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# THE POLITICAL LIBRARIAN

an  everylibrary publication

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## Mission

The Political Librarian is dedicated to expanding the discussion of, promoting research on, and helping to re-envision locally focused advocacy, policy, and funding issues for libraries.

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## Dustin Fife

Libraries have entered financially perilous times as the merits of public services, once described as “common goods,” are under attack. Institutions that have been unassailable for over a century are being undercut nationally and locally. Public schools are being stretched financially by for-profit charters, prisons are being privatized, and libraries and museums are being asked to quantify the unquantifiable. Asking questions is a good thing, and services can be justified through both quantitative and qualitative research, and should be. Questions about the inequitable distribution and implementation of public services are essential. But what do we do when the idea of a “common good” existing at all is under attack? How do libraries, as one indispensable aspect of the public square, help protect the entire public square?

The answer is politics and policies. It is well past time that we all learned to be policy advocates to preserve (and build) transformative democratic services. We must fundamentally understand where and how we should expend our valuable resources in the quagmire of politics and policy. This issue of *The Political Librarian* focuses directly on what it means to be an advocate and how understanding the evolving political environment and funding paradigms influences how we should be advocating.

This issue begins with TJ Bliss, a long time Open Educational Resources (OER) advocate and the current Director of Development and Strategy at Wiki Education. He has spent the best part of a decade fighting for OER policies at the local, state, and national level. Bliss dispenses wisdom as an advocate that has persisted across all types of government. After Bliss, both James LaRue, Director of the Office for Intellectual Freedom, and John Chrastka, Executive Director of EveryLibrary, explain why support for “common goods” is not as common anymore. LaRue lays out best practices for advocates and invites you all to the ALA Advocacy Bootcamp, an incredible resource for taking your advocacy to the next level. Chrastka explains how libraries must diversify and adapt to new taxing models as policies from the Progressive Era and Great Society period are replaced with new models that describe social services as “entitlements” and, as James LaRue also points out, refers to taxes as “burdens.” Michelle Boisvenue-Fox, the Direc-

tor of Innovation and User Experience for Kent District Library, Michigan, joins the political fray by examining how openness, empathy, and reaching across political aisles creates opportunities for libraries to find unexpected champions.

Our final two pieces philosophically challenge the idea of neutrality and search for the role of libraries in a democratic society, respectively. T.J. Lamanna shows that libraries hurt themselves and the most vulnerable members of our society when we cling to a false narrative of neutrality. Not choosing a side, is choosing a side, and Lamanna passionately explains why, “Libraries have never been neutral, and never truly can be.” Last, but not least, John Buschman, Dean of University Libraries at Seton Hall University and author of *Dismantling the Public Sphere: Situating and Sustaining Libraries in the Age of the New Public Philosophy* (2003) and *Libraries, Classrooms and the Interests of Democracy: Marking the Limits of Neoliberalism* (2012), intellectually and philosophically searches for the role of libraries in our modern society. Buschman goes beyond the normal narratives of librarianship to place libraries among the writings of several different fields in order to articulate a vision of what libraries already do and how they are intertwined with a healthy community and society.

It is often said that without a librarian, a library is not a library. It has also been said that without a library, a community is not a community. These statements may be debatable, but without a belief in “common goods” what we have understood society and the public square to be, might altogether cease to exist. All of these articles implore each of us to wake up and do more than retweet ideas, policies, and services that we believe in. We must be policy advocates and build a better and brighter public square.

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Dustin Fife is the Series Editor of *The Political Librarian* and the Director of Library Services for Western State Colorado University. If you have ideas for *The Political Librarian* or would like to submit a piece, please do not hesitate to contact him at [dustin.fife@everylibrary.org](mailto:dustin.fife@everylibrary.org).

# You Should be a Policy Advocate

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TJ Bliss

*My message to that small, but committed group that night at the museum is still true today: anyone can be an effective advocate for change, if that person is willing to persist.*

The world can be divided roughly into three groups: people who create policy, people who advocate for (and often implement) policy, and everybody else. This may sound overly simplistic, but I've found the grouping to be true at all levels of governance and citizenship - from the United Nations to the local public library.

I've been involved in policy advocacy for several years, from several different positions. As an undergraduate student, I emailed the university president to advocate for a change to the textbook buyback policy at our campus bookstore. As a policy fellow at an international academic organization, I wrote and published white papers to advocate for national and state-level policies to help reduce the burden of textbook costs on college students. As a high-level bureaucrat in a state department of education, I testified before the legislature and spoke personally with elected officials to advocate for policies supportive of a new assessment and school accountability system. I also created a few policies when I was in this role, but even that required advocating for the policies to be approved by the State Board of Education. And, most recently, as a program officer in charge of a multi-million dollar grant program at one of the largest private foundations in the world, I funded several organizations to advocate for policies at the institutional, state, national, and international levels supportive of open educational resources (OER) and open licensing requirements on government-funded works. On occasion, I even engaged in direct advocacy about OER to university presidents, governors, and various national policy makers.

Most importantly, I have had the incredible opportunity to watch other people with far more experience and talent advocate successfully in many different contexts. Through this experience, I've distilled a few key lessons about advocacy that I think are generally applicable to you, regardless of your position or context. Yes, you too can (and should!) be an advocate for policies that make the world - or even just your world - a better place.

## **Policies solve problems.**

A friend of mine who served as a policy advisor to a United States Senator defines policy as a "solution to a problem." If you think about any policy you know at any level (national, state, local, or institutional) you'll find this to be a true definition. Every policy ever enacted was designed to solve some problem - though some policies are more effective than others. While the relative importance of the problems can be debated, the policies themselves really only have this one function. Framing and focusing your policy advocacy around the core problem, or set of problems, you want to solve increases your odds of success.

A first key to effective advocacy is to *keep the problem you are trying to solve at the front and center of all your advocacy efforts*. If you forget or get distracted from the important problem, your advocacy is more likely to fail.

## **There are no small actors.**

Dabbs Greer once said, "Every character actor, in their own little sphere, is the lead."<sup>1</sup> Through my own experience, by watching my friends and colleagues all over the world, and by studying history, I have come to believe that anyone can be an effective advocate for policies that solve problems and lead to a better world (or nation, or state, or college, or library). The position you hold in a society, system, or organization can and should influence the strategies you use to advocate, but a position of power is not required to effect change through advocacy.

Rosa Parks provided a remarkable example of powerful advocacy despite her lack of positional power. In 1955, when she refused to give up her seat on the bus, Parks was the secretary of her local NAACP chapter. It's true that she had been involved in activist and advocacy work prior to that fateful day, but when she made the courageous decision to refuse her seat as an act of advocacy for policies to ensure the fair and equal treatment of all people, she was by no means considered a leader of the Civil Rights movement, even in her hometown. It was only later, when the leaders of the movement thought her

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1. Nelson, Valerie J. (1 May 2007). "[Dabbs Greer, 90; busy character actor played everyman-type roles.](#)" *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved 18 October 2016.

experience might make a good test case in the courts, that she became a well-known figure.

A second key to effective advocacy is to remember that *good advocates are not necessarily the people with the most formal power*. You can be an advocate regardless of your job title, position, experience, or background.

### **Argue, don't fight.**

I have several friends who are widely considered to be experts in their field. While expertise and knowledge are definitely important to have when advocating for policy, some of these expert friends are better at advocacy than others. The best advocates among them, in fact, aren't necessarily the most expert or even the most experienced in the specific area for which they are advocating. What sets these folks apart from their equally (or even more) expert colleagues is that they have developed an additional kind of expertise in the ancient art of rhetoric. They have developed the skills and unique capacity to argue persuasively. These people understand and utilize effective rhetoric in their informal conversations, as well as when they are in formal advocacy situations, like giving conference speeches or testifying before a state legislative committee. In particular, my expert advocate friends never forget that there is a big difference between arguing with a clear purpose and fighting. Effective arguments -- meaning arguments that lead to outcomes, like persuading a policy-maker to take action -- almost always occur in the future tense, which is the tense of choices and decisions. Ineffective arguments (fights) almost always occur in the past tense, where the goal is to assign blame, or in the present tense, where the goal is to assign values (right and wrong). Arguing over who holds fault or who's ideas are best, or most moral, or most right will not lead to effectively persuading someone to agree with your advocacy position.<sup>2</sup>

A third key to effective advocacy is to *develop and improve your expertise in rhetoric so your conversations are productive, persuasive arguments rather than fights*.

2. There isn't space here to dive deeply into the powerful principles of rhetoric, so I recommend some excellent further reading on the subject. My favorite is a straight-forward and entertaining book called [Thank You For Arguing: What Aristotle, Lincoln, and Homer Simpson Can Teach Us About The Art Of Persuasion](#) by Jay Heinrichs (2017).

As you learn and exercise the tools and skills of rhetoric, your likelihood of successful advocacy will increase dramatically.

### **Advocate in your underpants (if need be).**

Another friend of mine was once a senior policy advisor to the U.S. Secretary of Education. He was (and continues to be) an advocate for open policy, a position that argues that copyrightable works produced with public money should be openly licensed to allow unfettered access to those resources by the public. During his time in Washington, my friend had the opportunity to advocate for the inclusion of an open policy in a major \$2B grant program for community colleges being developed by the Department of Labor. Most of his advocacy activities occurred during regular business hours through phone calls and face-to-face meetings with his Labor colleagues. His regular efforts seemed quite effective, with the open policy provision being included throughout the program drafting process. Then, at 5 pm on the day before the program was set to be approved, he learned that top lawyers in charge of legal review at the Department of Labor wanted to remove the open policy provision. My friend had plans that evening, but quickly scrapped them in order to make one last effort to advocate for the policy he cared so much about. After making several phone calls, he eventually found himself at home near midnight, in his underwear, on a three-way call with the lawyer from the Department of Labor - who opposed the policy - and a lawyer from the White House - who my friend knew supported the policy. After a constructive, multi-hour argument (not fight!), the dissenting lawyer finally conceded on the merits of the open policy and agreed to keep it in the grant program. I've tried not to visualize the merry dance my friend must have done that night - and, for his neighbors' sake, I hope his blinds were closed!

The point here is that sometimes, effective advocacy requires us to seize the moment when the moment presents itself, even if the timing is inconvenient. My friend could have simply declared defeat when he learned at the last hour that his policy would not be approved. The working day was done and evening plans were set. Instead, he rolled up his sleeves (and removed his pants), and argued right down to the final minute. His tenacity paid off, to the tune of \$2B in openly licensed content now available to the public.

