



What industry leaders predict about the future of libraries

New research and survey results from over 400 library leaders



The challenges
that the world
faces, libraries
face with the
world.



Elif Tinaztepe

Partner at Schmidt Hammer Lassen Architects

Foreword

FIRST AND FOREMOST, libraries have always supported their communities — regardless of how their role has evolved over time. As communities change, so too do the institutions that serve them. Librarians are therefore tasked with constantly adapting their services, policies and even design to meet these developments in real-time. With this need to anticipate and respond to short- and long-term trends, it's important to review the movements and developments that are shaping the future of libraries.

We first explored this in 2019, with our inaugural Future of Libraries report. In light of the rapid changes we've seen in the past few years, particularly the impacts of COVID-19 on communities, local institutions and the ways we work, we're revisiting this theme. We set out to see what has changed since then, what remains consistent and what lies ahead for library teams and beyond.

To do so, we interviewed six experts chosen for their diverse backgrounds and experiences within the library field. We asked each person to share his or her insights about what's to come for libraries in the future — challenges they may face, new developments coming and exciting opportunities.

This report will explore the six main themes that emerged from these conversations, highlighting important areas of focus for libraries in years to come.

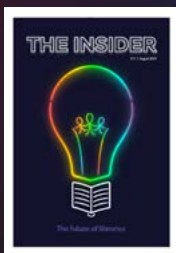
We cross-referenced these insights with a survey of over 400 library professionals around the world, asking them to respond to these topics, elaborate on how they're impacted by these challenges and share the strategies they're implementing to tackle them.



Kelly Banks
Senior Director of Libraries, PressReader

About Kelly Banks

Kelly Banks is the Senior Director of the Libraries and Institutions sales team with PressReader. She believes that libraries play an essential role in fostering literacy and learning in our communities, and shares insights on media literacy and the effects of COVID-19 on the industry. When not leading the growing team of passionate sales professionals, Kelly can be found outdoors with her young daughter or listening to the latest audiobook from her local library. One of PressReader's many travel magazines can be found in her download list at any given time.



Read The Insider:
Future of Libraries
2019 report [here](#).

Libraries are an indispensable part of our social infrastructure. With the popularization of the internet, they are forced to reinvent themselves, moving from being an institution or repository, to an experience rich in knowledge and humanity. In this issue we discuss how some libraries have rewritten themselves to serve a new generation of patrons.

Publisher's note: This edition of The Future of Libraries Report was originally published in 2022 and was updated in October 2024.

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Meet the experts



Keith Thong
President, Malaysian
Booksellers Association
Malaysia



Elif Tinaztepe
Partner, Schmidt Hammer
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Juanita Thacker
Director, Marketing
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USA



Kayla Lar-Son
Indigenous Programs
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Shamichael Hallman
Senior Library Manager,
Memphis Public Libraries
USA



António Torres
CEO, WECUL
Consulting Agency
Portugal

Survey methodology

We polled library teams around the world with a 16-question multiple choice survey about their experiences related to the themes covered in this report. The findings we've consolidated were gleaned from 434 worldwide responses.

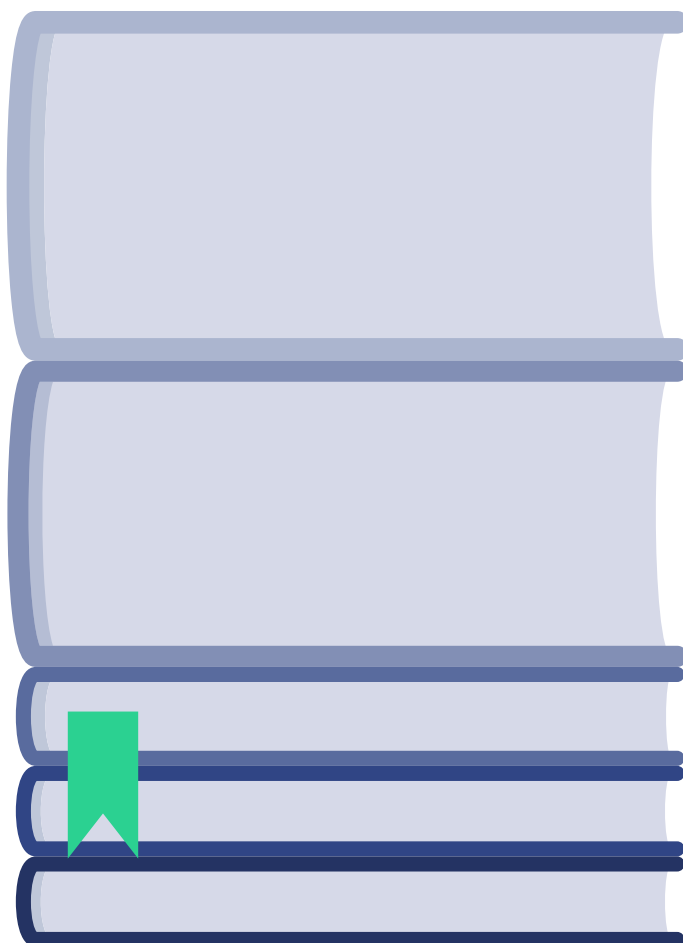
Our respondents come from:

**69**

Countries

**6**

Continents

**40%**

Public libraries

34%

Academic libraries

10%

K-12 libraries

9%

Corporate libraries

7%

Government libraries



ACCESSIBILITY & INCLUSIVITY

Libraries will continue to develop into accessible, inclusive learning centers.

LIBRARIES HAVE TRANSFORMED from content depositories to inclusive learning centers for their communities by diversifying the use of their spaces — a trend we first explored in 2019. Today, the experts we spoke with reiterated the importance of accessibility as a core part of this effort. Libraries of the future need design without barriers to welcome diverse, multigenerational communities. These elements can be physical (wider aisles, lower tables, adjustable seating) or incorporated into programming, such as offering text-to-speech screen readers, or closed captioning or ASL translation during events.

Reading should be accessible to everyone ↘

Give your patrons a reading experience that meets government-mandated accessibility standards (WCAG 2.1.), with audio, tab navigation, color contrast, font size control and more.

Learn more about PressReader Accessibility [here](#).

To achieve this, library teams need to take a human-centered approach to design. “The architectural design of the building [is important], but also how we design the day-to-day happenings within it — the programs, the activities,” says Shamichael Hallman. “Even the friendliness of the staff. All of those things fall into design.” Human-centric design also empowers the individual. “One of the things that we really need is an approach where patrons will be given plenty of choices on how they would like to access content, or participate in an event or webinar for that matter,” says Keith Thong.

Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are critical components of this work. “Many libraries are responding to [the value placed on EDI today], creating panels and revisiting strategic plans,” says Hallman. “A risk is that this is just a moment. As we get past the pandemic, things open back up and we get back to normal, we lose that moment. It would be devastating for libraries to not take this time to embed those newly discovered principles.”

Juanita Thacker echoes the urgency of making real change within library institutions. “Instead of giving lip service to EDI initiatives, do the hard work. That means taking stock of the ways that you perpetuate anti-Blackness and have your managers follow suit,” she says. “Communicate with clear purpose and provide meaningful opportunities to center the

voices of all BIPOC employees. Build the efforts to be equitable and inclusive into library staff performance management plans. It means nothing to say you are anti-racist or support BIPOC people, it’s a completely different thing when you give up some of your power putting action behind the rhetoric...I hope EDI-centered design is more than a moment and becomes a bastion of librarianship.”



Community-led design in Memphis, Tennessee

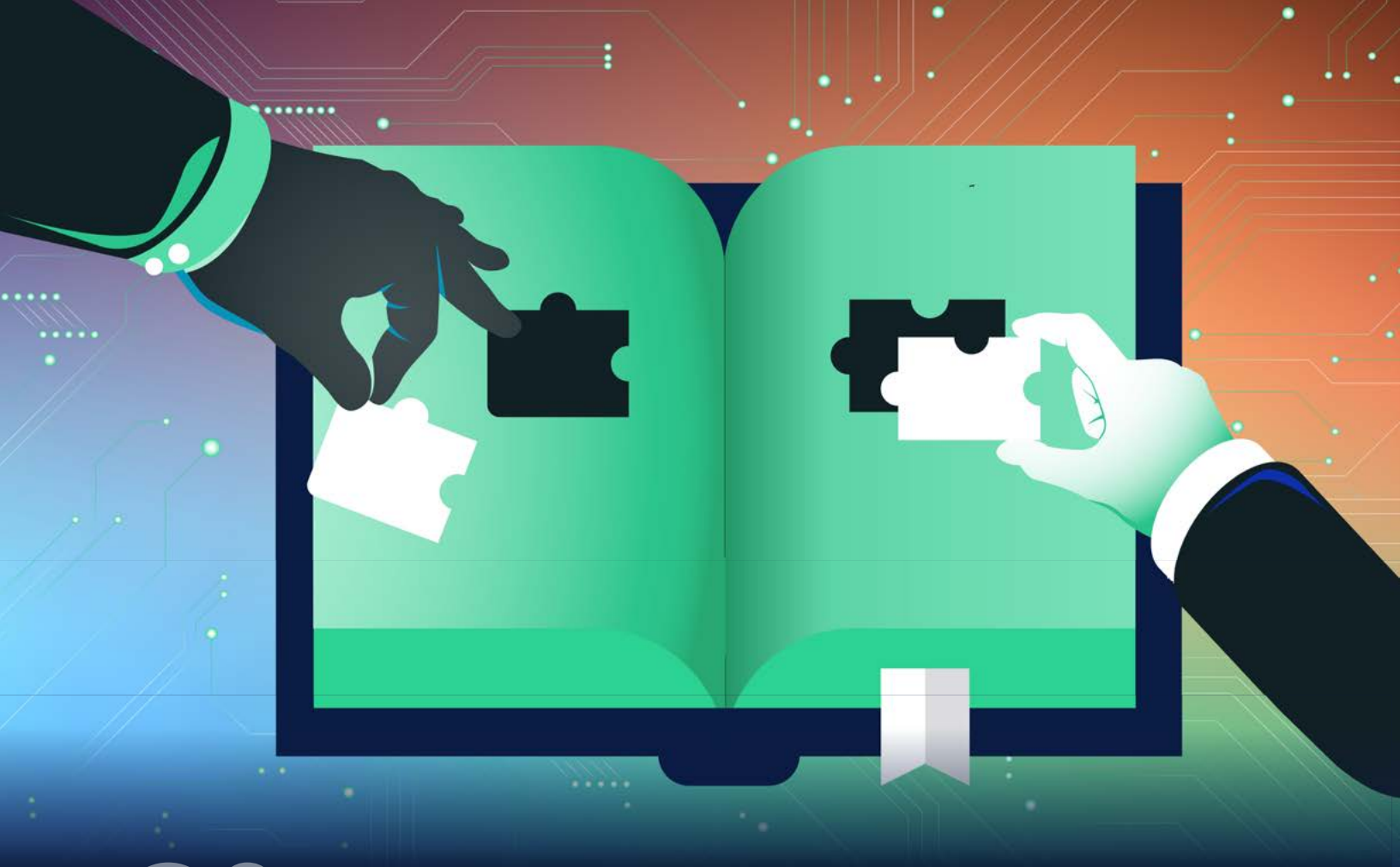
“As we think about what it means for libraries to be rooted in equity and inclusion, I think a huge part of that requires libraries to reorient,” says Hallman. “Considering the ways they think about the community, the ways they serve the community right.”

As part of the redesign of MPL’s Cossitt branch, Hallman and his team led a three-month community engagement initiative focused on the arts community. They spoke with over 100 local artists to understand how to best redesign a 2,500-square-foot performance space. They learned that there were very few places in the city where artists felt they could be their authentic selves, so the library team worked closely with them to build an inclusive, accessible space that truly met their needs.

“Just with this small performance space in one library, we created a model built on aid that would not only save artists, but also residents, from ticket costs. This model has the capacity to create a significant economic impact.”



Cossitt Library
Memphis, Tennessee, USA



O2

SHARED CULTURAL & INTELLECTUAL PRESERVATION

Libraries will place more focus on co-ownership with their communities when preserving cultural and intellectual history

"LIBRARIES WERE AND ARE THE GUARANTOR of the preservation of our intellectual heritage," says António Torres. In a library, we find, access and share the physical books of our literary and scientific production. The new digital age and its technologies allow libraries to use digital platforms and tools in an effort to preserve content."

This is one of the most important functions of a library, but the library of the future will find ways to share ownership of these records with its community — an important new theme that emerged from this year's research.

