

A New Paradigm for Librarianship: A Review of Library Associations' Work and AI from 2019 Until the Present

Loida Garcia-Febo, International Library Consultant

Chair, IFLA Management of Library Associations

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Abstract

This article reviews how library associations worldwide have shaped the profession's engagement with Artificial Intelligence (AI) from 2019 to the present. During this period, AI has driven a paradigm shift in librarianship, influencing professional practice, education, policy, and global advocacy. Through competency frameworks, ethical guidelines, international collaborations, and alignment with United Nations initiatives, associations such as ALA, IFLA, ARL, CENL, and ACRL have played a central role in guiding responsible and inclusive AI adoption. Key milestones between 2019 and 2025 illustrate the institutionalization of AI readiness across the field. The article concludes by identifying three strategic priorities—AI literacy, global collaboration, and agile governance—that will enable library associations to continue leading the profession through ongoing technological transformation.

1. Introduction

The field of Library and Information Science (LIS) stands at a historic inflection point. Once defined by the stewardship of physical collections and the facilitation of access to knowledge, libraries today are being reimagined as technology-driven institutions shaping the contours of digital society. The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data science into both library practice and education represents not merely an incremental update but a paradigm shift—one that redefines the role of librarians, reorients professional values toward innovation and equity, and positions libraries as global actors in the digital transformation of knowledge.

This moment demands visionary thinking and collective leadership across academia, professional associations, and international forums to ensure that the library profession not only adapts to but actively guides the ethical and inclusive use of emerging technologies. Library associations have emerged as essential players in this transformation, serving as conveners, advocates, and standard-bearers who connect local initiatives with global digital agendas. Their role as conveners, policy leaders, and advocates places them at the center of efforts to shape responsible adoption of AI across diverse library contexts. This leadership is increasingly expressed through collaborative and cross-regional partnerships. This global momentum echoes the priorities identified in the *IFLA Trend Report 2024*, which highlights accelerating digital transformation, algorithmic systems, and the need for cross-sector governance frameworks that center equity, transparency, and human agency (IFLA, 2024).

A notable example is the collaboration between the **IFLA Management of Library Associations Section (MLAS)** and the **Lebanese Library Association (LLA)**, who—following their highly successful joint conference in 2024—are partnering again to present LLA's 2026 annual conference. With its theme

“*Libraries at the Forefront: Leading Digital and AI-Driven Transformation in Education and Society*,” the 2026 event illustrates how library associations can model the global cooperation and ethical leadership required in the AI era.

I frame this analysis based on my ongoing engagement with AI and library associations since 2019. That year, as the then ALA President, I published an ALA’s President Column in *American Libraries* titled “[Exploring AI: How Libraries Are Starting to Apply Artificial Intelligence in Their Work](#)” and delivered a keynote address on AI at the [Austrian Library and Information Association Conference](#). More recently, as Chair of the [ALA IRC United Nations SDG Subcommittee](#), I have coordinated annual events such as “[Generative A.I. supercharging the mission of libraries: risks and opportunities](#)” aligned with the United Nations’ “AI for Good” initiative and collaborated on national events exploring AI in libraries, including in the Czech Republic. I have also been invited to speak about AI and digital transformation by library associations, libraries, and universities in Bangladesh, Croatia, India, the Dominican Republic, Dubai, Germany, and Romania.

I share this background not as a résumé but to underscore the perspective from which I approach this essay: an active participant in the ongoing dialogue between AI and library associations worldwide. The theme of AI belongs to all who engage critically and responsibly in shaping its implications for our field. Additionally, as Chair of IFLA Management of Library Association I am in constant communication with library associations from around the globe. From this vantage point, I offer reflections on how library associations have been navigating, interpreting, and leading within the global conversation on AI since 2019. I hope this essay spark conversations and actions within library associations about this timely topic.

2. AI and Paradigm Shift in Library and Information Science

The integration of AI into LIS represents a profound transformation in educational frameworks, professional practices, and the very conception of librarianship. Libraries, once primarily custodians of books and information, are evolving into dynamic, user-centered hubs of knowledge, innovation, and empowerment (Cox et al., 2019; Shen et al., 2021). This transformation is closely linked to the leadership and advocacy of library associations, which increasingly shape how AI, data ethics, and digital inclusion are adopted across institutions (IFLA, 2020; ALA, 2021; ARL, 2020).

