



25 Years of the IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto

An Advocacy Pack for Libraries and Library Associations

In this Advocacy Pack, you will find information about the IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, which is turning 25 in its current form. It includes the following information – we hope this is useful for you!

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Introduction to the Manifesto

The original [Public Library Manifesto](#) was agreed in 1949, and was last updated in 1994. A joint initiative of IFLA and UNESCO, it brings together IFLA's expertise reach within the library field, and UNESCO's leadership within the United Nations on questions of education and culture.

The Manifesto is not a legally binding document, but offers a key starting point, not only for governments establishing policy frameworks for public libraries, but also for libraries themselves in creating their own strategies and policies.

Placing public libraries at the heart of efforts to promote personal development and peace, it argues national and local governments should support them, while libraries themselves should work to deliver high quality, equitable and accessible services.

The Manifesto touches on many aspects of public library operation – collections, staffing, buildings, and access policies, as well as wider questions about funding and policy coordination. While a short document, it is rich in ideas and principles which are, in broad terms, as valid today as they were 25 years ago.

Nonetheless, the world has changed, sometimes radically – in the last quarter century, and libraries have changed too. They now offer new services in new ways, to satisfy new needs.

Library innovators and pioneers have shown what is possible, and their ideas can now spread faster than ever. IFLA's Public Library Section will therefore be reviewing the Manifesto as part of its workplan over the coming year in order to identify where there is scope – or need – for changes.

Public Libraries

According to IFLA's [Library Map of the World](#), there are over 405 000¹ public libraries around the world, providing services to their communities on a free or subsidised basis, usually financed, in whole or in part, from public funds. In line with the Public Library Manifesto, they have a mission to serve all members of their communities, without discrimination.

¹ As of October 2019, based on data from 110 countries.

As such, they differ from other library types, which may be limited to a particular community (such as school or university libraries), or institutions like national libraries which have a particular mission. As set out in the Manifesto, public libraries usually have a local focus, with staff committed to providing collections and services, as far as possible, to respond to local needs.

They can therefore be seen as a key ‘third space’ (between work and home) in the lives of their users, as well as a pillar of the ‘social infrastructure’ of any community. Both ideas underline the role of libraries not just in opening up new possibilities for individuals, but also in building stronger links between people.

Key Principles in the Manifesto

The Manifesto is based on a number of key principles which underline the vision it sets out for public libraries.

First of all, there is the **importance of information and learning**. The Manifesto has a strong emphasis on libraries as centres of learning, and in turn, learning as the driver of personal and collective development.

Secondly, the **need for equity**. This is not just a question of being open to all, but actually making a concrete effort to reach out, providing additional or tailored services to those who need them.

Third, a **focus on the individual**, and a responsiveness to the needs of all, with the librarian themselves as an active intermediary between users and the information they need.

Fourth, the belief that libraries have a **broad mission**, and can deliver support to their communities in a wide variety of ways, including education, promoting creativity, safeguarding heritage and diversity, and delivering training.

Finally, there is an emphasis on libraries as a **public service**. The Manifesto underlines that libraries should be publicly funded and open for all. They should be incorporated into broader strategies and budgeting.

The Manifesto's Influence

IFLA has carried out some [initial research](#) into the impact that the UNESCO-IFLA Public Library Manifesto has had in the world.

In addition to growing number of downloads from the IFLA website, it is clear that the document has served as a basis for policies at the national, local and institutional level. The Manifesto provides a framework for thinking about the role a public library should play, and how it should deliver them. It has also been a powerful advocacy tool itself for libraries in advocating for better policies.

Using the Manifesto, library leaders and campaigners have been able to promote the update of digital technologies, greater outreach to marginalised communities, and creating a culture of continuing professional development.

However, the Manifesto has also been directly incorporated into governmental or other official sites as a reference point, for example in Denmark and France. Beyond specific references, the ideas it incorporates have seen growing acceptance in recent years also.

Finally, there are early efforts in South Africa and Australia of efforts to use the principles of the Manifesto as a basis for developing indicators of public library (policy) performance.

It is clear that the Public Library Manifesto continues to exercise a strong influence, and to represent a key reference point in planning around libraries. Through incorporation into indicators and other tools, it is having impact in new ways.

See the IFLA [research paper](#) for more.

