

# A NATIONAL PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA FOR LIBRARIES AND THE POLICY REVOLUTION! INITIATIVE

Draft for Public Comment  
January 23, 2015

## INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENDA AND INITIATIVE

Libraries are in a revolution fueled by rapid advances in technology, and thus the roles, capabilities, and expectations of libraries are changing rapidly. Libraries provide myriad benefits to U.S. communities<sup>1</sup>—and therefore contribute to the missions of the federal government and other national institutions. To date, however, investment in libraries has lagged the opportunities they present. As such, the U.S. library community must reach out to national decision makers and influencers to raise awareness of these roles and capabilities to advance how libraries may best contribute to society in the digital age. Increasing this understanding establishes the basis for added support from and collaboration with national government agencies, non-profit organizations, foundations, trade associations, and commercial entities.

The development of a national public policy agenda for libraries is needed to guide focused and energetic outreach to key decision makers and influencers. This agenda will enable library organizations, including their members and allies, to drive toward common goals. The focus here is on the highest-priority national policy goals for the library community. Accordingly, it cannot be all-encompassing with respect to library interests and priorities. **What are the U.S. library interests and priorities for the next five years that should be emphasized to national decision makers?**

The agenda also is contextualized within national political, economic and demographic trends. For instance, the baseline political outlook is a Republican-controlled U.S. House of Representatives for the next few elections, a Republican-controlled U.S. Senate for at least two years, a Presidential election in the fall of 2016, and a new Administration beginning in January 2017. The baseline economic outlook includes the assumption that the trend of increasing commercial influence and control over the public's access and engagement with information will continue. Other trends such as increasing income disparity also are assumed to continue.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Communities" refers to the broadest use of the term. The most common understanding refers to towns and cities or subsets of them. But the usage here also can refer to a K-12 school community, a college or university community, or other communities directly tied to various other library types.

<sup>2</sup> The many trends that inform the future context for libraries are discussed in the [report](#) "Snapshots of a Turbulent World," prepared under the auspices of the Policy Revolution! Initiative.

With this environmental context, **what are the library priorities that are likely to be of most interest to decision makers and influencers? And where might there be windows of opportunity to advance a particular priority at this particular time?**

This shared agenda is intended to provide guidance for the U.S. library community. Thus, *this* document is not intended to be used directly outside of the library community—other documents and language aligned with the agenda will be developed for such advocacy purposes. The audience for *this* agenda is library leaders and close allies in the United States.

As an umbrella national public policy agenda for the library community, typically it will be too extensive to serve as **the** policy agenda for any given entity in the community. Rather, the goal is that various library entities would fashion their national policy priorities under the rubric of this national public policy agenda.

Outlining this key set of issues and context is being pursued through the Policy Revolution! Initiative,<sup>3</sup> led by the American Library Association Office for Information Technology Policy and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Major library organizations contribute to and advise the initiative through a Library Advisory Committee. The three-year initiative has three major elements: to develop a national public policy agenda, to initiate and deepen national stakeholder interactions based on policy priorities, and build library advocacy capacity for the long-term.

At a strategic level, the focus is on the high-level “Library” story rather than on the silos of academic, school, public, government, and special or other libraries. We also must gather the narrative and data to compellingly illustrate how and why investment in libraries of all kinds results in a favorable return on investment for society—i.e., how sustainable libraries are essential for sustainable communities.

#### *Call for Public Input in Early 2015*

This draft national public policy agenda will be vetted, discussed, and further elaborated upon in the first quarter of 2015, also seeking to align with existing and emerging national library efforts. From this foundation, the ALA Washington Office will match priorities to windows of opportunity and confluence to begin advancing policy priorities—in partnership with other library organizations and allies with whom there is alignment—in mid-2015. **Feedback should be sent by February 27, 2015 to oitp at alawash dot org, and updates will be available online at <http://www.ala.org/oitp>.**<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.ala.org/news/node/9649>.

<sup>4</sup> In future iterations, this section will be replaced by a summary of how the national public policy agenda was developed.