AI tools are increasingly embedded in library ecosystems, enabling:

- Real-time user support through conversational interfaces (Đurđević & Bajić, 2022; Luo & Yu, 2022)
- Improved accessibility and multilingual discovery (Zhang & Bhowmick, 2020)
- Research analytics for scholarly communication (Borrego & Anglada, 2021)
- Dynamic needs assessment and community analysis (Cox et al., 2023)

Such developments elevate the importance of ethical frameworks. AI systems carry risks of bias, opacity, and inequitable allocation of resources (Noble, 2018; Crawford, 2021). Library associations have emphasized the need to center human judgment, transparency, and professional values in the

deployment of algorithmic tools (IFLA, 2020; American Library Association, 2021; ARL, 2020; Huang, Samek, & Shiri, 2022).

Library associations contextualize these developments within shared ethical, policy, and strategic frameworks. They provide training, capacity-building, and collective vision, ensuring that the rapid integration of technology aligns with the profession's human-centered mission (ACRL, 2023; IFLA, 2020; Bhatt & Paul, 2022). Associations amplify librarians' expertise, grounding innovation in service ethics, intellectual freedom, and principles of equity and privacy (Jaeger et al., 2016).

AI is also being leveraged to support library advocacy and evidence-based decision-making. Associations provide frameworks that allow librarians to use AI for resource optimization, accessibility enhancements, and impact assessment (Cox et al., 2023; ARL, 2020; Kizhakkethil & Perryman, 2024). Tools such as predictive analytics and chatbots not only improve service delivery but also provide data demonstrating a library's value to stakeholders (Luo & Yu, 2022; Borrego & Anglada, 2021). By integrating AI into advocacy, associations help libraries strategically deploy technology while reinforcing their role as knowledge stewards and champions of equitable access (ALA, 2021; IFLA, 2020).

3. Education, Workforce Development, and the Influence of Associations

The shifts occurring in professional practice are paralleled by substantial evolution in LIS education, where library associations—particularly in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom—shape curricula through accreditation, standards, and collaborative partnerships (ALA, 2019; CILIP, 2020). Interdisciplinary programs at institutions such as **San José State University**, whose Department of Applied Data Science now emphasizes generative AI, machine learning, and deep learning in its Master of Science in Applied Data Intelligence program, (SJSU, 2025) the **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**, which is merging its School of Information & Library Science and its School of Data Science & Society to form a new interdisciplinary school centered on AI (Taylor, 2025), the **University of Washington**, where the iSchool's MSIM program recently introduced an artificial intelligence specialization covering ethics, governance, and large language models (UW iSchool, 2025), and the **University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign**, whose iSchool explicitly highlights expertise in explainable AI, natural language processing, and human-centered data science in its institutional capabilities report (UIUC iSchool, 2025), reflect a broader shift in LIS toward integrating data science, ethical AI, and sociotechnical analysis. Library associations guide these educational transitions, ensuring core professional principles are upheld. Through continuing education programs, strategic reports, and academic partnerships, associations translate emerging research into accessible professional development, equipping librarians with AI literacy, data ethics, and digital strategy skills.

Library associations play a central role in guiding these educational transitions. Through continuing education programs, strategic policy reports, and academic collaborations, associations translate emerging research into accessible training that equips librarians with competencies in AI literacy, data ethics, and digital strategy (IFLA, 2020; Jaeger et al., 2016). Studies indicate that while interest in AI is growing within LIS programs, many students and early-career professionals still feel underprepared for

AI-centered work environments—highlighting the need for association-led capacity building (Bhatt & Paul, 2025).

In the United States, the Association of College & Research Libraries' **AI Competencies for Library Workers Task Force** demonstrates how associations respond to this skills gap by providing structured training, competency frameworks, and professional guidance for responsible AI implementation (ACRL, 2023). These developments ensure that technological innovation remains grounded in the profession's commitments to intellectual freedom, privacy, equity, and service.

The influence of library associations in shaping LIS education and workforce development can be observed across several key areas:

3.1 Standards, Competencies, and Accreditation

Associations articulate professional expectations for AI literacy, ethical reasoning, and technical engagement. Frameworks such as ACRL's AI competencies and ALA's accreditation standards increasingly inform LIS curricula, professional certification, and institutional training programs (ACRL, 2023; ALA, 2019).

