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Library Transform campaign : the American initiative and librarian role to applied in the Arab world

Research – English Summary

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Abstract

Libraries Transform – an initiative launched by the American Library Association – aims to enhance the role of librarians as key leaders responsible for driving societal change. The initiative responds to a pressing need in the library sector by developing and distributing new tools, providing support and resources to librarians to engage with their communities in new ways. Libraries Transform helps libraries become more expressive and connected with their communities, achieving a greater impact on positive outcomes. This includes stronger relationships with local civil society organizations, nonprofits, funders, and businesses, increased investment in communities, and collaboration in several areas such as education, health, well-being, and community service. The American Library Association also hopes to transform libraries into tools for positive community change (ALA, 2022).

Most American libraries have found the Libraries Transform campaign to be an innovative and effective solution for increasing support for U.S. public libraries, achieving their goals, and turning libraries into centers of cultural and social support for communities. Since its launch in October 2015, more than 6,900 libraries have joined the campaign through advocacy meetings and library transformation efforts, as well as by leveraging social media. Many libraries continue to use the tools to demonstrate the power of the campaign, delivering a unified, dynamic voice for the library profession worldwide

Keywords

Libraries transform, USA, Arab countries, UAE

1. The "Libraries Transform" Initiative: Aims and Impact

The "Libraries Transform" (Libraries Transform) initiative, launched by the American Library Association (ALA), aims to "enhance the role of librarians as essential leaders and responsible agents of change in society." (ALA, 2022). This initiative responds to a "pressing need in the field of libraries" and seeks to empower libraries to become more connected to their communities, achieve greater impact, and foster stronger relationships with local civil society organizations, non-profit institutions, funders, and businesses. The ultimate goal is to "transform libraries into tools for positive change in communities." (ALA, 2022).

Since its launch in October 2015, over 6900 libraries have joined the campaign, recognizing it as an innovative solution to increase support for American public libraries and establish them as "centers of cultural and social support for communities." (Julian, 2017). The campaign leverages social media and various tools to demonstrate its strength and "deliver a unique and vital voice for the library profession to the entire world." (Julian, 2017).

Key Slogans of the Campaign:

The campaign's core message is encapsulated in four powerful slogans designed to resonate with the public:

1. "Libraries Transform Lives."

2. "Libraries Transform Communities."

3. "Librarians are enthusiastic advocates for lifelong learning."

4. "Libraries are a smart investment."

General Objectives of the Campaign:

The initiative aims to:

- Increase public awareness of the value and impact of library services.

- Ensure a vital and clear voice for the library profession, showcasing the transformative nature of libraries in the digital age.

- Change the public perception of libraries from outdated institutions to essential, beloved community assets.

- Activate librarian participation and build external supporters to influence local and national decision-makers.

2. Core Components and Implementation Strategy

The "Libraries Transform" campaign operates on several key components and a well-defined implementation strategy:

Main Components:

- **Engaging Branding:** Utilizing surprising and attention-grabbing branding (e.g., "For You, Libraries Transform") to capture public interest.

- **"Libraries Transform" Website:** A central online hub for the initiative.

- **Strategic Implementation:** Executing strategies and tactics at city, state, and national levels.

Implementation Strategy (ALA, 2022):

- **Inclusive Planning:** Engaging ALA members and non-members in non-traditional brainstorming for promotional campaigns.

- **Provision of Resources:** Supplying members with branded materials for local communication campaigns (print and digital).

- **Public Engagement:** Involving target audiences through an interactive website featuring the "For You…" slogan to generate and submit ideas.

- **Leveraging Existing Events:** Utilizing ALA's existing events and activities (e.g., National Library Week, Library Card Sign-up Month) as cornerstones of the campaign.

- **Public Service Announcements:** Focusing public service announcements on the "Libraries Transform" campaign.

- **National Social Media Campaign:** Launching a national social media campaign using the hashtag #librariestransform.

- **Championing Libraries:** Encouraging individuals and organizations to contribute (e.g., $5,000+) to support public awareness programs and ALA advocacy.

3. The Library's Role in American Society vs. the Arab World (UAE Focus)

The source highlights a crucial distinction in the perceived value and operational context of libraries between the United States and the Arab world, particularly the UAE.

In the **United States**, public libraries have actively worked to solidify their role since the campaign's launch. Local governments in the US "have no hesitation in closing public libraries unless they are utilized, because if these libraries do not achieve their desired goals, it is very easy for local governments to make closure decisions." This underscores the necessity for American libraries to constantly prove their value and engagement with the community.

Conversely, in the **Arab region, specifically the UAE**, the situation differs significantly. Even if libraries "do not undertake any activities or events, or even achieve their minimal effective goals, no administrative official or high-ranking authority would even consider 'closing' any library." This implies a greater degree of institutional stability for libraries, regardless of their immediate community engagement.

This difference necessitates a distinct approach for implementing the "Libraries Transform" initiative in the Arab world, focusing on "**serving the community**" and emphasizing "the library and librarians" as the core of transformation. The author proposes developing a specific **"Arab strategy"** to implement the campaign in the UAE and the wider Arab world, taking into account the unique "administrative and supervisory affiliations" and operational methods that differ from those in the US.

