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ABSTRACT

This report is about libraries and the challenges they face in the digital world, and where the public supports, or fails to support, libraries in this time of change. Library leaders' visions for the future are compared with the public's prescriptions for libraries, derived from public opinion research. Informing the study were library leaders' written vision statements and interviews; the public's view of public libraries; and the public policy agenda, especially as reflected in the Telecommunications Act of 1996. This research affirms the need for alliances among all nonprofit information providers to define their relative and collective roles in an expanding marketplace of information. Americans love their libraries, but have difficulty figuring out where libraries fit in the new digital world. Libraries must adjust their traditional values and services to the digital age. The growing use of home computers seems to complement, not compete with, library use. Libraries have enormous opportunities nationwide to influence and direct public opinion because strong public sentiment already supports key visions for the future of libraries. The report includes the following chapters: (1) Public Visions, Private Reflections; (2) Public Support for Libraries; (3) Key Public Policies as the Context for Libraries; and (4) The Prospects for a Coordinated, Collaborative Effort. An appendix provides the public opinion survey instrument on the future of libraries in the digital age. (SWC)

Buildings, books, and bytes

Libraries and communities in the digital age

A report on the public's opinion of library leaders' visions for the future

Prepared by the
Benton Foundation
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Preface

Funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and prepared by the Benton Foundation, this study was prompted by the Kellogg Foundation's desire to inform its Human Resources for Information Systems Management (HRISM) grantees about where the public supports—or fails to support—libraries as they confront the digital world. With more Americans turning to home computers and the Internet for information, the Kellogg Foundation wanted to help its grantees develop a public message about American libraries that reflected both the library leaders' visions and the American people's expectations. The grantees spanned the library and information science world—library schools, large public library systems, university libraries, the Library of Congress, the American Library Association, the Council on Library Resources, Libraries for the Future, the Urban Libraries Council, community networks, video producers, and other key information providers.

Informing the study were the grantees' visions of the future, as embodied in written vision statements and telephone interviews; the public's view of public libraries; and the public policy agenda currently under discussion, especially as reflected in the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Grantees were asked to submit examples of how they were presenting their vision of the future of libraries in print and in public statements. The ways that grantees presented these visions publicly were distilled and later discussed with them in private telephone interviews. Augmenting the public visions and private concerns of library leaders were public opinion surveys—including one conducted in April 1996 by Lake Research and the Tarrance Group for this report—and a

single focus group of sophisticated library users observed by library leaders. The results were discussed at a conference of grantees in May 1996 in Washington DC. The conference concluded with sessions to chart a strategy for the future.

The Benton Foundation had several key collaborators in the design and management of the Conference in May 1996 and in the preparation of this study: Leigh Estabrook, Dean of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois; Lake Research, a Washington DC public opinion firm; and the Tarrance Group, a survey research firm based in Alexandria, Virginia. Additional survey data were obtained from the Roper Center at the University of Connecticut.

At the Benton Foundation, Senior Program Associate Laura Weiss wrote this report. Program Officer Susan Bales and Laura Weiss supervised the research and sessions that contributed to the report. Executive Director Larry Kirkman provided project oversight. Program Officer Andrew Blau wrote the section on public policy.

The Benton Foundation wishes to acknowledge the many contributions of Tom Reis, Director of Marketing and Dissemination for the Kellogg Foundation, whose guidance was invaluable in the design of this project.

"You can take your kid to the library, but you can't take your kid to a website."

—18-year-old high school student

"If you plopped a library down . . . 30 years from now . . . there would be cobwebs growing everywhere because people would look at it and wouldn't think of it as a legitimate institution because it would be so far behind. . . . "

—Experienced library user

Executive Summary

This report is about libraries and the challenges they face in the digital world. But it is also about every noncommercial institution—from public TV to the freenets—that provides information to the public. It uses libraries as an exemplar of what can happen to even our most cherished public institutions when they face the onset of the digital revolution, a seismic societal shift. The report's findings about the intersection—and divergence—of library leaders' visions with those of the public hold lessons for everyone who values and wants to promote the public sphere of information and communications.

This study compares library leaders' visions for the future with the public's prescriptions for libraries, derived from public opinion research that forms the backbone of this study. For the purposes of this study, library leaders are defined by the institutional grantees of the Kellogg Foundation. This research suggests that libraries have their work cut out for them if they do not want to reside on the margins of the revolutionary new digital information marketplace. The younger generation—wedded to desktop computers—may provide a particular challenge.

But this battle is not the libraries' battle alone. At issue is the very notion of a public culture—that nexus of schools, hospitals, libraries, parks, museums, public television and radio stations, community computer networks, local public access, education, and government channels of cable television, and the growing universe of nonprofit information providers on the Internet. This public opinion research affirms the need for alliances among these institutions to define their relative and collective roles in an expanding marketplace of information.

How library leaders see the future

Library leaders want the library of the future to be a hybrid institution that contains both digital and book collections. And they assume that it will be the librarian "navigator" who will guide library users to the most useful sources, unlocking the knowledge and information contained in the vast annals of the information superhighway. Some library leaders envision a digital "library without walls" in which users gain access to almost unlimited amounts of information through home computers or at remote terminals located around the community. They also envision a time when one library's collection will, because of growing electronic capabilities, become everyone's collection.

Library leaders see a continuing role for the library building. As a central and valued community meeting space, the library will become more of a civic integrator and a locus of community information on health, education, government, and other local services. Library leaders also express considerable concern about the "information have-nots," individuals who do not have access to computers or online information. And they argue for a social activist role for libraries in which citizens could receive literacy information or acquire health and job information. They nevertheless express reservations about the library becoming marginalized by taking on exclusively the role of information safety net.

Public backing for libraries of the future

The public loves libraries but is unclear about whether it wants libraries to reside at the center of the evolving digital revolution—or at the margins. Trusting their libraries and seeing them as a source of comfort in an age of anxiety, Americans support their public libraries and hold them in high esteem. They support a combined role for libraries that links digital and traditional book and paper information resources. And they accord equal value to libraries as places where people can read and borrow books or use computers to find information and use online services (see the box on page 6).

Americans also strongly support the key roles of libraries, ranking the following roles as "very important":

- Providing reading hours and other programs for children.
- Purchasing new books and other printed materials.
- Maintaining and building library buildings.
- Providing computers and online services to children and adults who lack them.
- Providing a place where librarians help people find information through computers and online services.

Warning bells

But the public sounded some warning bells as well. For example, the youngest Americans polled, those between the ages of 18 and 24, are the least enthusiastic boosters of maintaining and building library buildings. They are also the least enthusiastic of any age group about the importance of libraries in a digital future. And they voted to spend their money on personal computer disks rather than contribute the same amount in tax dollars to the library for purchasing digital information for home use. Moreover, men were less enthusiastic than women on almost all aspects of the library.

And a strong plurality of Americans said they preferred to acquire new computer skills from "somebody they know," not from their local librarian. While only a fifth of respondents said they thought libraries would become less important in the digital age, those with access to computers were most likely to feel this way.

A focus group of frequent library users affirmed much of the polling data, endorsing America's trust in libraries and sounding warnings about the need to remain relevant. In many respects, focus group participants saw libraries as playing an important role in their communities. For example, they seconded the library leaders' vision of a hybrid institution, containing both books and digital materials. They also warmly endorsed the concept of the library as a place that provided equal and free access to information, especially to the information have-nots.

Yet, in other important ways, the focus group participants placed libraries at the fringes of modern life, especially in relation to the technological revolution. Most telling, they did not see libraries leading the way in the digital revolution. In fact, they thought libraries should take a reactive role, adapting to new technologies. Libraries "should stay just behind the curve. We don't need them to be on the curve because most people aren't," as one participant put it. Indeed, in a world of tight budgetary constraints, these Americans did not want to invest in libraries as technology leaders.

The "behind the curve" metaphor permeated the focus group participants' views of libraries in other significant ways. When asked to think about the role of libraries in the future, they placed libraries firmly in the past. In 30 years, they said, libraries would be relegated to a "kind of museum where people can go and look up stuff from way back when." Thus, the library of the future, far from being a technology leader, would function as an information archive.

The super bookstores, such as Borders and Barnes and Noble, surfaced as strong competitors to libraries. Not only did these stores have popular books in stock (something libraries fell down on), but they created a welcoming atmosphere with comfortable chairs, coffee, and music playing in the background.

The focus group participants presented an equally diminished view of the future role of librarians. They acknowledged that librarians could perform a useful role as navigators in the as-yet difficult-to-navigate universe of the Internet. Yet they just as easily sanctioned the notion that trained library professionals could be replaced with community volunteers, such as retirees. For these sophisticated library users, the concept of "librarians as trained professionals" was nebulous at best.

And what about funding? The focus group participants were unwilling to increase taxes to support library services, including the provision of more technology. Their solution to funding needs was to turn libraries into charitable institutions, to which individuals could make tax-deductible contributions. (The fact that libraries already rely on charitable donations to supplement their public support had escaped them.)

Given several notable discrepancies between survey and focus group findings, additional research on these topics is imperative to probe specific aspects of the public's vision and values and to create a more coherent context on which the library community can build a communications strategy.

America's love for libraries

Among other key findings of the public opinion research:

- There is enormous overlap among library users, bookstore patrons, and home computer users. While some library leaders fear that computers and bookstores will increasingly draw library users away from libraries, at least for now this concern appears groundless—one market seems to draw sustenance from the other markets.
- Americans favor spending more tax dollars and charging extra fees to supplement library operating funds and to purchase computer access and information. Given $20, they would rather spend it on taxes to aid libraries that want to purchase digital information and make it available through home computers than spend that $20 on their own computer software.
- Library users favor increasing taxes more than nonlibrary users, who prefer a pay-as-you-go fee system in which individual charges would be levied for certain services.
- Like library leaders, Americans place high value on library buildings. But unlike the library leaders, Americans are less sure that the library is a significant community meeting place.
- The public ranks high the notion that librarians should take on responsibilities for aiding users who want to navigate the information superhighway. But when asked where they would go to learn more about using computers, a strong plurality said they would ask "somebody they know," not their local librarian.
- Families with children were particularly strong library supporters as well as heavy computer users.
- Garnering strong public support is the library's role in providing computer access to adults and children who otherwise lack it.
- Minorities favor providing computer services to information have-nots and are strong supporters of building more libraries. They are also willing to pay extra taxes and fees for more library-based digital services. Lower-income Americans are least likely to ask a friend for help in mastering computer skills, so they might be particularly receptive to librarians acting as digital information trainers.