## **LIBRARIES: AN EXTRAORDINARY RESOURCE FOR THE UNITED STATES**

U.S. libraries are an equalizer in this information-rich nation, serving people of every age, income level, location, ethnicity, or physical ability, and providing a full range of tools and resources needed to live, learn, govern, and work. Equitable access, intellectual freedom, creating knowledge, diversity, preserving and sharing the nation’s cultural heritage, literacy and lifelong learning are core values that serve as the foundation for library programs, services, administration and advocacy.

Equitable access includes the gamut of books, media, computers and internet access, as well as the expert assistance of librarians in navigating and effectively using these resources. Libraries serve as part of a digital safety net (e.g., working to ensure access for people with disabilities), as well as a launching pad to exploration and innovation of cutting-edge technologies and advanced information services. Literacy is a basic building block for full civic participation—the first step among a lifetime of learning needed to respond to changing technology and workforce demands. A commitment to intellectual freedom is expressed through inclusive and diverse collections, neutral public spaces that encourage information exchange and debate, protection of privacy and confidentiality, and advocacy for government transparency, uncensored communications networks, and free expression. These values of equity, opportunity and openness are quintessentially democratic values, as well.

At the same time, rapid changes in digital information and communication technologies touch every aspect of our lives and are shifting expectations and roles for America’s libraries. The increasing proliferation of digital information, networking, and services challenges libraries to re-engineer their value proposition and focus less on access to “stuff.” As a result, libraries are increasing their focus on managing digital information abundance, information production and curation, bridging skills gaps, experiential learning, and community building.

Libraries today represent a national critical infrastructure<sup>5</sup> that delivers services and engages communities—with a long history of accomplishment connecting people with each other and with diverse collections. The nation derives economic and operational efficiency and effectiveness by using this existing infrastructure, rather than reinventing such a network to deliver services (e.g., jobs centers, technological innovation or computer labs, or data repositories). Collaborations with libraries to fulfill national mission needs should be contemplated whenever plausible—and especially before the creation of a new national network for a public service is contemplated.

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<sup>5</sup> Which may be conceptualized as a national platform (or platforms), highway system, or backbone.

## *Specific Policy Goals*

Libraries as a distributed national asset of people, places, and platforms and the imperative of “opportunity for all” underlie all of the national public policy goals below. Though contemporary libraries and librarians have evolved in the context of the digital revolution, this evolution is not widely understood by decision makers and influencers, who may often have mental models of libraries and librarians from decades past. Thus, aggressive communication of the roles and capacities of contemporary libraries is inherent across the policy goals.

Too often, investment in libraries lags the opportunities that libraries present. And in the digital age, these opportunities expand considerably. Thus, the nation will be well-served with increased investments in libraries, and especially in areas of notable opportunity that advance the agendas of national decision makers.

Finally, effective solutions for U.S. libraries need to be informed by the international context. The diffusion of digital information and worldwide networks cause information flows, technologies, and practices to be porous across national borders. National public policy, whether conducted by the U.S. government, information-sector corporations, or other entities, is inherently connected with the policies and practices of other countries.

The remainder of this document articulates three broad themes to organize the national public policy goals of the U.S. library community: Services, People, and Institutional Issues. Each goal includes a brief characterization of library contributions or interests and desired outcomes with the associated policy changes.

## **SERVICES**

### **Libraries Making a Difference to Americans**

Libraries serve communities in diverse ways.<sup>6</sup> With advances in technology, new possibilities emerge for improved or new services and service delivery.<sup>7</sup> With shifts in demographics and other societal changes, new demands and opportunities emerge. Programmatic policy goals provide direction for the most promising avenues at the national level for libraries to deepen and/or expand services. Four goal areas are discussed below: Education & Learning, Employment & Entrepreneurship, Health & Wellness, and Government Services.

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<sup>6</sup> One conception is encapsulated in The E’s of Libraries™: Education, employment, entrepreneurship, community engagement, and individual empowerment—but there are other characterizations.

<sup>7</sup> For a recent analysis, see the Aspen Institute [report](#) from its Dialogue on Public Libraries, “Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries.”