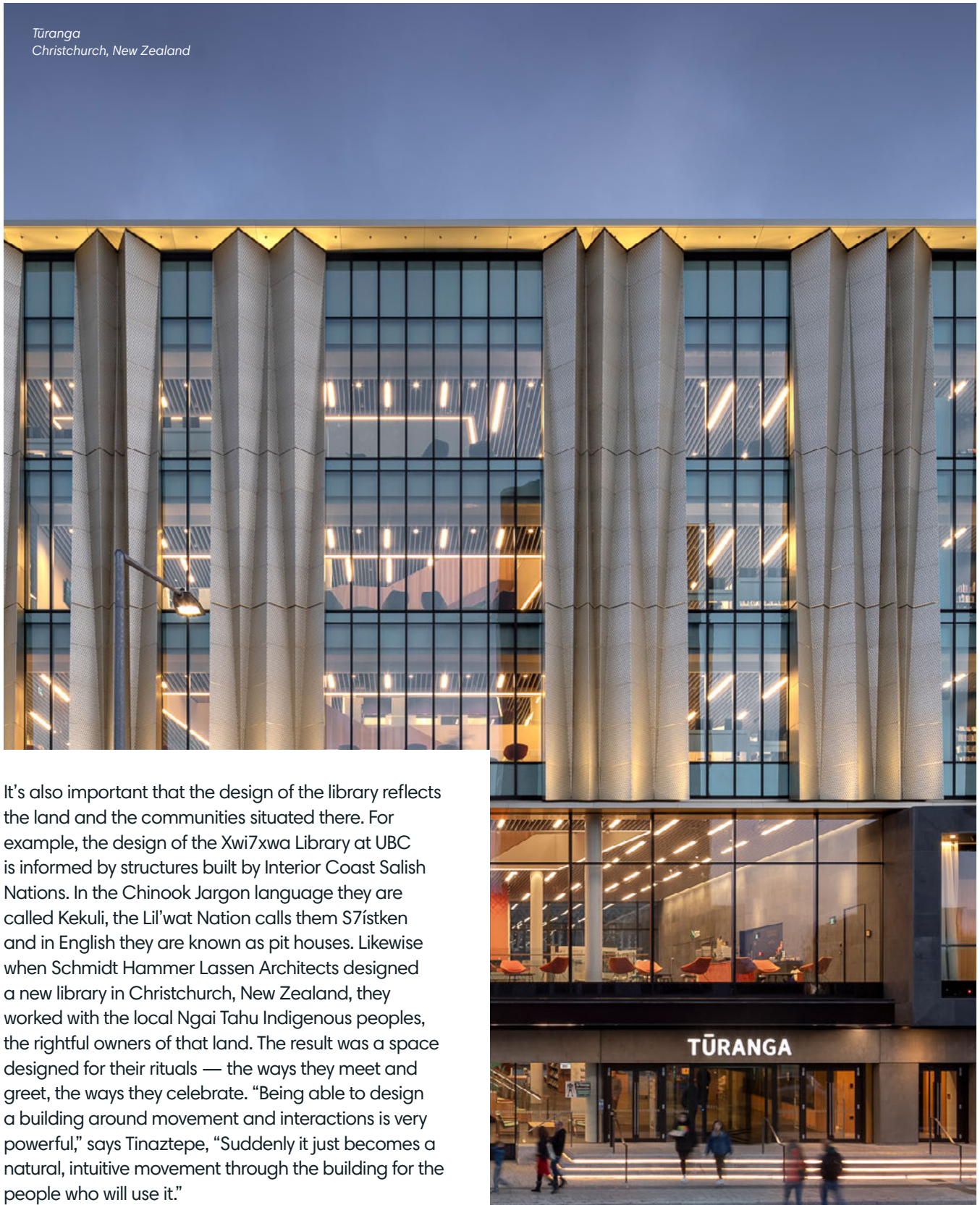
*Uwi7Uwa Library at the University of British Columbia (UBC)
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada*



Kayla Lar-Son outlines how decolonization of the library space achieves this. She focuses on the needs of Indigenous communities when it comes to the conservation, digitization and management of their knowledge — uplifting their voices, letting them make decisions and involving them in how the library can better serve them. This means developing more culturally appropriate metadata and inclusive classification systems, or letting the community determine their own access protocols. “At Uwi7Uwa Library at the University of British Columbia (UBC), we use an adaptation of the Brian Deer Classification System and the First Nations House of Learning subject headings,” she says. “So both the classification systems and the subject headings take into account how communities describe themselves and how they want to be called.

“So many Indigenous communities have very specific protocols for how to access information about them, and a lot of times this is informed by their own worldviews and understandings,” she continues. “So when it comes to us as libraries, we need to be aware of how to facilitate conversations with communities, especially when we’re acting as stewards of sensitive information or stewards of materials that we have gained in our collections over time, without the permission of specific communities that we work with.”