Public policy context

The vision statements suggest key roles for libraries as collections, institutions, and community resources in the digital age. Many of the roles identified in these statements rely on public policies that support—or at least do not undermine or contradict—these outcomes.

Four public policy issues will affect the realization of library leaders' visions for their professions and the ways that people use libraries:

- Universal service and access, through which libraries would provide affordable access to and use of computer networking tools.
- Freedom of speech and the host of policies that support or limit libraries' ability to collect, create, and make available

materials—including those that invoke controversy—in the digital age.

- Intellectual property issues, including copyright and the "moral rights" of artists and authors to their work, which will affect both libraries and library users.
- Funding or support mechanisms, especially with the decoupling of library services and the local tax base as more collections are part of digital networks with no geographic boundaries.

Strategies to move libraries into the digital age

At the spring 1996 conference of library and information management leaders, participants analyzed the implications of the public opinion research findings with the aim of exploring common communications messages and strategies that would move libraries productively into the digital age. Participants worked to build a bridge from the language and concepts of their library visions to the general public's ambivalent attitudes toward the library's identity and role, testing messages and strategies in small groups and generally arriving at a consensus.

Participants acknowledged that libraries cannot and do not exist in a vacuum—that libraries must join forces with the entire landscape of institutions that contribute to public culture. They pointed to examples of libraries teaming up with other public service information providers—such as public television and radio, community computer networks, and local nonprofits—to form community learning cooperatives. Several of the grantees mentioned that such collaborations already are flourishing in some areas. They imagined the possibility of a coordinated communications campaign, based on public opinion research, to position libraries as key players in this new cooperative venture.

Participants said that the opportunity is open to create and promote models of "community learning collaboratives" or new forms of "public service media" in which libraries play a key role—and to actively define the public interest in the digital age. Participants also identified the need for creating a broader, educated constituency familiar with the impact of the Telecommunications Act of 1996—which creates a new federal framework in which libraries and their partners must work if they are to articulate their key messages about public access, learning, and community service.

In sum . . .

Americans continue to have a love affair with their libraries, but they have difficulty figuring out where libraries fit in the new digital world. And many Americans would just as soon turn their local libraries into museums and recruit retirees to staff them. Libraries are thus at a crossroads, for they must adjust their traditional values and services to the digital age. But there is good reason for optimism as libraries and their communities take up this challenge. Libraries have enormous opportunities nationwide to influence and direct public opinion because strong public sentiment already supports key visions for the future of libraries. Moreover, the growing use of home computers seems, at least at this juncture, to complement—not compete with—library use. So libraries and their leaders now must chart a role for themselves, giving meaning and message to their future institutions and their central role in community life.

1. Public Visions, Private Reflections

Both publicly and privately, many library leaders welcomed the digital age and said that electronic information will broaden libraries' traditional ability to provide broad access to a rich and ever-expanding store of information. Others expressed concern in their public statements that the digital revolution could create a class of information have-nots. And in private interviews, some registered concern that libraries would be tagged as "safety net" institutions dedicated exclusively to serving this population.

The private interviews also raised issues—and anxieties—not addressed in the formal vision statements. These included the degree to which libraries need to carve out a competitive niche in the exploding information marketplace, the extent to which the public will continue to provide political and budgetary support, and the possibility of alliances with other information providers, such as schools, local governments, and other public service media. Not surprisingly, given the digital revolution's enormous impact on information production and retrieval, the library leaders failed to agree on many key issues.

Technology and the library: Where is the nexus?

Many library leaders see libraries as the natural jumping off point for the National Information Infrastructure (NII). Building the NII around libraries expands and enhances an already-existing information infrastructure. It eliminates the need to create an entirely new one. Most librarians want to marry the explosion of digital resources to traditional library values: service to people, education to meet information needs, broad access to library resources for all, the provision of quality information

and knowledge, and building and inculcating democratic values and American history.

~ The electronic age will allow libraries of varying types, serving varying populations, to link together and even merge. Thus, say some library leaders, the local public library and the university library will merge, electronically, into a single entity. The links will extend to form a worldwide digital library, making the library a bulwark of the global community and potentially serving a worldwide audience.

~ Library leaders emphasize that libraries are places that acquire, catalog, preserve, and disseminate collections. Many leaders now expand that vision to include "virtual collections" of digitized information. This vision implies a fundamentally different relationship between libraries and "their" collections: libraries will have access to vast collections but may not actually control them.

~ Some library leaders assert that libraries in the digital age will create, publish, and manipulate information. This vision transforms libraries from collectors and disseminators to actual information creators. Other library leaders say libraries' core mission is to maintain and distribute collections.

~ While some library leaders envision the book and other print publications as playing an increasingly marginal role, others anticipate a "hybrid" library—one that combines traditional print publications and new digitized information. Few look forward to a time when the book and other traditional print publications will cease to be a fundamental cornerstone of library collections. Most library leaders acknowledge, however, that room must be made on the library "shelf" for digital information sources.

~ Libraries will continue their roles as lenders of information and as facilities for browsing. Some fear that the digital explosion could undermine libraries' lending role because individuals will be able to easily replicate (and therefore "own") any online document. But the digital library also greatly extends the traditional idea of "browsing" into the boundless archives of cyberspace.

Libraries with and without walls

~ Library leaders are struggling to find a place in the digital age for the physical building most Americans traditionally associate with the library. Most library leaders say without hesitation that libraries constitute a physical space that holds collections. Libraries are also a space for learning and reflection—a public space that brings together diverse populations into one community to learn, gather information, and reflect.

~ Traditionally, libraries have been collections of items stored in a site-specific facility. Access is limited to those who can travel to the library site or can arrange a loan. Thus time and space define the nature of the library as physical space.

~ With the onset of the digital age, many library leaders say libraries must expand beyond the confines of the traditional library building. Because of the electronic revolution, libraries now can embrace government archives, business databases, and electronic sound and film collections that previously were not considered part of the libraries' own collections.

~ Some carry this notion one step further. They say libraries need to evolve into entirely new organizational forms that take

into account the digital library-without-walls and that acknowledge that information today can be gathered, disseminated, and created at any time in any place. The digital library reduces—even eliminates—geographic and temporal barriers. Libraries, which traditionally have provided links to additional information through connections to other branches and library systems, will now be providing links through cyberspace.

~ Your computer is a library, say those who carry this concept the furthest. It is outside library walls, but it can take you deep into library and other information collections.

~ But others still see a role for the library "place" in a digital world. The notion that you can get any information from a desktop computer threatens the communal nature of the library, which is rooted in its physical space.

The library as a provider and protector of equal access and equal opportunity

~ Providing equal access for all Americans to library resources is a bedrock value. The free-flow of information to all who desire it, regardless of race, income, or other factors, is vital to the functioning of a free society. Libraries should act as an information safety net for the information have-nots, especially as Americans move into the digital age.

~ A vision subscribed to by all the library leaders is that underserved communities must have free and unfettered access to libraries, including traditional and digital collections.

~ Public libraries are uniquely suited to provide equal access gateways onto the NII, connecting people in underserved urban and rural areas to information resources. The digital age merely extends the traditional notion of the library as "the people's university."

~ Libraries should provide training, equipment, and information to the information have-nots. Information—or lack of access to it—should not become a new barrier to achievement and social mobility, keeping some individuals from realizing their fullest potential as wage earners, parents, and responsible citizens.

The library as community builder, civic integrator, and community activist in a digital world

~ Library leaders are nearly unanimous in their belief that libraries, along with schools and the courts, are among our fundamental civic institutions.

~ Libraries are civic integrators. They are community nerve centers. They constitute, along with other vital local institutions, the basis of civic life. They provide a forum through which community members interact with each other, both through the use of meeting space and through the collection, dissemination, and implementation of information. They offer programs, services, and collections that support direct civic participation.

~ Libraries draw the community in through literacy, after-school, preschool, and other programs. Some library leaders stress that libraries and library users should play an active role in community revitalization. Libraries should become intervenors and activists in the communities they serve, especially in low-income and other underserved communities. Whether they are offering online job services, after-school programs, links among community activists, access to government information, or

literacy programs, libraries must be forces for positive social change in their communities.

~ Libraries are directly tied to a community's quality of life. If libraries are weakened or fail because of budgetary or other constraints, the community's quality of life depreciates.

~ The digital library can be an extension of the traditional communal library. It is a new expression of the old American idea of providing the widest possible access to knowledge to the community.

~ But some library leaders add a cautionary note. The digital library—and the digital age—can undermine the notion of the library as a community institution and a building block of American culture. If the cost of technology becomes a barrier, entire segments of the community may be left out. If the desktop computer replaces the library as a community "place," the library's community functions may wither, and its traditional function as an identifier and shaper of the American experience may start to decline.

The library as a definer of American culture

~ Libraries must continue their tradition of providing a window onto American culture, values, and traditions. They do this through open access to all—any citizen can acquire the knowledge he or she needs to function effectively in a democratic society.

~ Some librarians believe that the digital library can enhance this traditional function. The digital library preserves and makes broadly available original icons of American history. No longer will Americans have to travel to specific locations to view important American historical documents and artifacts. They will be available through a computer terminal.

The evolving librarian

~ Some library leaders see a basic redefinition of the librarian's role. Instead of being caretakers of materials, they will become information navigators, aiding users to tap more effectively the resources of the Internet and other digitized collections. Librarians will become coaches rather than information authorities. They can become trusted guides for a person who knows what he or she needs but is unsure how to find it. They can point to electronic tools and resources as well as to card catalogs and other traditional information repositories.

~ Other library leaders try to marry a more traditional view of librarianship with the exigencies of the digital age. They want to join together the basic values of librarianship—service to people, education to meet information needs, broad access to library resources for all, the provision of quality information and knowledge, and building and inculcating democratic and American values and history—to the NII. In fact, they view these basic values as critical adjuncts to a wide-open, confusing digital age in which users will need more, not less, assistance to understand what it is they don't know and what they need to know.

~ Librarians are the guardians of the fundamental library principle of equal access. They can equip information have-nots with the tools and equipment to give them parity with more affluent users.