A fourth key to effective advocacy is to *seize key moments and be willing to sacrifice your time, energy, and plans to make your case*. Good advocates don't just advocate when it's convenient for them, or during regular working hours; they advocate whenever the opportunity presents itself. Often, they *make* their own opportunities.

### **Avoid advocating alone.**

When I worked at a large private foundation, the grants I made went to several different organizations who advocated for a similar cause. These organizations had people with strong advocacy skills, but they each approached advocacy in their own ways. For example, some focused on direct advocacy to elected officials, others tried to influence institutional leaders, and others wrote op-eds and white papers to inform the general public. Sometimes these advocacy efforts overlapped and synergized, but most of the time they operated in their own independent spheres. Recognizing the potential benefits of a coordinated approach, we made a decision to support the formation of a formal policy advocacy coalition. In making a new round of grants, we asked the various organizations to work together on a preamble to their grant proposals that outlined areas of advocacy overlap, distinct policy goals, and a set of norms for collaborative engagement. Because of this coalition structure, these organizations have been able to draw on each others' strengths, respond more quickly to opportunities, and generally improve their advocacy efforts in meaningful ways.

A fifth key to effective advocacy is to *coordinate and collaborate with others who care about your cause*. This collaboration can occur at any level, and may even just be with one other person in your organization or network. Typically, the more people involved in coordinated advocacy, the better.

### **A night at the museum: A conclusionary tale**

A couple of years ago, I received an email from someone who worked at the Smithsonian. She asked if I might be willing to meet to talk about effective strategies for advocating for a particular policy that a few other museums around the world had recently instituted. As an advocate myself, I happily agreed. On the appointed date, I wandered into the main hall of the Museum of Natural History and looked for my contact, whom I had never

met. She found me immediately and then told me that several of her museum colleagues would be joining us for the conversation. As these colleagues appeared one by one, they introduced themselves to each other as though they had never met. And, indeed, they had not. It turns out, the Smithsonian is a much bigger and less coordinated place than one might imagine!

After introductions, our host led us through the bowels of the museum to a classically-adorned conference room somewhere secreted beyond the public's view. Then she kicked off the conversation by explaining that, despite meeting in person for the first time that evening, this group of strangers/coworkers shared a common cause: they desired to advocate for a policy that would allow for the entire Smithsonian archives to be digitized and made available to the public under an open license. The implementation of this policy would allow for people everywhere to access and use the museum assets for any purpose, in perpetuity.

With enthusiasm in her eyes, my new friend looked at me and asked a simple question: "What's the best strategy for advocating successfully for this policy?" I thought about it for a moment, and then replied, "There isn't one."

She and her colleagues were deflated. They had brought me there in the hopes that I would be able to give them a silver bullet strategy – the key to accomplishing their noble goal. But the reality, as I explained it to them, is that there is no single approach, no magic recipe for successful advocacy. As I thought about all of the various efforts my friends and I had made over the years, it occurred to me that the only common element to every attempt at advocacy was this: *persistence*. Those who succeeded with advocating for policies persisted. They persisted even when they were alone. They persisted even when it was inconvenient. They persisted even when people wanted to fight. They persisted even when they felt small. And they persisted even when few people agreed with them on the problem that needed to be solved.

My message to that small, but committed group that night at the museum is still true today: *anyone can be an effective advocate for change, if that person is willing to persist*.

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### About the Author

TJ Bliss is the Director of Development and Strategy at Wiki Education, a non-profit that connects higher education to the publishing power of Wikipedia. Bridging Wikipedia and academia creates opportunities for learners and researchers to contribute to, and access, open knowledge. Before joining Wiki Education, TJ was a Program Officer in the Education Program at the William and Flora

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# Why Stories Matter

James LaRue

*“Winning elections is good. But real advocacy is a much longer game, requiring a much savvier and informed approach.”*

In 2008, we learned that library support, as measured by libraries getting to the ballot and winning if they did, had been falling for a generation.<sup>1</sup> At the time, use, at least, was rising. This year, based on the 10-year follow-up study, support for tax-supported libraries is even worse.<sup>2</sup> Now, use is falling, too. Clearly, we have a problem. While we still have some “supersupporters,” as the reports call them, there are not enough of them to win an election. I believe that most libraries do a good job of fulfilling their mission. However, even library excellence, by itself, does not guarantee support. In this essay, I will argue that turning this sorry state of affairs around will take action in four areas: library brand management, professional campaign management, donor development, and culture change.

## Brand management

Why did library use rise, and library support fall? There are several causes, but one of them was our marketing efforts. For the past 30 years, libraries have been pushing what we *do*, mainly provide materials and services. However, we also believed that use would result in support. That was the 2008 wake-up call: use and support are very different things. To build support, we need to push not just what we do, but what we *mean*.

The first step is to get serious about brand management. At a minimum, that means every library should conduct a *communications audit*. A trained graphic designer should review all library collateral, and make recommendation for sharpening the images, and ensuring graphic consistency. Don't think that is important? Here is an exercise: pull out your library card, look at the sign outside the building, look at your letterhead, and look at your website. Would your patron know that all of these things come from the same place? Alternatively, as is usually the case, you have just discovered a mishmash of fonts, colors, lo-

1. “From Awareness to Funding: a study of library support in America,” OCLC, 2008. Available from <https://www.oclc.org/en/reports/funding.html>

2. “From Awareness to Funding: Voting Perceptions and support of public libraries in 2018,” OCLC, ALA, PLA, 2018.

gos, and logo placement. It is the work of well-meaning and even passionate *amateurs*.

Advertisers and marketers will tell you it's all about reach (how many people see your message) and frequency (how *often* they see it). The psychological truth is that there are so many things vying for our attention, that we have to see something some 7-15 times before we see it for the first time. If you stick with different looks for every piece (the library program sign-up, the flyer announcing a speaker or book club, an overdue notice, etc.), you have to start from scratch every time. Using a thoughtful, professional, and unvarying template establishes an immediately recognizable “look” for the library, making it far easier to get other messages across, particularly the succinct brand of the institution.

The second piece of brand management is the creation of that tagline, the phrase that captures the deep mission of the organization. You cannot sell a product until you both know it and believe in it. Brand management should be undertaken at least two years before an election.

## Campaign management

I have worked with some of the most successful campaign managers in the business, and here's some of what I've learned:

- Election planning should start about a year ahead of time.
- Get lots of input months before you announce the campaign, so that the recommendation to increase funding comes from outside the library, for reasons that a core group of influencers can understand and advocate for.
- Get professional help. Campaign management is not something ALA can do; we're a 501 (c) (3). But depending on the type of campaign, other assistance may be available for free. For instance, tax levies for construction may attract bond brokers who pay the campaign manager themselves.
- Build a campaign committee that has people who can fulfill the following functions: administrative (call meetings and keep momentum), a treasurer (both to raise money, and do reporting), a subject expert (usually the library director, but could be a knowledgeable trustee), and an organizer (well-connected scheduler).

I've known people who could do two of those things. I've never known someone who can do three, or do them well.

- Build a campaign bible: what are your messages? Keep it brief and tie it to the community's needs, not just the library. What are the numbers (budget, mill levy, construction costs, etc.)?
- When you build a campaign talk, stick to it. If you get asked about things not in the bible, tell people you'll get back to them. Successful campaigns have discipline. They don't get derailed by loose talk.
- Be systematic: know which groups in your community are influential, then recruit good speakers to address them. Note that ordinary citizens are way more persuasive than library staff, who might be seen as self-serving.
- Don't spend a lot of time trying to turn people who are opposed to you; focus on your friends or people who are about to be.
- Social media is cheap, and as our last presidential election taught us, can be influential. Use it.
- But it also doesn't reach everybody. Get hold of active voter rolls, and if possible send 2 to 3 on-message mailings to them (postcards that look good, but not so expensive that they turn off the voters). Recruit volunteers and walk precincts. Make phone calls. Have a campaign calendar that gets letters to the editor submitted. Get yard signs.
- Time it all, so everything peaks right before the vote. Remember early voting and mail-in ballots.

Here's the other thing I've learned about elections: you still might lose. Even the best campaigners win only about 75% of the time. There are just so many factors. You find yourself up against the police department or schools, or there's a big lay off in your community. Campaigns are an art, not a science, and you cannot take a loss personally. However, even if you lose, you can, and you should, try again. Persistence pays off.

### Donor development

One of the more encouraging findings of the 2018 OCLC study was that although there is deteriorating support for raising taxes for libraries, there was increased support for private philanthropy. People are often and surprisingly willing to donate, year after year, more than their annual tax bill. (Given what libraries cost, it is not that hard.)

Nurturing that pattern of giving, trying to make it a habit, is one way to nudge people toward the supersupporter category. The more they give, the greater their *emotional* investment.

Donor cultivation and development needs to be systematic. It requires an annual giving campaign, and at least two other touches a year (newsletters, invitations to events, etc.). Thoughtful donor management moves people up: "you gave \$35 last year. Would you consider moving up to the \$100 a year level? Monthly payments are possible!" Most fundraisers will tell you that you just don't know who is sitting on big bank accounts, but when you build a relationship with donors, and maintain their trust, you just might find yourself with a big gift.

### Culture change

Part of the reason libraries lose elections is because they don't do the things I briefly discuss above. But there is a larger reason. It is not just libraries that are losing support. Support for the entire public sector is eroding. Why? As my colleague Marci Merola and I argue in the American Library Association's Advocacy Bootcamps, the chief reason is a 54 year campaign to reframe taxation as a terrible affliction. That "frame" is just two words: "tax burden." Once you accept it, there is only "tax burden" and "tax relief." This campaign, now coming into fruition, has resulted in the significant weakening of public institutions. Public education is one of them, as witnessed by the recent drop of teachers from the middle class.<sup>3</sup> Transportation infrastructure is another example. There are too many stories about collapsing bridges, decrepit subway systems, and derailed trains to be laughed away. A smattering of light rail stops does not make up for it. Libraries are part of a much bigger picture.

Taxation is, in fact, a brilliant strategy to accomplish big things by fairly distributing the costs among the many people who benefit from them. But people of both dominant political parties in America now accept tax cuts as an unquestioned good in itself.