*Tūranga
Christchurch, New Zealand*

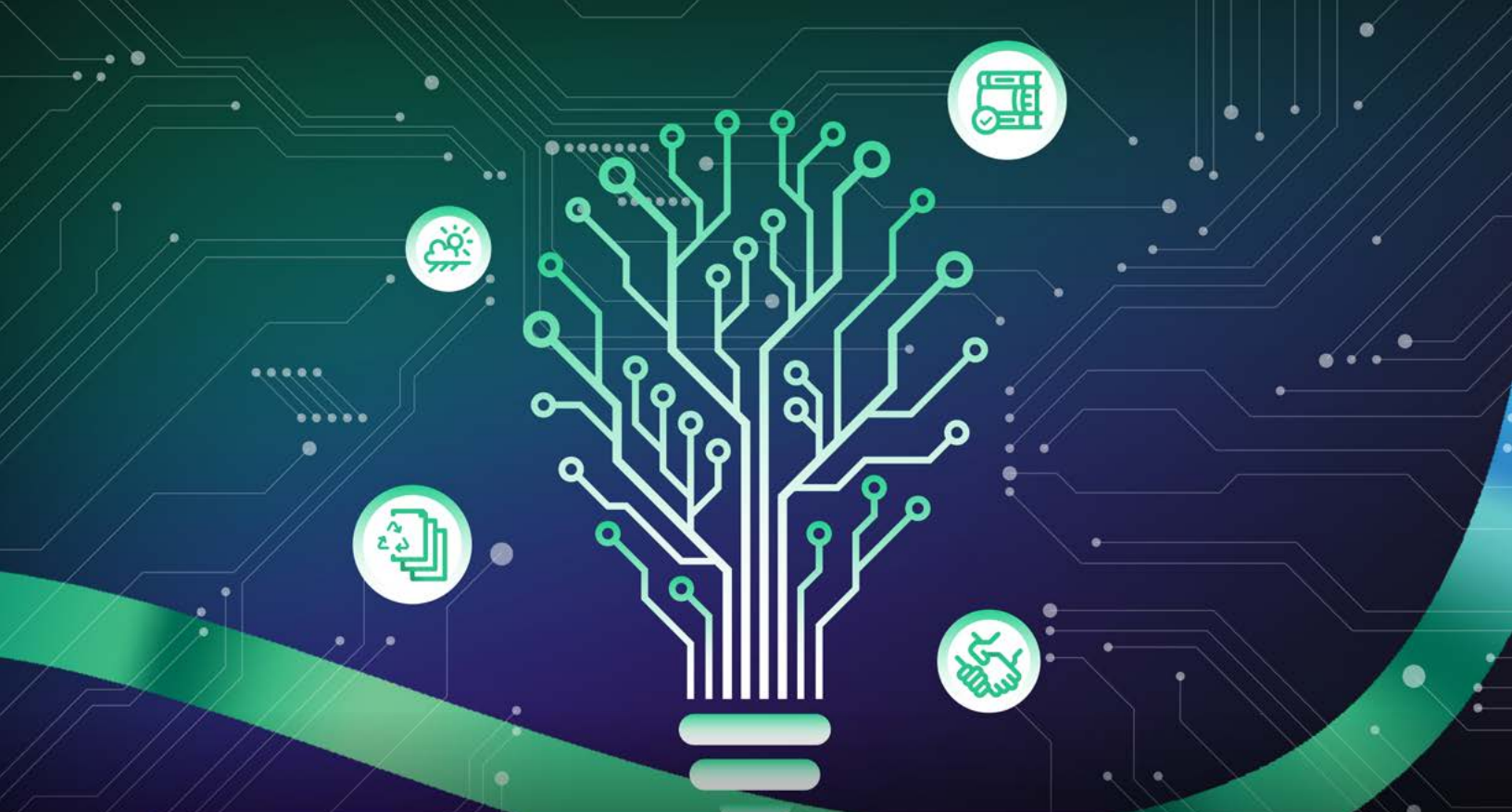


It's also important that the design of the library reflects the land and the communities situated there. For example, the design of the Xwi7xwa Library at UBC is informed by structures built by Interior Coast Salish Nations. In the Chinook Jargon language they are called Kekuli, the Lil'wat Nation calls them S7ístken and in English they are known as pit houses. Likewise when Schmidt Hammer Lassen Architects designed a new library in Christchurch, New Zealand, they worked with the local Ngai Tahu Indigenous peoples, the rightful owners of that land. The result was a space designed for their rituals — the ways they meet and greet, the ways they celebrate. "Being able to design a building around movement and interactions is very powerful," says Tinaztepe, "Suddenly it just becomes a natural, intuitive movement through the building for the people who will use it."

Dive deeper ↘

- **Our interview with Elif Tinaztepe:**
How great library design evolves alongside its community needs
- **More insights from our discussion with Kayla Lar-Son:**
Indigenous library programming helps community members connect with their culture

Tūranga
Christchurch, New Zealand



O3

HOLISTIC SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES

Libraries will emerge as leaders in holistic sustainability

IN 2019, WE FOCUSED on tactics to support the long-term sustainability of the library itself: diversifying revenue streams through creative programs and service offerings. Today, we're looking at sustainability through a broader lens: how libraries of the future will demonstrate that environmental sustainability efforts go hand in hand with social justice, including equality and decolonization, and the general wellbeing of communities.

Successful sustainability initiatives require local tactics, action and coordination. This hyperlocal focus has always been a core strength of libraries. While more and more libraries are aligning their strategies with the UN's sustainability goals, they're also thinking about their triple bottom line: people, prosperity and the planet. The experts we spoke with see the library as a living lab for sustainability efforts, bringing people together to share sustainable practices and learn from each other. This is consistent with our survey findings.

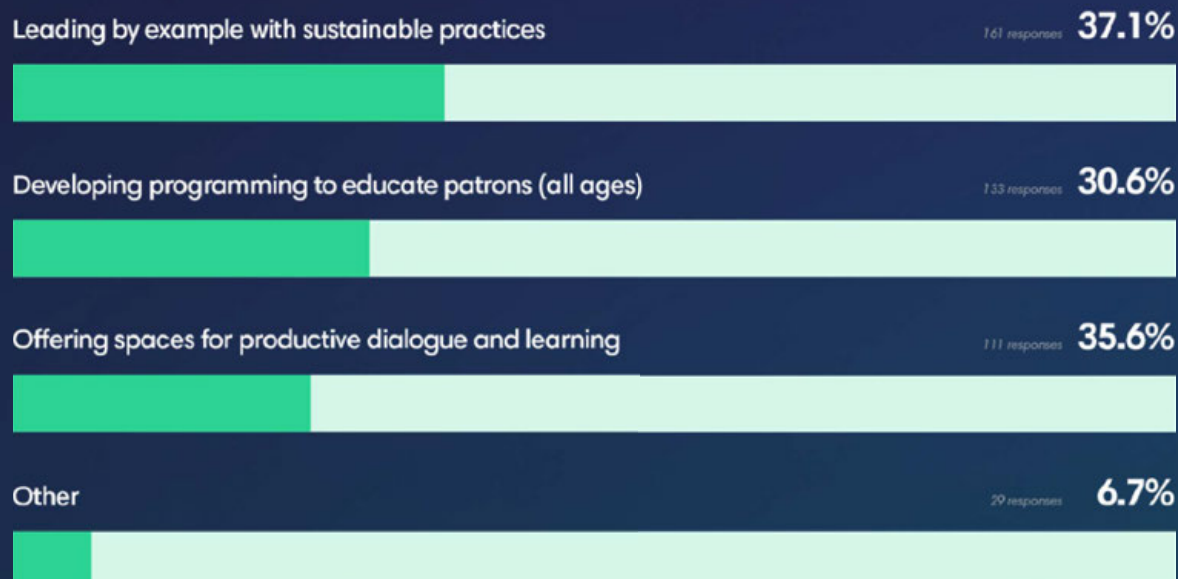
Read more ↘

[Constructing green libraries: Sustainable architecture for a green future](#)



