

ALA American Library Association

LIBRARIES FOR AMERICA

A Note for the Major Party Platform Committees and Presidential Campaigns

American Library Association
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U.S. libraries—120,000 strong—represent a robust national infrastructure that advance numerous goals in the major party platforms. Libraries, embedded in the largest urban centers, small farming communities, school and university campuses, and everywhere in-between, are natural partners in the development and delivery of pragmatic solutions to pressing issues such as expanding economic opportunity, veteran reintegration, early childhood development, STEM education and learning, and health literacy—among many others.

In driving opportunity and progress for all, libraries are singular in their mission to provide trustworthy, unbiased, and relevant information and essential services—as articulated in The E’s of Libraries™: Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Empowerment, and Engagement. In their role of preserving and promoting a free and open society, libraries are involved in information policy issues that include broadband, copyright, privacy, and access to government information.

The nation’s libraries and the American Library Association (ALA) stand ready to work with the new presidential administration and other newly elected and appointed officials at the federal, state, and local levels. Through new and strengthened collaborations, libraries are well positioned to serve as an ever-stronger and flexible resource to advance critical national goals.

The intersections between the party platforms and library capabilities are too numerous to characterize fully in this note. Thus, selected topics that appear to be priorities in national discussions are highlighted in the following paragraphs.

Economic Opportunity. In addition to a vast array of educational and learning programs and resources that enable economic opportunity, libraries provide specific employment services and resources for job seekers and the improvement of job skills. In fact, the U.S. Department of Labor advises workforce agencies that “collaboration with public libraries can increase the quality and quantity of access points for individuals to receive needed career information and assistance.” Libraries also have become centers to establish, sustain, and promote small

businesses and provide services targeted at entrepreneurs—such as training on business plan development and information resources for marketing research. Libraries increasingly serve as an ‘office’ for an ever-more mobile, decentralized workforce. To advance economic opportunity, we envision continued and more robust collaborations with the U.S. Departments of Labor and Commerce, the Small Business Administration, and other government agencies, as well as partnerships with corporations and the non-profit sector.

National Infrastructure. Libraries represent a national infrastructure. With physical buildings, information technology, professional staff, community goodwill, and a reputation for trustworthiness already in place across the country, libraries are a cost-effective way to address important societal challenges. To maintain and develop this infrastructure, investments and public policy are needed to advance the deployment of widespread high-speed broadband capabilities to libraries and other community anchor institutions, and to the general population—especially poorly connected areas such as many rural communities. Also essential to an infrastructure that serves all the people is a balanced copyright framework that fairly addresses the needs of both creators and users of intellectual content. We look forward to continuing this work with the Federal Communications Commission, U.S. Departments of Commerce and Agriculture, the U.S. Copyright Office, and other government agencies and with private sector stakeholders.

Serving Veterans. As members of the military transition to civilian life, they have many requirements, and libraries are well-positioned to address them. Veterans (and their families) may need to search for a job, improve and translate job skills to the civilian context, obtain financial or other counseling, learn about activities in their communities, and navigate bureaucracies to receive the benefits to which they are entitled. Libraries already assist veterans in these ways—and more—and look forward to further collaboration with the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense and other government agencies, as well as relevant private sector organizations.

Education and Learning. Libraries are instrumental in formal education and informal learning for all ages, beginning with early learning programming and services that boost school readiness for pre-K children. Students in K-20 use libraries as interdisciplinary resources to complete curricular requirements as well as to explore beyond classroom walls. Libraries host summer media and technology camps, new services designed to foster coding skills and computational thinking, as well as maker spaces, 3D printers, and help people to learn to navigate the world of big data. As learning opportunities via technology have expanded greatly, libraries have become centers for informal, distance, home-school, GED, and other non-traditional learners. Already in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education and many other government agencies and other stakeholders, libraries are prepared to extend these relationships towards the goal of providing the maximal opportunity for education and learning for all.

A Few Other Key Topics.

- **Health and Wellness.** An estimated 28 million people used library computers to address health and wellness issues in one year, and library partnerships and programs increasingly address individual and community health concerns. The National Library of Medicine estimates more than 90 million U.S. adults have low health literacy and are working to reduce this rate through training and public education. More work is needed, and libraries are well-positioned to address this priority.
- **Privacy.** While new technologies bring many advantages, they can also jeopardize individual privacy. As a core value, libraries vigorously advance public policy and adopt operational practices that safeguard the privacy of library users.
- **Community Forum.** Because libraries welcome people of all backgrounds and actively support a “marketplace of ideas” through diverse collections and programs, they constitute a vital “third place” and community hub. Libraries are trusted, neutral, safe spaces that make ideal venues to bring together community members to discuss the important, complicated issues of our time.
- **Government information & services.** Libraries advocate for government transparency and work to ensure that government information and services are readily available to the public. Library professionals provide training and guides, direct assistance to users, as well as advocacy to ensure maximum public access.
- **Preservation of Digital Cultural Heritage.** A central role of libraries is serving as stewards of the nation’s cultural heritage. For digital materials, a coherent national strategy needs to be developed, adopted by policy makers, and properly resourced.

From schoolwork and services for older Americans to college research and 3D printer prototypes for entrepreneurs, libraries of all types enable opportunity and progress. Equitable access, intellectual freedom, creating knowledge, diversity, preserving and providing access to the nation’s cultural heritage, literacy and lifelong learning are core values and goals that serve as the foundation for library programs, services, administration, and advocacy.

The U.S. library community looks forward to continued collaborations with federal agencies and other key stakeholders at the national, state, and local levels. Libraries bring a lot to the party, and through work with others we can accelerate progress on national priorities and transform our communities to be well positioned for the global challenges ahead.