

**Public Libraries and Youth Development:
A Guide to Practice and Policy**

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**PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT:
A GUIDE TO PRACTICE AND POLICY
*SUMMARY***

Introduction

Recent federal statistics indicate that some of the most alarming signals of adolescent crisis in the 1980s, including drug abuse, pregnancy, and criminal conviction have peaked and begun to decline. But broader trends still warn that adolescence is becoming a longer and more difficult passage to navigate, particularly for vulnerable youth in low-income communities. As part of a widening national response to these concerns, a growing number of public libraries are reassessing their place in the lives of young adults, and are collaborating with other youth-serving organizations to extend their impact to young adults usually not reached by library resources. More library directors have found that developing credibility among teens and their advocates opens places for the library at policy-making tables and offers new opportunities to build public support for library funding.

This study provides an overview of the landscape now evolving between public libraries, young adults, and the growing national movement that advocates for them. It explores three critical questions: What history, structures, and incentives account for the low priority frequently accorded young adult services within public libraries? What shifts in structures, incentives, and leadership create new opportunities for innovative involvement with young adults? And where are the opportunities within and surrounding public libraries to support, sustain, and institutionalize innovative young adult services into the future?

The analysis aims both to inform people who are considering new directions in library-based young adult services and to engage a broader audience concerned with building a more youth-friendly America.

Creating the Library of the Future

The public library that Americans know today is the product of successive responses to the Information Revolution, culminating in the challenges posed currently by digital technology. Despite the fact that high technology and traditional practices still coexist in uneasy proximity, the struggle to re-imagine the “library of the future” stands as one of the more remarkable institutional transformations of the late twentieth century. This transformation has involved rethinking traditional planning processes and discovering an equation for innovation that honors the profession’s core values, secures the institution’s future, and serves the public interest in the Digital Age. Today’s more entrepreneurial library draws eclectically from both business and public service models, and is willing to cut against the library’s traditional grain. It also reflects a commitment to reconceive the public library as a unique hybrid institution, a highly adaptable and arguably indispensable bridge between democratic values and technical progress.

Several institutional assets have supported the transformation of modern libraries, and can play a powerful role in the transformation of services for youth. Library staffs bring extensive human capital to work each day, and identify closely with a core set of values that supports high standards for performance and public service. Public support for public libraries remains strong and rooted in a vision of libraries as important centers of public information and non-formal education. This support has led to a general rise in library budgets, while the financial assets of libraries have diversified significantly.

At the same time, and like other public institutions, innovation within contemporary public libraries encounters obstacles and inertia. Professional librarians raise tough questions about innovation based upon deep identification with traditional principles and practices of librarianship, leading at times to a risk-averse mentality. Most public libraries remain

hierarchically structured, with a preference for discrete job categories and formal professional credentials. Two overarching institutional realities have the greatest constraining impact on library development: budget pressures fueled by expensive technology, and a shortage of professional staff, caused in part by labor competition for trained information professionals. Libraries that have leveraged their assets to meet these challenges are innovating to meet the needs of new service populations, from infants and pre-schoolers to the expanding population of senior citizens.

The Challenge of Youth for Libraries

Research suggests that adolescents represent one-quarter of daily library patrons, drawn as never before by more diverse media holdings and free access to well-stocked computers. Yet libraries remain slow to address the service needs of adolescents for several reasons:

- Staff positions in young adult services are disproportionately vulnerable to budget cuts, and a minority of libraries (11%) employ Young Adult Specialists.
- Adolescents are a highly diverse group of readers, in terms of reading ability, interests, and media preferences. Their tastes frequently clash with librarians' sensibilities.
- Adolescent gregariousness fits poorly with the library's culture of quiet and the policies that protect it. Low-income and minority youth particularly complain of being greeted with suspicion in libraries.
- Youth input is not solicited in the design of young adult resources, leading to design errors.
- Staff who specialize in children's and young adult services face status problems within their profession, and may lack training to undertake effective long-term planning and management.