~ In the view of some library leaders, librarians play a critical role in ensuring that libraries become organizers and mediators

of knowledge, not just purveyors of raw information. These observers fear, in fact, that the information explosion will supplant the quest for knowledge. Libraries must "rehumanize" the torrent of information flowing from the NII—and become trusted translators, knowledge mediators.

- Some observers believe that librarians must become involved in community organizations—and network with the community to ascertain community information needs and reach out to underserved populations.
- Librarians will need to be retrained. They will need new tools to search for information from digital sources. Some caution that in the process of becoming digitally fluent, librarians must not lose their humanistic origins.

Agreements and departures

Following the analysis of the written vision statements submitted by the library leaders, Leigh Estabrook, Dean of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, conducted a series of telephone interviews with the Kellogg grantees. Estabrook asked the library leaders to reflect and expand on the ideas expressed in their vision statements. The interviews were designed to probe further areas of consensus and divergence among the grantees. Estabrook also posed additional questions to solicit these library leaders' views on topics not touched on in the vision statements, specifically their assessment of the library's political base of support and potential competition with other information providers.

The interviews captured many of the sentiments expressed in the written vision statements, and many of these areas of agreement can serve as initial areas of consensus. There was, however, some significant divergence between the vision statements and the interviews. A host of new and intriguing issues arose in the interviews that the sector may want to examine as it seeks to forge its identity in the emerging digital world.

Two key departures from the written vision statements cropped up during the series of telephone interviews, perhaps because of the direct nature of the questions asked or the less formal interview format:

- The grantees, in their written statements, were enthusiastic about the role of the library as an information safety net for the information have-nots. The grantees, in their telephone interviews, expressed reservations about serving in this capacity, especially if it was the library's exclusive role. Some of those interviewed feared that if libraries serve primarily as information safety nets, they would become marginalized and lose political support from middle-class taxpayers.
- The written vision statements contained several affirmations of the library's role as democratizer. Some library leaders also stated in their documents that they believed libraries should actually become intervenors and activists in the communities they serve, especially low-income communities. During the interviews with the grantees, however, these notions barely surfaced.

New areas of concern

In contrast to the grantees' assertive written vision statements, the telephone interviews exposed a profession more tentative about its role in the digital age. The vision state-

ments, though differing on the specifics of how libraries should envision their futures, set out bold agendas. The interviews were much more ambivalent, raising more questions than answers. Indeed, several new issues arose that were only hinted at in the written vision documents:

- The degree to which libraries need to carve out a competitive niche in an exploding information marketplace. Super bookstores, such as Borders and Barnes and Noble, were viewed as posing as big a threat to libraries as an individual's ease of access to the digital information from personal computers.
- The extent to which libraries will be able to ease these competitive forces by forging relationships with other information providers, including other libraries, schools, local governments, and commercial information providers.
- The extent to which the public will continue to provide political and budgetary support to libraries in the wake of strong antigovernment sentiment, competition from commercial purveyors of home-use online products, digital collections not "owned" by locally supported public libraries, and public ambivalence about the significance of libraries.
- The degree to which the library field has developed leaders who can "step up to the plate," as one interviewee put it, and define and assert the role of libraries in the digital future.

Libraries in the digital age must find their competitive niche

- Many of the interviewees expressed great concern about the library's competitive niche in a marketplace of exploding information resources. One librarian suggested that libraries cannot continue to be a gateway for everyone—that they must evaluate their roles and functions like a business, sizing up the competition and carving out niches. As one interviewee said, "We don't have the franchise anymore to be sole providers of information in our communities, and we need to stop acting as if we did."
- Interestingly, the interviewees were just as worried about the super bookstores as they were about the individual surfing the Net on his or her home computer. Libraries' traditional middle- and upper-income supporters are finding it easier to purchase books at these stores than borrow them from the local public library. Moreover, many of these stores are increasingly emerging as community meeting centers—complete with story hours—a traditional, core role for local public libraries.
- The individual clicking a mouse while sitting at his or her home computer is seen as a threat to the library's future. As one interviewee put it, "If people can get all the information they need all by themselves at home on their computer without any intervention from the library, we have a problem." Another interviewee wondered about the role of the library—and the librarian—in an "any time, any place" information world. Still others worried about the continuing meaning and viability of the "local" public library in a world without information boundaries.
- Others were more sanguine. They envisioned the librarian-navigator as the "bait" for luring customers into the library and keeping libraries competitive in the new mix of information resources. "It will be a

long time before information technology replaces the human intermediary for a lot of information retrieval, so the library building is not a place where books are, but a place where somebody is sitting," explained one librarian.

~ Other interviewees expressed the notion that libraries could carve out a competitive niche by becoming creators or publishers of digital information, such as local job lines and other sources of local information. Some local community information networks are not connected to the public library, however, and do not see themselves becoming so in the foreseeable future. Thus local community information networks could be a potential source of competition.

~ Some library leaders expressed optimism that the availability of the super bookstores would create more readers, and therefore more library customers. "It enhances . . . it gets people more excited about wanting to read stuff, instead of just watching television all the time," was one interviewee's assessment. Other library leaders suggested creating partnerships with bookstores.

~ In the view of some library leaders, the public even may be starting to confuse these bookstores with their public library! As one interviewee recounted: "My favorite moment at Barnes and Noble was when somebody came in with her arms full of library books and said, 'Where do I return these?'"

~ Also mentioned as a source of competition was the ability of individuals today to purchase collections of digital materials from companies producing online products that heretofore were available only at one's local library.

Collaboration with other information providers may offer a solution

~ While the library leaders expressed concern about competition from various information providers, they also voiced some optimism about the possibility of collaborating with these same competitors.

~ Some librarians described the potential for partnerships between local public libraries and university libraries to expand collections and provide cost-sharing for expensive digital collections. Others talked about collaborations with local schools and governments—even with bookstores. Still others looked to partnerships with high technology and other businesses. Few offered concrete steps that could start to forge these partnerships, however.

~ One library leader pointed out that forging alliances can come with a political downside. Cooperative agreements with businesses or educational institutions, he said, means giving up some power and control. But another pointed out that collaborations are essential because libraries can no longer rely exclusively on public funding to support themselves fully.

The public's love affair with libraries: myths, money, and political might

~ As most of the library leaders agreed, everyone loves their local public library. It is a "warm and comfy" place, as one put it. The library is a symbol of trust and a locus of community culture, values, and identity that even nonusers care about.

~ But as many of the interviewees also agreed, this idealization of the library can be as much a curse as a blessing. First, it is this traditional view of libraries that makes it

difficult politically for libraries to remake their image and surge forward in the digital age. Second, this sentimental view of the library provides a shaky foundation on which to appeal for public funds. On the other hand, it may be this strong sentimental attachment that carries the day for library bond issues, other interviewees said.

~ At the same time that libraries may occupy an almost sacred place in the American community psyche, they are in many other respects "invisible" to the American public. As one interviewee put it, "Who's against libraries? Nobody's against them; it's just nobody much notices." Or as another interviewee acknowledged, "The public counts on libraries to be there, but they don't have a very good sense of what they might be counted on to do."

~ But several library leaders pointed out that despite these trends, libraries are definitely not off Americans' radar screen and in fact are enjoying considerable public esteem. A measure of this, suggested some interviewees, is the library building boom in several of America's major cities.

~ Others raised the issue of whether Americans will lend budgetary support to libraries if they come to primarily house computer terminals and digital collections and whether, to support these collections, libraries will have to start charging fees. Why should taxpayers support information that they can get from their desktop computer? Others posed the question, Why should taxpayers support digital information with local bond issues when, by definition, digital information is not locally owned? At the same time, one library leader cited a local community that seemed reluctant to support a bond issue for building more library buildings unless a strong digital component was factored into the planning process.

~ The apparent migration of middle- and upper-income Americans—traditional library boosters—to the super bookstores may also have implications for future library support, according to some library leaders.

Librarians must become active in articulating a leadership role for their profession

~ A sense of urgency pervaded library leaders' remarks about the need for the profession to "step up to the plate" and strongly define and assert its role in the information age. Many interviewees thought that librarians, at both the local and national leadership levels, were too reluctant to take on this role.

~ If nobody "much notices" libraries, then it is the librarians' job, in addition to being information navigators, to make the public notice and become advocates for the profession, the interviewees said. Library leadership needs to be able to state its case, be more aggressive, and as one interviewee put it, "be, in the public view, worthy of investment."

~ Many thought this assertiveness was particularly essential, given the current antigovernment political environment in which public institutions across the board are fighting for survival.

~ One library leader suggested that the profession actively recruit student government and other leaders in high school and college to consider entering the profession and to renew its leadership ranks.

~ Some of the leaders who were interviewed expressed optimism that the spring meeting in Washington DC—to discuss the sector's public message campaign—would spur this sort of activism. But others

expressed caution: "One questions the extent to which the public library directors, their staff, and their boards actually understand the profound nature of the change that's under way."

Library leaders, as expressed in their vision statements and personal interviews, are at a crossroads in trying to define their profession. Their vision is firmly grounded in the library as a physical space, a hybrid of digital and book collections, and a community information resource, and in the librarian as a vital information navigator. Still in dispute is the library's competitive niche in an expanding marketplace of information. The individual user who once would have sought out the library is now being his or her own "librarian"—or at least is attempting to assume this role. Another key question is whether the public will support these roles politically and financially and whether the sector can reach a sufficient consensus to exert its leadership in the new information environment.

2. Public Support for Libraries

Library leaders should be encouraged overall by findings of the public opinion survey conducted for this report that revealed that the public stands behind libraries. Notably, the survey documents that the public is willing to back up this support with financial resources—even to the point of paying extra fees beyond taxes already paid to support digital library services. And the points on which library leaders and the public agree are substantial.

But the survey—and the subsequent focus group—also sound a note of caution. The youngest Americans surveyed—the 18–24 age group—registered weak support for library digital activities and for library buildings. Nonlibrary users were not enthusiastic about paying more taxes to support libraries and preferred a pay-as-you-go approach. A strong plurality of Americans said they would ask "somebody they know" to learn more about computers, rather than their local librarian. Perhaps this reflects a sentiment voiced in the focus group: that libraries' rightful place in the emerging digital age is "behind the curve," rather than in front of it.