4. Roles and Responsibilities in Library Transformation

The transformation process places significant emphasis on the **human element within libraries: "librarians and staff are the primary component in the transformation process."** (Julian, 2017).

A. Roles and Responsibilities as Defined by ALA:

The Aspen Institute report (Boucher, 2014) emphasizes the potential of American public libraries to lead societal progress, highlighting key roles for libraries in the transformation process:

- **Library Leaders:** This term is a central focus of the campaign, though the author notes it may need adaptation for the Arab cultural context (suggesting terms like "Administrative Leaders at Libraries" or "Leader-Manager").

- **Prioritizing Community Needs:** Defining library programs and services around community needs, making choices that offer the greatest benefit.

- **Inter-Organizational Collaboration:** Partnering with governmental institutions (local and federal), schools (Ministry of Education), and local businesses/colleges to advance educational and economic goals.

- **Community Engagement in Decision-Making:** Involving the community in planning and decision-making, ensuring a seat at tables where important policy issues are discussed.

- **Connecting Institutions and the Public:** Serving as a bridge between institutions, other libraries, and the public, positioning the library as a central platform and communication hub.

- **Decision Makers:** ALA also identified elements for upper management in libraries to consider when adopting the "Libraries Transform" campaign:

- **Strategic Planning:** Utilizing library authority to gather stakeholders and create a comprehensive strategic plan for the library within the community.

- **Infrastructure Prioritization:** Defining libraries as part of essential infrastructure (like schools and transportation) and securing sustainable, long-term funding.

- **Strategic Alliances:** Developing partnerships with local library leaders to advance educational, economic, and social goals.

- **Economic Development Potential:** Leveraging the public library's economic development potential as a community platform.

- **Government Information Hub:** Positioning the library as a central access point for government information and open data.

- **Community Communication:** ALA outlined elements for effective community communication by libraries:

- **Comprehensive Information System:** Collaborating on developing a comprehensive strategy for information and knowledge systems within the community.

- **Strategic Partnerships for Content:** Developing partnerships with public libraries regarding content, organizational, or specific community needs.

- **Leveraging Technology:** Utilizing diverse options to help libraries create and share technology tools.

- **Connecting Knowledge Resources:** Linking community knowledge resources with the library's knowledge networks.

- **Preserving Local Heritage:** Participating in the library platform to preserve local history and culture.

B. New Roles, Tasks, and Skills for Librarians in Library Transformation:

The source argues that librarians are always influenced by technological developments, and their traditional roles have changed. New roles for librarians, especially in public libraries, include:

- **Leader of the transformation process.**

- **Community activator.**

- **Human development lecturer and trainer.**

- **Archival guide.**

- **First aid rescuer and trainer.**

- **Supporter of technological and digital decision-making within the library.**

- **Mediator.**

The figure illustrating the relationship between the librarian, the library, and the community emphasizes that the **librarian is at the heart of the system**, directly influencing the community through the library. A successful librarian is a "transformation leader" who can effectively understand community needs and implement activities that serve them.

Key Skills for Librarians as Transformation Leaders:

- **Understanding Community Needs:** Analyzing the community's strengths and weaknesses, understanding its various segments, and identifying its needs through direct engagement. This requires strong communication skills (eloquence, composure, social intelligence) to interact effectively with all community groups. Librarians must also possess strong analytical skills for data collection, analysis, and reporting to decision-makers.

- **Planning:** Librarians must be **innovative** in their planning, utilizing statistics and data from the community to develop logical and creative plans. They should also be capable of **developing alternative plans** to ensure flexibility and continued operations in unforeseen circumstances, demonstrating foresight and adaptability.

- **Mobilizing Support:** Effective communication skills and strong community relationships enable librarians to **attract sponsors, donors, and partners** to support transformation initiatives and community activities.

- **Visionary:** Librarians must possess a **clear vision** for the future of the library and its role in the community, demonstrating passion and the ability to drive towards that vision.

- **Risk Management:** The ability to **identify potential risks** during activity implementation, create contingency scenarios, and manage them digitally to ensure smooth operation.

- **Marketing:** Crucial for informing current and potential users about library resources and services. This requires:

- **Effective Communication Skills:** Essential for interacting with all age groups and segments of the public (scholars, families, children, adults, seniors).

- **Proficiency in Modern Technology:** Especially in digital marketing, to effectively reach diverse audiences and promote library services.

- **Strong Marketing Capabilities:** The ability to develop, implement, and evaluate marketing plans, measuring their impact on objectives.

- **Activity Implementation:** Librarians should be able to:

- **Organize community events** efficiently, considering social and psychological factors.

- **Monitor workflow** during implementation, guiding colleagues and ensuring fair digital distribution of roles.

- **Be flexible** in dealing with the public and adapting to situations that require quick thinking and alternative solutions.

- **Leverage their skills** (e.g., multilingualism, technical proficiency, computer skills) in workshops and activities.

