

IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 2022

Freedom, prosperity and the development of society and of individuals are fundamental human values. They will only be attained through the ability of well-informed citizens to exercise their democratic rights and to play an active role in society. Constructive participation and the development of democracy depend on satisfactory education as well as on free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture and information.

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 underpins healthy knowledge societies through providing access to and enabling the creation and sharing of knowledge of all sorts, including scientific and local knowledge without commercial, technological or legal barriers.

In every nation, but especially in the developing world, libraries help ensure that the rights to education and participation in knowledge societies and in the cultural life of the community are accessible to as many people as possible.

This Manifesto proclaims UNESCO's belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture, inclusion and information, as an essential agent for sustainable development, and for individual fulfilment of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of all individuals.

UNESCO therefore encourages national and local governments to support and actively engage in the development of public libraries.

The Public Library

The public library is the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. It is an essential component of knowledge societies, continuously adapting to new means of communication to fulfil their mandate of providing universal access to and enabling meaningful use of information for all people. It provides publicly accessible space for the production of knowledge, sharing and exchange of information and culture, and promotion of civic engagement.

Libraries are creators of community, proactively reaching out to new audiences and using effective listening to support the design of services that meet local needs and contribute to improving quality of life. The public has trust in their library, and in return, it is the ambition of the public library to proactively keep their community informed and aware.

The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, language, social status, and any other characteristic. Specific services and materials must be provided for those users who cannot, for whatever reason, use the regular services and

materials, for example linguistic minorities, people with disabilities, poor digital or computer skills, poor literacy abilities or people in hospital or prison.

All age groups must find material relevant to their needs. Collections and services have to include all types of appropriate media and modern technologies as well as traditional materials. High quality, relevance to local needs and conditions, and reflective of the language and cultural diversity of the community are fundamental. Material must reflect current trends and the evolution of society, as well as the memory of human endeavour and imagination.

Collections and services should not be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship, nor commercial pressures.

Missions of the Public Library

The following key missions which relate to information, literacy, education, inclusivity, civic participation and culture should be at the core of public library services. Through these key missions, public libraries contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals and the construction of more equitable, humane, and sustainable societies.

- Providing access to a broad range of information and ideas free from censorship, supporting formal and informal education at all levels as well as lifelong learning enabling the ongoing, voluntary and self-conducted pursuit of knowledge for people at all stages of life;
- providing opportunities for personal creative development, and stimulating imagination, creativity, curiosity, and empathy;
- creating and strengthening reading habits in children from birth to adulthood;
- initiating, supporting and participating in literacy activities and programmes to build reading and writing skills, and facilitating the development of media and information literacy and digital literacy skills for all people at all ages, in the spirit of equipping an informed, democratic society;
- providing services to their communities both in-person and remotely through digital technologies allowing access to information, collections, and programmes whenever possible;
- ensuring access for all people to all sorts of community information and opportunities for community organising, in recognition of the library's role at the core of the social fabric;
- providing their communities with access to scientific knowledge, such as research results and health information that can impact the lives of their users, as well as enabling participation in scientific progress;
- providing adequate information services to local enterprises, associations and interest groups;
- preservation of, and access to, local and Indigenous data, knowledge, and heritage (including oral tradition), providing an environment in which the local community can take an active role in identifying materials to be captured, preserved and shared, in accordance with the community's wishes;
- fostering inter-cultural dialogue and favouring cultural diversity;
- promoting preservation of and meaningful access to cultural expressions and heritage, appreciation of the arts, open access to scientific knowledge, research and innovations, as expressed in traditional media, as well as digitised and born-digital material.

Funding, legislation and networks

Access to the public library building and services shall in principle be free of charge. The public library is the responsibility of local and national authorities. It must be supported by specific and updated legislation aligned to international treaties and agreements. It must be financed by national and local governments. It has to be an essential component of any long-term strategy for culture, information provision, literacies and education.

In the digital era, copyright and intellectual property legislation must ensure public libraries the same capacity to procure and give access to digital content on reasonable terms as is the case with physical resources.

To ensure nationwide library coordination and cooperation, legislation and strategic plans must also define and promote a national library network based on agreed standards of service.

The public library network must be designed in relation to national, regional, research and special libraries as well as libraries in schools, colleges and universities.

Operation and management

A clear policy must be formulated, defining objectives, priorities and services in relation to the local community needs. The importance of local knowledge and community participation is valuable to this process, and local communities should be included in decision-making.

The public library has to be organized effectively and professional standards of operation must be maintained.

Services have to be physically or digitally accessible to all members of the community. This requires well situated and equipped library buildings, good reading and study facilities, as well as relevant technologies and sufficient opening hours convenient to the users. It equally implies outreach services for those unable to visit the library.

The library services must be adapted to the different needs of communities in rural and urban areas, as well as to the needs of marginalized groups, users with special needs, multilingual users, and Indigenous Peoples within the community.

The librarian is an active intermediary between users and resources, both digital and traditional. Sufficient human and material resources, as well as professional and continuing education of the librarian, to meet the challenges for now and in the future, are indispensable to ensure adequate services. Consultation by leadership with library professionals as to the quantitative and qualitative definition of sufficient resources should be undertaken.

Outreach and user education programmes have to be provided to help users benefit from all the resources.

Ongoing research should focus on evaluating library impact and collecting data, in order to demonstrate the societal benefit of libraries to policy makers. Statistical data should be collected long-term, as the benefits of libraries within society are often seen in subsequent generations.

Partnerships

Establishing partnerships is essential for libraries to reach a broader and more diverse public. Cooperation with relevant partners - for example, user groups, schools, non-governmental organisations, library associations, businesses, and other professionals at local, regional, national as well as international level- has to be ensured.

Implementing the Manifesto

Decision makers at national and local levels and the library community at large, around the world, are hereby urged to implement the principles expressed in this Manifesto.

18 July 2022