

Public Libraries Support Development through Access to Information

A Statement from the [Public Libraries Section](#), International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)

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. It 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. UNESCO therefore encourages national and local governments to support and actively engage in the development of public libraries. [IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto](#) (1994)

Public libraries are the new village green. They are public spaces where everyone is welcome and can participate. They make a vital contribution towards the social capital, educational and recreational development of local communities and are an important foundation of democracy.

Public library services are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status. Specific services and materials are provided for those users who cannot, for whatever reason, use the regular services and materials, including the aged, people with disabilities or people in hospital or prison.

Collections and services are developed to meet the current, emerging and future needs of the local community and include print and electronic resources. The *Public Library Manifesto* opines that public libraries should be free and that collections and services should not be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship, nor commercial pressures.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES ...

- Create and nurture an environment that recognises the importance and joy of reading;
- Support formal and informal learning and literacy development for all ages;
- Promote awareness and recording of cultural heritage, including support of the oral tradition;
- Contribute to an inclusive and diverse community;
- Facilitate the development of digital information and literacy skills;
- Deliver opportunities for learning, personal development and creativity through a rich program of events and activities;
- Enable good citizenship. They ensure equality of access to information for all;
- Foster innovation, economic development and prosperity.

Adapted from the [IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto](#) (1994)

Supporting Development

Public libraries worldwide play an essential role in supporting development through equitable access to quality assured information. Library services, technology tools, collection formats and community needs are diverse and continue to evolve at a rapid pace. Technology will continue to feature, providing people access to devices and software that would otherwise be unaffordable; library staff will not be behind a desk, they will be engaging with users and providing expertise face-to-face and online, and they will be delivering programs and activities, both direct and through partnerships, tailored to suit the local community. Public libraries will continue to connect users to information and ideas, but they will play an even greater role in bringing people together.

Support people to make informed decisions through access to information, skills, media and information literacy, and digital literacy

Improving adult literacy and language ability, teaching people to use technology, and providing access to knowledge and information are ways in which public libraries help people to develop the skills needed to successfully interact in today's society in professional and personal situations. The public library sector constantly adapts traditional library methodology and teaching in an innovative way to ensure that programs are relevant and meet the specific needs of clients and the local environment.

- **Logan City Council's Libraries (Australia)** partnered with other agencies to offer *Get Job Ready* workshops to the community. Aimed at the mature age job-seeker, the workshops were held at Beenleigh, Logan Central and Marsden Libraries with these libraries servicing catchments with some of the highest rates of unemployment in the city. Take-up from the community was strong with all available spaces booked. The workshops attracted a broad spectrum from the community, including mothers returning to the workforce, previous business owners and older workers experiencing periods of unemployment and focussed on the digital literacy skills needed to re-enter the workforce.
- At **Bergen Public Library in Norway** the DEL project seeks to heighten digital literacy in adults who shy away from using online services, by offering one-to-one guidance and courses. As part of the project, the Library has developed a Service Centre for Language and Digital Services, where visitors have daily access to guidance by staff of IT and language proficiency. Assistance is provided for everything from help with job applications to introductions to tablets, mobile phones and social media. Guidance is offered in Spanish, Portuguese, Polish, Russian, Arabic and Somali, as well as English.
- **Chattanooga Public Library's (USA) 4th floor** is a public laboratory and educational facility with a focus on information, design, technology, and the applied arts. The more than 12,000 square foot space hosts equipment, expertise, programs, events, and meetings that work within this scope. While traditional library spaces support the consumption of knowledge by offering access to media, the 4th floor is unique because it supports the production, connection, and sharing of knowledge by offering access to tools and instruction.
- **Buruburu Public Library's (Kenya)** mobile digital librarian brings the magic of e-books to hospitals, young offenders' institutions, child care centres and schools, reaching hundreds of children who do not have access to books and would otherwise not hear the stories. The mobile digital librarian travels with a laptop, a modem, an LCD projector and speakers. The librarian downloads the stories from a variety of digital libraries, which provide free e-books and educational resources for children.
- **City of Gold Coast Libraries (Australia)** supports and blends programs across a range of cultural domains including new and emerging writers to refine their craft and develop industry skills and knowledge through a series of writing programs. *Writer's Block* brings highly regarded successfully published authors and publishing industry leaders to the City to share their wisdom in a full day of lectures and workshops twice a year. *Book Clinics* is a bi-monthly networking event enabling local new and emerging authors to connect with each other for support and inspiration. Guest speakers facilitate discussion on industry topics and participants share ideas and challenges. *Words Out* is an annual creative writing competition aimed specifically at encouraging and endorsing children with active imaginations and a passion for writing.