The deep question of successful advocacy is not just

3. "Public Servants Are Losing Their Foothold in the Middle Class," by Patric Cohen and Robert Gebeloff, New York Times, April 22, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/22/business/economy/public-employees.html>

how to win an election. It is about building a climate of library support, a fundamental reclamation of the idea once called “the common good.” How do we change culture? The short answer is, the same way it got changed the last time. Build a new frame. Repeat it for 54 years. This is another area where librarians have not been professional. We launch new campaigns, new initiatives, new slogans, new services far too frequently. Our failure to build a script and stick to it has not, will not, *cannot* succeed against one of the most disciplined and long-lasting trends in American history, the libertarian attempt to reframe all taxation as theft.

Modern neuroscience has demonstrated several things. First, we are emotional creatures; then rational creatures. Second, nobody’s mind is changed by the facts. In fact, a barrage of facts tends to make people dig in their heels. Third, effective advocacy involves the definition and cultivation of ever deeper and wider circles of engagement. ALA has proposed several models for doing this, under the heading of “turning outward.” Fourth, the best strategy to break through a destructive frame is to appeal to some of the oldest parts of the brain. As just a few minutes in a lapsit storytime demonstrates, we are wired for stories. Stories open the door to learning, define identity, and build community. They are also more than feel good anecdotes. As we present in our Advocacy Bootcamp, “telling the library story” has a consistent and powerful structure, easily learned. But that’s not the whole package. It also has to be tied to a strategic and

persistent communication of library value. ALA has a suggested framework for that, too. (See sidebar.)

So it’s not just about telling stories, it’s telling the right stories, telling them well, and telling them to the right people, over and over, with a consistent framework of messages that undoes the willful destruction of the public sector. Winning elections is good. But real advocacy is a much longer game, requiring a much savvier and informed approach.

If you’re interested in this big work, in joining a movement to reclaim a moral sanction for the public sector in general, and libraries in particular, consider checking out our Bootcamp. More information is available at <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/advocacy-bootcamp>.

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#### About the Author

James LaRue is the director of the ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom, and the Freedom to Read Foundation. Author of “The New Inquisition: Understanding and Managing Intellectual Freedom Challenges.” LaRue was a public library director for many years. He has written, spoken, and consulted on leadership and organizational development, community engagement, and the future of libraries. Contact him at: [jlalrue@jlarue.com](mailto:jlalrue@jlarue.com) or follow him on Twitter: @jaslar

#### Sidebar: the American Library Association’s 4 Key Messages (based on the same OCLC studies)

- Libraries transform lives.
- Libraries transform communities.
- Librarians are passionate advocates for lifelong learning.
- Libraries are a smart investment.

# A Progressive Era Eulogy for Libraries

John Chrastka

*“It is incumbent upon us to advance our own infrastructure policy agenda to ensure that libraries are part of the next round of spending in this country.”*

At this current political moment, we need to remind ourselves that public libraries today are largely funded through tax policies that were created in the Progressive Era and extended during the Great Society period. A progressive approach to taxation supports a wonderfully American idea that local and state government are service providers, and we should tax ourselves accordingly to fund the common good. Without a system of local taxation that is either based on property, sales, or income, core functions of government such as education, livability, and infrastructure would not exist.

Throughout the country, free public libraries have historically been seen as a key component of the basic package of local government services. Likewise, the state and regional systems which support libraries and that have come into existence largely because of a Great Society-influenced approach are seen as a positive way to use federal funding to equalize library services across economic or social lines. Funding through the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) has, since its inception, been intended to supplement and not supplant state and local funding for library services, though the need to use federal money to backfill state library and system budgets is well known. Interlibrary loan is, at its core, a 50-year-old experiment in tax equalization between rich and poor places in the form of moving materials from place to place. That said, federal support for state-level issues like education and libraries is a relatively recent development. And it is becoming more and more precarious in the current political climate.

With the 2017 tax reform law, basic tenants of our Progressive Era tax scheme have been upended. For example, individual deductions for State and Local Taxes (SALT) that had been a bedrock part of the federal tax code since its inception in 1913 have been dramatically limited. Limiting those deductions is part of a whole-cloth approach by the Trump Administration and Congress to shift responsibility for government from Washington, D.C. to the states. And in limiting SALT deductions, they are also using policy to force higher-taxing localities and

states to directly confront their tax burdens and not hide it within a federal deduction. Libraries will feel the pinch of those perceived-as-higher taxes when going out for new or even renewed revenues.

Lawmakers have likewise challenged the basic principles of the Great Society by undertaking a systematic process to dismantle the role of the federal government in ensuring equity and access for all its citizens. While this process of unraveling federal programs and funding began under President Reagan, it has advanced by an order of magnitude with this current Administration and Congress. From the rollback of regulations across many federal departments to dismantling the individual mandate in the ACA and to loosening proscriptive protections of student populations across K-12 and higher education settings, we are seeing the movement toward a renewed federalism take hold.

The Progressive Era and the Great Society approaches to funding the federal government are coming to a dramatic end. With it, we have seen a direct threat to IMLS and LSTA funding in the last two federal budget proposals. The federal budget for libraries was, until recently, considered safe<sup>1</sup>. The pressure on library budgets at all levels of government will continue to grow as the 2017 tax law curtails the amount of revenue available to programs across all parts of the federal discretionary budget. Library leaders must anticipate these changes or face real, significant, and potentially catastrophic consequences. The policy shift from Progressive Era and Great Society to Libertarian and Tea Party is internally cohesive, well supported across society, and will be ongoing despite inevitable setbacks. One approach in this shift away from public taxes to fund public entities is that being advanced by Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) and his allies at the Heritage Foundation, Hoover Institute, and other think tanks, who are seeking to change the role of the federal government from direct involvement in developing, supporting, evaluating, and advancing policy to simply being a checkbook. A little discussed, but potentially devastating policy shift for libraries is the movement toward Social Impact Financing that the Speaker has been espousing for some time. In his budget framework titled, “A Better Way,” Speaker Ryan defines

1. <http://www.districtdispatch.org/2017/03/18298/>

“Social Impact Financing” (SIF) as:

...a financing mechanism used to raise private-sector capital to expand effective social programs. Under this model: 1. Government determines a desired social outcome and agrees to pay for that outcome; 2. An intermediary identifies a service provider, arranges for private investors to fund the services, and monitors progress. 3. If the agreed-upon outcome is achieved—usually a cost savings or a socially beneficial result—the government reimburses the intermediary (who pays investors) for its expenses plus a return based on the program’s success. If the outcome is not achieved, the government does not pay.<sup>2</sup>

The Better Way budget framework goes on to say that “SIF shifts the risk of achieving the outcome from the government to the private sector, as taxpayer funds are spent only if desired outcomes are achieved.” The Speaker continues to make an argument that Social Impact Financing can, through competition between service providers, drive innovation and increase accountability. Please note that the “service providers” the Speaker of the House envisions delivering these social outcomes are all private entities.

Currently, when a library system is taken private in this country by local elected officials, the value proposition for local government and its voters is limited to “turn-around” or “worse-case” scenarios. The threat that is described focuses on a “privatize it or lose it” model of library services. What could happen to libraries when Social Impact Financing has the rule of law behind it across the country? In the education sector, we have had years of charter schools being first framed as a turn-around solution for failing schools then being adopted as a natural and normal way to deliver private education for profit using public money. Our industry recognizes and espouses the merit of keeping a public library public precisely because of the equalizing force that universal access and accommodation have on society.

Take for example the significant threat to Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) that we are seeing in the current Congress in H.R. 620, the so-called “ADA Education and Reform Act.” Title III is the ADA section

2. <http://abetterway.speaker.gov/assets/pdf/ABetterWay-Poverty-PolicyPaper.pdf>

that covers public accommodation by private corporations (i.e., businesses or service establishments that are open to the public like grocery stores, doctors’ offices, recreation facilities, private schools, and even homeless shelters) from discriminating against people with disabilities, mainly their facilities. H.R. 620 is designed to reduce opportunities for affected individuals or populations to go through administrative processes or judicial review to seek remediation of these physical barriers. The attack on Title III of the ADA comes at an interesting time. If the shift to privatized government services continues through Social Impact Financing and other similar policies, watering down the rights of minority or vulnerable groups within areas of public accommodation will make it more attractive for corporations to assume the role of government without the legal or Constitutional need to equalize or accommodate.

The impact of the 2017 tax bill on families and communities is only starting to be understood. At a macro level, 41 states currently have “conformity” with the federal tax code. Because the 2017 tax bill was the first comprehensive change to the tax code since 1986, some level of evaluation or overhaul of each of those state tax systems will take place over the next few years. If your state is contemplating a significant reworking or reevaluation of your basic tax laws, it is important for library leaders to do more than we usually do with important bills and policies, which tends to be “monitor then react.” As the federal changes are implemented and felt by families, small businesses, major corporations, and the nonprofit sector, we have a unique and important opportunity to see if we can align the future of library services with the future of public funding and revenue. Each state will make a decision about continued conformity, but any library specific policy proposals will remain within each state’s revised tax code.

As the third decade of this century starts to come into clearer focus, library leaders need to actively look for new sources of revenue at the state and local levels. We need to move beyond the currently established property tax or sales tax systems in each state to initiate a new discussion about revenue for library programs, services, collections, staffing, and facilities. There are several categories of tax revenue that are available to states including: Sales and Use Taxes, Personal Income Tax, Corporate Income Tax, Fees on Public Utilities, Insurance and Banking

Fees, Tax on Alcohol and Tobacco, Severance on Natural Resources, Gaming and Pari-Mutuel taxes, Motor Fuel Excise tax and Vehicle Registration fees, and state Property Taxes (Perez, 2008). As every resident of the seven states that do not currently have a state Income Tax can attest, the application of each of these taxes, fees, or levies is uneven around the country. What type of local and state taxes your state currently has available should be well known to library thought-leaders. The question of what types of current or new taxes that could be utilized to fund libraries can only be opened to re-imagination by us. When the post-2017 state tax codes are reconsidered, library leaders need to be at the table.

I believe that the best course of action for library leaders is to engage with the upcoming reforms to state and local tax policy in full force, and to make our own tax policy recommendations alongside other stakeholders. For example, can we position libraries as a proper beneficiary

of funding from “sin taxes” like gaming expansions and recreational marijuana or a “millionaires tax” on capital gains and luxury items to not only find pragmatic sources of new revenue but also help policymakers smooth out the rough edges of new policies. It is incumbent upon us to advance our own infrastructure policy agenda to ensure that libraries are part of the next round of spending in this country. In some cases, there may be reasonable and limited Public-Private Partnerships that can provide financing for new or renovated libraries. In every case, library leaders need to become experts in public finance and public tax policy to survive and thrive.

