

Futures Thinking Room

“Welcome to the future!” is how attendees were greeted by the Special Projects Library Action Team (SPLAT) during the Idaho Library Association’s 2022 annual conference in Lewiston, Idaho. SPLAT members came together to host an interactive, imaginative experience where attendees were asked to envision what libraries might be like in 10 years.

Two different future scenarios were presented for participants to think about. On day one, after walking through a black curtain, participants were given images of a deteriorating world. They were then asked to imagine a future where society has collapsed, and libraries no longer have physical spaces. It was a little difficult to think about such a bleak future. However, the great thing about taking the time to think through this scenario is that we will be better prepared for such a future, even if only parts of it come to pass.

On day two, after walking through a colorful futuristic curtain, participants were asked to imagine a future in which a former library director has been elected President of the United States, and libraries now have unlimited federal funding. What a contrast from day one! On both days, we asked participants to focus their ideas on these topics: what would the role of the library in the community be; and what kind of job titles, patron services, technology, and library services would there be in this future? These prompts were loosely based on the STEEP categories used in futures thinking (social, technical, economic, environmental, and political).

In reviewing what participants wrote, we noticed a few trends. These included: variations on the theme of libraries serving as the resource and information hub for their communities; library staff as storytellers or advisors; and low-tech things such as bicycles, along with high-tech items like Virtual Reality (VR). We were struck by the similarities between what library staff do now and what participants envisioned them doing in the future. Some of the pieces and topics might be different, but at its core, participants all saw libraries and their staff as a key part of their communities. What job titles, services, technology, or roles do you imagine for each of the two scenarios? The results from our two-day activity are shared in an [article](#) from an issue of the [Curiosity Report](#), SPLAT’s bimonthly newsletter.

COLLAPSE SCENARIO PATRON SERVICES



GROWTH SCENARIO PATRON SERVICES



Participant responses from the futures thinking room.

Left: collapse scenario, patron services.

Right: growth scenario, patron services.