## *Education & Learning*

Libraries are instrumental in education and learning for all ages. The range of services and policy intersections implicated may be conveniently delineated using the ASCEND acronym:

- A – All educational activities and advancement are supported at libraries. This includes those described below, as well as summer reading programs; resources and services that advance science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) knowledge; and afterschool enrichment and tutoring programs, among others.
- S – Students in K-20 use libraries as interdisciplinary settings guided by teacher-librarians and research specialists. Embedded within educational institutions, school, college, and university libraries develop students' ability to effectively find, evaluate, synthesize, communicate, and produce information. Libraries of all kinds also curate and broker homework and research resources.
- C – Continuing education is a hallmark of libraries, and becomes more important in a time of educational disruption in which technology creates new mechanisms for personalized and distributed learning. Massive open online courses (MOOCs) and digital badging represent early forms of this trend in which libraries provide physical access to broadband infrastructure, devices, complementary content, proctoring, and face-to-face mentor or peer learning for otherwise digital-only providers.
- E – Early learning programming and services boost school readiness for young children and directly serve parents and caregivers as their children's first teachers. Many libraries also have outreach programs to Head Start and child care centers.
- N – Non-traditional students such as those schooled at home, seeking GEDs or online certifications, or developing basic literacy, are served by libraries.
- D – Digital literacy is enabled by providing new information technology, services and training. From laptop labs to maker spaces to 3D printing, librarians provide both formal and informal learning opportunities to gain familiarity and confidence using technology.

The fundamental goal is to increase awareness and understanding by decision makers of these roles, leading to additional library capacity for these educational opportunities through strengthened and new collaborations and funding by the federal government, non-profit organizations, private philanthropy, and information services and technology firms. Additional capacity would support national policy priorities ranging from the Campaign for Grade-Level Learning to increasing college readiness and retention. National partners may include agencies and organizations such as the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Honda Foundation, Coursera, National Center for Families Learning and many others.

## *Employment & Entrepreneurship*

In addition to educational and learning opportunities that equip students to begin their careers, libraries also provide direct contributions to workforce and economic development in communities. Libraries provide programming and services for job search and the improvement of job skills. Many libraries serve as centers to establish, sustain, and promote small businesses. With longer hours than other community organizations, better technology access and training, and the ability for parents to engage in employment-related activities while children participate in other activities, libraries are particularly attractive workforce partners.<sup>8</sup>

New technologies, changing business models, and evolving cultural norms are enabling more decentralized work opportunities. Libraries with their rich information resources, skilled staff, and distributed physical locations are prime venues to advance entrepreneurship and sustain a more mobile workforce. A number of libraries already are engaged in promoting entrepreneurship in their communities, but much more may be done.

Under the bipartisan Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), libraries are eligible for the first time to be considered One-Stop partners and eligible for federal funding to support job training and job search programs. The Department of Labor should develop rules and regulations for WIOA that make it possible for libraries to apply for funding so that their services can best meet evolving workforce needs.

Another goal is to establish stronger or new collaborations with groups that advance the ability of libraries to promote entrepreneurship. These groups include federal agencies such as the Small Business Administration and the Department of Commerce; non-profit organizations such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the U.S. Conference of Mayors; and commercial entities and start-ups.

## *Health & Wellness*

As health care is a major sector of the U.S. economy and society, it is a significant focus for libraries. People use library resources to learn about and discuss every aspect of their health, both reactively (e.g., I have a disease and need to learn more) and proactively (e.g., I want to move to a healthier lifestyle for the future; how do I achieve this?).

Libraries and librarians also help people navigate health service organizations, whether in the government or the private sector. As an individual's health care now involves engagement with multiple large bureaucracies in both the public and private sectors, the information requirements for obtaining services can be daunting for many people, which created the need for libraries to help their communities.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.ims.gov/assets/1/AssetManager/Workforce.pdf>

More and closer collaboration between libraries and health care organizations will enable libraries to fully contribute at national scale. Libraries already address a varied range of activities from helping people complete web-based forms to creating information systems for medical research and providing access to these systems. With additional focused investment, considerable social benefit will be realized. Useful library collaborations may take place with the U.S. Department of Health Human Services and multiple other federal entities with health components in their missions, as well as a wide range of private sector organizations, such as foundations, health management organizations, and other entities in the health care arena.