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# Relationships Matter in Politics

Michelle Boisvenue-Fox

*“It takes a certain kind of person to be comfortable enough to open up to loving many different kinds of people, as well as earning the respect of others with a variety of political viewpoints. Werner does this with empathy and genuineness.”*

In life, people matter - and it's no different in politics, despite its bad reputation. Lance Werner, Library Journal's 2018 Librarian of the Year, puts this in action by purposefully reaching out to area legislators. He doesn't just do the expected things that many library leaders do; he also focuses on what he calls “the mushy stuff.” Werner's passion for libraries is palpable in all of his conversations, inspiring legislators to believe in Michigan libraries and act on those beliefs. The taxpayers of Michigan matter to Werner.

Werner, Library Director of the Kent District Library (Mich.), has found success by building relationships and connections with local legislators regardless of their political affiliation. In being purposeful and casting his net wide, he has proven that this approach is beneficial to the library and the Michigan library community. Werner's approach to serving the West Michigan community is to value people, to treat everyone with the kindness, empathy, and the love that they deserve. This soft approach may appear unusual as a professional tenet, but his successful library system continues to be a leader in the state and across the nation. It has opened the library up to many new community relationships, innovative approaches to help solve community problems, and has attracted many new friends with the hope that others will tell the library's story during the next millage campaign in 2024.

It takes a certain kind of person to be comfortable enough to open up to loving many different kinds of people, as well as earning the respect of others with a variety of political viewpoints. Werner does this with empathy and genuineness.

What follows are several stories of Werner building relationships to help Michigan libraries politically.

## **Kent District Library Millage Success (2014)**

One of the first stories librarians should hear about Werner is how the Michigan Tea Party supported our

2014 Library Millage increase. In 2013, when Kent District Library was starting to line up their talking points for their informational campaign and decide how to focus the millage campaign, the local Tea Party organization (Kent County 'Taxpayers' Alliance) approached the library with concern about a tax increase for local residents. Werner took a different tact than they were expecting; he met with them and brought along the library's financial records. They asked question after question which Werner answered honestly. He was open about the library's operations and spending. He talked about the savings to the 27 communities the library serves that is achieved through a variety of efficiencies. The library was both transparent and accountable.

With this approach, Werner started a relationship with local leadership that continues to this day. Werner not only made a case for the library, but asked them for advice on getting support for the millage. It probably didn't hurt that one of the tea party members used the library, so were familiar with its services, but Werner was humble about the library's commitment to the communities and sincere in his ask for support. In the end, the support that the Tea Party gave KDL included staff training on sharing our library story with every group in our county, as well as personally walking door to door in select communities in support of our library millage. KDL passed its millage with 57%, that is the highest percentage in the library's history. And, they won in voting precincts that had never passed a tax millage.

Since this millage, Werner has gone on to work for Michigan libraries alongside the Michigan Library Association (MLA) in its efforts to elevate libraries' standing with legislators by increasing their knowledge about library funding. As a result of Werner's efforts with MLA, all libraries in Michigan are now seeing more money in their budgets. In talking to Werner, he bases his words of wisdom on his past success and his approach to fostering relationships with local legislators. “Be genuine and listen to all,” Werner says. By being open to others viewpoints, you learn what matters to them and understand what they consider a problem. “It's always personal,” he'll say. Everything is personal and it can be tied to the library. Legislators do care about their local communities and ultimately they believe in what libraries do when given the opportunity.

### **Bill to Eliminate February Millage Elections (2014)**

Alongside the Michigan Library Association, Werner was contacted by a local legislator before a bill was introduced and able to make the case to change what was originally going to be proposed. Legislators wanted to eliminate millage elections in February, May and August which left the only option for libraries (and others) to pass a millage in the November election. With libraries, this is not ideal since it only gives them one chance to successfully pass a millage, and if it's an operating millage, it could mean they have to close the library.

Through his strategic relationships, Werner was given a heads up that this bill was being introduced. He then had an opportunity to influence it and negotiate a change that benefitted libraries. The compromise only eliminated the February election. In the end, the bill did not pass, but this relationship allowed the Michigan Library Association an opportunity to have a conversation before the bill was introduced on its effects for libraries.

In regards to advocacy, Werner advises leaders to “talk passionately about what you care about.” Passion is contagious and it shows that both the library leader and legislator care about the library. With this personal relationship, there is a personal connection to the library.

In being purposeful, Werner suggests further building on this personal relationship, but “do it ahead of time so that you are not contacting legislators in the moment of need.” It doesn't work as effectively if you don't already know them and have worked with them. It can be seen as a political cry for help instead of a request from a personal friend.

### **Millage Campaigns and Elimination of Factual Information Averted (2016)**

Later, a bill was introduced into the state legislator that would have banned the dissemination of factual information 60 days prior to a millage election. This would open the door for special interest campaigns to wage war against any municipal millages, including libraries without consequence. Werner worked again with the Michigan Library Association (and many other groups) to personally contact legislators to educate them on how this would affect libraries. They got the message that this bill went against some important American values, such as free

access to information and being transparent with voters when information is important to their decisions at the poll. It is already illegal for government entities to use public funds to solicit “yes” votes, so this bill was utterly unnecessary. Ultimately, a permanent injunction was signed by a US District Court judge that stopped this bill, declaring it an infringement on constitutional rights.

Kent District Library used its experience with their library millage. They talked personally about how this legislation would have affected their local library and its efforts to talk to community groups and offer community presentations on what the library is planning in the future.

Another tactic Werner uses successfully is to offer help to legislators. This might be lost on people, but offering to help (again personally) to support campaigns means something and is noticed by legislators. Spending time with them, whether it's a lunch, inviting them to a banquet (ideally where the library receives an award) or a fundraiser can matter. “It's about treating them as friends,” Werner will tell you. “With lobbyists, they are there when legislators need information but it's after the issues are over that matters,” says Werner. If you are genuine about making this a personal relationship, then you work to connect with them at different points along the way. If leaders are only around for the issues, then it's solely a professional relationship.

### **Tax Capture Victory (2017)**

Libraries have long wanted a conversation with legislators on giving libraries the option to opt in to tax captures if they so desire, instead of being treated like schools and being automatically opted out of tax captures by local entities, such as development authorities. Since Werner has personal relationships with local legislators, he knows how to contact them. He is familiar with their staff. This “mushy” stuff, as he calls it, helps him find advocates for the library. So, when the Tax Capture Relief Bills were introduced, he made sure that local legislators knew about them and how they impacted their local libraries. After two decades of work on this effort, library leaders saw the fruits of their efforts when the legislature passed this exemption, with libraries being the fourth special entity included. While this didn't affect existing tax captures, it does mean that millions of future dollars will go into library budgets instead of being captured.



It is important to Werner to foster relationships on both sides of the political fences. “Despite political beliefs, you should always find something in common,” Werner says. At the end of the day, we all want the best for our families and communities. Werner further says, “Recognize that they have an obligation as a legislator. Being angry about their decisions isn’t conducive to the bigger picture.” It’s good to keep in mind what can’t be changed or influenced and to let go of what will happen based on political ideologies.

### Being vulnerable

Werner finds it valuable to be vulnerable. Showing kindness and empathy to local legislators can make some leaders feel vulnerable, but Werner takes it a step further. “Be willing to share yourself. This takes a lot to do this,” Sharing yourself puts your own values, family, stories, and work life on parade for possible judgement. As part of being genuine, it is important to be yourself and open up to share the things you care about. This vulnerability is necessary to find a connection with a legislator.

Werner has taken this advice to great lengths for the benefit of his library and all libraries in Michigan. So for starters, take the advice of general advocacy training, but then to grab the golden ring of success, dig deep to build these relationships on personal level. These unexpected relationships will have a deep impact on your library work and on your community.

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# Dispositif: Or Subjectivity and Neutrality in Libraries

T.J. Lamanna

*Many people take refuge in a neutralist politics. But even this unconsciousness generates anguish. - Negri and Guattari, 1990*

Most people understand a dispositif according to Foucault as a way of defining how a social movement uses knowledge structures to exercise their power. This is a solid foundation, but as interpreted by Antonio and Negri, a dispositif is a way of creating subjectivities. I believe this is where librarians fit. We are in the position of facilitating the creation of subjectivities. Under this definition your library isn't neutral. It never was, and it never can be. Librarians who claim a neutral position are setting themselves outside of a vital conversation, a conversation with real and damaging impacts. In almost all cases, choosing not to pick a side is, in itself, picking a side. Or even worse, like Switzerland during the Second World War, it's playing both sides for your benefit. Any attempt to claim a neutral stance assumes a librarian can be objective, and if we understand the library as a creation-space of dispositif, we realize objectivity cannot be obtained. Every decision you make is political, because *all things are political* and all politics are subjective. Your politics are your ethics in action. At the most fundamental level, that's what politics are: a willful expression of your ethics.

Librarians aren't concerned about neutrality, and anyone who says they are, deflect the real issue-at-hand. *The established schema of librarianship is adverse to controversy.* Can I understand why? Of course. Public support for libraries connects to local funding; without positive press, funding sources are threatened. But don't confuse the problem with the solution, libraries are threatened either way, and giving ground is not going to rectify that. We'll work on these issues as we stand up for ourselves, not slink into the dark corners. Remaining silent on a topic is not the same as being neutral. One of the strongest forms of action can be *inaction*. When you decide not to do anything, you're already taking a stand. So, what kind of institutions do we want to be? Do we want to sequester ourselves, simply placing holds on new books all day, or do we want to light a fire that fulfills why many of us became librarians in the first place; *to change the world*. Librarians should view their interactions with their communities phenomenologically, examining the space-between themselves and the communities they serve.

We need to *empower* our communities and strengthen them, and this can only be done if we understand our interactions with them. How can you help anyone if you don't understand them and their needs? As Fanon said, "Everything can be explained to the people, on the single condition you want them to understand" (Fanon, 2005). Coupled with Pisacane, that "ideas result from deeds, not the latter from the former, and the people will not be free when they are educated, but educated when they are free" (Messer-Kruse, 2012). We understand the role of education is not indoctrination, but, it's something to take to heart. People do not need to be educated about the white supremacy *they live in*, but movements like Black Lives Matter or how the plight of the Palestinians is purposefully misrepresented by *those who wish to see people oppressed* (Khan-Cullors and Davis, 2018; Schulman, 2017). Feigning neutrality harms us. If you don't stand for anything, you'll fall for everything.

