Eliminating the Library Reality-Perception Gap

What is the Reality-Perception Gap?

On a scale from essential, to nice-to-have, to obsolete.

> **The Perception of Far Too Many People:**
> Libraries are either nice-to-have or obsolete.

> **The Reality:**
> Libraries are not only essential, but they are essential in numerous ways.

Why is it Critical to Eliminate the Reality-Perception Gap?

If libraries do not gain widespread acceptance as being essential, then…

> Libraries will be susceptible to reduced support and funding.

> Libraries will be challenged to obtain new sources of funding and partnerships.

> Libraries' advocacy efforts will continue to be impaired (institutions that are viewed as essential have an advantage in their ability to advocate for their interests).

Why Does the Reality-Perception Gap Exist?

The gap is the result of two major hurdles that libraries face in connection with public perception.

Past Perception Hurdle

> Many people view libraries based on their past perceptions – they view libraries as a good place to go to borrow books, but believe they are now largely outdated.

> Other people have the view that libraries are primarily about providing information, but they think that any information you need can be found online. These people view libraries as being far less important than they were before the Internet.

Lack of Dominant Activity Hurdle

> Libraries do many great things; they do not, however, have one dominant specific function.

> Most entities that are viewed as essential have one dominant activity (e.g., schools educate and hospitals heal).

Proposal

Complement General Messaging with Organizational Framework Messaging

Types of Messaging That May Be Used

1

General Messaging
Aspirational language about role(s) of libraries.

2

Organizational Framework Messaging
Messaging that provides an organizational framework for what libraries do.

3

Specific Messaging
Messaging that addresses a specific attribute of libraries and services.

Strong organizational framework messaging would address both of the major hurdles and help eliminate the gap.

> Libraries Transform® is strong general messaging that can be even stronger with complimentary organizational framework messaging.

> Organizational framework messaging should make it far easier to remember what libraries do—and that what they do is essential. Once people realize the services libraries perform, and they learn what libraries do in a memorable and organized way, they will know the truth that libraries are essential.

> Organizational framework messaging can turn what would otherwise be a negative when it comes to messaging—the lack of one dominant activity—into a positive.

> Organizational framework messaging will facilitate the way librarians describe what they do through a more consistent structure, and likely help to increase the number of library advocates.
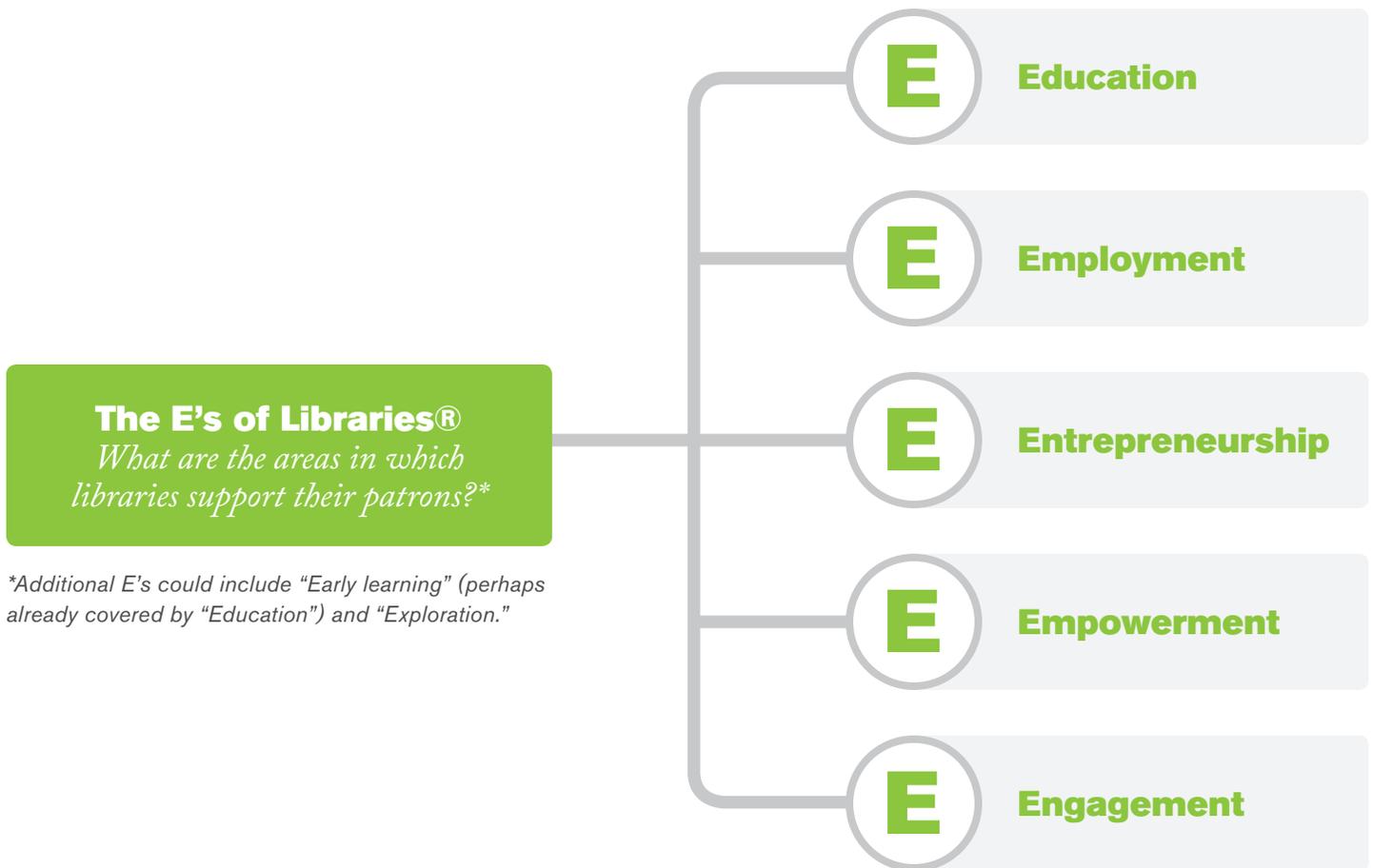
What Specific Attributes Should the Organizational Framework Messaging Have?