Finding Winning Combinations With Youth: The Youth Development Perspective

As public institutions, libraries are subject to the same pressures as other government agencies to demonstrate their relevance and to respond adaptively to major social issues. Given significant public anxiety about such challenges as education reform and youth violence, it is not surprising

that most libraries sponsor and publicize targeted programs for teenagers. Libraries seeking an orienting framework for engaging youth strategically are paying more attention to the institutional experience of other youth-serving organizations as represented in the emerging youth development movement. This movement matured in the 1970s and 80s in part through a critical examination of the problems confronting youth and the organizations that serve them, yielding principles for practice that include the following:

- A young person who is problem-free is not fully prepared for adulthood.
- Youth need a wide range of experiences in diverse settings to develop adaptive skills and the confidence to use them.
- Youth thrive in communities that link families, government services, and private and community organizations into a web of supports for families, youth, and children.
- Youth thrive in communities that think round-the-clock and beyond the school day to create opportunities for youth development.
- Youth thrive in organizations that see them as valuable contributors to their own development and assets to community development.

Orienting to these and related ideas, more libraries have begun to collaborate *with* youth to develop new services, and to seek connections with other community and youth-serving organizations to extend library resources to underserved groups of youth. New approaches to serving youth include sponsoring city-wide youth events, creating new spaces for youth, diversifying young adult materials, employing youth for customer support, and creating public service opportunities that are rich in learning. Libraries also have begun to evolve a repertoire of management strategies for finding sustainable, developmental engagements with youth.

The Policy Context for Libraries and Youth Development

The emergence of a coordinated movement to promote youth development has begun to influence the attitudes of regional and local funders, and shape the priorities of policy makers and legislators. More legislation is recognizing the value of a “whole-child” perspective in

preventing problem behaviors, and encouraging partnerships among public and nonprofit service providers to implement diverse services for all young people, and particularly disadvantaged youth.

Regarding factors that may condition the ability of libraries to extend their commitment to youth development, four general observations may be made. First, in matters of policy and fundraising, local politics and community priorities occupy center stage in the strategic considerations of public library leaders. Increased funding for youth services often faces an uphill struggle when pitted against funding requests for young children, senior citizens, and working adults. Second, to the degree that public libraries seek federal and state financial assistance for special projects or populations, they are wary of legislative requirements that might clash with such core values as equal access to collections and services. Third, library leaders are wary of efforts by sister institutions like schools and park districts to task the library with ill-fitting roles and responsibilities. Fourth, differences between the cultures and resources of libraries and youth organizations, while narrowing, can complicate partnerships. The fiscal instability of many youth-serving organizations poses a challenge to collaboration.

The American Library Association and Other Library Organizations

At 60,000 members, the American Library Association (ALA) is a significant unifying force in public library policy. The ALA influences policy at the local level by authoritative information and advocacy rather than by standard-setting or direct influence over libraries. ALA also maintains a strong lobbying capacity in Washington, DC. ALA has directed much of its recent policy agenda toward shaping the conversation about libraries and technology at the federal and state levels. But attention to youth and children's policy is becoming more pervasive and prominent at all levels of ALA, reflecting its growing emphasis on libraries as centers of

community. Organizations such as the Urban Libraries Council and Libraries for the Future also play important roles in advocating youth development approaches to young adult services.

Federal Overview of Public Libraries

Although the proportion of public library costs covered directly by federal dollars remains minor, the pace of federal involvement in library funding and policy has quickened noticeably in the last decade, with an emphasis on building technology infrastructure. The Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the administrator of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), provides seed funds for new projects in public libraries as well as medical libraries, university libraries, and schools of information and library studies (\$197,602,000 in FY 2002). The IMLS funding framework includes opportunities for libraries that can incorporate a youth development agenda in their broader vision of community librarianship. The generally collegial relations between the IMLS, state library agencies, state library associations, and library systems may signal that a more sophisticated approach toward national library policy is emerging from Washington, DC.

The second federal agency with a significant impact on public library finances is the Universal Service Access Company (USAC), and its Schools and Libraries Division (SLD), both created by the Telecommunication Act of 1996. This Act identified libraries as a critical public venue for information access, and tasked SLD to help libraries acquire software, computers, and other information technologies at reduced rates (known as the E-Rate). As of November 2000, more than 4,500 libraries had received about \$77 million in discounted services indexed to economic need and rural or urban location.