What is the library's primary role in combating climate change

434 out of 434 people answered this question



Other strategies libraries are applying



Collaborating with researchers or city council



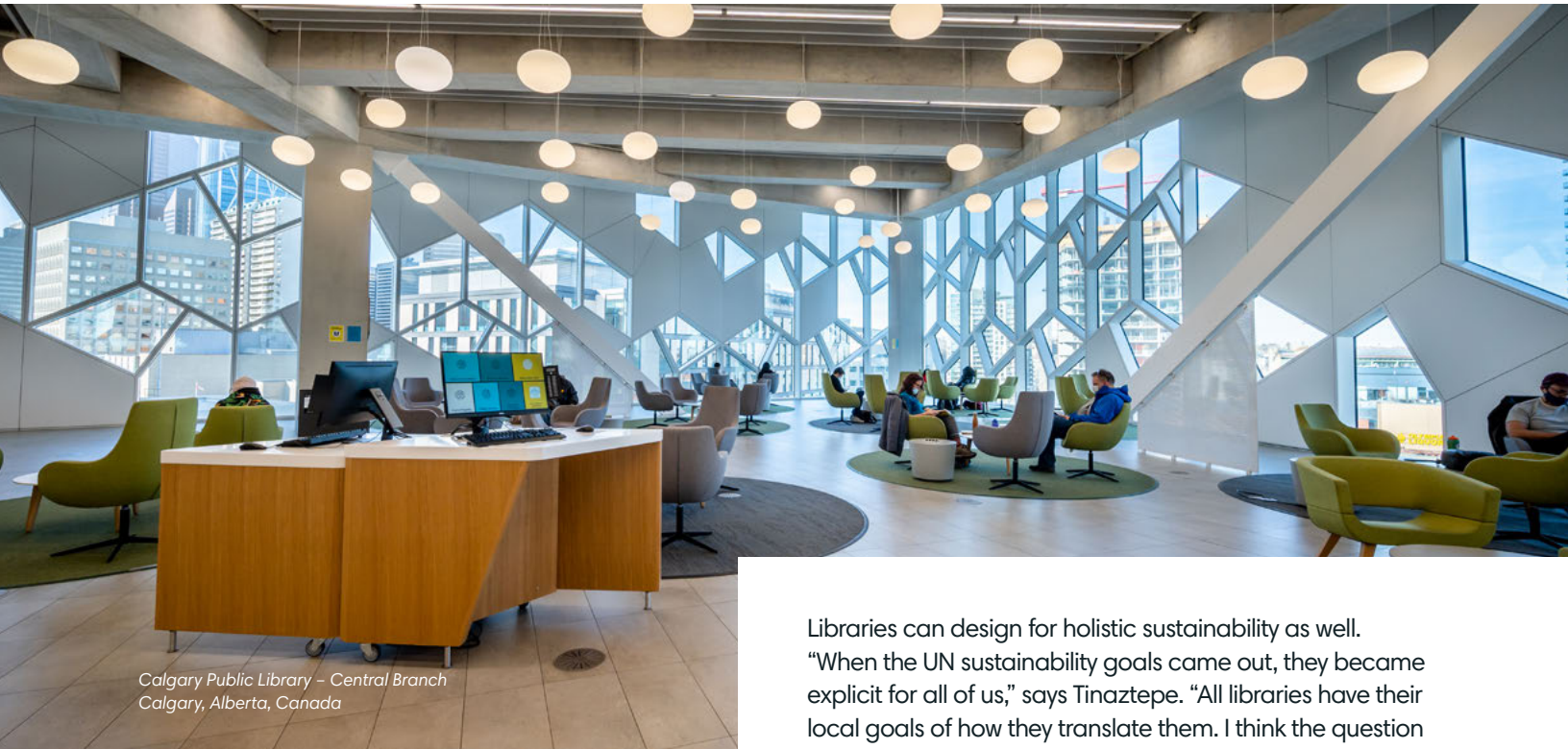
Adding climate change databases and literature to collections



Offering free holds and reducing the number of reference titles to lessen the need for patrons to move around the city



Reducing paper use when possible



Calgary Public Library – Central Branch
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

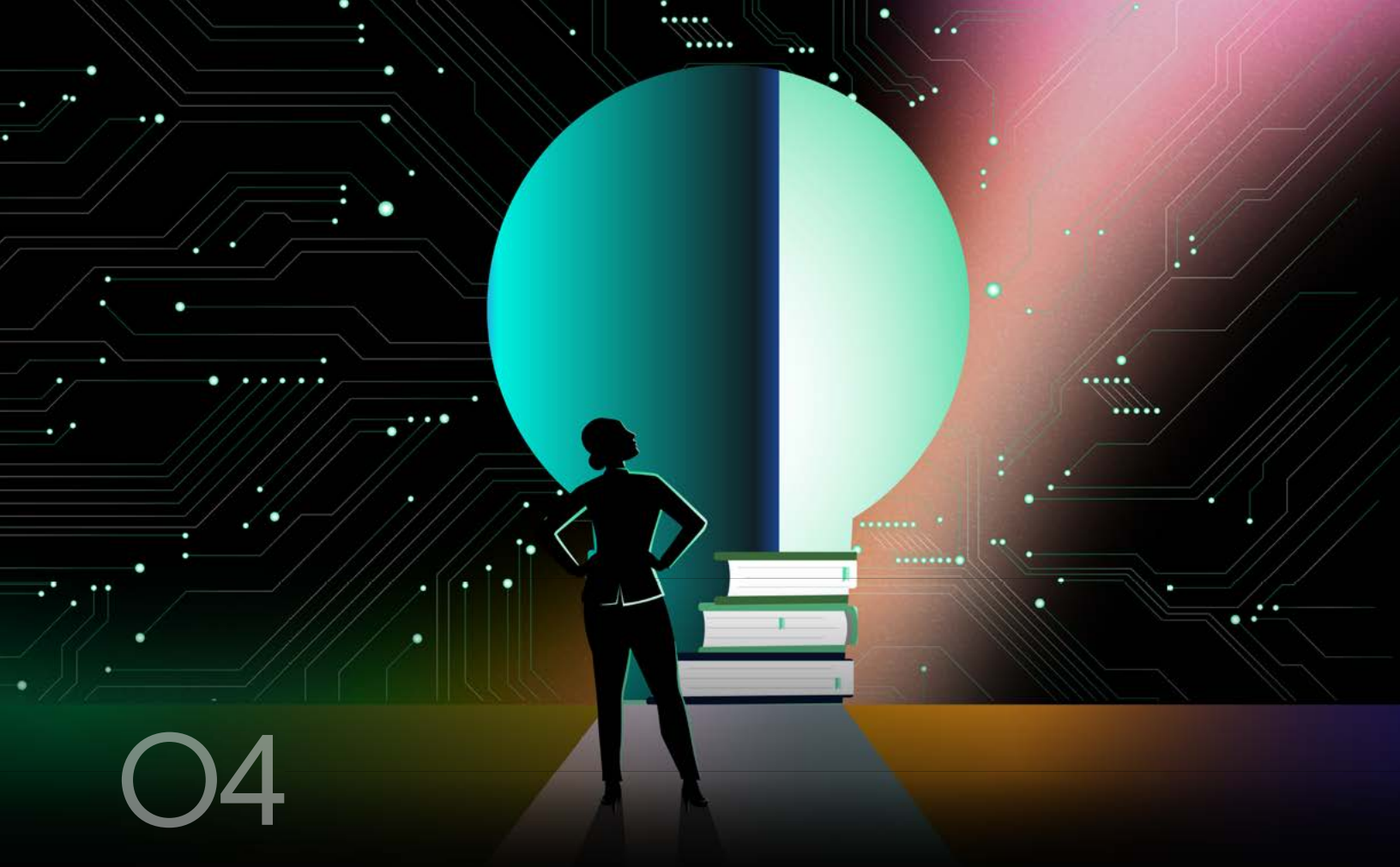
“I think it’s imperative for libraries to be able to find ways to capture their social impact and to be able to tell those stories[...] Libraries were and are the guarantor of the preservation of our intellectual heritage.”