### *Government Services*

Libraries provide public access to government information and services—at the local, regional, state, and federal levels. Libraries provide computers and network access and staff expertise as well as library-developed portals and tools and access to fee-based online services.

Except for a narrow class of information (e.g., classified information), the data and information collected, produced, managed, or funded by the federal government should be widely available to the public. The library community strives for stronger provisions for simple and direct access to federal government information, with a focus on e-government services and digital (“big”) data.

## **PEOPLE**

### **Leveraging Opportunities to Serve Specialized Community Needs**

Libraries serve all of society, but certain sectors demand particular attention because of projected growth in the demographic, specialized needs beyond the program areas outlined above, political potential for resource availability, or other policy opening specifically relevant for libraries. Four population segments are deemed to fit in one or more of these categories: Rural Communities, Veterans, New Immigrants, and Older Americans.

#### *Rural Communities*

Fundamentally, libraries in rural areas, which constitute 17% of the U.S. population, serve the same roles as libraries in urban and suburban areas. However, rural libraries often are even more critical to their communities because alternate educational, cultural, and civic institutions may be much more limited. For example, a rural library may well serve as a local area museum, jobs center, health information center, community center, and theater by necessity.

At the same time, rural libraries tend to face more profound challenges than other libraries because they often are geographically isolated, lack easy or affordable access to infrastructure

such as high-speed broadband, and may struggle to recruit librarians or IT staff. Needed services—especially in more remote areas—are inhibited, such as distance learning, telehealth and teleworking, to name a few. Rural libraries are essential connectors for their residents, but frequently lack the staff, funding and infrastructure capacity needed to erase the geographic limitations that technology can enable.

The overriding goal is to provide rural libraries with comparable infrastructure, access, and resources to other libraries in the country.<sup>9</sup> But some aspects—for example solid video conferencing capabilities—are foundational as they enable numerous other community services. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (particularly the Rural Utilities Service and perhaps the Cooperative Extension System Office) serves as a partner with libraries, as well as foundations and non-profits like the Foundation for Rural Service. However, many other entities are excellent prospects, as well, for working toward this goal.

### *Veterans*

More than 22 million Americans are veterans of military service, constituting about 7.5% of the total U.S. population. About 2.2 million people currently serve in the military. Community reintegration and support are key concerns. Major issues faced by veterans fall within the domain of mainstream library services—job search, improving job skills, formal and informal education, digital literacy, access to health information, cultural and civic activities, and more—and a few libraries already provide veteran-specific services.

In addition to the life challenges faced by community residents generally, veterans may face some specific challenges such as access to and awareness of behavioral health services; enhancing financial readiness; promoting home security; and ensuring availability of substance abuse prevention and treatment.

Libraries can help close information gaps and collaborate to offer community space and trained staff assistance to help address these needs. There are a number of agencies and organizations that work to meet the diverse needs of this community and could partner with libraries, including the Veterans Administration, American Legion, ReserveAid, USA Cares, Operation Homefront, U.S. Army Wounded Warrior Program and the Center for Veterans Issues. Leveraging the resources and infrastructure of libraries in the service of veterans has great potential for cost-effective services, and consequently libraries seek stronger and more numerous collaborations in this area.

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<sup>9</sup> Noting that “equal” is not used deliberately, as some inherent geographical or physical differences may compel different resources or solutions.

### *New Immigrants*

The U.S. population is becoming more diverse. This increased diversity results from immigration that has grown steadily since the 1950s and differing birth rates among different races and ethnicities, as well as intermarriage. Libraries have long been a part of the new American experience, and today more than 55% of use the public library at least once a week. Libraries of all types provide a trusted environment, resources and community connections that can ease the way to full participation in American society. Libraries serve as a gateway to citizenship, English language learning, and civic engagement.