We need to learn the difference between intellectually honest writing and propaganda, and how something said once doesn't retain the same meaning when repeated. Differentiating between the two is not always easy, but it's a vital skill. It's something we, as a profession, claim to know, but example after example proves that untrue. For instance, your library likely has items in their collections about Christopher Columbus, John Smith, and George Washington that adhere to a 'hero narrative,' so many authors perpetuate and masquerade fiction as truth that 'sounds good' and fits the cultural metanarrative. By retaining these items in your collections, you are taking a stance on that narrative, namely that you support it. You cannot have those items in your collection and claim to be neutral, unless you put them all in the fiction section where they belong. Working with marginalized and oppressed groups, making sure they are represented in your collection, programs, and community is where true history is being created and lived. Don't be swayed by groups who claim to be oppressed (I'm looking at you Men's Rights Activists and Christians). Merely claiming to be marginalized doesn't make you marginalized. Dive into your local ordinances, laws, policies. Deeply immerse yourself in your community. Listen, and more than listen, hear. Carla Hayden, the fantastic Librarian of Congress, said it best, "(Librarians) are activists, engaged in the social work aspect of librarianship. Now we are fighters for freedom..." (Orenstein, 2003). Freedom that im-

pinges on someone else's freedom isn't freedom, that's power. It's vital to understand the difference.

There are grave concerns about how collection development shouldn't censor any point of view. And I believe that. We've seen this problem arise time and time again, whether it's *And Tango Makes Three* or the deservedly failed Milo book. It runs down the political line, and our personal politics make us feel passionate about these issues. The resolution of this stems from your collection development policy. You need a strong one. No, you shouldn't not add Milo's book (I'm using this as an example since I'm sure we're all familiar with the controversy), because he's a spiteful, hateful man, but you might consider not adding it because it's poorly written, or poorly researched. You cannot decide to not add a book because the author is vile. I mean, you probably have books by Kissinger (a war criminal), Orson Scott Card (a homophobe), Hemingway (a serial abuser), Dr. Seuss (a racist), nor should you try, as many of us do, to separate the works from the authors. An author and their work are intimately linked and neither should be dealt with in isolation. It should go without saying that people are a product of their environment, a combination of nature and nurture. But, your socio-political background only *explains* your behaviors and points of view and your choices; it does not excuse them. Saying someone is a 'product of their time' minimizing the issue-at-hand and even worse, minimizes the efforts of the people who fought to change that dominant oppressive cultural narrative that they recognized as abhorrent. Are you just simply buying books to fill shelves? Or are you actually *developing a collection*? If you feel like you are compelled to purchase a book by a bigot, whether through community pressure or 'cultural relevance,' I understand. But you can also host a program or partner with an organization that works towards liberating oppressed peoples. U.S. public libraries spend a lot of time, energy, and resources on Banned Books Week, which works to highlight issue of censorship and literature. There is discussion on why these books were banned, what the issue with banning them is, and if that decision was overturned. We, as library professionals, should be able to justify each item in our collection the same way. That's the development in collection development.

Neutrality is based on holding the middle ground, the balancing point between two diametrically opposed views.

There is a glaring problem with this view, and that is the poles change. Which means neutrality *changes*. To stay in the 'center' we have to move towards whatever pole is pushing out. Example: the (decidedly bigoted Dewey Decimal System) lists phrenology in the 139s. This is the range of philosophy and psychology. That's hardly a neutral decision. It's placing debunked pseudoscience on the same plane as substantiated research. That's not to say current modalities won't be overturned, but in that case *they should be re-cataloged*. You cannot assert your collection is neutral when it's based *on a non-neutral cataloging schema*. The issues of our cataloging schemas have been addressed ad nauseum and I'll refer you to a more detailed exploration of the topic in Safiya Umoja Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression*. But if a foundational principle of library science can be so easily and explicitly highlighted as biased, what claim is there for a neutral profession?

Robert Anton Wilson said it best, "It only takes 20 years for a liberal to become a conservative without changing a single idea" (Wilson, 1997). The point isn't to pass judgment on a particular set of views, but rather to show that any ideological foundation is built on shifting sands. Poles change, and if you don't move with them and constantly evolve your thoughts, you'll be swept away. And it's usually out to sea, not back to shore. Frantz Fanon points out clearly, that troubled times had unconscious effects not only on the active militants, but also on those claiming to be neutral and to remain outside the affair, uninvolved in politics (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983). The Overton Window is in full effect here. There is no escaping politics, the *body politic* is inscribed on each member of a society, and the inscribing begins at birth via your ascribed gender, race, class, etc. You are born political and only those at the height of privilege can wear that mask of neutrality. Your neutrality is *born of privilege*. As Anne Fausto-Sterling explains nature and bodies are always being transformed by social interactions. Specifically, harking back to Fanon, we know that culture and societal pressures can have physical effects on the body. Culture can literally shape bones. The library plays a dual role in this regard, our culture shapes our community, but our community also shapes our culture. We cannot exist apart from this, and choosing neutrality will have serious ramifications for the bones of our culture. (Fausto-Sterling, 2005)

Going even further in discussing the polemics of neutrality

in libraries, we see that neutrality has never been a core tenant of libraries, and it's only recently that we've attempted to assert ourselves into that position. Unfortunately, our lack of neutrality skews negatively, either as discriminatory hiring practices (Misra, 2018) or policies that marginalize portions of the community (specifically the homeless or poverty stricken (Mars, 2018)). These policies are in place to 'protect' the patrons, which is almost exclusively affluent white patrons (dp.la. 2018). The same rational is used to justify having police and cameras installed in libraries. This security theater does little to protect our patrons, and actively discourages marginalized portions of our communities from access our libraries. These are some of the most predictable dangers of the 'neutrality' argument.

A lot of us grew up hearing, 'everyone is entitled to their beliefs'. We have been convinced that if someone believes something, they are entitled to it. *They aren't*. No one is entitled to their beliefs, no one is entitled to any belief. We need not respect a belief merely because someone holds it, that respect is earned by *informing* that belief. A belief held in isolation isn't a belief, it's a thought. A belief is something you act on and that acts on you, it's primary and immediate; beliefs are *lived-in* thoughts, they correspond to experience. *Context* is everything. *Every belief deserves to be challenged*. There are no exceptions to this. If a challenged person responds 'that's just what I believe,' you are not required to give them a pass. That's intellectually dishonest and *immoral*. In a functioning society *communication is key*, and when someone refuses to communicate they harm the community. I'm not advocating ostracizing anyone, cutting them off from the community, or punishing them for the thoughts, but we all must be held accountable for them. Censoring isn't the answer. I call you to *viscerally* engage your community, from the core of your being. If a work violates your collection development policy, you should be able to clearly and explicitly point to the problem. Censoring allows the author or group to *claim oppression* even when there is not, which is dangerous since the *appearance of oppression* is easily confused with actual oppression.

Libraries have never been neutral, and never truly can be. It's not something to aspire to, it's not something to hold dear, and the veneer of neutrality isn't doing anyone any favors. This false dichotomy of attempting to show 'both sides' is easily washed away as soon as we look at

the actuality of how a library functions, the embedded systemic issues, whether it's the lack of PoC in libraries, your collection development, bigoted cataloging systems, or myriad of other issues. You're mired in controversy before you begin, you can't feign ignorance and hide behind 'neutrality.' You just look like cowards. And has oft been repeated, you're on the wrong side of history. To twist Artaud a little, 'I call for [librarians] burning at the stake, laughing at the flames'" (Artaud, 1958). Every patron who walks through your doors should find something in your building that challenges them. *They* can choose not to engage, but the library *must* offer it. But I want to be clear, this doesn't mean inflammatory books that are only intended to cause harm; that's not challenging anyone's worldview, it's merely capitalizing on ignorance or hate to sell a product. If we're going to create subjectivities we should be creating joyful ones.

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# Everyday Life, Everyday Democracy in Libraries:

## Toward Articulating the Relationship

John Buschman

### Introduction

I have suggested the importance of the idea that democracy now frequently takes place outside of formal political settings (Buschman 2018; 2017a; 2017b; 2012). That is, social life is shaped democratically in various arenas. The dramatic decline in smoking and the rise in acceptance of same-sex marriage are good examples of thresholds crossed not by dint of laws, policy, science, media coverage, or evidence gathered and organized and presented for investigation by libraries, but also by and through (essentially) democratic talk and social change that preceded and then drove law and/or policy. That many restaurants have changed their treatment of smokers (becoming less tolerant) or same-sex couples (becoming more tolerant) some time ago are good examples. We in the United States are, as of this writing, currently experiencing a reevaluation of how we have handled issues as diverse as sexual harassment (an area where law and policy were clear but not honored), concussions in football (getting our entertainment from a sport that frequently causes life-altering brain injuries), and the technology infrastructure that allows/promotes lies and misinformation as news and Russian interference with our democratic processes and institutions. These are not being led by Congress or the Executive branch, but rather by open airing of the problems (almost daily) and discussion among people and in various media—some of which are the source of problems just noted.

Where, then, do libraries come into these processes? Traditionally (and that term is not deployed pejoratively), the answer is that libraries and librarians are there to foster informed discourse and exchange (Buschman 2003). This of course is a cornerstone of the field and, given political history and its relationship to control/manipulation of information, it would be perverse to argue with these approaches and the principles behind them (Webster 1999; Peters 1993). But that answer is too one-size-fits-all to fully explain a complex phenomenon, often essentializing it down to an information literacy problem in helping to establish context and trace sources, deployed to cover everything from dealing with real fake news, to fake “fake” news (Baer 2017; Lupien and Rourke 2017) to predatory publishing (Swauger 2017). It hasn’t proven terribly persuasive, being dourly remarked by Joseph

Schumpeter all the way back in 1942 that “Information is plentiful and readily available. But this does not seem to make any difference” in the content or quality of our democratic decisions (Schumpeter 2001, 147). What we need as a supplement is a theory of how democracy works on the ground socially (as in our smoking and marriage examples), and what role libraries play in those social processes.

