

The purpose of this document is to change the conversation about Idaho libraries – from a nostalgic character in our past to an essential player in our state’s future – and to help focus the library community’s collective outreach to key policy and decision makers about how libraries uniquely contribute to society in the digital age. This shared agenda is intended to provide guidance for the Idaho library community and to help library leaders and advocates fashion their own priorities for action at the local and state levels.

IDAHO LIBRARY INFRASTRUCTURE

Idaho libraries represent a statewide infrastructure or backbone that delivers services and engages communities, with a long history of connecting people with each other and with diverse physical and increasingly digital materials. Our 144 public library facilities, 8 public academic libraries, and school libraries have distinct missions and overlapping clientele groups; they now offer their respective communities physical and virtual spaces for learning, creating, exploring, and gathering.

The state derives economic and operational efficiency and effectiveness by using the existing library infrastructure and the services it provides, rather than reinventing such a network to deliver services. Collaborations with and investments in libraries to fulfill state and local needs serve the public good and are fiscally sound.

The Commission’s mission is to help Idaho libraries build their capacity to better serve their clientele. We do that by providing continuing education and consulting services, managing systems for resource sharing and online resources, and developing and implementing statewide programs that meet common local needs. We also leverage state and national initiatives that support our mission, and are a conduit for state and federal information to Idaho libraries.

THE EVOLVING ROLE OF LIBRARIES

Libraries are singular in their mission to provide all people with unbiased and relevant information and essential services that drive opportunity and progress. The role they play in preserving our free and democratic society is unique, and therefore libraries are relevant to existing and new state and local public policies. Further, libraries are embedded in communities and campuses across the state, making them a natural partner for the development and delivery of pragmatic solutions to pressing issues, ranging from veteran reintegration, early childhood learning, and workforce development to STEM education, consumer health, and rural sustainability.

Libraries are going through a renaissance in terms of the social infrastructure they provide and the diversification of services and experiences they offer. They are evolving into hubs for education, health, entertainment, and work. Libraries are attracting people into their physical space with maker spaces, job search help, and family literacy programs. At the same time the “walls” of libraries continue to expand beyond the physical space with online resources, social media, and mobile services changing how collections and services are accessed while on the go.

Current trends indicate that Idaho libraries are reshaping and reinvigorating the roles they play in public, academic, and school settings. However, these trends are not uniform across the state; not all libraries have the capacity to deliver the resources and services needed to advance community priorities. To help address that challenge, the Commission has identified 12 strategic focus areas in which, working with the library community and supporters, we have potential to affect change to build and maintain the capacity Idaho libraries need to better serve their clientele. We offer a call to action to the library field as well as to local and state agencies, organizations, and private entities to join us in this effort.

STRATEGIC FOCUS: Build the capacity of Idaho libraries to better serve their clientele.

Progress in the following strategic focus areas will help build the capacity of Idaho libraries to better serve their clientele and strengthen and connect communities through existing and new programs. The strategic focus areas are:

- Broadband Access
- Education & Learning
 - Early Literacy
 - College & Career Ready
 - Lifelong Learning
- Economic Development, Workforce Development, and Employment
- Community Engagement & Sustainability
- Privacy & Security
- Consumer Health & Wellness
- National Digital Infrastructure
- Public Library Funding
- School Library Services

Broadband Access

Idaho public libraries play a critical role as the community technology hub, providing free access to the Internet, devices, and other technology tools as well as help in learning to use and apply technology. In recognition of that role the state has an interest in supporting access to broadband for public libraries, as well as for public schools and academic institutions.

- Broadband in public libraries is a critical resource for education, economic development, and sustainability in our communities.

- Public libraries need more adequate, reliable, scalable, and affordable broadband to provide the information and connections to the world Idahoans need for a successful life in the 21st century.
- Idaho's public libraries are significant consumers of broadband for Internet connectivity and should be included in any statewide planning for broadband.