- **Measuring Community Satisfaction and Impact:Good Statistical Skills:** Essential for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data to understand the impact of transformation efforts.

- **Good Analyst:** Crucial for interpreting statistical results, evaluating the library's success in the community, and formulating recommendations for decision-makers.

- **Partnership Seeking:** Librarians must be proactive in **researching and establishing effective partnerships** with local civil society organizations and official institutions to benefit the library and achieve transformation goals.

- **Customer Service Excellence:** Developing skills in **customer service** to provide exceptional services that exceed community expectations, thereby preserving the public library's social standing.

- **Activity Coordinator and Event Implementer:** A key role involves **coordinating and implementing cultural and community events**, directly engaging with the public daily to reinforce the library's importance and elevated role in the community.

- **Evaluation and Follow-up Responsible:** Evaluating the performance of activities, gathering feedback from the public, and communicating it to management for addressing errors and adjusting plans.

- **Impact Measurement Specialist:** Given their involvement from planning to execution, librarians possess the comprehensive vision to **measure the impact of programs and activities** on the community, understanding their contribution to addressing negative societal phenomena or promoting positive ones.

5. Connections and Requirements for Implementation (UAE Context)

A. Sustainable Development in the Light of the Initiative:

Libraries inherently play a vital role in enabling access to knowledge. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) emphasizes libraries' role in promoting sustainable development by ensuring freedom of access to information, which supports all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Public libraries are seen as **"effective drivers for implementing sustainable development programs."** (IFLA, 2010).

The source highlights the alignment of the "Libraries Transform" initiative with several UN Sustainable Development Goals (IFLA, 2010; UN, 2020):

- **Goal 4:** Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

- **Goal 9:** Building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and fostering innovation.

- **Goal 11:** Making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

- **Goal 16:** Building peaceful and inclusive societies, and ensuring justice for all individuals.

B. Strategic Planning for Initiative Implementation:

Strategic planning is crucial for achieving library transformation, especially in the context of the UAE Ministry of Culture and Knowledge Development. This involves understanding community needs, developing appropriate activities, and building partnerships. The source stresses that **"the planning phase for transformation requires libraries to know their potential audience and their actual needs, and the extent to which libraries add real value that makes them frequent visitors."** (Buchanan & Cousins, 2012). Strategic planning ensures that all realistic methods are explored to achieve the library's vision and mission, including assessing internal and external environments and anticipating potential risks.

C. Requirements for Transformation:

Any library adopting this initiative needs to meet specific requirements:

- **Logistical (Infrastructure) Requirements:**
- **Needs:** Diverse meeting rooms, discussion spaces, open spaces for outdoor events, children's areas, general public facilities, and reliable transportation options.

- **Current Status (UAE Ministry of Culture Libraries):** The Ministry's libraries already possess **"strong and sustainable infrastructure"** (Culture, 2020), including meeting rooms, multi-purpose activity halls, large cultural spaces, children's libraries, and outdoor open spaces, with furniture and facilities meeting international standards.

- **Human Resources Requirements:**

- **Needs:** Staff with extensive knowledge of transformation, continuous training and learning, and social skills to bridge the gap in skills required for new roles.

- **Current Status (UAE Ministry of Culture Libraries):** The Ministry has significant financial and human resources, though it **"does not possess the qualified human element in the field of libraries."** However, existing staff have sufficient skills to undertake many activities and programs that support the community.

- **Technical and Technological Requirements:**

- **Needs:** Sufficient computers for training, a strong internet network for community service, and a qualified in-house technical support team.

- **Current Status (UAE Ministry of Culture Libraries):** The Ministry has adopted **"the latest information technology to provide efficient and effective library services"** (Monica Sanchez, Chloe R. Van Stralendorff, 2018). Libraries are equipped with modern computers, subscribed to global databases for research, have training labs, and offer free Wi-Fi.

- **Legal Requirements:**

- **Needs:** Establishing clear legal and legislative frameworks to ensure the success and continuity of the initiative and avoid legal challenges.

- **Current Status (UAE Ministry of Culture Libraries):** The Ministry operates within a **"safe legal environment"** since its establishment in 1972 (Al-Hadab, Al-Nabawi, 2012). The issuance of the National Reading Strategy and National Reading Law has further strengthened its legal framework, enabling collaboration with various governmental departments and institutions.

- **Training Requirements:**

- **Needs:** Providing highly skilled trainers in areas such as strategic planning, activity organization, customer service, innovation, and dealing with special needs groups (people of determination, children, seniors).

- **Current Status (UAE Ministry of Culture Libraries):** The Ministry **"attracts experts and talented individuals"** (Culture, 2020) for both recruitment and continuous training. It also has a large e-learning platform for staff development, aiming to implement best global practices.

Conclusion

The article underscores that the "Libraries Transform" initiative aims to elevate the voice of public libraries and highlight the crucial role of librarians as "transformation leaders." This

necessitates a shift in library objectives and the acquisition of new skills by librarians to effectively perform these evolving tasks. The transformation involves creating partnerships, fostering community support, and adapting to the unique cultural and administrative contexts, particularly for successful implementation in the Arab world like the UAE.