Public libraries and the ALA also track federal and state legislation that affects their operational integrity and core philosophical values. Two contemporary issues with implications

for youth development are policies concerning intellectual property and child protection on the Internet. The Uniform Computer Information Technologies Act (UCITA) could limit the freedom of libraries to deploy software in branch sites by converting the purchase of software into a licensing arrangement, with license provisions controlled by software vendors. The Child Internet Protection Act (CIPA) denies federal funds to public libraries that do not filter Internet content up to federal specifications. Both laws could significantly constrain the capacity of public libraries to increase exposure to digital resources among youth on the far side of the “Digital Divide.”

Youth Development Advocates: Influence at the Federal and State Levels

The influence of youth development advocates has become more evident in recent federal and state approaches to youth legislation. At the federal level, an interagency effort has been underway to integrate a common core of youth development concepts into the grant programs of a wide range of agencies, including the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Labor, and Justice. Most federal grant programs also stipulate collaborative models of service provision, often targeting funding to groups of providers rather than individual grantees. The provision of quality information to youth in areas such as workforce development, afterschool enrichment, and preventive health education could open multiple opportunities for libraries to contribute information services to partners and communities.

Resources and Issues at the State Level

As of 2001, state support for public libraries averaged 12 percent of total operating revenues, a significant increase over support levels 25 years ago. The involvement of state government in library services also has diversified, reflecting the expansion of library roles in education and electronic information management. Currently, most state governments provide some direct

support for library construction, technology infrastructure, and other capital improvements in legislation specifically targeted to public libraries. In addition, all states maintain state library agencies charged with providing a diverse range of services to public libraries. Some offer consultation on youth and young adult services. Every state includes a state library association, independent from but affiliated with the ALA, which advocates for the interests of libraries and library professionals.

Several factors appear to influence the attention given to young adult services at the state level. States in which youth policy is a high priority tend to include institutions such as libraries in comprehensive networks of youth and family resources. State library agencies and state associations with dedicated capacity in the young adult arena appear better able to advocate for state dollars for library-based youth initiatives. The specific location of a state library within state government (e.g., within a department of education) will also influence the direction of state funding for library programs with youth.

Factors Influencing Youth Investment at the Local and Regional Levels

Groundbreaking work with youth is underway in American public libraries of all varieties across the country. Much of the impetus for innovative youth services is emerging from local and regional vision about the importance of investments in youth. Four broad factors that impact the capacity of libraries to re-imagine their young adult services include the following:

- The capacity of any library for innovation is inevitably sensitive to the general economic health of its region. The dependence of most public libraries on property tax revenues can limit the capacity of libraries to plan long term for service expansion. The degree to which libraries have both political and fiscal autonomy affects their latitude to pursue new program directions.
- Labor processes in a region will likely impact both the general climate of labor relations within libraries and the capacity of libraries to convince staff across the institution to accept greater responsibility for service to youth.

- Regions that are developing broad civic agendas for youth development tend to be more supportive environments for innovation in young adult services. Where libraries are involved at the design stage of service coordination, they are better positioned to identify funding sources and institutional partners in a climate that reduces inter-agency competition for limited dollars.
- The tone and direction of education reform can impact opportunities to develop and fund young adult services negatively and positively. In places where education reform and youth development are in dialogue, interesting opportunities for new library roles are emerging.

Conclusion

This document provides a broad overview of the issues posed by the intersection of the public library with the needs of today's youth and the emerging youth development movement. It sees the call to reconceive the library's commitment to young adults, and in particular underserved youth, as consistent with a broader effort to boost incentives for innovation at every level of the institution. It explores early evidence that investment in more active and varied roles for youth can yield benefits for the library and the public as well as youth themselves. And it reviews levels of potential support for further library investment in youth at the federal, state, and local levels. Research can and should be brought to bear to inform library leaders about the youth they aim to serve and the processes best designed to engage them. Arenas for inquiry should include:

- *Questions of participation.* Who are the youth in poor and underserved communities, and what needs and assets might they bring to an engagement with the library? What approaches to programming attract and keep youth who otherwise do not frequent libraries?
- *Questions about programming.* What constitutes "best practice" in library-based youth development programs? What outcomes for youth are appropriate to expect in programs of varying length and intensity?
- *Questions about partnership.* What criteria should determine when the library should pursue a goal for youth through organizational partnerships? What management practices help libraries conserve accruing wisdom about strategic collaboration for purposes of decision making?
- *Questions about cost and finance.* What are the primary categories of expenditure to consider when planning library-based young adult services? And how do the budgetary practices of public libraries complement or conflict with parallel processes in various types of partner organizations?