- **Memorable:** The message itself must also be memorable (novel, catchy, creative), and the message must make it easier for people to remember what libraries and librarians do.

- **Actionable:** People are more likely to remember and respond to interactive messaging.

- **Perception-Changing:** The messaging must be perception-changing so that libraries can overcome the Past Perception Hurdle.

The E's of Libraries® & What's Your E?™

An option for organizational framework messaging that libraries may want to use.

- *The E's of Libraries®* and *What's Your E?*™ would work hand-in-hand together, and also compliment the libraries' strong general messaging.

- The idea for *The E's of Libraries®* and *What's Your E?*™ emerged as ALA was advocating E-rate issues at the Federal Communications Commission.

- The FCC found the messaging to be very effective.

- *The E's of Libraries®* and *What's Your E?*™ is one effective way to easily communicate and make memorable what libraries are doing, and can do with additional funding and capacity.

E Education

E Employment

The E's of Libraries®
What are the areas in which libraries support their patrons?*

E Entrepreneurship

*Additional E's could include "Early learning" (perhaps already covered by "Education") and "Exploration."

E Empowerment

E Engagement

Other Library Attributes

Everyone	Everywhere	Expertise	Equity
Who libraries serve	Where libraries are in the US	What libraries provide	What libraries advocate for

What's Your E?™ Can be Used in Actionable (Interactive) Ways
Examples of How It Could Be Used

"Our E is employment."

Company X
*Partnering with ALA on,
or certain libraries on
[employment-related activity]*

*"An **E** that this [federal government] committee focuses on is 'empowerment' and namely empowering veterans to succeed. We are pleased to do x [which helps libraries to assist veterans]."*

Congressman Smith

*"Our **E** is engagement, and particularly community engagement. As a foundation, we believe community engagement is critically important, and we are pleased to help fund certain community engagement efforts of libraries."*

Mary Doe
Executive Director of X Foundation

"My E is education."

Alice Jones, 11 years old
*As she talks about how she uses
her local library for [fill in the blank]*

The E's of Libraries® & What's Your E?™ Along With Libraries Transform®
A collaboration that could help libraries overcome the major perception hurdles they face.

› *The E's of Libraries®* meets the memorable attribute as a novel, catchy phrase that makes it easy to remember what libraries and librarians do.

› *What's Your E?™* satisfies the action-inducing characteristic as an interactive phrase that people will respond to.

› Combined, *The E's of Libraries®* and *What's Your E?™* meet the perception-changing criterion by revealing that, at their core, libraries play a key role in, among other things, education, employment, and entrepreneurship, which everyone thinks are absolutely essential.

Questions?
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