This paper is an attempt to articulate that relationship further, and it starts with an unlikely source—Jane Jacobs’ *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*—that will in turn be placed in context by a current and very influential idea taken up by democratic theorists: Amartya Sen’s capabilities approach. This framing will then be deployed to situate the actions, place, and functions of libraries and the meaning of their relationship to democratic societies that go well beyond the traditional functions noted above. In so doing, this article deploys legal scholar Cass Sunstein’s (1996) concept of “incompletely theorized agreements on particular outcomes” (143); that is, “it is rare [to] completely...theorize any subject, [meaning] to accept both a general theory and a series of steps that connect the theory to a concrete conclusion” (146). The ideas presented here certainly have more-than-casual affinities but, as with Sunstein (1996), it is not argued that they contain a lockstep of premises, consequences, and explanations that logically flow up and down the theoretical ladder, but rather “the goal is to try to stay with the lowest level of abstraction necessary” (143-144) to provide both a framing and a further elucidation of the democratic content of libraries and library and information science (LIS).

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### Democracy and Everyday Life

Jacobs published *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* in 1961. Her book was – and remains – controversial, a full-throated and polemical challenge to the ideas behind and the methods of city planning. We will touch on only some of her ideas, but they are still valid: mismanaged, unmanaged, and unregulated real estate still inflicts “damage...on the economic and psychic well-being of neighborhoods” and on people’s lives, “cherished local shops are disappearing, replaced by national chains or, worse, nothing at all [and] ‘blight extracts a social cost’”

(Editorial Board 2017). In turn, Jacobs' (1961) observations proved prescient concerning how most of us *now* live: "Even residents who live near each other are strangers...The bedrock attribute of a successful [place to live] is that a person must feel personally safe and secure... among all these strangers [and] not feel automatically menaced by them" (30)<sup>1</sup>. The concept of place Jacobs uses is related to, but not identical with that of space; "space refers to location somewhere and place to the occupation of that location. Space is about having an address and place is about living at that address" (Agnew in Leckie and Buschman 2007, 5). Jacobs described the ways places and communities can be arranged to live well and safely among strangers that remains essential and relevant.

In so doing, Jacobs (1961) repeatedly linked that idea to what she called "democratic self-government" (128), "mundane organs of self-government" (114), "civilized self-government" (117), and "processes of self-government" (427). The connection she made was not an intuitive one between the arrangement, organization, and principles of places, planning them, and democracy (Rich 2016), so we should plumb what she meant by these terms. First and foremost, Jacobs means by these terms arrangements that people freely choose, enjoy living in, and in turn contribute to their vitality: places that are "populated naturally and casually...by being situated...close to...active and different currents of life and function[:] shoppers, visitors and strollers as well as...workers... where there is work, cultural, residential, and commercial activity—as much as possible of everything" (1961, 101). These are places to visit and live where arrangements are as local as possible and freely improvised and formed (Jacobs 1961, 60-61). It is, in short, an "intricate and close-grained diversity of uses that give each other constant mutual support, both economically and socially. The components of this diversity can differ enormously, but they must supplement each other in...concrete ways"

1. This idea still informs concepts of and research into publics and the public realm (Buschman 2017b). Political theory states it this way: "The unencumbered self is...the encumbrance of our modern social condition." That is, under neoliberalism our very fluid social and economic arrangements mean that we are often unknown in and less-connected to our local communities now, whether urban or not, but we still wish to live a good life where we are (Gutmann in Buschman 2012, 134; see also Putnam 1995a; 1995b; Webster 2006, 208-209).

(Jacobs 1961, 14)<sup>2</sup>. In other words, a rich and democratic everyday life is helped along considerably by the qualities of the sites where it takes place. For philosopher Marshall Berman (1982), she captured the "environment...uniquely capable of nourishing modern experiences and values: the freedom [and] order that exists in a state of perpetual motion and change, the...intense and complex face-to-face communication and communion" of the best of modern life capable of adapting and enlarging the idea of community (317-318).

With economic (and architectural) diversity comes a diversity of persons (social classes, ethnicities, ages and purposes for being there) and differing schedules of usage, thus making spaces safe and usable over the course of a whole day (Jacobs 1961, 148, 35). People using an area beget more people using that area, and they observe and watch one another as a casual form of entertainment and passing the time (think of a Starbucks); in turn, small businesses "are typically strong proponents" of these attributes because "they hate having customers made nervous about safety [and] are great street watchers and sidewalk guardians" (Jacobs 1961, 37-38). Small businesses of course imply a modest-to-extensive circulation of people, and in these various ways places become desirable, habitable, and good for people of all ages. This circumstance allows people to move in and out of the area and shape their lives as they choose, interacting with people with whom they are not intimate, but with whom they are deeply interconnected because they all depend on one another for a place to function well. Such places "have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody" (Jacobs 1961, 238). This then is what Jacobs meant by democratic self-government: mutual (if often unnoticed) daily life shaped and improved by the free choices and actions of people that make life interesting, various, reasonably safe, and mobile. She "converted

2. A critique of Jacobs written at the time (Rodwin 1961) was that "one almost gets the impression of a golden age before" the developments she opposed "appeared on the scene." This idea has been carried forward; she "romanticised social conditions that were already becoming obsolete by the time she wrote about them" (Zulkin in Beauman 2011; Berman 1982, 323-325). Her importance and relevance lies in that, "when we remove [her work] from the specialized discourse of urbanism, its connections to other streams of writing and thought become obvious and revealing" (Fulford 2011, 7).

democratic values into design policy” (Rich 2016).

Jacobs (2011) described this elsewhere as navigating the essential tension between the “morality and values in commerce and politics—in other words, social or public morality as distinguished from purely private moral behavior” (161). She makes it clear that the happenstance architectural, economic, and social diversity that has been improvised is what fosters and underwrites effective democratic living, cooperation, and action. Jacobs takes pains to note that these ideas applied to cities, making the distinction between them, suburbs, and small towns. However, living patterns have clearly changed in the last five decades or so. The problems (and solutions) she identifies are more generally relevant now:

[P]eople like to live, not just be, in such lively [areas and] youngsters and elders alike need such surroundings [but] we continue to put up civic centers... residential areas and housing “projects” segregated by income. [T]hese developments...combine to produce boring homogeneous cores which generate traffic for limited periods and then lapse afterward into dead or dangerous districts. [N]ew buildings with high rents squeeze out...marginal activities, the small business...just getting a start, the colorful shop...the little restaurants and bars...all that... lends spice, charm and vigor to an area... Jacobs proposes that we do most of the things urban experts tell us not to do: attract mixed activities which will generate active cross-use of land; cut the length of blocks; mingle buildings of varying size, type and condition; and encourage...concentrations of people. (Rodwin 1961)

Jacobs’ critique is the obverse: that planners and policymakers together produce “financial incentives...to achieve [a] degree of monotony, sterility and vulgarity” that serves an idea of how people should live, rather than fostering how they want to live by allowing people to make the environment themselves (1961, 7).

Two aspects of Jacobs’ analysis are of concern to us here. First, there is a specific way in which Jacobs connects these ideas to political action. Healthy and lively areas foster and allow “communities of interest” to form that enable them to sustain interest groups, support businesses, create or support culture, and/or exert political pressure or take political action—sometimes in the

interests of preserving the character of their community and area (Jacobs 1961, 119, 124-128)<sup>3</sup>. Second, Jacobs writes at some length about libraries and their role and placement in communities: “Monopolistic...monumental cultural centers cloak, under the public relations hoo-haw, the subtraction of commerce, and of culture too, from...intimate and casual life” (1961, 4). That is, libraries as part of a suite of cultural institutions (along with museums, concert halls, etc.) can de-diversify an area: “there is no point in bringing [them] to where the people are, if in the process the *reasons* that people are there are wiped out and [they are] *substituted* for them” (Jacobs 1961, 101). Libraries can be the primary use and reason people come to an area, but they should nevertheless contribute to its diversity; likewise, a branch library can increase an area’s convenience, cohesion, diversity, and identity (Jacobs 1961, 159-162, 172). The point is that a library’s placement and integration with its community can, by itself and in conjunction with what libraries do, help to foster the attributes and actions of her democratic self-government and foster a community of interest. Jacobs gives us a valuable corrective and addition to what LIS believes is (or should be) our proper function: “The New York Public Library, on an immensely valuable site, contributes more of value to the locality than any possible profitable duplication of nearby uses—because it is so different, visually and functionally” (Jacobs 1961, 254). In other words, a library affects everyday life (for better or worse), often irrespective of how we think it is (or should be) used.

### Capabilities

Is that all libraries do—mere placement on our campuses and in our communities and in their building design? This would be as impoverished a vision of what we contribute to democratic society as neutral information-provision (Buschman 2017c). However, there is a vein of political theory that can help us to bring these two strands together, enriching both. The capabilities approach<sup>4</sup> was created by Sen almost forty years ago, and its extensive literature and application will not be done full justice

3. Jacobs was central among the “local campaigners [who in 1962] narrowly defeat[ed] an attempt by the despotic city planner Robert Moses to run a 10-lane elevated highway through the middle of Washington Square Park. For decades, Moses... play[ed] god with New York” (Beauman 2011).

4. This language follows Robeyns’ (2005; 2016a) formulation.



here. It is a theory that lends itself to adaptation and interpretation across many fields (Robeyns 2005; 2016a). Our concern will be to deploy the ideas to further define and explain Jacobs' democratic everydayness of libraries as briefly as practicable without doing too much violence to their depth and subtlety. The first thing to note is that the capabilities approach was rooted in two critiques of relevance to Jacobs' ideas. The first was of the philosophical assumptions that economists imposed "not just on economics, but also on other social disciplines [which] see behaviour in terms of preference fulfillment and the intelligent pursuit of self-interest, steering clear of the... demands of morals and values" (Sen 1993b, 23). Sen argues that this is a self-referential definition that is isolated, non-social, and unable to accommodate variety, interests over time, and the context of specific acts: "The *purely* economic man is indeed close to being a social moron" (1977, 336)<sup>5</sup>. The second critique is of ideas of justice and equality rooted in equality of resources: "it is... concerned with good things rather than with what these good things do to human beings... [or] uses a metric that focuses on the person's... mental reaction" to getting such things like rights or income (Sen 2006, 481)<sup>6</sup>. Sen (2009) has gone on to critique political theory's perfectionism—that is, ignoring current injustices in the search for intellectually defensible foundations of a theory of justice<sup>7</sup>.