Elif Tinaztepe

Libraries can design for holistic sustainability as well. “When the UN sustainability goals came out, they became explicit for all of us,” says Tinaztepe. “All libraries have their local goals of how they translate them. I think the question is how we as designers can support them by creating spatial solutions driven by their values and goals.” She gives the examples of designing safe and welcoming spaces to support gender equality, or supporting improved nutrition by designing gardens and outdoor space to feed and nourish the community.

Alongside these initiatives, it’s important that libraries show their return on investment for these efforts. “I think it’s imperative for libraries to be able to find ways to capture their social impact and to be able to tell those stories,” says Hallman. “It’s important to find the right sorts of measurements, the right sorts of qualitative and quantitative data points that can speak to the important work that’s happening.”

Thong echoes this, emphasizing how critical this is to secure future funding for such projects. “The library really has to rebrand or reposition itself as a revenue-generating entity for the country, rather than just a cost center for cultural initiatives,” he says. “The library may look into how it can add value to key social economic sectors or government ministries, where the social return on investment can be measured from their social impact tools. This will justify more funding to the libraries from taxpayers and from the government.”



O4

CIVIC EMPOWERMENT & MEDIA LITERACY

We'll see a growing need for libraries as credible places of civic empowerment, both to foster democracy and prevent the spread of misinformation

LIBRARIES ARE UNIQUE in that they offer neutral ground for collaboration, fostering democratic practices in a way other civic institutions can't. "There's a general declining trust in institutions, and libraries are still thought of as being very credible places. By being the most credible, inclusive, unbiased democratic space, they also take on

a huge responsibility," says Tinaztepe. "As our societies are getting more and more polarized, libraries are the one place where we can all come together, regardless of our views, backgrounds and interests. The library is the one place that is actually made to bring us together, regardless of what we think."

The experts we spoke with highlighted the opportunities libraries have because they bring together such a diverse cross-section of people. The importance of sustaining democracy and cultivating media literacy remains consistent with our 2019 findings, though the demands on libraries with the rapid evolution of technology and algorithms continue to grow.

Read more ▾

[Information literacy and critical thinking:
Libraries help fight misinformation](#)

"I think many consumers will always be trapped within their echo chamber," says Thong. "Especially by all kinds of clever algorithms that may constantly reinforce

their beliefs and views, instead of opening their minds to explore new ideas or views. So the library actually has a very important role to play. That is to make available on-demand content that can be used in a neutral manner and that allows individuals to make their own informed and calculated critical decisions."

Torres agrees: "Libraries are in the middle of confusion arising from the explosion of social networks, which libraries also use. There are several problems associated with these networks, like the issues of false information, not to mention the problem of internet security. This is a real risk, but also a possible opportunity for libraries — the task of providing reliable content with controlled information, information that matters."

We've heard from some experts that librarians will become important thought leaders – and possibly even social media heroes/influencers – as the need for credible information and media literacy grows.

WE ASKED

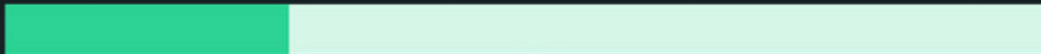
Do you feel ready to take on a more prominent role like this?