Commission Actions:

- Keep state policy makers informed of the need that public libraries have for broadband access, and the gap between libraries' current bandwidth and the minimums defined by the FCC (100 Mbps for libraries serving less than 50,000, 1 GB for libraries serving more than 50,000).
- Participate in discussions of state broadband policy, planning, and adoption.
- Continue to help public libraries take full advantage of opportunities provided by E-rate and other programs supporting adequate, reliable, scalable, and affordable broadband.

Education & Learning

Historically libraries have played a major role in informal learning, and today they are a significant provider of both informal and formal education opportunities for all ages. Particularly in this time of disruption in formal education, libraries must be recognized for the range of education opportunities they currently provide and those they could provide if they had additional capacity.

Additional library capacity will support state policy priorities of grade-level reading, increasing college and career readiness, supporting workforce development, and implementing the recommendations of the Governor's Education Improvement Task Force.

Commission Actions:

- Increase awareness and understanding among policy and decision makers that:
 - Libraries are deeply engaged in education and learning - formal, informal, and experiential - for all ages.
 - Public libraries are broadening their offerings of continuing education, both formal and informal, through new mechanisms enabled by technology.
 - Strong school libraries - with qualified staff, technology, materials, and access to content that support the school curriculum and independent reading - are integral to student learning and academic achievement in 21st century skills.
 - Literacy, a long-time focus of libraries, has expanded to include digital literacy that enables people to become proficient in using new and emerging technologies.
- Establish/strengthen capacity-building partnerships with other state agencies and coalitions to improve student achievement and seamlessly increase skills of lifelong learners.

Education & Learning - Early Literacy

Research continues to reinforce the importance of early learning as the foundation for success in education, career, and life. Idaho libraries have a long history of providing early literacy services, and merit wider recognition for their significant contributions to local and statewide efforts to strengthen early learning. Librarians must be included in early education public policy development.

Public libraries are primary providers of local early learning programming and services that increase school readiness for young children and support parents and caregivers as their children's first teachers. Elementary school libraries are ideally situated to provide access to a wide variety of age-appropriate reading material during the school day and for young students to take home; this is a critical service especially for children who don't have books at home and/or are unable to get to a public library. Staff with relevant training help young children find topics of interest to them and encourage individual learning, curiosity, and exploration.

Commission Actions:

- Increase awareness and understanding among policy and decision makers of the contributions and existing capacity of libraries in providing local early literacy services.
- Continue capacity-building partnerships with other state agencies and coalitions with similar early literacy goals including reading at grade level by 3rd grade.

Education & Learning - College & Career Ready

Preparation for success in life is a continuum that must begin at home with early literacy. Each type of library – public, school, and academic - plays roles along that continuum to support student learning, helping prepare Idaho students to be successful in education, career, and civic life. Communication and collaboration with other public and private entities is essential to help more Idaho students graduate from high school ready for college or a career.

Commission Actions:

- Increase awareness and understanding among policy and decision makers of:
 - The resources in public and school libraries that support independent student learning and acquisition of 21st century skills.
 - The importance of learning to read proficiently by 3rd grade to later academic success.
 - The range of opportunities for out-of-school learning experiences that public libraries offer after school, evenings, weekends, and during the summer.
- Continue capacity-building partnerships with other state agencies and coalitions with interest in increasing the number of Idaho students who complete post-secondary certifications or degrees.
- Integrate “college and career ready” concepts in existing statewide programs for libraries.

Education & Learning - Lifelong Learning

Public libraries continue to provide resources, programming, and experiences for lifelong learning essential for making well informed decisions and negotiating a rapidly changing world. Libraries serve the earliest learners with “books for babies” and pre-school storytimes, as well as home-schooled and non-traditional students and adult learners of all ages interested in learning new skills independently through an increasing range of educational opportunities.

Commission Actions:

- Increase awareness and understanding among policy and decision makers of the growing need and demand for ongoing learning, and the role public libraries play in addressing that need in their communities.