Libraries are well placed to serve this diverse community, both physically/geographically and in terms of programming, services, and expertise. Collaborations with libraries yield cost-effective solutions to helping new immigrants integrate into U.S. communities. One possibility for development is to strengthen or expand work already begun by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) with US Citizenship and Immigration Services. Family literacy programs like “The American Dream @ your library” also should be considered for additional funding and capacity with funders like the Dollar General Literacy Foundation. But many other opportunities are may be realized in the federal government, not-for-profit sector, and philanthropic initiatives.

### *Older Americans*

The U.S. population is getting older. In 2050, about one in five people will be over the age of 65. In contrast, this was true for only 13% in 2009. Challenges associated with this trend include whether this older population will have adequate retirement income and health care. Increased time in retirement also could result in demand for leisure activities to fill older adults’ time, deeper pools of volunteer talent, or need for new community and gathering spaces. Libraries already are creating stronger outreach connections with senior centers, and many technology training opportunities are specifically geared to older Americans.

As the population grows, specific attention should be devoted to building capacity for libraries to offer accessible services and outreach to support lifelong learning and engagement. Libraries also should continue to support volunteer opportunities with organizations like SCORE to leverage this valuable expertise to support program goals listed above like entrepreneurship. Relationships should be explored with the Administration on Aging (within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) and the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) to develop and fund model projects that might then be replicated, among other groups.

## INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

### What Libraries Need to Serve Their Communities

Libraries have the potential to make even more significant contributions to communities than in the past. But given the evolving technological, economic, social, and political environment, libraries also need some assistance at the national level to enable these contributions to be realized. We note that these accommodations also generally advance the broader public interest beyond libraries—helping schools, museums, archives, social services by religious organizations, and many companies in the information and technology sectors. Needs in eight areas are articulated: Library-specific Funding, Privacy & Transparency, Systems for Digital Content, Protecting the Nation’s Digital Heritage, Balanced Copyright & Licensing Frameworks, Equitable Access to Abundant Broadband, Aggregating and Leveraging Library-related Functions in the Federal Government, and Preparing the Next Generation of Library and Information Professionals.

#### *Library-specific Funding*

Significant funding targeted to libraries is provided through the Library Services and Technology Act and the Telecommunications Act.<sup>10</sup> Multiple other federal agencies—ranging from the National Science Foundation and the Department of Education to the National Endowment for the Humanities and Department of Health and Human Services—direct a small portion of their budgets to library-related activities. Additionally, the federal government directly funds the Library of Congress, National Library of Medicine, and other federal libraries, as well as related organizations such as the National Archives and Records Administration, Government Publishing Office, and the Smithsonian Institution. For at least the next five years, this library-specific funding needs to be increased faster than the rate of inflation to take advantage of the opportunities enabled and demands created by the digital revolution. Private-sector funding should be similarly increased for the same reasons.

There are a number of national-level programs—both in the federal government and private sector—that provide funding for allied functions and institutions such as schools, community centers, or various other social service organizations—but not libraries. Oftentimes, the exclusion of libraries is unintentional. Whether intentional or not, one goal is to modify existing programs and ensure that newly established programs designate libraries as eligible entities for funding if libraries can meaningfully contribute to program goals.

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<sup>10</sup> Administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Federal Communications Commission, respectively.

## *Privacy & Transparency*

A major challenge of the digital revolution for libraries is the ease with which personal information can be collected, transmitted, and analyzed—through the actions of the federal government and commercial entities. New information services and technology often capture such information as part of their normal operation. This data collection and storage, however, can jeopardize individual privacy, absent robust safeguards.

A central tenet of librarianship is that user information must be kept private unless disclosure is explicitly permitted—thus the privacy bar is even higher for libraries. By contrast, many of the digital information services used by libraries and the public fail to adequately safeguard privacy. The library community must work more intensely and proactively to combat intrusions in the privacy of library users and the general public and advocate for appropriate changes in legislative, regulatory, and judicial arenas, as well as with the information and technology industries—working independently and with coalitions and other allies.