3.2 Continuing Professional Development

Associations provide ongoing learning opportunities—through workshops, webinars, and online courses—to help practitioners develop skills in algorithmic accountability, data governance, and human-centered AI. These educational models align with recommendations from emerging LIS scholarship emphasizing ethical and responsible AI integration (Huang, Samek, & Shiri, 2021; Cox et al., 2023).

3.3 Collaborative Models for Educational Leadership

Cross-regional and international partnerships expand access to expertise and strengthen AI readiness across geographic and institutional contexts. Such collaborative models demonstrate how associations can mobilize global networks to support equitable and context-sensitive professional development (Shen et al., 2021; IFLA, 2020).

Together, these developments illustrate a sustained shift toward building a workforce capable of analyzing, adapting, and ethically implementing AI technologies in support of library missions and community needs.

4. Global Advocacy and the Expanding Role of Library Associations

The paradigm shift in librarianship extends beyond education and practice into the collective advocacy of library associations at national and international levels. Organizations such as the American Library Association (ALA), the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) are leading efforts to position libraries as essential partners in global technology governance. Through platforms such as IFLA's advocacy at the UN and the IFLA AI SIG, as well as ALA's ACRL and ALA IRC UN SDG Subcommittee, these associations push forward digital

transformation while promoting ethical frameworks. These efforts reflect libraries' enduring missions—to promote equitable access to information, uphold human rights, and engage responsibly with AI.

Recent United Nations reports highlight global priorities that align closely with the work of library associations. For example:

- The [2025 UN Human Development Report](#) underscores the imperative of harnessing human-centered AI to promote inclusive development and avoid reinforcing inequality.
- The [UN SDG Report 2025](#) emphasizes digital transformation and the need to close the digital divide — areas where libraries can act as bridges.
- The [80th UN General Assembly](#) has called for global dialogue on AI governance, which library associations can help shape by advocating for transparency, ethics, and public interest.

Library associations translate these global priorities into practice through policy development, collaborative networks, and alignment with international agendas.

4.1 Policy Development and Ethical Guidance

Associations have developed foundational documents to guide libraries' engagement with AI. [IFLA's Statement on Libraries and Artificial Intelligence](#) articulates key ethical considerations, including privacy, transparency, and the social responsibility of AI deployment.

Likewise, [ARL's Research Libraries Guiding Principles for Artificial Intelligence](#) emphasize fairness, bias awareness, accessibility, and accountability in AI systems.

In 2025, IFLA released an [Entry Point to Libraries and AI toolkit](#), offering reflective questions and scenarios that help librarians assess both opportunities and risks in adopting AI.

4.2 International Collaboration

Global cooperation is central to the advocacy agenda. IFLA's Artificial Intelligence Special Interest Group (AI SIG) serves as a focal point for aligning library ethics with practical AI engagement, working with its IT Section to promote capacity-building, share best practices, and supporting libraries in underrepresented regions.

Through international conferences, webinars, and working groups, associations bring together librarians, technologists, policymakers, and industry to build shared understanding and influence AI governance.

4.3 Regional and Cross-Regional Partnerships

Beyond global networks, library associations forge partnerships at regional and cross-regional levels, enabling joint policy development, co-hosted events, and shared resources. These collaborations help ensure that global ethical principles are adapted to local contexts and implemented in a culturally responsive way.

4.4 Alignment with International Agendas

Library associations also anchor their advocacy in broader global frameworks, especially the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By engaging with initiatives such as [AI for Good](#), associations contribute to multistakeholder processes that shape inclusive, human-centered AI. These alignments allow libraries to act as digital public goods—supporting capacity-building, bridging infrastructure gaps, and promoting equitable access to technology.

These developments reinforce themes from the *IFLA Trend Report 2024*, which stresses the pivotal role of libraries in shaping equitable digital futures, strengthening AI governance, and supporting global policy dialogue at the intersection of information, technology, and society (IFLA, 2024).