Economic Development, Workforce Development, and Employment

Libraries contribute to economic and workforce development with programming and services that support job search and improvement of job skills. Libraries are a crucial part of the infrastructure for community development because they provide valuable services to people of all ages and backgrounds, draw consumers to downtown or Main Street, and serve as the center of community literacy. New technologies and changing business models are enabling access to more decentralized work opportunities. With their information resources, skilled staff, technology access, distributed physical locations, and open hours, libraries are logical workforce partners and prime venues to advance entrepreneurship.

According to a 2015 Pew Research Center study, 79% of Americans who have looked for work in the last two years used online resources in their job searches. Online employment resources now rival personal and professional networks as a top source of job information for those looking for work. In Idaho the public library is often the only source of free access to online resources for those who don't have access at home, making it a critical factor in job search success.

Commission Actions:

- Increase awareness and understanding among policy and decision makers of:
 - Libraries as economic drivers.
 - The resources and services libraries provide in support of workforce skills development and job searches, and expand support for those efforts.
- Strengthen relationships with Department of Labor, Division of Professional Technical Education, and community colleges, and share information about workforce development resources, initiatives, and gaps.
- Engage Department of Commerce in increasing the visibility of public libraries as community assets that support and enhance economic development.
- In collaboration with Department of Labor, seek funding for libraries under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Community Engagement & Sustainability

Public libraries are central to the healthy functioning of a community and are uniquely positioned to partner with community leaders to build prosperous and livable communities.

The 2014 community review analysis sponsored by the Idaho Rural Partnership (IRP) demonstrated that a number of Idaho public librarians have been successfully engaging their respective rural communities for years. The analysis of 26 IRP community reviews dating from 2001 to 2014 showed that, out of 67

community values, the quality of the library ranked #2 with a score of 3.99, right after fire protection at 4.01 and well above the average score of 3.02. Subsequent interviews with several of the library directors confirmed their active and continuing interaction with their community as a key to providing valued services.

The Commission's Community Building Initiative, and others such as the ALA-Harwood Institute "Libraries Transforming Communities," the Aspen Institute's "Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries," ULC's The Edge, IMLS's "Building Digitally Inclusive Communities," and Arup University's "Future Libraries," all include a central concept: the library actively engaging with its community to address community needs.

The rapid and continuous change of the 21st century offers many opportunities for Idaho libraries. Community engagement, along with collaboration, adaptability, and flexibility are key to the sustainability of Idaho libraries, as well as the sustainability of many of our communities.

Commission Actions:

- Increase awareness and understanding among policy and decision makers of the significant value that public libraries provide their communities.
- Initiate/maintain communication with other state agencies and organizations that can benefit from collaborating with the Commission and local libraries to reach more residents with their resources and services.

Privacy & Security

A central tenet of librarianship historically is that user information must be kept private unless disclosure is explicitly permitted. By contrast, many of the digital information services used by librarians and the public fail to adequately safeguard privacy. The library community must work independently and with other allies to combat intrusions in the privacy of library users. Idaho librarians must also explore and discuss what privacy in the digital age means.

Commission Actions:

- Initiate conversations within the library community to identify policy issues around privacy and security.

Consumer Health & Wellness

Idahoans use library resources to learn about every aspect of their health and well-being. Librarians help people find and evaluate health information, navigate health service organizations, and access their electronic medical records so they can make informed decisions about their health.

Commission Actions: TBD

National Digital Infrastructure

The current systems for managing and preserving digital materials are fragmented and in the early stages of development at the national level. The digital infrastructure needs investment to boost discovery and leverage the opportunities enabled by digital information and network technology. A stronger national digital infrastructure or “connective tissue” will enable sharing across libraries of all types, as well as other community and culture institutions, and increase economic and operational efficiency.

The proposed National Digital Platform grant program by IMLS provides tangible means for bringing together the infrastructure, services, tools, and people needed to deliver digital content to people everywhere. The Idaho library community should support this project.

