

# Conclusions & Recommendations for Digital Literacy Programs and Libraries

Report of the Office for Information Technology Policy's  
Digital Literacy Task Force

June 2013

The Digital Literacy Task Force of the ALA Office for Information Technology Policy developed the following recommendations to advance and sustain library engagement in digital literacy initiatives nationwide as a companion to its January 2013 report *Digital Literacy, Libraries, and Public Policy*.<sup>1</sup> Libraries of all types – school, academic, and public – play a vital role in ensuring all people have the skills and abilities to succeed in the Digital Age. These conclusions and recommendations culminate the task force's work over 18 months and constitute a call to action on the part of the ALA, library education programs, front-line libraries, various funding bodies, and the diverse stakeholders who use and support library services.

One over-arching recommendation is that ALA should continue to have a member body that focuses on digital literacy and libraries. This group should consist of members with broad ALA representation. It would provide library leadership in digital literacy initiatives across and beyond the library community and track progress against these recommendations. It also would provide a central place for ALA units to collaborate on digital literacy projects, share resources, and develop advocacy that speaks with a single library voice.

## Recommendation I: Increase Investment in Digital Literacy

Access to technology is only a part of the solution necessary to ensure digital inclusion and empowerment. Increasing digital skills and competencies embedded in a strong traditional literacy base make up the rest of this equation. Twenty-first century digital literacy skills are basic to classroom performance, workforce readiness, and full participation in civic life. The imperative to close the digital skills gap demands funding and other direct support to sustain current efforts and step up digital literacy initiatives.

- Current and future digital literacy initiatives at the state, local, and federal level (whether public, private, or a hybrid) should include funding and other direct support to libraries for digital literacy programs. It is not enough to *promote* digital literacy; we must support the providers of digital literacy programs at the grassroots level.
- ALA should identify and build relationships with federal agencies, foundations, and corporate philanthropic entities to ensure that future policies include support for libraries that currently provide or seek to provide digital literacy services.

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<sup>1</sup> The American Library Association's (ALA) Office for Information Technology Policy (OITP) launched the OITP [Digital Literacy Task Force](#) in spring 2011 and brought together literacy experts and practitioners from school, academic, and public libraries to address opportunities and challenges related to digital literacy and associated national policy conversations. The Task Force defines "digital literacy" as: the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, understand, evaluate, create, and communicate digital information, an ability that requires both cognitive and technical skills. More information on the Task Force and its activities is available via the Washington Office blog, [District Dispatch](#). The report [Digital Literacy, Libraries, and Public Policy](#) is available online.

- ALA, other national library organizations, and advocates must continue to urge federal regulators and policy makers to review existing policies to identify areas that could include support for digital literacy initiatives in libraries.
- State library staff, as well as state library associations and other advocates, should prioritize and support the development of effective and sustainable digital literacy programs in libraries and, as appropriate, in partnership with other community-based organizations.
- Local libraries should prioritize digital literacy as part of their missions. They should allocate funding for programming, staff development, and other costs associated with providing digital literacy programs to patrons.
- As requisite technology competencies continue to evolve, library staff must remain nimble and be allowed work time to try new applications and devices that are emerging in the consumer market. Job descriptions, evaluations, and goal-setting should include technology competencies and expectations for staying current with technology. Library managers and directors should include this kind of in-house professional development as part of the library mission.
- As required by [ALA Standards for Accreditation](#), MLS education programs should actively foster a culture of continuous learning and curiosity. Programs should require classes in instructional design and educational pedagogy so that new librarians are best prepared to work with learners in formal education settings, as well as the public sphere.
- ALA should develop digital literacy-focused continuing education programs to support the professional development of librarians.

## **Recommendation II: Develop and Sustain Robust Partnerships and Collaborations**

In addition to strategic funding, mutually beneficial partnerships are vital for delivering and sustaining high-quality digital literacy programming. Within an educational environment, for instance, digital literacy competencies are usually developed in a curricular context, with librarians, teachers, and professors partnering to develop instruction and standards. In a community environment, public library staff may collaborate with workforce, health, or e-government specialists to address community needs. In addition to increasing the relevancy of programs, partnerships also add capacity, extend reach and reduce redundancies.