Secure cultural heritage for current and future generations

Culture, understood as an ensemble of values, traditions, tangible and intangible heritage, religious beliefs, worldviews and the expressions of culture in ways of living – can facilitate the achievement of development goals by supporting social inclusion, resilience, innovation and local knowledge. In libraries, culture is supported through, locally relevant collections and materials in indigenous languages, and preservation for the benefit of future generations.

The public library community is actively involved in securing cultural heritage and creating a sense of place. This ranges for extensive digitisation programs where historic and sensitive collections are made available online to projects which capture local stories and assist citizens in the creation of local content:

- San Javier-La Loma is a mixed working class and farming neighbourhood of about 25,000 people on the outskirts of Medellin, **Colombia's** second largest city. Homes are close together, roads are narrow and some places are only accessible on foot.

[Public Library San Javier-La Loma](#), a branch of the Medellin public library network, was eager to offer the community services focused on their needs. But they ran into a problem – there was no recent map of the area: the last official map was dated 1971. Modern San Javier-La Loma was invisible to Colombia and the world. Librarians found a solution in the concept of community mapping, a process through which communities decide what to include in maps and create maps of their own neighbourhoods. Over 400 residents of San Javier-Loma are involved in the library's project, bringing memory, photos and stories about their day-to-day experience to the mapping process. The new maps are online, and the members of the community can constantly update them to reflect changes in their location and lives.

San Javier-La Loma is now mapped in more detail than any other part of Medellin. Access roads and footpaths, markets and businesses, statistics, farms and factories, historical, religious and cultural sites, schools and social services are all included in their living online maps.

- [The Library of Birmingham \(UK\)](#) opened in 2013 to international fanfare. One of the issues that faced the Library was how to make its collections accessible. To do this the Library created an app and a Kinect (gesture-driven) interactive screen within the building that serve as fun and visual introductions to its vast collections. The result, *Dozens & Trails*, takes a selection of gems, surprises and curiosities hidden in the library's collections – such as maps, books, manuscripts, images and so on – and groups them in quirky ways that people can explore at their leisure. *Dozens* are groups of 12 related items representing different aspects of the library, pulled together with an interesting common link.

Trails consist of 12 artefacts, photographs or landmarks, each located on a map which together forms a trail around the city. Users can use the app to view these different places as they looked in the early days of photography and see archival material to learn about their history. Current trails include Birmingham's anti-slavery landmarks, a tour of city life living on sixpence a day during the 18th and 19th centuries, and a more contemporary side of Birmingham following sculptures around the city.

- [Central West Libraries \(Australia\)](#) has created an online resource for use by students and the wider community to commemorate the [Centenary of World War I](#) as it relates to the local community. This resource, and the research that underpins it, is key to many of the other planned programs. A blog and a related wiki have been established which identifies and documents service personnel with links to the district. This includes links to official records, information from personal papers and family stories.

Support governments, civil society, and local communities to achieve development goals

Public libraries bring everyone together. They provide free access to information and ideas and are an important foundation of democracy. Planners and developers recognise the unifying role and have put a public library at the centre of new buildings and regeneration projects.

Public libraries are an essential portal for e-government services. The digital divide – the gap between people who are confident IT users and those without digital literacy skills and access to computers at home is lessening due to the availability of technology and trained staff in libraries.

