

THE LIBRARY AS PEOPLE

The library as people reflects the shift away from building collections to building human capital, relationships and knowledge networks in the community. People are at the center of the library's mission to inspire and cultivate learning, advance knowledge and nurture and strengthen communities. While there are thousands of stories in the public library, the ones that matter most come with the people who use the library.

The public library comes alive when it is teeming with people from all walks of life:

- Parents reading with their children in colorful, comfortable chairs;
- Teens learning how to write code for a new video game in a noisy learning lab;
- Students meeting in a library classroom for group discussion as part of an online high school course;
- Job seekers working on résumés in career centers, with guidance from a business librarian;
- Entrepreneurs preparing presentations in co-working spaces, using the library-provided Wi-Fi and creating new products in maker spaces;
- Immigrants learning English in classes and improving their job-seeking skills with the help of community mentors;
- Retirees using new online tools to create digital scrapbooks for their grandchildren;
- Authors publishing books on new library publishing platforms.

In this people-driven environment, skilled librarians help people navigate new technology, manage vast amounts of data and meet their information needs. With the resources and know-how to deliver individualized learning and social experiences, the public library delivers a high-touch participatory experience to support personal goals. Library personnel anticipate individual and community needs and connect people to available resources, both locally and globally.



"We like books, but we like people more."
Felton Thomas, Director, Cleveland Public Library

As the library's roles change and expand, library staff have to refine and broaden their skills to meet new needs and define the library's continuing value to the community. They serve many roles, as coaches, mentors, facilitators and teachers more than as sources of information. Measuring outcomes is more important than measuring outputs. An intelligent community, not large circulation numbers, is the primary library goal.

A common descriptor given to librarians in the new information marketplace is "guides," but there is simply too much information for that to be a realistic goal. The better response is to talk of librarians as "curators" for their communities, and communities themselves as curators. The skill set libraries need is domain expertise, and for that libraries need to draw on the people in their communities to help design what Beth Jefferson, CEO of Bibliocommons, calls "collaborative filters" designed with the public interest in mind. Commercial search engines are great, said Jefferson, but "their algorithms are designed with a for-profit point of view. Libraries are in a different business. Curation in the public interest is distinctly missing [from commercial search engines]." Public libraries serve the *public's* interests.