Public Libraries in Action

There are already some great stories of how public libraries are delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals set out in the United Nations 2030 Agenda. There are many examples available on IFLA's [Library Map of the World SDG Stories](#) page. In particular, you can find out about how:

- Public libraries in Australia are helping to [bridge generations](#) and develop digital skills
- Public libraries in Romania are developing [coding skills](#) amongst youth, and helping farmers to benefit from [support schemes](#).
- Public libraries in South Africa are helping rural women to [grow food and develop skills](#), as well as farmers in general to [develop their businesses](#).
- Public libraries in Kenya are helping children in the most deprived areas to [access education](#), and in particular to [pass the maths exams](#) necessary to get into the best schools.
- Public libraries in Ghana are offering education and training to help [reduce teenage pregnancy](#).
- Public libraries in Russia are providing spaces that help [strengthen communities](#), and build the confidence and literacy skills of [children with learning difficulties](#).
- Public libraries in Czechia are helping to [boost literacy levels](#) across the population.
- Public libraries in Germany are [supporting refugees](#) in integrating into their new home.
- Public libraries in the Netherlands are helping to make [early interventions](#) to increase literacy
- Public libraries in Chile are giving [people experiencing homelessness](#) new opportunities to reconnect with society
- Public libraries in Colombia are [supporting peace-building](#) by bringing public services to long-isolated regions

Key Messages

In your advocacy around the anniversary of the Public Library Manifesto, you may want to highlight the following key messages. For example, if you are writing your own article or blog, doing an interview, or even just in a conversation with a friend, you could try to get these points across:

- Access to a well-supported public library is key for promoting equitable individual and community development.
- Public libraries are a vital infrastructure for access to culture, digital inclusion,
- Public libraries are a gateway to other public services, boosting policy effectiveness

Key Quotes from the Manifesto



In your advocacy around the anniversary of the Public Library Manifesto, you may want to be able to use key quotes, for example in social media, in articles or on posters. Below are just some ideas which could help you in your outreach:

- ‘The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups’
- ‘The public library [is] a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women’
- ‘The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all’
- ‘Collections and services should not be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship, nor commercial pressures’
- [The public library] has to be an essential component of any long-term strategy for culture, information provision, literacy and education’.

Available Tools

In addition to the ideas above, IFLA has a number of other tools available to help you celebrate and promote the work of public libraries:

- Take a look at IFLA’s [10-Minute Library Advocate Series](#) – this will give you a series of ideas on how you can talk and act more effectively for public libraries. Pick the ones that you think will be most useful for you!
- Follow these instructions to add a frame to your Facebook profile:
 - Either: add a frame to your Facebook profile by [clicking here](#),
 - Or:
 - Go to www.facebook.com/profilepicframes
 - Select a frame from the menu or search for the frame you want to use (search using the “25 Years Public Library Manifesto” or just “IFLA”)
 - Set for how long you want to have this frame
 - Click Use as Profile Picture to save
- You can adapt our draft op-ed or letter below



Draft Op-Ed: Equity in the Information Society: Why We Need Public Libraries More than Ever

Information has never been so important.

We are at a time where the costs of being uninformed – on education, on health, on the chances of finding a job, and on democracy – are higher than ever.

To create truly equitable, successful, sustainable societies, we need to ensure that everyone has the possibility to access and use information to improve their own lives.

This is what public libraries do.

The UNESCO-IFLA Public Library Manifesto

On 29 November, the current version of the UNESCO-IFLA Public Library Manifesto turns 25.

Over the past quarter century, it has helped shape government policies, provided the framework for library strategies, and offered a key reference for anyone wanting to understand the role of public libraries.

Despite the dramatic changes of these last years – not least in the way we access and use information – both the Manifesto and the institutions it describes have not lost any of their relevance.

Its focus on the value of education and equity, on responding to the needs of the individual, on the importance of truly public, generalised services, and of the necessity of spaces where everyone can feel at home is as valid as ever.

The anniversary is, therefore, a great opportunity to reflect on what makes public libraries so essential, and so unique for the individuals and the communities they serve.

The Next Quarter Century

The technologies and trends that have created the information society are not going away. We are more and more aware both of the benefits they bring, and the problems they raise.

Worries about ‘fake news’, about the weakening of community and social connection, about dependency on just a few platforms and websites, about privacy and security are growing.

In parallel, far too many people are still not able to benefit from the positives that participation in the information society can bring.

In both cases, public libraries provide a solution by giving people the access and skills they need, as well as offering a space that allows for real-life interaction and community building.

To guarantee this, public libraries need the support of governments, which in turn need the support of documents such as the Public Library Manifesto.

IFLA will be working with its members in the coming year to establish if any changes are needed to the Manifesto to enhance its contribution to building better lives and better communities.