434 out of 434 people answered this question

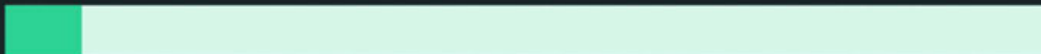
Yes

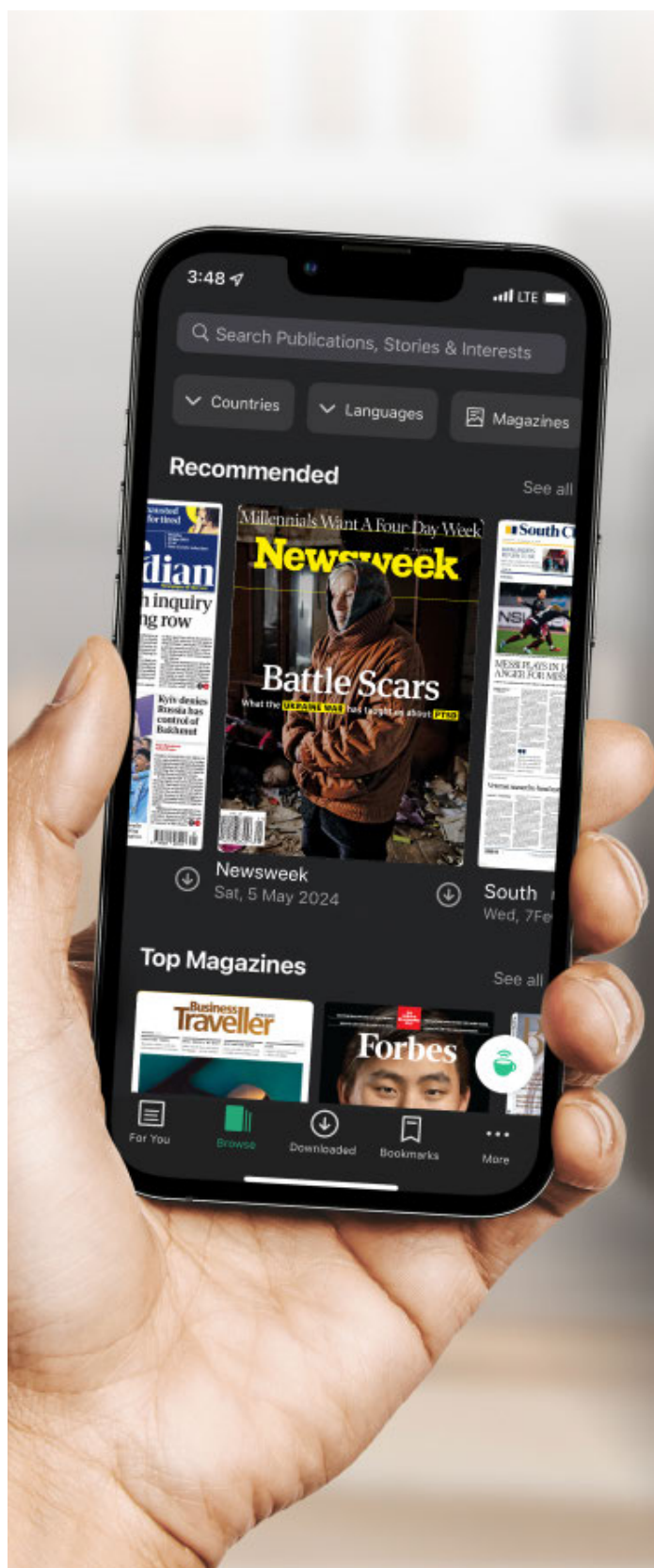


Unsure



No





How to cultivate media literacy within your library

We polled survey respondents for ideas to fight the spread of misinformation with libraries and communities. Here's what they said:

- Offer information literacy training to library patrons
- Within this training, emphasize the importance of finding relevant and reliable information sources and thinking critically
- Create displays or posters with information about misinformation online and how to assess digital media
- Teach children how to assess their sources and provide access to reliable sources
- Partner with teachers to teach media literacy at school

Media literacy resources ↘

- [PressReader - Media literacy toolkit](#) — article
- [MediaSmarts](#) — Canada's Centre for Digital and Media Literacy
- [Common Sense](#) — media literacy resources
- [UNESCO](#) — media and information literacy directory



O5

DIGITAL TOOLS & TRAINING

**Libraries
will serve as
important
portals to new
technology and
training**

IN 2019, WE STARTED exploring the impacts of advanced technologies on libraries and education, particularly focusing on blockchain and artificial intelligence. In 2021, the experts we spoke with focused more on tackling smaller, tangible steps that will help move libraries towards these broader and more technologically-advanced trends.

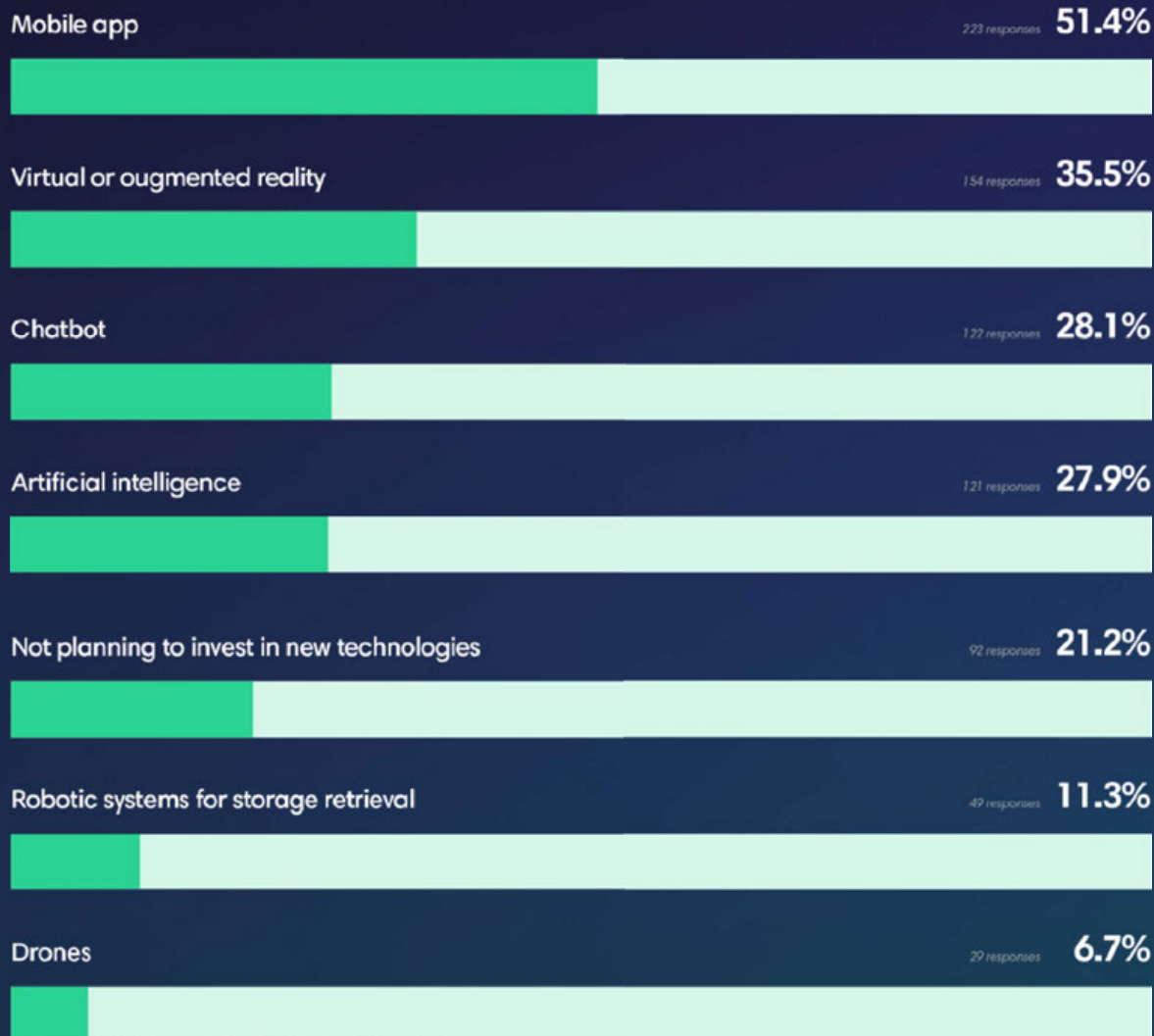
Thong highlighted the opportunities libraries have to be the first touchpoint for patrons accessing new, often intimidating, tools. "Artificial intelligence assisted learning and assessment is widely deployed now," he says. "A library may even be a mock-test center where one can do preliminary tests using AI. And then you have learning resources using AI that are made available."

Hallman reminded us that partnerships with other organizations in the community can play a key role in breaking technology barriers — you don't need to have all of this expertise in-house. For example, his team wanted to support local entrepreneurs by helping them build and launch their websites. They partnered with two other organizations: one to provide business mentorship

and one to provide software and training for roughly 50 individuals. "So one of the very first programs that we're going to have is not even run by library staff," he explains. "Instead, the library is playing host to connect local entrepreneurs with the business community to help them get their websites up."

