THE ADVOCATE *for Maryland Libraries*

Top Trends Impacting the Future of Public Libraries

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Here is a quick snapshot of five trends impacting public libraries. Please take a moment to place these trends in the context of your own environment. Can you identify examples of how these trends are at work in your library?

Trend #1: Public libraries are a powerful partner and often a community's lead organizer of family literacy initiatives. Recognizing that young children spend only a fraction of their time at the library, many public libraries are actively working with other community partners to ensure parents and caregivers are developing skills they need to help children develop early literacy skills. The [Public Library Association](#) and [Association for Library Service to Children](#) have an initiative called [Every Child Ready to Read](#) (ECRR) that is serving as the foundation for a family literacy curriculum at many libraries. ECRR teaches strategies for developing pre-reading skills within the framework of the five early literacy practices of singing, talking, reading, writing, and playing.

Trend #2: Libraries have embraced STEM initiatives through creative programming and classes. Digital media labs and maker spaces help to close the digital divide by providing equal access to innovative technologies, devices, and software to people from diverse backgrounds across our communities and across the socio-economic spectrum. Individuals develop new skills as they engage with technology to create their own movies, music, tools, and items of artistic expression.

Trend #3: Libraries have long been on the forefront of showing the economic value of shared resources. In a much broader way we have seen the growth of what has come to be known as the "sharing economy," where people have shown increased interest in borrowing cars, apartments, and other resources for a limited period time. Many years ago public libraries recognized this emerging trend by expanded their circulating collections beyond books to include audio and video formats. Some libraries began purchasing educational toys that could be taken home or to a daycare. An excellent early example is [Harford County Public Library's (HCPL) Learning and Sharing Collection](#), which launched in the 1970s. HCPL now offers Little Leapers and LEAP kits (STEM kits in a box) as well as American Girl dolls and superhero action figures, which allow children to combine reading with play. Some libraries, such as [Calvert Library](#), offer e-readers and tablet computers for check-out. Other libraries across the U.S. are now circulating items as diverse as cake pans, tools, and seeds.

Trend #4: Our customers expect that materials and services will be available electronically and on demand. Meanwhile, libraries are facing the reality that the provision of physical material (i.e. print books) is also expected by a substantial number of people who prefer or need these formats. Libraries continue to work both individually, and in coordination, with e-content providers to push for the development of fair models for lending and licensing of e-books, e-journals, and other digital content. One example is [ALA's Digital Content Working Group](#). Public libraries have recognized they need to provide support for individuals who are making the migration to digital by providing classes and training. Staff are responsible for maintaining and updating their skills, and their libraries need to further ensure that staff have the skills they need by supporting learning through formal training, courses, and conferences.

Trend #5: Libraries are experiencing increased competition for limited funds. The competition has increased the importance of library advocacy initiatives, whereby the library builds and sustains effective communication and

meaningful relationships with all of its stakeholders—specifically representatives of local and state governments. The library's leadership team, staff and volunteers all play a part in ensuring that a clear message about what the library is accomplishing is conveyed. Public libraries have also recognized the importance of seeking support from their Friends groups in the context of both advocacy and financial support for branch initiatives. Many Maryland public libraries have also realized the benefit of having a Library Foundation that can raise financial support from non-traditional sources to support high-profile programs and services, such as summer reading, early literacy initiatives, and maker spaces.

Each library is different and must determine the best way to address its own community's needs. Review your library's strategic plan, talk with your library's leadership team, and ask how you can support initiatives that directly address these trends. Through a strong awareness of the larger trends impacting our institutions, we can be best prepared to confront them with innovative solutions that address the needs of our communities.

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Digging Deeper: Reports and Resources to Better Understand Trends

Shaping Public Library Service

Aspen Institute: Rising to the Challenge: Re-envisioning Public Libraries
http://csreports.aspeninstitute.org/Dialogue-on-Public-Libraries/2014/report
This report provides a vision for the future of public libraries and strategies for successful change.

Center for the Future of Libraries: Trends
http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends
A look at over 20 varied trends that are impacting libraries and a concise explanation of why each matters.

Pew Research Center: From Distant Admirers to Library Lovers–and beyond: A typology of public library engagement in America
http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/03/13/library-engagement-typology
An in-depth look at how public libraries are perceived, how they are valued, and how people rely on them.

The Citizen
http://www.citizensformarylandlibraries.org/newsletter.asp
The Citizen is CML's bi-annual newsletter. Browse the archives to learn about new services and facilities across Maryland libraries.