- Digital literacy must extend beyond library walls. Libraries should actively seek community partners to build the capacity of all agents involved with providing digital literacy programming. Potential partners on the national level include associations or agencies (e.g., the Department of Education or workforce development) that have a state or local footprint.
- Librarians in formal education settings (e.g., K-12 schools, colleges, and universities) should identify opportunities to embed digital literacy skills in curricular and research activities.
- Replicable partnership models from the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) projects for non-BTOP communities should be developed and broadly disseminated to encourage best practices among all digital literacy providers.

- National digital literacy initiatives should identify opportunities to work with K-20 libraries, as well as public libraries.
- Librarians providing digital literacy services should engage in a community of practice to share resources and continuously build skills across the profession.

### **Recommendation III: Strengthen and Expand Research and Assessment**

To show the value of digital literacy and library investments, it is imperative that libraries assess their programs. In addition to individual library assessments, broader studies are key to determining success factors and effective practices in delivering digital literacy training to optimize return on future investments.

- The library community should define the scope of digital literacy, including technical skills and its relationship to copyright, privacy, licensing, and devices. Additionally, the relationship and scope of each type of literacy (e.g., foundational literacy, information literacy, media literacy, digital literacy, and transliteracy) needs clear definition.
- Research that assesses the impact of digital literacy training (in both formal and informal learning settings) on individual learning and community development should be undertaken and disseminated. This research should then be used to develop an assessment matrix that could be used by local libraries.
- An analysis of the impact of investments in non-traditional learning (e.g., blended classroom and virtual classes, game design, project-based learning, makerspaces) on student and adult learning and how digital literacy relates to these new learning paradigms should be undertaken. Such research will help inform future areas for investment in school and public libraries, as well as opportunities for collaboration
- ALA should seek funding from a national foundation, corporate philanthropic organization, and/or a federal agency to carry out research and analysis projects.

### **Recommendation IV: Increase Access to Digital Literacy Programming**

Access can include many variables. To support a digitally literate society, we must have access to robust infrastructure, including the services and hardware required to bring broadband to the device. We must have a trained and dedicated cadre of information professionals to develop and provide digital literacy programming. We must have resources, tools, and technologies that support the variety of stages of individuals seeking digital literacy training. We must have an accurate picture of the current state of digital literacy programs, and we must be poised to evaluate and refine these programs to be ready for future initiatives.

- In all digital literacy programs and services, there must be an awareness of the basic literacy levels and program flexibility to allow for differences in abilities.
- Library programming should reflect the fact that digital literacy is a basic requirement for functioning in life, embedding digital literacy in family literacy activities and increasing integration in any kind of library programming (e.g., financial literacy, etc.).
- There should be a regular and systematic method for collecting, evaluating, and curating digital literacy curricula and materials available in K-20 and public library settings. These efforts will help librarians disseminate effective practices, identify gaps that may exist in

meeting diverse needs and abilities, reduce duplication of effort, and ensure a minimum level of digital literacy training at all library locations.

- ALA should assist librarians in interpreting statutory requirements of federal filtering requirements affecting schools and K12 education and the ability to provide students with effective 21<sup>st</sup> century digital literacy programs. ALA also should provide tools to help communicate the interpretations such that governing boards, administration, and the public clearly understand what is required of the school community.
- Digital literacy initiatives must be culturally sensitive and be aware of unique needs and challenges of diverse populations, such as non-English speakers or people with physical disabilities. Federal digital literacy initiatives, including public-private partnerships, should include representative organizations in their development and implementation.
- ALA should develop clear messaging to promote the role librarians play in supporting digital literacy to administration, library boards, IT departments, policy makers, and funders. Such messaging should be available to librarians and other interested stakeholders such as through a dedicated digital literacy page on the ALA website.

## Conclusion

As the online world becomes increasingly complex, digital literacy will remain a significant issue for librarians and other stakeholders concerned with ensuring equitable access to electronic information. New technology devices, applications and services will demand new proficiencies, while foundational competencies related to basic literacy and the ability to effectively evaluate and use information will continue to be vital for full engagement in the global information economy.

Some of the recommendations above already have begun to come to life with the launch of [DigitalLearn.org](http://DigitalLearn.org) and the release of the [Broadband Adoption Toolkit](#) from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. The Digital Literacy Task Force hopes that these recommendations can be a catalyst for continued improvement in work underway as well as prepare the profession for future initiatives. More information on the American Library Association's commitment to literacy in all its forms can be found at: <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/literacy>.