Are you planning to incorporate any of the following new technologies in to your library experience in the next 5 years?

434 out of 434 people answered this question (with multiple choice)





What new services or community programming have you introduced, or are you planning to introduce in the next year?

73%

said remote access to library content (i.e. digital news tools, remote reference and information search services), the highest ranked response.

What is your primary budget priority right now?

28%

said digital content licences, the highest ranked response.

Lar-Son's focus is assessing digital tools in service to her patrons: British Columbia's Indigenous communities. In her case, she provides servers and hosting to house their digital heritage collections. Her ultimate aim is to empower Indigenous communities to take control of their own collections. Through this effort, she's exploring ways for them to upload their own content, learn new skills and create their own policies regarding access to their collections.

Libraries are also investing in digital content licences and tools to offer remote access to library content, much like what PressReader offers. "The affirmation of these digital reading methods, which imply changes in reading habits and reaching new audiences for reading, is a way forward for libraries," says Torres. "Libraries have already seen a greater demand for them, in recent times, due to the pandemic situation. These platforms even offer coverage of content in the local languages of the countries, far beyond the English language content, which is already more available."



“Electronic subscriptions and e-book spending greatly outpace that of print materials in libraries. I see that continuing to grow in the future,” says Thacker. “The library’s continued presence and existence quite literally depends on technology. To that end, I can see library workers at all levels across departments becoming more tech savvy in response to the changing times.”

Throughout these discussions, we also heard the importance of privacy and confidentiality. How will libraries continue to protect privacy and intellectual freedom as society becomes increasingly data-driven? For the libraries of the future, this will be a prevalent risk and challenge. “The library has to make critical decisions about what to store,” says Thong. “For what purpose? And who actually can access this information?”

“Electronic
subscriptions and
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the future.”

Juanita Thacker

About PressReader

PressReader is on a mission to empower and enrich curious minds by bringing a universe of quality content within reach. PressReader has partnered with leading institutions such as the New York Public Library, Yale University, Los Angeles Public Library, the Library of Congress and Public Libraries Singapore to provide patrons with access to thousands of the world's top newspapers and magazines.

Learn more about PressReader's services for libraries [here](#).



06

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Libraries must continue to make important investments in their own workforce

NOTHING WITHIN THIS REPORT would be possible with the incredible library teams who make it all happen. We've seen just how much the role of librarians has evolved over time. They've been first responders as frontline workers during COVID-19. They are technology specialists and social media managers. They go beyond their official job descriptions every single day.

While this was relevant in 2019, we've found that it's even more pertinent today. Every expert we spoke with mentioned that there's a need to upskill the library workforce, not only to keep pace with technological, environmental and societal changes, but also to invest in

the personal and professional growth of such important individuals. Our survey respondents agreed: 61% of respondents plan to provide upskilling opportunities for their workforce within the next year. Another 15% plan to improve benefits programs and 13% plan to increase the compensation for their teams.

Dive deeper ↘

[How new technology impacts professional development for librarians](#)

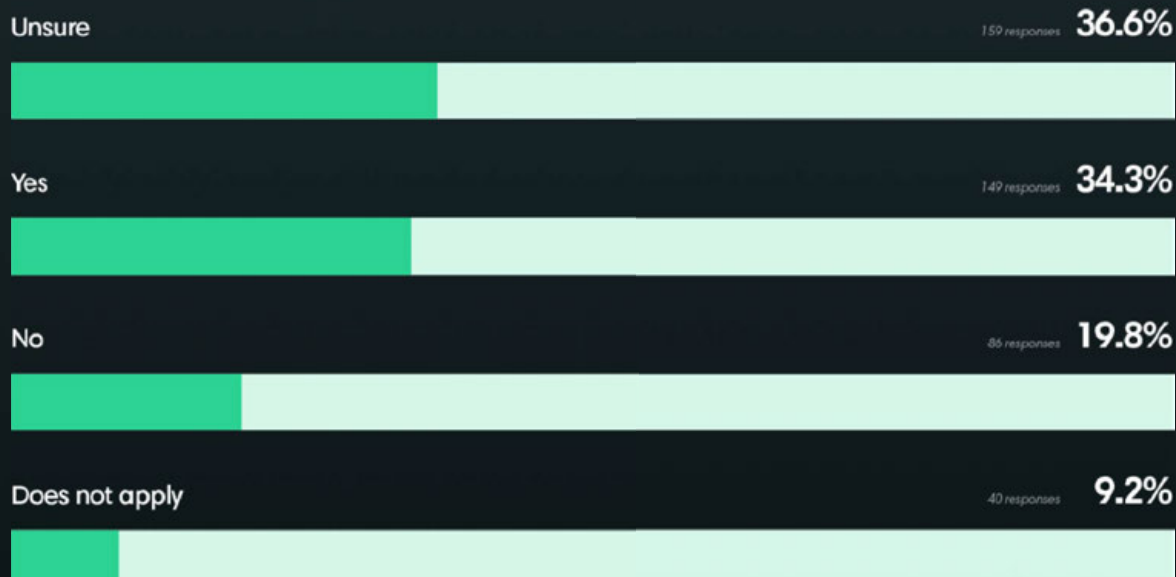
Improving library workspaces is another top priority. In fact, 40% of survey respondents plan to make this investment in the next year. “The library is a public space, but it’s also a workplace for so many people,” says Tinaztepe. “How can we design their workplaces so that they can work creatively and create programs and services? Libraries are increasingly using design thinking in their daily work. What does that workplace look like as opposed to the classic library workplace, where they sit in their offices? We should see library workplaces as an extension of the library.”

“The library is a public space, but it’s also a workplace for so many people.”

Elif Tinaztepe

Do you have the necessary budget for those workforce investments?

434 out of 434 people answered this question



Looking forward

Through all of our research it's clear the only constant is that libraries will continue to evolve, but it will be a contextual evolution. While each of these themes is relevant on a global scale — and libraries can and should share their methodologies, experiences and strategies with each other — libraries will need to respond to their own contexts. “The library is unique in that it can be super global in its vision and incredibly local in its application,” says Tinaztepe. She highlights that the 2021 Systematic Joy of Reading Award went to the Za’atari Camp Libraries, the first library system worldwide to be run solely by refugees. What truly matters in the end is hyperlocal impact.

“I see a future where libraries will tackle global agendas, like inequality, poverty, sustainability, technology, democracy,” she continues. “That will be high on their agendas. But how they engage with their audiences... the format of it, the substance of it and how they will operate, will be completely different. I think the future will be as diverse as our imaginations allow us, and that is quite infinite.”