Among the survey's key findings:

~ The public strongly supports public libraries and wants them to take a leadership role in providing access to computers and digital information. At the same time, the public voices substantial support for maintaining such traditional library services as book collections and offering reading hours and other programs for children.

~ There is a high correlation between those who are frequent library users, frequent bookstore patrons, and those who have access to a personal computer. This would seem to suggest that some library leaders' fears that bookstores will win away library customers may be groundless. In fact,

rather than competing with one another, as one leader suggested, bookstores, libraries, and computers may be cross-fertilizing each other's constituencies.

~ A majority of Americans do not think libraries' importance will decrease as personal computer use becomes more widespread. Equal numbers of Americans believe libraries should spend their resources on digital information, as opposed to book and other printed information. Thus library leaders' vision of a hybrid library may be winning some adherents among the public.

~ Despite fears voiced by library leaders that current antigovernment sentiment will hamper libraries' ability to raise money to support digital and traditional collections, the public says it is willing to pay additional taxes and fees for these services. A cautionary note should be added, however. Library users are willing to pay more taxes, but nonlibrary users want fees charged to individual users instead.

~ Some of the library leaders expressed concern that home computers would compete directly for library users. But a majority of those polled, when asked how they would spend $20 on digital resources if they had a computer at home, voted to spend that money in taxes to allow the local public library to develop an information service that could be accessed from home. Only a third wanted to use the money to buy their own computer disks for individual use.

~ The survey found that families with children are much more likely to have computers at home—and also to use their local public library. This suggests there is a strong nexus between children, computers, and libraries, one that librarians should take note of and consider carefully as they seek to attract growing numbers of library supporters and users.

~ The public values the notion that librarians should take on responsibilities for aiding users who want to navigate the information superhighway. When asked where they would go to learn more about using computers, however, a strong plurality of Americans said they would ask "somebody they know," rather than their local librarian. Nevertheless, the potential exists to develop the librarian's information navigator role, especially if it can be promoted as the institutional equivalent of that "somebody you know."

~ Maintaining and building library buildings was ranked third among all the library functions listed in the poll, right behind providing children's services and books.

~ The public favors using libraries for community meetings, although this role is ranked lower than all but one of nine other roles and library activities read to survey respondents.

~ The public voices less enthusiasm than library leaders for setting up computers in remote locations like shopping malls to ease access to library information.

~ Americans divide along demographic lines on some key issues affecting libraries. For example, the youngest Americans polled, those between the ages of 18 and 24, are the least enthusiastic boosters of maintaining and building library buildings. They are also the least enthusiastic of any age group about the importance of libraries in a digital future. And they vote to spend their own money on computer disks rather than contributing the same amount in tax dollars to the library for purchasing digital information for home use. Older Americans, the poll revealed, want the library to provide

these services and generally are less enthusiastic about computer services in the library than younger respondents. Minorities favor providing computer services to so-called information have-nots, are strong supporters of more library buildings, and are willing to pay extra taxes and fees for more library-based digital services. Lower-income Americans are least likely to ask a friend for help in mastering computer skills; this group might be particularly receptive to librarians as digital information trainers.

Libraries enjoy substantial public support in the digital age

For the vast majority of Americans, libraries are a highly valued institution—even with the advent of virtually unrestricted access to information from one's home computer.

Respondents say that libraries will be at least as important in the digital age as they are now. Respondents were asked whether they thought public libraries would become more or less important than they are now, as the use of computers continues to grow. A majority of Americans don't think libraries' importance will decrease. That majority split evenly between those who said libraries would become more important (40 percent) and those who thought their significance would not change (38 percent). A fifth of respondents indicated that libraries' importance would decline. While this is a small group, it should be noted that it is twice the percentage recorded in a 1995 survey (see the box on page 28).

The responses to this question, though certainly positive, should be interpreted with some caution. In the survey, 24 percent of those with access to a personal computer said libraries would become less important, as opposed to 16 percent of those who lack such access. These findings suggest that as access to computers swells, the number of Americans who say that libraries will become less important in the digital age may well expand.

Another possible pitfall is that the group with the lowest level of backing for the notion of libraries' increasing importance was the 18–24 age group, which registered only 27 percent support for this view. This population is the one that is most at home with the notion of obtaining information from a desktop computer without the help of the library. Still, as this independent-minded and computer-literate group ages and has children, they may migrate in larger numbers to libraries.

Respondents rank traditional and computer-related services highly. Americans hold in high regard nearly all of the nine current and potential library services tested among those polled. When asked to rank these services, every service received substantial support, whether it was expressed in terms of personal preference or in terms of what public libraries should provide to their community.

Ranked highest were services to children. Eighty-three percent of those queried rated them as "very important." Close behind was purchasing new books, at 72 percent. Maintaining, repairing, and building public library buildings won support from 65 percent of respondents, and providing computers and online services to children and adults who don't have their own computers ranked fourth, with 60 percent judging this service "very important."

Other computer-related services also drew strong popular support. The role of librarians as information navigators was

rated as "very important" by 58 percent of respondents, with 85 percent saying that "providing a place where librarians help people find information through computers and online services" was "very important" or "moderately important." A large number of respondents said that enabling people to access library information through their home computers was a worthy goal, with 78 percent rating this function as either "very important" (46 percent) or "moderately important" (32 percent). A total of 70 percent agreed that providing community meeting space was "very important" or "moderately important," but only 34 percent labeled this function as "very important." Setting up computers to access library information at remote locations scored lowest; only 34 percent of respondents agreed this was a very important service.

Of those respondents who ranked each library service as "very important," there were some notable differences among the demographic groups probed. Women ranked such services as children's reading hours, purchasing books, maintaining buildings, and providing computer services to those who lack them, higher than men. For example, 79 percent of women thought it was "very important" for libraries to spend their money on purchasing new books; 65 percent of men shared this view. Men and women polled nearly evenly on two key computer-related services: establishing links from libraries to home computers and purchasing computers and providing online access.

Minorities generally were more interested than whites in spending money on library services, although all groups were highly supportive. For example, while 57 percent of whites thought it was very important for libraries to provide computers and online services to those who lack them, 76 percent of African Americans and 86 percent of Hispanics felt that way. A total of 65 percent of Hispanics and 62 percent of African Americans thought it was "very important" for libraries to allocate funds to allow people to access library information from their home computers. Only 43 percent of whites agreed with this view. Finally, 58 percent of Hispanics thought libraries ought to allocate their financial resources to providing community meeting space; only a third of whites and 39 percent of blacks supported this view.

Age seemed to play a part in determining how much importance a respondent placed on various library services:

- Only 49 percent of college-age respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 rated maintaining and building libraries as "very important," as opposed to 67 percent of the 25–34 age group and 70 percent of the 65 and older age group.
- Those at the other end of the age spectrum, ages 55 and older, assigned low priority to providing access to library materials through home computers and to purchasing computers and access.
- Young adults, those between the ages of 25 and 34, ranked providing access to computer services to those who lack them at 73 percent, far higher than other groups.
- Only 30 percent of the 55–64 year-olds thought that providing computer services to information have-nots was very important.

Household income and education were related to the importance Americans placed on building and maintaining library buildings and on providing computer access to those who lack it. As detailed below, lower-income groups supported library building activities substantially more than higher-

income groups. Those with less education also voted in favor of the importance of library buildings in greater numbers than more highly educated respondents. Education, more than income, appeared to play a role in the level of support for providing library access to those without computer access.

Libraries may be drawing on decades of good will when the public displays such unequivocal support for their continuing service to communities—even with the advent of the digital age. The library leaders noted the esteem in which libraries are held. Perhaps this high regard will provide a safe pathway on which libraries can navigate the transition from their traditional book-only role to a book-plus-digital role. Several cautionary notes emerged from these findings, however. Support for library buildings and for providing computer access to those who do not have computer access at home or work, while generally strong, displays weakness in some demographic subgroups.

Americans support digital library collections, access, and services

The survey reveals that while Americans are using computers in substantial numbers at home and at work, they are also heavily patronizing their local library and local bookstore. Americans are divided over whether it is more important for libraries to invest in digital resources as opposed to books and other paper information resources, with both points of view drawing equal numbers of adherents. Yet Americans are willing to spend extra tax dollars and fees on library computer and digital services and books. Finally, the survey reveals that Americans would be willing to have additional tax dollars invested in digital information accessible from a home computer, rather than spend that same amount on a computer product for their own individual use.

There is significant overlap between Americans who use libraries, bookstores, and home computers. One of the survey's most important findings is the high correlation between library use, bookstore patronage, and home computer access.

A total of 44 percent of respondents said they had access to a computer for personal use at home; 37 percent said they had such access at work; 10 percent had school access. Altogether, 81 percent of those queried said they had access to a personal computer either at home or at work. At the same time, 69 percent of the respondents said they went to a public library at least once in the last year. A total of 78 percent of Americans reported that they went to a bookstore in the past year to browse or purchase a book.

The survey reveals that home computer use and library use are highly correlated. People with home computers were more likely to have gone to a public library at least once in the past year (79 percent) than those who lack computers (60 percent). They are also more likely to have gone frequently (52 percent more than five times) than those who do not have computers (30 percent more than five times). Thus, as computer use and ownership spreads, library use may actually swell, rather than decline, as some library leaders have feared.

The survey also reveals a significant correlation between heavy library use, frequent bookstore patronage, and home computer use. Of those Americans who have gone to

the library at least once in the past year, 88 percent went to a bookstore at least once. Of those respondents who have not used the library, only 56 percent went to a bookstore.

Of those Americans who own home computers, 79 percent went to the library at least once, 90 percent frequented a bookstore at least once. Those who lack a home computer were far less frequent users of either service. Only 60 percent of those individuals went to the library at least once, while 69 percent went to the bookstore at least once.

People with home computers are also more likely to have gone to a bookstore frequently (5 percent more than five times, 36 percent more than ten times) than those who do not have computers (34 percent more than five times, a fifth more than ten times).

The findings would seem to suggest that though Americans are patronizing bookstores in large numbers—and using personal computers in growing numbers—they do not seem to be abandoning libraries. Quite the contrary, the three activities appear to cross-fertilize one another.