5. Timeline of Major Milestones in Library Associations & AI (2019–2025)

Year	Milestone	Link
2019 (January)	American Library Association / TechSource (U.S.) – <i>Library Technology Reports, Vol 55 No 1: “Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in Libraries”</i> – Edited by Jason Griffey	Link to LTR
2019 (March)	American Library Association’s Presidents Column on AL: “Exploring AI: How Libraries Are Starting to Apply Artificial Intelligence in Their Work” by Loida Garcia-Febo	American Libraries
2019	Book: <i>Law Librarianship in the Age of AI</i> , ed. by Ellyssa Kroski (ALA / Neal-Schuman)	
2019 (September)	Austrian Library Association Conference: “Artificial Intelligence in Libraries” – 34th Austrian Library Conference (Graz)	VÖB Austria
2020 (January)	CENL AI in Libraries Network established in 2020 (applied in 2019; accepted in 2020)– and launched a Survey on AI in Libraries in 2021	2021 CENL Survey report
2020 (October)	International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) – <i>Statement on Libraries and Artificial Intelligence</i>	IFLA Statement PDF
2020-2021	IFLA / IT Section – Formation of AI Special Interest Group (AI SIG)	IFLA AI SIG page

Year	Milestone	Link
2021 (March)	Conference of European National Librarians (CENL) – “AI in Libraries Network Group” formal action (survey, AI Cookbook, GitHub registry, webinars)	CENL “AI in Libraries” Network Group
2022 (April)	Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) / ALA (U.S.) – Book: <i>The Rise of AI: Implications and Applications of AI in Academic Libraries</i> (ed. Wheatley & Hervieux)	
2023–2024 (March 2024)	ACRL / ALA – Establishes “AI Competencies for Library Workers” Task Force under then-President Dr. Leo S. Lo	ACRL
2024 (April)	IFLA / Chile – 4th AI in Libraries Symposium (co-hosted by IFLA IT Section & AI SIG)	News item
2024 (April)	Association of Research Libraries (ARL, U.S.) – <i>Research Libraries Guiding Principles for AI</i>	ARL Page
2024 (May)	ALA IRC UN SDG Subcommittee hosted: Generative A.I. supercharging the mission of libraries: risks and opportunities ” during the days of the United Nations’ “AI for Good”	Recording
2024 (Aug 5–9)	IFLA / Mexico – MexINFO 2024 Global Forum: Seminar on AI & Information Integrity (led by IFLA FAIFE + AI SIG)	Event page
2024	GPT-4 Exploration Program (UNM) led by Leo S. Lo. “Transforming Academic Librarianship through AI Reskilling: Insights from the GPT-4 Exploration Program”	Paper
2025 (April)	ALA (U.S.) – “Library of the Future Award” recognizes a library AI Task Force	News item
2025 (April)	2024 CENL Survey on Artificial Intelligence: Report	Report
2025 (May)	ALA IRC UN SDG Subcommittee hosted: “AI for Good: Empowering Libraries to Advance Equity, Access, and Innovation”	Recording
2025 (June)	IFLA (Global) – <i>Entry Point to Libraries and AI</i> Document	IFLA Entry Point release

Year	Milestone	Link
2025 (Aug 14–15)	IFLA / Astana, Kazakhstan – Satellite Meeting: “AI, Bibliographic Control and Legal Matters” – IFLA Bibliography Section + IT Section + AI SIG	Event page
2025 (September)	AI Knowledge Café in Prague, Czech Republic – Moderated by LGF, Chair IFLA Management of Library Associations	Report on MLAS site
2025 (October)	CENL (Europe) – “Common Statement on the Management of Artificial Intelligence”	Statement
2025 (October)	ACRL/ ALA “AI Competencies for Academic Library Workers”	Competencies

Key Observations & Takeaways

- 2019: Early engagement in the U.S. and Europe (ALA, Austria), foundational publications, and events established AI as a strategic concern for libraries.
- 2020–2021: Global and European networks formalized (IFLA AI SIG, CENL AI Network Group), signaling institutionalization of AI initiatives.
- 2022–2024: Focus on professional development, reskilling programs, and competencies (ACRL books, Task Force, Leo Lo’s research and GPT-4 pilot at UNM), showing structured capacity-building within associations.
- 2024–2025: Broad international engagement, specialized meetings (AI Knowledge Café, cross-regional partnerships), and official guidance documents demonstrate AI integration in policy, practice, and global advocacy.

6. Strategic Directions for Future-Proofing Library Associations

As library associations navigate the accelerating convergence of AI, digital transformation, and societal expectations, three strategic areas are critical for ensuring continued relevance, influence, and leadership.