Capabilities then are "opportunit[ies] to achieve valuable combinations of human functionings—what a person is able to do or be" and allows us to distinguish between the ability to do something a person would value doing (capability) vs. possessing the means to do so, and then being able to convert the means to those highly individual

5. This is clearly related to Jacobs' critique and her valorization of the non-economic (democratic) affordances and values of places and their makeup and arrangement.

6. This is both a philosophical and a practical critique of, respectively, Rawlsian and Utilitarian theories of justice, hence Sen's interest to political theory and philosophy. This is in turn related to Jacobs' related description of functional, lively areas and why people like to be and live in them: because their diversity and safety allow people the freedom to shape a life attractive to them.

7. This is not, incidentally, also related to Jacobs' (1961, 16-25) critique of modernist perfectionism in urban planning and that tradition studiously ignoring of how people actually choose to live.

ends (Sen 2005, 153; 2006, 481)<sup>8</sup>. Sen began with "basic capabilities" (2006, 481; Robeyns 2005) that are rooted in poverty analysis: "the ability to be well nourished, to live disease free lives, to be able to move around," to be clothed and have respect and dignity as a person (Sen 2004, 78). He, however, refuses to weight these or preliminarily list capabilities; human diversity is illimitable and social and cultural conditions vary far too much to proscribe individual goals in any way; "the selection of capabilities is the task of the democratic process" (Robeyns 2005, 106; Sen 2004)<sup>9</sup>. Because of his background as an economist, much of the capabilities approach has affinities with ways to analyze, focus, measure, and shape development policies in more humane and effective ways (Robeyns 2005; 2006). Democracy and rights are then means to secure capabilities and an environment of economic development to further them (Sen 2009; 2005; 1999). Capabilities can thus be thought of as the freedom to have freedoms: "the alternative combinations of functionings the person can achieve, and from which he or she can choose one collection"—that is, the freedom/ability to realize things people end up actually choosing to do (Sen 1993a, 31).

There are of course tensions here. The achievements are often collective, but the capabilities approach is thin on who is responsible in such a circumstance for selecting and expanding capabilities and *how* that would take place democratically (Robeyns 2016b; 2005). Second, Sen's approach can be said to be too individualistic. A capability very often refers to one person (Robeyns 2016b; 2005). Third, there are technical and philosophical complications such as the choice not to make use of a capability like mobility to achieve a good (like visit family) vs. the deprivation of a capability; the distinctions among achievements when capabilities are converted; and the relationship between achieved functionings, capabilities, and standard of living which cannot be addressed here (Sen 1998, 298-303). By deploying the capabilities approach to look at both what librarianship conceives of as its role and its everyday effects together, we won't solve

8. Sen (2006) famously noted that it is much more difficult (and expensive) for a differently-abled person to convert an income (a means) into a capability (mobility), hence the highly specific nature of capabilities.

9. Sen cites the "remarkable fact that, in the terrible history of famines...no substantial famine has ever occurred in any independent and democratic country with a relatively free press" (1999, 7-8).

or avoid all of these problems, but it is a productive exercise to explore both the practices and the institutional place-ness of libraries as contributing to Jacobs' everyday democratic life.

### Capabilities and Libraries

There has been only a small amount of work done on libraries and capabilities, even if we include related areas such as access to technologies and information rights (see Hill 2011; Loh 2015; Britz et al. 2013; Dadlani 2016). Clearly the capabilities approach is compelling in its approach to poverty and different abilities, that is where it has been theoretically and practically explored and applied the most, including in libraries (Hill 2011). Its social and collective applications to institutions and processes that are not resource challenged are less-developed: "On the theoretical level, the capability[ies] approach does account for social relations and the constraints and opportunities of societal structures on institutions on individuals," but the thinking and theorizing on those processes are in need of further development (Robeyns 2005, 108; 2016a, 399). The most relevant work for our purposes here has been on education. Like investments in educational systems and structures, the purpose of libraries is not human capital development *per se*. Rather, "While economic prosperity helps people to have wider options and to lead more fulfilling lives, so do more education...and other factors that causally influence the effective freedoms the people actually enjoy" (Sen 2007, 100). The development of human capital and capabilities are closely related, but they have different yardsticks and are not commensurate; at the same time they are both closely linked to political freedoms and rights (Sen 2007; 2005). What libraries "mean for a life that is composed of many different dimensions and sees [them] as a contribution to the development of the kind of person one will become and the types of things one will be able to do" is a deep contribution to capabilities (Robeyns 2016a, 399). We also know that "social conversion factors" (public policies) are important: if there are no libraries, it becomes much more difficult to achieve what a library does for a person (Robeyns 2005, 99; Sen 2005). At the same time Sen (1993b; 2007) notes that successful economies rely on the functioning of institutions (political and social) to promote and sustain them (and both support capabilities), and that expanding capabilities in turn often brings about political and social change. Finally, the

capabilities approach does not choose our collective political and social ends for us, but it does imply a vigorous Habermasian political discourse to sort out our ends and the justice of collective means to them (Sen 2009; DeCesare 2014). This of course places libraries squarely (again) in the midst of the public sphere (Buschman 2003), and it strongly suggests alternative evaluative measures (to return-on-investment) of what libraries are doing and how they affect the lives of the people they serve.

Jacobs' analysis suggests both a different variant within the capabilities approach and a measure of its success. Though capabilities are easily cast as individualistic, Sen also quite clearly points to broader social goals:

- The capability "to participate in public life" (2004, 78) as well as what "societal cohesion and the helpfulness of the community" enables in terms of capabilities (2005, 154) are also given primacy in Jacobs' account of the quality of democratic life.
- The capabilities approach enables a more subtle assessment of individual well-being and its relationship to social arrangements, including through public functions like education and good quality libraries (2004, 78; Robeyns 2005). This has clear affinities to Jacobs' democratic self-government and the variety of uses and persons in a place.
- Capitalism has not been attuned to these factors, but private economic success (and hence the actions that lead to it) are actually matters of *public* good and a source of common benefit (1993b). In other words, the capabilities approach effaces the complete separation of private property rights, choice, and social/public matters. Jacobs' work stands as an exemplar of modern community as challenge to the economic vision of social goods or private property rights.
- That "social conditions and the priorities they suggest may vary" (2004, 79) is highly germane to our economically, socially, and politically fractured society (Buschman forthcoming) and the societal infrastructure of Jacobs' healthy democratic self-government.
- And finally, these considerations are in no way of a lesser order of rationality, or importance, or are answered or superseded by economic reasoning (1977).

We will take as given Jacobs' design principles in terms of the location of libraries in communities and on campus, diversity of uses and traffic, and that the library will embrace those factors, but part of what libraries do is to

increase the functionings of democratic self-governance as a healthy part (in Jacobs' sense) of communities. The capabilities approach suggests (strongly) that we find ways to describe and account for those factors that enable such progress. That is the connection Jacobs makes: she describes the interplay of communal and personal health (a social functioning enabled by capabilities) that libraries can be vital to. In other words, Jacobs gives us the beginning of a metric to describe the democratic effects of libraries.

### Libraries and Capabilities: Fleshing Out Jacobs and Sen

Sen writes that "There is...a close connection with [the 18th century's] deep interest in enriching societal statistics, and with [a] commitment to the necessity of continuing public discussion, since they all help to advance the use of more information in the procedures of public choice and in the exploration of social justice" (2009, 94). This is deeply implicated in what we invest in as a public and a polity:

[T]he importan[t] distinction on which the capability approach focuses [is this]: *can the person actually do these things or not?*...It is this distinction that the capability approach tries to capture, and it is a momentous distinction to acknowledge in general and to be recognized in the making of public policy in particular...[W]ithout [it we are] steer[ed] towards the view that instituting social security provisions, or having a supportive society, cannot make any difference to anyone's freedom...[T]hat would be a huge lacuna...For example, individual parents may not be able to set up their own school for their children, and may be dependent on public policy, which may be determined by a variety of influences, such as national or local politics. And yet the establishment of a school in that region can be sensibly seen as increasing the freedom of the children to be educated. To deny this would seem to miss...an important way of thinking about freedom that has both reason and practice behind it. This case contrasts sharply with a case in which there are no school in the region and no freedom to receive school education. [O]n this the capability approach concentrates, even though in neither case can the person bring about her own schooling independently of the support of the state or support from others. (Sen 2009, 307-308)

Simply add the word/concept of library/library use alongside that of school/schooling in the quote above and the capabilities approach provides a both compelling *reason for the field* and situates its work<sup>10</sup>.

The subject of this article is not what libraries *should* do in and for democratic societies, but rather theoretically situating and explaining what libraries actually do for them already that exists, but is not necessarily well understood as such. Once this perspective—Jacobs' everyday democratic self-government viewed through the lens of capabilities—is adopted, there is a very respectable amount of research extant in LIS scholarship that documents and studies these practices. Libraries have been documented as:

- a locus and embodiment of African American community in a Carnegie library in the segregated South (Hersberger, Sua, and Murray 2006);
- places of social caring: "supportive mutuality in the information search and use process in the library" (Harris 2009, 176);
- academic library places and spaces that are "about student learning and the quality and nature of the community in which students...learn [and] most fundamentally about the learning behaviors that give life to the educational missions of the institutions that bring us together physically," and not about "students as information consumers or...of instructional services" (Bennett 2007, 176; Given 2007);
- "community resources" staying open in contemporary urban settings while riven by racial strife over police brutality: "libraries are...[T]hey are anchors in so many communities...the only resource" (Hayden in Cottrell 2015);
- a safe space for the young—LGBTQ youth (Rothbauer 2006) or the 10 year old Barack Obama upon returning to the US from Indonesia (Wiegand 2015b)—to explore identity, commonality and difference;

10. There are important distinctions to maintain in deploying the capabilities approach. A library is a means to an end, not an end in itself; its presence is enables a capability to achieve a functioning; a functioning is the achievement—becoming informed or educated or entertained or exploring life-options in a library. And, there will be illimitable variations in how persons can convert the resource of the library into their particular functions/achievements (Robeyns 2016a, 405-407).

