight into ways that library leaders and staff expect changing library experiences to create more meaningful engagement and positive impacts in the next five to ten years.