Commission Actions:

- Communicate/provide feedback to IMLS and key influencers about ways the platform can meet the needs of rural communities.

Public Library Funding

Because of the role public libraries play in healthy and sustainable communities, they should be funded by a combination of local, state, and federal funding. On average, Idaho libraries receive 89.26% of their revenue from local property taxes, .04% from federal sources, 2.63% from state funds, and 8.07% from other sources. Libraries need additional resources to meet diverse community demands in a rapidly changing environment.

Commission Actions:

- Increase awareness and understanding among policy and decision makers of the significant role libraries play in delivering information services in the digital age and of the value they provide to their communities.
- Identify priorities for increasing public and private support for library services.

School Library Services

School districts have the responsibility of providing primary support for school library services – qualified staff, technology, materials, and access to content that support the school curriculum for both students and teachers as well as independent reading.

Strong and effective school library services are integral to student learning, and ideally include teacher-librarians who assist students and teachers with the skills and materials they need for success. An effective teacher-librarian has a valuable role in collaborating with classroom teachers in course design, providing professional development for fellow teachers, and teaching students how to find and evaluate information regardless of format.

Traditional education systems cannot meet today's learning and skill development needs alone. Public and private entities, along with formal and informal education institutions must coordinate efforts to improve education outcomes. Public libraries are natural and significant partners in that effort.

Commission Actions:

- Continue to articulate the benefits of a strong school library program to relevant audiences (including school administrators, boards, classroom teachers, parents, legislators).
- Increase awareness and understanding among policy and decision makers of:
 - The necessity of professional development for those serving as school librarians to acquire and maintain skills needed to assist teachers in meeting literacy and ICT standards in all content areas.
 - The importance of an elementary school library providing access to a wide variety of quality age-appropriate reading materials to help young children become proficient readers.
 - Strong school libraries - with qualified staff, technology, materials, and access to content that support the school curriculum and independent reading - as integral to student learning and academic achievement in 21st century skills.
- Continue to encourage collaboration between public libraries and schools, recognizing that although they have different missions they share the population base of K-12 students, teachers, and parents.
- Initiate discussion with the Department of Education about including school library services in its implementation of the recently passed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).
- Lead a collaborative effort to develop a definition of an "effective school library program" in the context of ESSA.

"Idaho Commission for Libraries Strategic Focus Areas" is a derivative of "[A National Policy Agenda for Libraries](#)" © by American Library Association, 2015, and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License, <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>.

Additional background reading: Future Libraries: Workshops Summary and Emerging Insights, Arup University, 2015.

IDAHO CODE POLICY STATEMENTS ON LIBRARIES:

33-2501. COMMISSION FOR LIBRARIES ESTABLISHED. The state of Idaho recognizes that libraries are uniquely suited to making the benefits of information and information technologies available to the citizens of the state of Idaho. Therefore, the Idaho commission for libraries is hereby established for the purpose of assisting libraries to build the capacity to better serve their clientele.

33-2601. POLICY. It is hereby declared to be the policy of the state of Idaho, as a part of the provisions for public education, to promote the establishment and development of free library service for all the people in Idaho. It is the purpose of this act to assure an informed electorate by enabling the provision of free local library service, in the present and in the future, to children in their formative years and to adults for their continuing education. To carry out the purpose of this act, an independent, nonpartisan board shall govern the library.

Every library established in this chapter shall be forever free for the use of the residents of the city, always subject to such reasonable rules and regulations as the library board may find necessary to adopt.

33-2701. PURPOSE AND POLICY. It is hereby declared to be the policy of the state of Idaho, as a part of the provisions for public education, to promote the establishment and development of public library service for all the people of Idaho. By so declaring, the state acknowledges that the ability of its citizens to access information has a critical impact on the state's educational success, economic development, provision for an informed electorate, and overall quality of life. It is the purpose of this chapter to integrate, extend and add to existing library services and resources so that public library service may be available to all residents of the state from infancy through adulthood, beginning in the formative years and continuing for lifelong learning.