## *Systems for Digital Content*

Library systems to manage physical materials are mature, whereas the library systems for managing digital materials are fragmented and in the early stages of their life cycle at the national level. Accordingly, the digital infrastructure needs investment to boost discovery and leverage the opportunities enabled by digital information and network technology. This investment includes systems architecture, hardware, software, networking, information management, and human capital dimensions.

A strengthened national digital infrastructure also enables sharing across libraries of all types, as well as other community and cultural institutions, which derives economic and operational efficiencies over standalone systems. And technological advances enable a broad range of data and information production and distribution possibilities (e.g., open access-based models) for libraries and our communities that extend beyond the confines of traditional models or siloes.

The federal Digital Libraries Initiative (DLI) led by the National Science Foundation could represent a model, or at least provide insight into possibilities for a future programmatic proposal.<sup>11</sup> Stronger support from decision makers, in terms of financial resources, and inclusion in related programmatic initiatives, as well as public policy making, are needed.

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<sup>11</sup> The DLI operated in the 1990s and early 2000s and sponsors included the Library of Congress and National Library of Medicine as well as other federal agencies; see <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/dli2/>.

### *Protecting the Nation's Digital Heritage*

A central role of libraries is serving as stewards of the nation's cultural heritage. For physical materials, this role and operations are well established, and facilitated by copyright law and policy. By contrast, preservation of digital materials is a huge and complex challenge because materials are typically provided through licensing regimes and so the rights to preserve digital content are distributed, and responsibility and commitment uncertain at best.

While there are multiple disparate efforts towards digital preservation, their scope is limited and under-resourced. National decision makers and influencers must understand and be willing to articulate the necessity of a national strategy for digital preservation. Then a process to establish a coordinated national strategy and implementation plan needs to be developed and subsequently launched.

### *Balanced Copyright & Licensing Frameworks*

Copyright in the physical world provides for limitations and exceptions that promote and enable public interest functions. By contrast, the digital world increasingly bypasses copyright law—and these public interest provisions—through licensing regimes.

The library community must continue to advocate for the public interest in the management of digital content, whether through copyright or licensing frameworks. Society's institutions such as libraries, and the public at large, need to be able to use digital content in a reasonable, fair, and common-sense manner, as envisioned in the U.S. Constitution. An important goal of this advocacy is to broaden the national copyright conversation from its focus on piracy and protection to creativity, innovation, and the needs of the public at large.

### *Equitable Access to Abundant Broadband*

All libraries should have affordable access to high-speed broadband infrastructure. Telecommunications services should be available to libraries on a non-discriminatory basis to support equitable public access, enable content creation and dissemination and distribute digitized and digital collections. As new technologies and technological opportunities arise (e.g., unlicensed spectrum), libraries need to be included among the potential user groups during policy decision making. Libraries will continue to advocate for federal policy and work with coalitions and collaborate with others toward this end. Efforts to take advantage of existing opportunities such those from E-rate modernization in 2014 need emphasis.

### *Aggregating and Leveraging Library-related Functions in the Federal Government*

The visibility and champions for libraries and related institutions within the federal government are dispersed and loosely connected, which means that our sector is less powerful and visible

than it could be. Many of the organizations<sup>12</sup> are standalone units (e.g., Library of Congress [which includes the U.S. Copyright Office], IMLS, Federal Communications Commission, National Archives and Records Administration, Smithsonian Institution, National Endowment for the Humanities, and National Science Foundation) whereas others are within the bureaucracies of various cabinet departments (e.g., National Telecommunications and Information Administration, National Library of Medicine, and National Agricultural Library). The goal then is to increase ties among relevant units in formal and informal ways to leverage the aggregate resources and political influence towards more coordinated planning, advocacy, and action.

### *Preparing the Next Generation of Library and Information Professionals*

Given the revolution in libraries—and the information sector generally—the roles and responsibilities of library staff also are changing in fundamental ways. New models for library organizations and staff positions are emerging. Many of the traditional skills of librarianship remain applicable in the digital age, but additional skills also become necessary. Federal agencies and private foundations should increase their investments in preparing the staff for libraries in the digital age.

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<sup>12</sup> As indicated, the organizations listed here are examples. There are numerous federal entities with interests in libraries or library issues.