- [Rijeka City Library, Croatia](#) draws on the creativity of students and young unemployed people in Rijeka to publish an exciting online magazine that tackles serious issues and challenges shallow and sensationalist local media.

GKR Magazin has led to an explosion of creativity in Rijeka, a city of 128,000 people. Since its launch in June 2013, the magazine has published over 500 articles; built up a team of eight volunteer editors, designers and proofreaders, and has 68 regular contributors—mostly under the age of 30—who provide a steady stream of short stories, news, essays, features, poetry, reviews, photographs and film. Watch out local media – GKR Magazin already has over 2,000 visitors a day.

- Schools hundreds of kilometres apart in remote areas of western **Kenya** and across the border in **Uganda** are engaging in lively inter-school debates, quizzes and spelling competitions through [Kisumu Public Library's](#) smartphone, laptop and video conferencing project.

Few rural schools have internet connections, and so the library researched ways of connecting to the internet through the mobile phone network. The library provides technology training for teachers, who use laptops and mobile phone connections to log in and connect to other schools. The programme has opened the eyes of teachers and pupils to the power of digital technology.

Support creators and provide a rich foundation for new forms of creativity

Libraries have always been places for exploration and discovery through the use of shared resources. Now, as well as books, we have new materials and devices. Public libraries are already experimenting with maker spaces, including 3D printers and other gadgets that would be beyond the reach of most individuals.

- [Devon Libraries, UK](#) have been instrumental in setting up a [Fab Lab](#), where 3D printers and technology enable people to develop new skills. Fab Lab Exeter is adjacent and complementary to the Library's Business and Information Hub, which provides business information and intellectual property (IP) support for local businesses. It enables users to develop or refine a product or object from first idea to a formed and working prototype. Advice and further business support is also available to help develop the business proposal to ensure a route to market.
- [Tarnby Library, Denmark](#) is running a workshop for children, *Coding Pirates* in cooperation with the ITC-University. [Rockhampton Regional Library, Australia](#) provides a fully equipped sound studio provided in for community use. In addition to being able to use the music studios at Helsinki's [Library 10 Finland](#) users can digitise their LPs and cassettes at a Vinyl bar.

- In the town of Olsztyn in **Poland**, [Olsztyn Municipal Public Library's](#) ICT laboratory is well known as the MultiCentre. Its doors are open to people with all kinds of needs and interests, and of all ages. In the MultiCentre people compose music, draw caricatures, produce media like movies, animation and posters, and build robots. Skills courses are divided into four modules: MultiArt, MultiMusic, MultiScience and MultiTech.

An especially keen group is young people living with disability, who come to the centre to learn skills and have fun as part of the library's 'Yes They Can!' programme. Since 'Yes They Can!' began in 2010, the library has worked with 750 disabled children and young adults. A favourite is the MultiTech module, in which the children build toys, like aeroplanes, fire engines and carousels, and learn digital robotics to make the models move.

Recommendations

In order to fulfil these objectives there is a need to:

- Advocate for universal free access to public libraries
- Support the engagement and training of people with the skills and ability to facilitate connection, learning, access and opportunities for literacy in all its forms
- Recognise the role and spread of the international public library network and build on this in the roll out and delivery of on-line services by governments and other agencies by engaging with those sector in policymaking for open government, access to information, and culture;
- Acknowledge and support the importance of public libraries as a safe, neutral place that actively contribute to the development of social and economic capital
- International advocacy campaign to position public libraries as key to the delivery of trusted and essential information
- Ensure the effective use of technology tools to deliver business. Ensure public libraries are equipped with robust and up-to-date information and communications technology frameworks to maximise and deliver services
- Advocate for strong funding of public libraries.



**International
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Public Libraries Section

The IFLA Public Libraries Section provides an active international forum and network for the development and promotion of public libraries. We are committed to ensuring the world's communities have free and equal access to information and public library services. Our goals, objectives and strategies are developed within the context of the principles enshrined in the *Public Library Manifesto*, *The Lyon Declaration* and the IFLA Professional Priorities. This Section also represents mobile libraries.