Americans are evenly divided over whether libraries in the future should be a place for books or digital information

The public seems to be almost evenly split over which functions should take precedence as libraries move into the future. A third (35 percent) think it will be most important for libraries "to be a place where people can read and borrow books." Another third (37 percent) believe it will be most important for libraries "to be a place where people can use computers to find information and to use online computer services." Only 10 percent felt it would be most important for libraries to provide meeting space and community information. These findings were extremely consistent across all demographic categories.

These results are encouraging for those library leaders who support the concept of a "hybrid" library, because they seem to suggest that there are substantial blocks of public support for both the traditional and digital functions. On the other hand, these findings suggest that library backers who seek political and financial aid will need to bow to the concerns of both camps as library supporters launch public awareness and funding campaigns.

Americans want libraries to provide digital information—and they are willing to spend tax dollars to make this happen

When survey respondents were asked, if they had a personal computer at home, would they choose to spend $20 a year in taxes to enable the library to have an information service that could be accessed from a home computer, or would they prefer to spend the money to buy disks to install on their home computer, a majority of respondents said they would rather pay for the library-based system. Exactly a third said they would prefer to use their tax dollars to buy their own disks. A majority—52 percent—said they would rather spend those funds to enable the public library "to have an information service that you could access from your home computer." As discussed below, Americans also are willing to be charged extra for library computer and online services above and beyond the taxes they already pay.

Surprisingly, income level played virtually no role in determining support for home- or library-based digital information. There was some differentiation by age, however. The strongest support for buying one's own disks came in the youngest age group, at 47 percent, and declined steadily to 21 percent of those Americans who are 65 and older. Also, individuals in households with children lean toward favoring buying their own disks, with 41 percent of those with children between the ages of 12 and 17 supporting this approach, while only 29 percent of childless individuals favor individual purchase.

Overall, the support for spending tax dollars on library-supplied digital information that can be accessed from home is a positive finding on several scores. First, when pitted against the notion that individual PC users don't need or want libraries as they become more able to navigate online information on their own, the library comes out ahead. Americans would rather have the libraries collect digital resources than purchase them on their own. Second, these findings may help ease some library leaders' concerns that the current antigovernment mood might infect libraries' ability to move forcefully into the digital age. Clearly, Americans see libraries as an important public institution and are willing to pay for them to play an expanded, digital role.

Finally, these findings would seem to suggest that Americans see digital information as a public, rather than private, good and are willing to pay to see this vision realized. It should be noted, however, that respondents were told the library information would be available on their home computer. It would be interesting in future surveys to probe whether this support would hold up if the library's digital collections were available only at library branches.

The survey also revealed that Americans are willing to spend extra tax dollars or pay extra fees for library services, particularly computer access and information. A plurality of Americans—43 percent—favored increasing taxes to cover costs if their local library needed additional funds to continue operation and another 39 percent said they would back charging a fee to people who use the library. These findings are almost identical to those recorded by a 1991 University of Illinois poll (see the box on page 28). And Americans in significant numbers (60 percent) are willing to pay—in addition to taxes—extra fees to pay for access to personal computers and online services at the library. Of these, 27 percent would pay $10 a year, 27 percent would pay $25 a year, and 6 percent would pay $50 a year, while 35 percent would be willing to pay nothing.

Americans' endorsement for paying more taxes to libraries may be weaker than it first appears because it is library users who are most behind a tax boost. Nonlibrary users want to pay fees as they need the library—they are less interested in general public support for the institution. For example, of those who have gone to the library at least once in the last year, 49 percent favored increasing taxes to cover costs, while only a third of nonlibrary users agreed with this approach. The percentages are reversed when it comes to backing fees: 46 percent of nonlibrary users support library charges; only 34 percent of library users would back this type of assessment.

The youngest age group (18–24 year-olds), at 71 percent, was far more willing to

Details of the public opinion survey

In spring 1996 the Benton Foundation commissioned a national survey to test public support for libraries in the digital age. The poll was conducted for Lake Research and the Tarrance Group between April 18 and April 21, 1996, by the Opinion Research Corporation (Princeton, New Jersey). Telephone interviews were conducted by paid, trained, and professionally supervised interviewers using a stratified random-digit replicate sample. A total of 1,015 interviews were completed, and respondents were limited to adults (18 years and older) living in private households in the United States. Interviews were weighted by age, sex, geographic region, and race to ensure that the sample accurately reflects the total population 18 years and older. The maximum margin of error for questions asked of all respondents is ±3.1 percent.

This survey builds on earlier research that is now in the public domain. A primary source is a survey funded by the U.S. Department of Education, conducted by George D'Elia, Associate Professor in the Information and Sciences Department, Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota, and Eleanor Jo Rodgers, now with the Urban Libraries Council, as well as the University of Minnesota Center for Survey Research and the Gallup Organization. This complex and rich survey set out "to describe for librarians what the public considers to be the important roles of the library in society." The survey compares responses from several populations: a national sample of 1,001 adults, a sample of 401 African Americans, a sample of 846 Caucasian Americans, a sample of 399 Hispanics, and a sample of 300 opinion leaders. Also important to the development of the HRISM survey was a survey conducted for the Library Research Center of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which surveyed 1,181 adults and 390 librarians in 1991 to gauge their interest in and support for a range of library services. Finally, the Roper Center at the University of Connecticut was examined for relevant survey findings.

pay for these services than the oldest age group (65 and older), at 36 percent. Nearly three-quarters of African Americans (72 percent) said they would pay a fee, while only 58 percent of whites indicated a willingness to do so. Not surprisingly, those with higher incomes and more education were more willing to pay charges than were those with lower incomes—as were people with children, who at 72 percent were far more willing to pay charges than were childless individuals at 54 percent.

Families with children are much more likely to have home computers and use libraries

The survey found that families with children are much more likely to have computers at home—and to use their local public library. Half of all families with children have computers at home. Only 37 percent of childless households have home computers. At the same time, library usage among families with children is also substantial. Fifty per-

cent of such families have gone to their public library more than five times in the past year. This suggests that librarians may want to target this population since it exhibits strong attachments to computers and libraries.

Americans are uncertain about librarians' roles as trainer and navigator for the information superhighway

As noted above, the notion of librarians serving as navigators—"helping people find information through computers and online services"—for the information superhighway was ranked high by Americans. A solid majority—58 percent—thought this function was "very important." Altogether 85 percent believed this service was important.

When Americans were asked where they would go to learn more about using computers to find information through the Internet and other online services, however, only 10 percent listed the library. A strong plurality of Americans—41 percent—would ask "somebody they know." All other categories—buying a book, going to a computer store, reading a magazine, using an online computer service—ranked in the single digits.

Women and older Americans were more interested than other Americans in taking a class to learn computer skills. A fifth of women and roughly a quarter of older Americans said they would take this route. African Americans and Hispanics were among the least likely (at 32 percent and 24 percent, respectively) to ask somebody they know for assistance. The lowest-income Americans—those with household incomes less than $15,000 a year—were also among the least likely—32 percent—to ask a friend or acquaintance for help, while nearly half, or 47 percent, of those with incomes of $50,000 or more were the most likely. This is perhaps because lower income Americans may have fewer friends or acquaintances who own personal computers than more affluent Americans. Also, nearly a fifth of the lowest-income Americans said they would go to the library to learn computer skills, the highest level among all demographic groups except African Americans. Twenty-four percent of African Americans and 15 percent of Hispanics indicated that they would use the library to learn how to access online information.

This finding may not be as discouraging as it first appears. Librarians may be able to promote themselves effectively, given most Americans' warm feelings toward libraries, as exactly that "somebody you know"—the person to go to when you need to learn about computer information gathering and access. Also of interest is the fact that minority and lower-income Americans may turn with increasing frequency to libraries to perform a digital information safety net training function.

Americans look to libraries to provide computer services to individuals who don't have their own computers

Indeed, an overwhelming 85 percent of Americans think it is important or moderately important for libraries to "provide computers and online services to children and adults who don't have their own computers." Americans ranked this service fourth, both in terms of their personal preference and its importance to their communities. This may signal broad public support for the notion of the library performing as

a safety net for the information have-nots.

Hispanics registered the strongest support of those who said spending library money on providing computer access to information have-nots was personally "very important" to them, while whites registered the least. A total of 57 percent of whites favored this position, 76 percent of African Americans, and 86 percent of Hispanics. When support for this view was framed in terms of how public libraries should spend money in their communities, support among whites stayed the same, but backing among minorities dropped somewhat, to 65 percent of African Americans and 78 percent of Hispanics.

Library buildings score high

Americans value maintaining and building public library buildings. Americans support using library budgets to preserve and erect library buildings, placing this activity third in the poll's rankings of library services they would spend money on. A total of 65 percent felt this was "very important"; an almost identical number, 62 percent, thought this should be a library priority.

Women favored this activity more than men, with 71 percent of women saying they favored supporting library buildings as opposed to only 58 percent of men. Minorities registered very strong support, especially African Americans, 84 percent of whom felt it was very important to spend library money in this way. Support among minorities dropped off for this position somewhat when the question was asked in terms of libraries' priorities. In this case, only 67 percent of African Americans thought it was very important for libraries to expend funds on their buildings.

Clearly, the American public agrees wholeheartedly with the library leaders that the American public library building is an intrinsic part of the library's identity. It is important to note that support for this function comes only after purchasing new books and computers and computer access, and that all three categories polled extremely well among all groups.

Americans are mixed in their support for libraries as community centers

Americans support using libraries for community activities—but less strongly than they support other library services. A large majority—70 percent—say it is very or moderately important for libraries to serve as neighborhood or community activity centers to provide meeting rooms and auditoriums for community groups and public activities. When asked which locations actually serve in their communities as community activity centers, however, libraries were ranked third at 16 percent, behind schools (32 percent) and community recreation centers (28 percent). Moreover, providing community meeting space was ranked next to last when Americans were asked how they would like their public libraries to spend money, with only 33 percent expressing strong backing for this role.

Summary of focus group findings

The focus group participants—convened by the Benton Foundation in spring 1996 to further probe these findings—were all residents of Montgomery County, Maryland, a suburb of Washington DC. All eleven white, mixed-gender participants were library

How important are these library services to you? Survey participants respond.