6.1 AI Literacy and Ethical Competency

Library associations must establish multilayered professional development frameworks that equip librarians to critically engage with AI and other emerging technologies. Such frameworks should include:

- Foundational knowledge of AI and algorithmic systems, emphasizing how these tools function, their risks, and their societal implications (Noble, 2018; Crawford, 2021).

- Ethical reasoning, human-centered design, and algorithmic accountability to ensure librarians can both apply and critique technologies responsibly (IFLA, 2025a; Jaeger et al., 2016).
- Embedded certification programs, micro-credentials, or recognition pathways to normalize AI literacy as a core professional competency across the field (ACRL, 2025).

By emphasizing these dimensions, associations ensure that librarians are not merely users of technology, but ethical guides, advocates, and stewards of digital innovation.

6.2 Global and Cross-Sector Collaboration

Future library leadership requires deep engagement across borders and sectors. Associations should:

- Expand network models that bring together national library associations, regional consortia, academic institutions, civil society, and technology partners, facilitating shared learning and resource pooling (IFLA, 2024; IFLA AI SIG, n.d.).
- Prioritize inclusive engagement with underrepresented geographies, particularly in the Global South, to ensure diverse voices inform global AI policy and practice (IFLA, 2025b).
- Act as convenors of dialogue among librarians, policymakers, technologists, and legal stakeholders—positioning associations as the bridge between innovation and social purpose (Cox, 2023; ACRL, 2025).

Such collaboration enables libraries to influence global AI governance while adapting ethical frameworks and capacity-building models to local contexts. Cross-regional partnerships, co-hosted events, and knowledge exchange initiatives illustrate how associations can leverage collective expertise to strengthen professional practice globally.

6.3 Agile Policy, Governance, and Innovation

To remain adaptive in a rapidly evolving technological landscape, associations must develop flexible governance and policy frameworks that anticipate future change:

- Establish living policy toolkits that are reviewed and updated regularly, helping libraries respond to new technologies, regulatory shifts, and evolving user needs (IFLA, 2025a).
- Promote experimental pilots, test beds, and rapid feedback loops, allowing member institutions to iterate on technology adoption without compromising ethical standards (Cox, 2023).
- Extend governance and innovation strategies beyond AI, incorporating emerging areas such as immersive metaverse applications, data-driven ecosystems, and computational publishing (IFLA AI SIG, n.d.).

By institutionalizing agility, associations can guide libraries in proactively shaping technology adoption, ensuring alignment with core values of intellectual freedom, equity, privacy, and public service (Noble, 2018; Crawford, 2021).

7. Implications for Practice and Research

Library associations have emerged as linchpins of AI integration within the LIS profession, transitioning from reactive adaptation to proactive strategic leadership (IFLA AI SIG, n.d.; ACRL, 2025). Their influence manifests in education, workforce development, policy formation, and global advocacy. Key implications include:

- The necessity of ongoing assessment of association-driven AI guidelines to evaluate effectiveness in diverse regional and institutional contexts (IFLA, 2025b).
- The importance of cross-regional collaborations in promoting equitable access to AI literacy, ethical practices, and professional development (IFLA, 2023; Cox, 2023).
- Opportunities for research to examine long-term impacts of AI integration on library operations, user engagement, and societal outcomes, informing evidence-based strategies for future innovation (Lo 2024).

8. Conclusion

The profession of librarianship stands at a transformative crossroads. Library associations are central to shaping this future, ensuring that AI and emerging technologies amplify rather than undermine libraries' foundational missions. Through ethical stewardship, global collaboration, and sustained investment in education, associations empower librarians to act as both practitioners and ethical leaders.

Key strategies for future-proofing include:

- **AI Literacy and Ethical Competency** – Equipping librarians with skills, critical frameworks, and recognition pathways to evaluate and guide AI responsibly.
- **Global Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange** – Fostering international networks and inclusive dialogue to shape equitable AI policies.
- **Agility in Policy and Practice** – Developing adaptive frameworks and experimental platforms to anticipate and respond to technological change.

By advancing these initiatives, library associations can maintain relevance, strengthen trust, and drive innovation. Librarians, supported by their associations, are not just responding to change—they are defining it, guiding society toward a knowledge-driven, ethically informed, and inclusive digital future.

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