- enabling communities of learners (Riedler and Eryaman 2010);
- places of respectful civic dialog, civic engagement and pride (Wiegand 2015a, 259; Curry 2006);
- providing a space for women to appropriate for their purposes and needs: “When inhabited by women jointly engaged...the public space of the [library] program room becomes a site...for the enactment of women’s identities and the performance of caring (McKenzie, Prigoda, Clement, and McKechnie 2006, 126);
- a place of individual possibility: “mixing a collective desire to build...community with...goals generated by personal ambition and [the] will to acquire power and wealth” (Wiegand 2015a, 270);
- sites of community in general, functioning as “public mediation sites for determining local...values” while at the same time “stimulat[ing] the dynamism of diverse communities by both addressing and celebrating their diversity [and] promoting a sense of belonging” (Wiegand 2015a, 266-267, *passim*);
- a public third place “offering...novelty, perspective,...tonic, and friendship [and] in addition,...a societal good in terms of its political role, habit of association, recreational spirit and importance” as a public domain for sharing and enjoyment (Fisher, Saxton, Edwards, Mai 2007, 152; Leckie and Hopkins 2002); and
- a scholarly redoubt conducive to scholarship, “a quality that is linked to the value of library space” in itself, reflecting a “passionate belie[f] in the power of place” (Antell and Engel 2007, 174-175).

It is perhaps easier to see Jacobs and Sen in the *absence* of these—of functionings in Sen’s capabilities approach and in everyday democratic self-governance in Jacobs’ terminology—as social deficits harmful to democratic society: “diminish[e] social interaction [and] diversity...because strangers of differing ages, classes, genders, and religions have less opportunity to mingle in physical space” that is damaging to “inclusivity and community; spatial access and proximity; and a high degree of user control” (Leckie and Hopkins 2002, 331, 328-329). At the core is what it means to explore and learn and what learning means as a *social and political phenomenon*—which is the often unacknowledged core of LIS and its institutions<sup>11</sup>. Jacobs

11. Webster (2006) notes that “a genuine sense of community is not a matter of...restricted communication, since it involves connecting with whole people rather than with the

helps us locate the individual’s actions within social results healthy to society and democracy—and what library places do for them. Sen helps us to locate those capabilities as meaningful and rightful goals of policy in the name of equality, in and through a democracy.

### Conclusion: Toward a Yardstick For Libraries

There are acknowledged difficulties in this approach: 1) famously, the lack of a baseline list of capabilities seriously hinders empirically describing success; 2) the open inclusiveness of its application also produces the same challenge; and 3) some capabilities are simply hard to measure. It is “much more difficult to assess people’s ability to have self-esteem, than their ability to write and read” along with other “nonmaterial aspects of people’s well-being” (Comim in Chisa and Hopkins 2014, 54); the yardsticks are thus better suited to study of some of the classic poverty-addressing capabilities listed earlier since social- and policy-level research “can [only] focus on the analysis of people’s ability to choose what to do or be” (Chisa and Hopkins 2014, 54). For academic libraries “currently, societal contributions are not a part of institutional ranking schemes” and their “contributions to society have not been widely identified or researched”; for public libraries “outcomes can be more challenging to assess than calculating data on economic impacts [because of] the complexity of social impacts and the difficulty demonstrating that libraries, and not some other entity, caused the impact to occur” (Oakleaf 2010, 56, 80). Librarians and administrators often fall back on an improvised admixture of utilitarian and capabilities approaches in response to their ideals operating in fluid and challenging circumstances (Dadlani 2016). Are we at a dead end then, with libraries vaguely described as a good, which is most often interpreted by boards and administrators as merely feel-good?<sup>12</sup>

Sen’s (2009) formulation provides a key to addressing that question: if social realizations are assessed in terms of capabilities...rather than in terms of their utilities or happiness...then some very significant departures are brought about. First, human lives are...seen inclusively, taking note of the substantive

specific ‘bits’...that can easily be disposed of when the interest wanes...Such superficial, non-disturbing and self-centred links do not merit the term...that...involves encountering others in real places and real times” (106-107).

12. Webster (2006, 176-182, 198-202) outlines this challenge well.

freedoms that people enjoy, rather than ignoring everything other than the pleasures or utilities they end up having...[S]econd...it makes us accountable for what we do (19).

Much of the new value-of-libraries literature (Oakleaf 2010, Neal 2011) is an honest attempt to both provide nuanced answers to questions arising from a neoliberal fiscal oversight environment, and to move away from traditional metrics (size, usage) in so doing. But like the research on libraries and social capital (Johnson 2015, Buschman and Warner 2016), it can display a dual nature, describing both real social capabilities and their instrumental (“capital”) side. Sen and Jacobs suggest that the questions must be flipped: without libraries, what capabilities are precluded? The question is more obvious in education: do MOOCs engender what campus communities and their libraries do? Can they be a substitute for primary and secondary schools? But the same questions can be asked about the internet and public libraries and cheap access to books via online sellers. They’re free (or inexpensive), hence they *must* provide utility and pleasure, but people over and over reaffirm the value and desirability of libraries through use (Horrigan 2016; Axiell 2017).

We may be abandoning some of our usage data a bit too soon. We need to plumb the depth of what that usage means rather than exclusively focus on a search for outcomes which tend to be individual and exceptional—“a useless frame when you are concerned with the majority” (LeBlanc 2014). Time and again, when fundamentally challenged—recently that the field was radically shrinking and “dying”—the LIS field responds with ... usage data: “Visit a library in your community,” urged [American Library Association President James] Neal. “You’ll be amazed by the energy and the innovation, and by the extraordinary growth in use of collections, services, programs and staff expertise.” He added that visits to public libraries remained stable from 2007 to 2015 at 1.4 billion, and said that the use of electronic resources like ebooks, streaming services and archival databases “is exploding.” Anne R. Kenney, interim executive of the Association of Research Libraries, [said] that...visits to ARL libraries remained high at 240 million in 2016 [and] Roger Schonfeld, director of Ithaca S&R’s libraries and scholarly communication program, said that while libraries and the role of librarians are changing, they

still play a vital role. “I’ve spent time in dozens of academic libraries and I don’t see any evidence that they’re dying...” He added that public libraries have been “transformed” into “vibrant centers for community engagement” in recent years, despite reports of funding crises. (McKenzie 2018)

Utilitarianism (ironically enough) provides us with a good reason for this fallback: the fact that people value and choose to use them is evidence enough that libraries are desirable in some way (Mill 2002, 106).

Sen asks us to flip the question: why are people using libraries when there is so much social and media weight behind the storyline of the dying institution? There is a Jacobsean everydayness to the quality of community and campus life that a library is a core part of that is captured by how we have actually long been living in a highly mobile (and often alienating) society:

In his classic 1949 essay ‘Here Is New York,’ E. B. White described the city as ‘a composite of tens of thousands of tiny neighborhood units,’ each ‘virtually self-sufficient’ with shops that met most residents’ basic needs, from groceries to shoes, from newspapers to haircuts. Every neighborhood was so complete, White wrote, ‘that many a New Yorker spends a lifetime within the confines of an area smaller than a country village’ (Editorial Board 2017).

Libraries certainly have an educational-research-informing-citizenship role, but modern society needs the places (and spaces) of libraries. Physically and digitally shutter them in one’s community or campus for a given October and then let the board or administration handle the outcry. Jacobs and Sen move us toward capturing why that would be such a bad idea. We must put our shoulder to that theoretical and research task to further document and argue why.

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## **Volume Four: Call for Submissions**

### **Proposal Deadline: November 1, 2018**

We seek submissions from both researchers and practitioners, that fall into one of three submission categories:

- Opinions/First Drafts – Editorial in nature; the first draft of an idea or argument.
- White Papers – Longer form discussions that may include research.
- Peer Reviewed – Long form articles that include original research and arguments, and are submitted for review by our Editorial Board and/or external reviewers.

## **Submission Guidelines**

### **Who Can Write for The Political Librarian?**

We want to bring in a variety of perspectives to the journal and do not limit our contributors to just those working in the field of library and information science. We seek submissions from researchers, practitioners, community members, or others dedicated to furthering the discussion, promoting research, and helping to re-envision tax policy and public policy on the extremely local level.

### **Submission Categories:**

- Opinions/First Draft – Editorial in nature; the first draft of an idea or argument (1000-2000 words).
- White Papers – Longer form discussions that may include research (2000-5000 words).
- Peer Reviewed – Long form articles that include original research and arguments, and are submitted for peer-review by our Editorial Board and invited reviewers. (2000-12,000 words).

### **Article Proposals:**

If you want to propose an article for The Political Librarian, please submit the following:

1. Article abstract: a paragraph of no more than 250 words. Be sure to include what category of article that you're writing.
2. Attach resume/CV or a link to an online version.
3. Writing sample: this can be a fully completed article, blog post, essay, etc. Our goal is to see your style and ability not judge where the writing comes from.

### **Completed Works:**

Completed submissions should include:

1. Article abstract: a paragraph of no more than 250 words. Be sure to include what category of article that you're writing.
2. Attach resume/CV or a link to an online version.
3. Full text of the submission.

### **Submission Format**

Accepted submission formats are Word documents (doc, docx), rich text or text files (rtf, txt). Please do not send PDFs of article submissions. This hinders the editorial process, and you will have to resubmit.

## Style Guide

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- Be professional: While we encourage our writers to reflect their own writing style and voice in their pieces, we also require that articles are professional in nature and tone. We are creating a new kind of journal and bringing new kinds of discussions to the forefront, and we want our articles to reflect well on that mission.
- Be Inclusive: The world is a dynamic and varied place and we at the Political Librarian believe in creating and inclusive environment for writers and readers. Your language should reflect this dedication to inclusivity.
- Be Critical: The Political Librarian wishes to foster debates and critical discussions. That said we want to foster well-reasoned and supported arguments. Your piece should stand up to critical examination by our editors and readers.
- Be Clear: Be sure your topic is relevant and well thought out. Use examples and/or evidence to support your claim along. Use clear and concise language that is professional but not so full of jargon that it is not accessible.
- Cite Your Sources: If you are citing the work of others you must cite them. All articles should include a works cited list formatted using guidelines. In-text citations need not follow APA to the letter, but they should be consistent throughout the piece, hyperlinks are encouraged. If you are using a direction quotation you must list the author's name in addition to any other relevant links or source titles that are appropriate to the piece.

### Formatting/Punctuation/Grammar

- Double-spaced lines.
- 12pt standard font (Times, Times New Roman, Calibri, etc).
- Single space between sentences.
- Use the Oxford comma.
- Spell out acronyms the first time they are used.
- Submission formats: doc, docx, rtf, txt. Please do not send PDFs of article proposals/submissions.
- Use proper punctuation and grammar.
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