	Very	*Moderately*	*Slightly*	*Not*	*Don't know*
1. Providing reading hours and other programs for children.	83	12	2	3	1
2. Purchasing new books and other printed materials.	72	19	5	3	1
3. Maintaining, repairing, and building public library buildings.	65	25	5	5	1
4. Providing computers and online services to children and adults who don't have their own computers.	60	25	8	6	1
5. Providing a place where librarians help people find information through computers and online services.	58	28	9	5	1
6. Making it possible for people to access library information through their home computers.	46	32	10	8	3
7. Purchasing computers and providing access to information and online services through computers.	42	34	12	9	3
8. Providing meeting rooms and auditoriums for the use of community groups and for public activities.	34	36	17	12	1
9. Setting up computers in public places such as shopping malls and community centers so that people can access library information from these places.	19	28	22	29	2

users. All but one had at least some college education, and three participants had children in the home. Although these findings should be interpreted with some caution because they represent the views of only one group of Americans, they do signal some potential trouble spots for libraries. After all, if these sophisticated library users raise doubts about libraries, then what support can we expect from less-experienced users?

In many broad respects, these Americans share many of the visions articulated by library leaders. Americans generally see public libraries as playing an

Earlier survey research reveals strong public backing for public libraries

The 1996 survey confirms in many respects earlier surveys of public attitudes about libraries. But it also expands this earlier body of work. The following key points are offered as context on issues most germane to the 1996 survey and the vision statements of the library leaders.

Computer access and library use: the future is now

~ As early as 1991, two in five Americans (40 percent) said they had used a personal computer. Only 29 percent indicated that they had a personal computer at home (University of Illinois 1991).

~ More than two-thirds of Americans (68 percent) said they had used library services in the past year, with a little more than half (52 percent) saying they had used library services at least one to four times a year (University of Illinois 1991).

~ More than half of adult Americans (54 percent) took their child to the library at least once or twice a month (National Parent Teachers Association/*Newsweek*, February 1993).

~ One in seven Americans (14 percent) are hard-core library users who say they borrowed something in the last seven days from the public library (Barna Research Groups, January 1994).

~ More than half the adult public (56 percent) is already using a computer at the library to find what they are looking for (*U.S. News & World Report*/Gallup, October 1995).

~ About two-thirds of the adult public (65 percent) said their library had its books and materials listed in both a computer and card catalog (*U.S. News & World Report*/Gallup, October 1995).

~ More than half the adult public (52 percent) said they had used a computer to search for information at their library (*U.S. News & World Report*/Gallup, October 1995).

~ In 1993 three-fourths of adults (77 percent) said they would be extremely or somewhat interested in retrieving books and articles or doing library research over interactive TV (Wirthlin Quorom, November 1993).

Roles of the library

~ The most important roles of the public library for the general public were to support the educational aspirations of the community and to provide access to information,

important role in their communities. Libraries provide free and equal access to information to all members of the community, including the information have-nots, said these Americans. As one participant put it, "I think as we are seeing the population . . . stratifying along class lines in a huge way . . . the library is one of those symbolic things that is left, that is a cornerstone of 'we all do this for everyone' so that everyone can use it."

~ These Americans also have adopted the

outranking eight other missions that were offered to respondents. A total of 88 percent ranked as "very important" the library role as educational support center for students of all ages, the top choice (Urban Libraries Council 1992).

~ Opinion leaders also ranked this function first in importance with an identical number—88 percent—favoring this role (Urban Libraries Council 1992).

~ The public clearly sees a role for libraries in the digital future. A 1995 survey asked people to choose between the following statements: "Some people think libraries will no longer exist in the future because of all the information available through computers. Other people think libraries will still be needed despite all the advancements of computers." Only 9 percent said they thought that libraries would no longer be needed; an overwhelming 91 percent believed that libraries would still be needed (*U.S. News & World Report*/Gallup, October 1995).

The library and the community

~ Only one in five Americans (21 percent) said they had attended a library program like a story hour, lecture, or movie (University of Illinois 1991).

~ Only 17 percent of adult Americans said they had visited the library in the past year to hear a speaker, see a movie, or attend a special program (*U.S. News & World Report*/Gallup, October 1995).

~ Popular and opinion leader support for libraries serving as community activities centers was weak. Among ten possible roles for the library, this ranked last for the general public (41 percent agreeing) and eighth among opinion leaders (46 percent agreeing) (Urban Libraries Council 1992).

Paying for libraries and liking what you pay for

~ The public was evenly split on how to pay for library services in hard times. A strong plurality of the public (44 percent) favored increasing taxes, while 41 percent favored charging people fees for use of library materials if their local library needed additional funds to continue to operate (University of Illinois 1991).

~ An overwhelming majority (87 percent) of heads of households indicated they were satisfied with their local public libraries (*Family Circle Magazine,* June 1993).

~ Eight in ten Americans (81 percent) said that libraries in their area served the needs of people either very well or pretty well (Barna Research Group, July 1993).

concept of the library as a hybrid institution, containing both books and technology. Libraries were seen as a particularly vital resource for children; indeed, Americans see children as central to libraries' primary mission. Another highly touted service was the ability to find hard-to-locate resources at the local library, particularly local master plans and other government documents. One participant mentioned his difficulty in locating an industrial handbook. After a futile search on the Internet, he found it at his local

library. Others valued the library for providing a plethora of community resources, such as zoning master plans and other government documents.

~ But along with these positive responses to libraries, these Americans also mentioned several pitfalls that they had encountered in their attempts to use library services. They applauded libraries' free and equal access policies. But, said several participants, the materials on hand—especially works of fiction—may not be those people are seeking. "[I]f it's hot, it's not [available]," proclaimed one participant, adding: "If you want to get the book that everybody is reading right now, it is just not in." Others suggested that bookstores were the place to go for popular books and even some reference works. One older participant, who claimed to check out a half dozen books from his local library every other week, said, "We don't . . . read the latest books. We don't get those at the library. We get those at Borders or Crown Books. . . . "

~ Also mentioned as an impediment was the library's "mind boggling" resources, as one participant put it, which she found impossible to navigate on her own. As for asking for assistance: "I always seem to be waiting in line forever," she said. Others mentioned libraries' restricted hours, especially on holidays and weekends, as obstacles to greater and easier use.

~ And in many other important ways, these Americans placed libraries at the margins of their day-to-day lives, especially regarding the technological revolution. When asked, for example, if libraries are more or less important than they used to be, participants' responses were equivocal. Many cited the growing trend in which individuals retrieve information from their desktop computers at home and saw the library reduced to the role of a place where isolated people, chained to their desktops, could escape "to find other people." So, they said, libraries would perform a social role: "I think [libraries] will stay around . . . because people would then . . . go out where they can find other people," concluded one participant when asked whether libraries would continue to be as important as they are now.

~ Most telling, participants said libraries should not take the lead in providing services in the digital age. In fact, they thought libraries should take a reactive role, adapting to, rather than pioneering, new technologies. Libraries "should stay just behind the curve. We don't need them to be on the curve because most people aren't," as one participant put it. Indeed, in a world of tight budgetary restraints, these Americans did not want to invest in libraries as technology leaders.

~ The "behind the curve" metaphor permeated these Americans' views of libraries in other significant ways. When asked to ponder the role of libraries in the future, they placed libraries firmly in the past. In 30 years, they said, libraries would be relegated to a "kind of museum where people can go and look up stuff from way back when." Thus the library of the future, far from being a technology leader, would function as an information archive. As one participant summed up this view, "If you plopped a library down . . . 30 years from now . . . there would be cobwebs growing everywhere because people would look at it and wouldn't think of it as a legitimate institution because it would be so far behind. . . . "

~ Focus group participants presented an equally diminished view of the future role of librarians. They acknowledged that

librarians could perform a useful role as navigators in the as-yet difficult-to-navigate universe of the Internet. Yet these Americans in the next breath recommended that trained library professionals be replaced with community volunteers, such as retirees, who would be dispatched to serve cappuccino as well as perform more traditional library services. For this particular group of Americans, "librarians as trained professionals" was a nebulous concept at best. "In the business that I'm in," said one, "I find people in their fifties and sixties that were in prominent positions. . . . Many of those people will wind up in libraries because they will . . . want to feel useful. Maybe that is the avenue that the libraries [should take]; they should start recruiting for librarians [among] those people."

~ These Americans ranked bookstores as genuine competitors to public libraries. They saw these superstores, in fact, as models that libraries should strive to emulate. To revitalize libraries, several participants recommended a Borders-style approach, with coffee shops and music. "It is a social event," commented one participant about a trip the super bookstore. "Make it more welcoming," was her advice to library leaders as one path to the future.

~ These library users were also well aware that the library must compete for tax dollars with other community resources in order to provide the "free" information resources they so highly valued. "It's not free. We pay for it," commented one participant. "The only way that libraries are going to be able to keep up with getting the newest books, the newest technology . . . it takes money." "If somebody is not paying for it somewhere, it is not going to happen," said another participant. Notably, these library users were *not* willing to sustain a tax increase in order to support library services. One participant recommended turning the library into a charitable institution as an alternative to tax levies. "Maybe the way to save the library system . . . is to allow people that want to contribute to the library to get a tax deduction."

~ Most telling, these library users retained a fuzzy image of the recent history of their local community library. The only time any one of them could recall libraries having been in the news was when the local libraries were threatened with closing.

Admittedly, these focus group findings should be understood as one group of citizens' responses to a set of directed topics. More research is needed if we are to understand the feelings behind the survey data, and the ambivalence just below the surface of the forced-choice options that surveys measure. In fact, the survey foreshadows some of the more pessimistic focus group comments, when segmented by types of users. Research is especially needed with various target groups, such as younger adults and men.

But the single focus group proved a useful counterpoint to the optimism of the aggregate survey data, revealing areas of public confusion and restraint that the survey data mask. And, for library leaders eager to cling to the reassuring notes of the survey results, the focus group revealed how quickly public support can erode when arguments are leveled by even a friendly opposition. While it would be a gross misinterpretation to derive American public opinion about libraries from one participant's quotable "just behind the curve" metaphor, the language and the tone of this discussion among a group of sophisticated

library users should nevertheless make library leaders cautious about what happens when citizens are left in an information vacuum to reason through the library's role in a digital future. If the library is indeed "invisible," as some library leaders admit, then its story and mission are vulnerable to new, more assertive arguments and advertising that substitute other institutions as information navigators.

3. Key Public Policies as the Context for Libraries

To realize their visions, library leaders must take into account the public policy context in which they operate. They must judge whether these public policy imperatives will support or impede their visions—and whether the current debate over these policies takes these visions into account. The following section addresses these issues and also presents the policy issues that will overlay the public's vision for libraries.

The vision statements suggest key roles for libraries as collections, institutions, and community resources in the digital age. Many of the roles identified in these statements rely on public policies that support—or at least do not undermine or contradict—these outcomes.

This section describes the areas of policy that are most significant to realizing the libraries' visions. The vision statements do not invoke policy concerns on a one-to-one basis. Instead, four policy themes will most affect the viability of the visions articulated by the group:

- Universal service and access, which includes the mechanisms by which each library would be guaranteed, as a matter of public policy, affordable access to and use of networking tools.
- First amendment rights and those policies that support or limit the library's ability to collect, create, and make available a wide array of materials, including potentially controversial material, in the networked environment. The most widely publicized debate to involve these questions for libraries was that around the "Communications Decency Act," which became part of the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

~ Intellectual property issues, including copyright and the "moral rights" of artists and authors to their works, which may support or inhibit the library's role as holder and lender and may in some scenarios even affect the ability of library patrons to browse material freely in digital formats.

~ Funding or support mechanisms, including federal, state, and local support for library services, acquisition, and operating expenses. Questions include the sources of support for new or expanded activities, and the implications for local funding when the traditional link between library service areas and local tax bases is uncoupled through networked services and collections.

Other, very broad, policy issues may also affect whether the roles imagined by library leaders can be realized. For example, current efforts to bar access to public schools and health facilities for illegal immigrants may spill over to other public institutions such as libraries. Finally, certain policy decisions that will be key to realizing the visions articulated by library leaders are not a matter of public policy but library policy. Specifically, many of the themes of libraries as community institutions, and the services they provide under that umbrella, are choices to be made by library boards, not policymakers.

Universal service

While the visions for American libraries in the digital age vary in how active libraries will be online, all the visions articulate a place for libraries and their constituencies in cyberspace. What are the funding mechanisms to get libraries connected? What policies guarantee that this will happen?

Universal service, as defined in the Telecommunications Act of 1996, creates some of these mechanisms. For years, universal service has meant providing person-to-person voice communications through telephones to all Americans at prices made affordable through a system of subsidies. Today, converging communications technologies expand the concept of universal service beyond "plain old telephone service" to the benefits of new communications capabilities—including enhanced phone and computer networks—to most Americans.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is working to implement the "Snowe-Rockefeller" provision of the Telecommunications Act, which requires the FCC to ensure that public libraries, as well as schools and rural health care providers, can get telecommunications services "at rates less than the amounts charged for similar services to other parties." The Act goes on to specify that the discount is to be enough "to ensure affordable access to and use of such services by such entities." The amount of the discount has not been determined. These rates will ultimately determine how these institutions get to use these services. The FCC is also required to establish rules to enhance access to advanced telecommunications and information services for libraries as well as public and nonprofit classrooms and health care providers.

Many states are not waiting for the result of the FCC's deliberations to create their own universal service policies for libraries and schools. Some states, such as Wisconsin, have created an advanced telecommunications fund to support the extension of new technologies into institutions such as libraries. A handful of other states offer somewhat reduced rates for basic telephone service to libraries.

Freedom of speech and the Communications Decency Act

If the universal service provisions of the Telecommunications Act assist libraries in getting online, the "communications decency" provisions were an attempt to determine what libraries make available online and the degree to which they are responsible for materials that patrons access through library facilities. The Communications Decency Act (CDA) restricted the transmission of "indecent" material, yet it relied on a very broad definition of indecent, which courts have traditionally ruled is protected speech under the First Amendment. "Indecent" is a vague legal term and could be stretched to include health information, art, and cultural materials. Libraries could be held liable for making information available to minors through library controlled facilities, and there have been suggestions that congressional proponents of these measures intended to keep libraries responsible in order to create publicly accountable "choke points" for controversial materials.

A number of public interest groups—including the American Library Association and libraries such as the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh—challenged these provisions in court as overbroad and unconstitutional. The Center for Democracy and Technology (*www.cdt.org*) reports that a panel of federal judges in Philadelphia ruled earlier this summer that the CDA was unconstitutional and that the government could not enforce it. Later that month a federal court in New York City reached a similar verdict.

While the injunction of the CDA was an important victory for advocates of First Amendment rights, the battle for free speech online is far from over. The debates on this issue will continue in at least three arenas. First, the Justice Department has appealed the Federal Court decisions and has taken the CDA case to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court should hear the case in late fall or winter of 1996, with a decision expected in early spring. Second, given the political potency of "decency" concerns in this new medium, even if the court finds the CDA unconstitutional, legislators will most likely introduce similar guidelines into another bill at the soonest opportunity. Finally, as in many other areas of policy development, key decisionmaking is taking place at the state level. According to information on the ACLU's website (*www.aclu.org*), at least 11 states now have legislation regulating speech online, with strict guidelines for who is responsible for the transmission of digital materials. Many other states considered bills dealing with online content and in some cases the bills are still pending.

Library professionals and advocates should pay attention to information policies as they develop at the state and local level. If libraries are to reflect and transmit American culture in the digital age, they must ensure that their holdings and services can reflect a diverse set of views, images, and experience.

Intellectual property and copyright

In the future, according to some, libraries will do more than make information available—they will even create new forms of information. How do these increased capabilities affect our traditional understanding of copyright and fair use?

In the digital age, sharing or lending documents, as well as linking, excerpting, or otherwise creating novel combinations of works may raise difficult issues that threaten the distinctions under which copyright law has traditionally operated. The library tradition of "no fee" access is called into question by current efforts to create electronic payment mechanisms to compensate rights holders and the proposal to assert that the transmission and storage of a digital work, even if it is not viewed, is a distribution that can be controlled by the copyright holder.

As a recent review and analysis of the *Report of the Working Group on Intellectual Property Rights, Intellectual Property and the National Information Infrastructure,* by Arnold Lutzker, notes: "To the extent that the commercial owners control transmissions of works as a public distribution, copy or display, and are encouraged to develop and employ technological envelopes to restrict . . . non-compensated access to works, public access to copyrighted material may be limited." Such an outcome would substantially restrict the ability of libraries to fulfill the purposes outlined in their vision statements.

Funding or support mechanisms

How libraries are funded through federal, state, and local efforts will affect what services are offered and the boundaries on who or what community a library can or is expected to serve.

At the federal level, one key component has been the transition of the Library Services and Construction Act into the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). According to its proponents, LSTA was designed to help libraries "ensure that access is equitable, content is useful and usable, and expert help is available." In the course of congressional consideration, this measure was folded into the omnibus appropriations bill for fiscal year 1997 and financed at $136.4 million a year.

Nevertheless, recissions in the federal budget have not spared libraries, and state and local funding has been cut in many instances as well. In a notable countercurrent, however, a number of bond issues and other special library support measures, when put directly to voters, have won support, suggesting a mixed outlook for public support of libraries, despite a general withdrawal of support for public institutions. But despite such support, many libraries—from the Library of Congress to branches of local public libraries—have had to cut back staff and reduce the hours they are open to meet budgetary constraints.

Some concerns have also been expressed about the long-term consequences for funding library services when service areas are potentially vastly expanded, while the tax base that supports the provision of those services remains unchanged. If networked libraries draw on resources they do not pay for directly, or provide service to patrons who are not also part of the tax base supporting the provision of that service, pressure may mount to support libraries in new ways or to limit access to those who have paid for them. The second possibility creates an implicit fee-for-service structure that may have negative consequences for low-income communities.

The broader context for support must also take account of financial pressures on related institutions such as public schools, which are facing analogous demands, especially in lower-income communities, to repair

crumbling physical infrastructure, acquire basic teaching materials, and get connected to computer networks. To the degree that competition exists among local institutions, the successful resolution of these demands in schools (or elsewhere) may limit the resources available to do the same in libraries, especially as other, for-profit institutions offer access, facilities, customer support, and related services in the private market.

4. The Prospects for a Coordinated, Collaborative Effort

Charged with identifying a vision, message, and future direction for the library field, the Kellogg grantees met in Washington DC in spring 1996 to grapple with the tough issues raised by their own vision statements and interviews—and by the public opinion research that revealed the public to be generally supportive of libraries but uncertain of their place in the digital age. The conference consisted of two days of panel presentations, break-out sessions, group discussions, and consensus building. The sessions were filled with intense debate over the future direction of libraries in the digital world. Participants—led by Benton Foundation staff, media consultants, and pollsters—sought to find language and ways of framing their vision that would advance their own ideas about the future of libraries and still respond to what the public said it wanted from the field.

This was no easy task. It was not difficult for participants to absorb the positive findings about libraries: they have strong support among children and families, people value them for their collections of books, librarians are trusted information navigators. But it was sobering for participants to absorb some of the less optimistic findings from the survey and the focus group: college-age Americans are soft in their support for libraries, nonusers don't want to pay taxes to support various library services, and libraries are "behind the curve" of the new wave of technology, as one focus group participant put it.

What emerged was a proposal to propagate "new life forms," in which libraries team with other public service information

providers to form community education and information networks open and available to all. With some communities already experimenting with collaborations and cyberspace creating myriad cyber-communities for information exchange of all kinds, libraries should create broad-based, real-time networks with public service partners that can facilitate this exchange of information. Grantees also felt their efforts in reaching this goal would be enhanced by a coordinated communications campaign and message strategy.

Tom Reis, Director of Marketing and Dissemination for the Kellogg Foundation, set the tone for the conference sessions by issuing a call to the grantees to "build consensus around current and emerging roles in libraries; to develop a message that we can all support, and to figure out how we can collaborate to get the message heard."

Pollsters Celinda Lake (Lake Research) and Brian Tringali (The Tarrance Group) summarized the survey and focus group findings. While underscoring that Americans are enthusiastic about their libraries, Lake cautioned conference participants that Americans are ready to turn librarians into volunteers and libraries into charitable institutions to which Americans would make voluntary donations. Lake also cautioned that Americans historically are unwilling to pay more in taxes for public services because they think those services will benefit others. Tringali issued a word of caution, arising out of the polling and focus group findings: "Signaling the death knell for libraries is . . . the public perception that libraries are museums of old information." Tringali added that libraries must create a vision for the future or risk losing financial support, especially because the public generally holds all public institutions in low esteem.

Pointing toward a new strategy for libraries, Joey Rodger of the Urban Libraries Council asserted that the focus group "described an institution that is behind the curve in a lot of ways. The context for our discussion should be that the world does not understand us and does not love us, so what do we do in that context?" Further pointing toward a strategy of collaboration and renewal, two participants noted the potential coming together of two like-minded entities to create a forward looking cooperative in tune with the digital age. "It seems like libraries are trying to become community networks," observed Patrick J. Finn of La Plaza Telecommunity Foundation. "It seems like community networks are trying to become like libraries," responded Daniel E. Atkins of the University of Michigan. "Why can't they merge?" he asked.

The grantees worked to build a bridge from the language and concepts of their library visions to the general public's ambivalent attitude toward libraries' identity and role. Messages and strategies were tested in small group discussions. A vision that emerged was: access for all built around a unified and integrated resource hub. This would become the "new life form," with other public information providers as partners, and would tackle the community's information needs and problems.

The attributes of this new collaborative would be: community-based; publicly funded through taxes, fee-for-service and other contributions; a seamless web of community information, which all partners would participate in creating and disseminating. The opportunity to create models of community learning collaboratives or new

forms of public service media, in which libraries play a key role, is to actively define the public interest in the digital age, participants said.

Attendees engaged in a discussion about creating a joint multifaceted, multimedia, umbrella communications and outreach campaign, based on a model developed by the Benton Foundation for the Coalition for America's Children. This campaign would begin to lay the groundwork for new perceptions of the role of libraries and other public service media in fostering healthy communities. This campaign could consist of two parts. The first part would develop a communications strategy and related products, based on the research conducted to date and on additional focus group testing. The second part would create communications campaign products to support local coalition-building and alliances, some of which could be directed to specific audiences developed through existing networks. These products would be based on the opinion research but adaptable to local use.

The conference participants also articulated the need for an ongoing policy assessment and analysis of the impact of the recently passed Telecommunications Act of 1996. The Act creates a new federal framework in which libraries and their partners must work if they are to effectively articulate their voice as key points of public access, public learning, and community service.

In sum . . .

With the role and impact of personal computers still fluid in this emerging digital world, now is the time for libraries to seize the opportunity and define their role with an aggressive public education campaign. Libraries clearly have an enormous reservoir of goodwill to draw on. The public trusts them—and holds them in high esteem at a time of broad national anxiety. Perhaps librarians can become that "friend you know"—to help adults and children understand, navigate, and benefit from the explosion of digital information that Americans are just starting to grapple with.

Because the media drive the public agenda, which in turn drives the political agenda, library leaders may want to take steps toward taking responsibility for defining their image in the public mind—rather than sitting back passively and waiting for their role to be defined for them. Just as they are navigators of information, so they must chart a role for themselves, giving meaning and message to their future institutions and their profession. This is particularly important as commercial undertakings make significant inroads in information provision, and as the youngest Americans turn to their home computers to find information.

Library leaders do not shy away from the need to come up with new community-based alliances for libraries—strategic partnerships that can weave a network of community public service information providers to enhance each other's value and their combined value to the communities they serve. One key model for building this new network is a further testing of public sentiment toward libraries and other information providers, especially as the impact of the 1996 Telecommunications Act becomes clearer. Also on the possible agenda is crafting effective messages for a comprehensive, community-based public education and communications campaign.

As the demographic clouds on the horizon portend, libraries could begin to

weaken in public support. And they could find themselves relegated to the status of dusty archives—little more than museums, cataloging the resources of the past. To secure their future with a younger, more private, more acquisitive generation, libraries will need to think creatively. The future is open to invention, and libraries must give meaning to their public role in this critical transition. As this report makes clear, the public loves libraries. But the libraries they love are sometimes at odds with the library leaders' visions of libraries' future roles. If libraries want to secure an identity as a community meeting place, for example, they had best chart a course to create this identity, one that now registers low on the public agenda.

What will determine the course of libraries in the digital future? The way that library leaders and visionaries respond to public opinion and the public policy context—as well as their own visions. The library world thus has its work cut out.

Appendix

Public Opinion Survey on the Future of Libraries in the Digital Age

Prepared by Lake Research and the Tarrance Group

1. Do you have access to a computer for personal use at home, at work, or at school?

home	42
work	35
school	10
no access	40
(don't know)	0

2. As you may know, many people now use computers to find information—through the Internet and through computer online services. If you wanted to learn more about using computers to find information in this way, where would you go? [*first mention, read, and rotate*]

take a class	17
go to a library	10
buy a book or manual	7
go to a computer store	6
read a magazine	2
use an online computer service	7
ask somebody you know	41
(other)	3
(don't know)	6

[*second mention, read, and rotate*]

take a class	17
go to a library	20
buy a book or manual	16
go to a computer store	19
read a magazine	14
use an online computer service	10
ask somebody you know	23
(other)	4
(don't know)	14

3. Now, imagine that you have a personal computer at home. Which would you prefer:

• Spending $20 a year to buy disks or information to install on your computer.

OR

• Spending $20 a year in taxes that enables your public library to have an information service that you could access from your home computer.

buy disks	33
use library	52
both [*ask*: But which one would you prefer?]	2
neither [*ask*: But which one would you prefer?]	6
(don't know)	7

4. During the past year, how many times have you gone to a book store to browse or purchase books? Would you say—

not at all	22
1 to 5 times	35
6 to 10 times	17
11 to 20 times	10
21 times or more	15
(don't know)	1

5. How many times did you, yourself, go to a public library in the past year? Would you say—

not at all	32
1 to 5 times	29
6 to 10 times	12
11 to 20 times	10

21 times or more	16
(don't know)	0

Split Sample A

6. The library serves as a neighborhood or community activity center, a place where organizations or clubs could hold meetings or present concerts or lectures. How important would you say this service is to your community?

very important	56
moderately important	26
slightly important	10
not important	6
(don't know)	2

Split Sample B

7. I am going to list some places in your neighborhood. Which of these places most often serves as a community activity center, a place where organizations or clubs could hold meetings or present concerts or lectures? [*first mention, read, and rotate*]

a school	32
a community recreation center	28
a public library	16
a bookstore	3
a service club, such as a veteran's hall or Elk's lodge	10
(none)	5
(don't know)	6

[*second mention, read, and rotate*]

a school	24
a community recreation center	22
a public library	21
a bookstore	5
a service club, such as a veteran's hall or Elk's lodge	15
(none)	18
(don't know)	10

8. As more and more information becomes available through computers, some people say that public libraries will change. Thinking about the future, as the use of computers continues to grow, do you think public libraries will become more important than they are now, less important, or that their importance will not change much?

more important	40
less important	19
no change	38
(don't know)	3

9. As you think about the future, as the use of computers continues to grow, which of the following do you think will be most important for public libraries? [*rotate*]

to be a place where people can read and borrow books	35
to be a place where people can use computers to find information and to use online computer services	37
to be a place that provides community information and a community gathering place	10
all [*ask*: But which of these will be most important?]	15
none [*ask*: But which of these will be most important?]	1
(don't know)	2

Split Sample A

Many public libraries are facing difficult budget decisions. I am going to read you some ways that public libraries spend money, and I would like you to tell me how important each one is to you personally—very important, moderately important, slightly important, or not important. [*rotate*]

	Very	*Moderately*	*Slightly*	*Not*	*Don't know*
10. Purchasing new books and other printed materials.	72	19	5	3	1
11. Purchasing computers and providing access to information and online services through computers.	42	34	12	9	3
12. Providing computers and online services to children and adults who don't have their own computers.	60	25	8	6	1
13. Providing a place where librarians help people find information through computers and online services.	58	28	9	5	1
14. Maintaining, repairing, and building public library buildings.	65	25	5	5	1
15. Providing reading hours and other programs for children.	83	12	2	3	1
16. Making it possible for people to access library information through their home computers.	46	32	10	8	3
17. Setting up computers in public places such as shopping malls and community centers so that people can access library information from these places.	19	28	22	29	2
18. Providing meeting rooms and auditoriums for the use of community groups and for public activities.	34	36	17	12	1

End Split Sample A

Split Sample B

Many public libraries are facing difficult budget decisions. I am going to read you some ways that public libraries spend money, and I would like you to tell me how important each one should be **for the public library in your community**—very important, moderately important, slightly important, or not important. [*rotate*]

	Very	*Moderately*	*Slightly*	*Not*	*Don't know*
19. Purchasing new books and other printed materials.	68	23	4	4	1
20. Purchasing computers and providing access to information and online services through computers.	47	34	11	6	2
21. Providing computers and online services to children and adults who don't have their own computers.	60	22	11	6	1
22. Providing a place where librarians help people find information through computers and online services.	59	31	6	3	1
23. Maintaining, repairing, and building public library buildings.	62	26	8	3	1
24. Providing reading hours and other programs for children.	84	12	3	1	0
25. Making it possible for people to access library information through their home computers.	47	33	14	5	2
26. Setting up computers in public places such as shopping malls and community centers so that people can access library information from these places.	19	26	26	28	1
27. Providing meeting rooms and auditoriums for the use of community groups and for public activities.	33	38	16	12	2

End Split Sample B

All Respondents

28. Let us suppose that your local library needs additional funds to continue operation. Please tell me which of the following you would favor as a possible solution. [*rotate*]

increasing taxes to cover the necessary cost	43
the library charging the people who use the library	39
reducing the services the library offers to the public	9
all [*ask*: Well, which one do you favor most?]	3
none [*ask*: Well, which one do you favor most?]	4
(don't know)	3

29. Some libraries are starting to charge fees for certain kinds of services. In addition to any taxes you already pay to support your local library, how much would you be willing to pay for the use of personal computers and online services at the library—$10 a year, $25 dollars a year, $50 dollars a year, or isn't this something you would be willing to pay for?

$10/year	27
$25/year	27
$50/year	6
nothing	35
(don't know)	5

Kellogg Foundation Human Resources for Information Systems Management Grantees

American Documentary, Inc.
220 West 19th Street, 11th Floor
New York, NY 10011

American Library Association
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, IL 60611

Benton Foundation
1634 Eye Street, NW
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Council on Library Resources
1400 16th Street, NW, Suite 715
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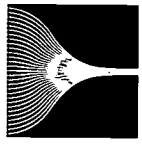

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