These and related questions are the current focus of the national evaluation of the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds' *Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development* (PLPYD) Initiative. This initiative now funds nine library systems throughout the United States to apply youth development principles to the creation of new programs for and with youth, engage community partners to enrich each library's youth service repertoire, and reach a wider range of young people. A report on the outcomes of this evaluation will become available in fall 2003.

Recommendations

The analysis in this document does point toward four recommendations regarding policy development and the advancement of young adult services in libraries.

- First, the evidence suggests that libraries currently make minimal use of federal grant programs targeting youth. Given the growing influence of the youth development framework in federal and state funding strategies, libraries should reassess their traditional caution about government aid, and look beyond the IMLS for resources to launch innovative youth programs and connect with community partners. Local leaders can encourage their public libraries in this direction.
- Second, the American Library Association has built a considerable reputation as an effective lobbyist, and has begun to track youth development opportunities at the federal and state levels. The ALA could raise the profile of young adult services and youth development in promotional events such as the recent “@ Your Library” campaign. ALA could also enhance policy awareness and capabilities within the ranks of librarians who work with teens and pre-teens by encouraging more attention to policy issues in organizations like the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) and the Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC).
- Third, state library agencies are the primary recipient of federal IMLS funds, and can help public libraries secure state and federal funding for youth initiatives in numerous ways. But state library agencies around the country vary considerably in their commitment to youth advocacy. State library agencies should be encouraged to increase the resources they devote to youth services, and help public libraries increase their access to federal and state resources for youth development.
- Finally, most graduate schools of information and library science pay cursory attention to services for children and youth, and little attention to child or adolescent development. As the accrediting body for library education, the ALA could influence schools of information and library studies to reexamine their commitment to young adult services. Thought also should be given to recognizing the value of alternative credentials for young adult service positions, sponsoring joint degree programs with other academic departments focused on

youth (e.g., education, psychology, human development), and delineating career paths within libraries for professionals with youth development training.

INTRODUCTION

Recent federal statistics indicate that some of the most alarming signals of adolescent crisis in the 1980s, including drug addiction, pregnancy, and criminal conviction have peaked and begun to decline (Statistics, 1999; Synder & Sickmund, 1999). But the broader trends still warn that adolescence is becoming a longer and more difficult passage to navigate. The daily matrix of social supports for teenagers continues to wear thin. As more parents work longer hours, young adults are spending more time alone in their homes than ever before, and less time talking to or solving problems with their parents or other competent adults (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000). Under these circumstances, young people need more than average initiative, persistence, and social support to find the resources to succeed in adult life (Larson, 2000).

Further, in comparison with the 1950s, U.S. adolescents lack a clear picture of the educational requirements of most professions, and choose high school courses poorly aligned with their ambitions (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999; William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work & Family and Citizenship, 1988). Too many of those who do graduate high school play catch-up in 2-year colleges on part-time schedules, frequently with disappointing results.

As part of a widening national response to these concerns, in communities around the country, a small but growing number of public libraries are reassessing their place in the lives of young adults. Some are taking a fresh look at themselves as safe and welcoming places, even enlisting young people to help design teen-friendly surroundings. Others are expanding their repertoire of programs to include broader offerings for adolescents, targeted to real-life problems as well as real teen interests. Still others are trusting youth with jobs of unprecedented scope and responsibility, ranging from front-line technology coaches to community outreach workers. And

in many cases, they are collaborating with other youth-serving organizations to extend their impact to young adults usually not reached by library resources.

Despite the fact that such innovations feel risky at the outset, libraries and librarians report many benefits and pleasant surprises. Whether reading to young children, helping peers with their homework, or orienting seniors to new software, youth with appropriate training have become valuable assets to patrons and library staff. In more than one reported case, branch heads who hired teens reluctantly in May became staunch advocates of youth development by summer's end.¹ And library directors have found that developing credibility among teens and their advocates opens places for the library at policy-making tables and new opportunities to build public support for library funding.²

At present, however, the inclination to think of libraries as primary resources for young adults remains the exception rather than the rule. Belying public stereotypes, the “library of the future” emerging today is a complex modern institution situated at the crossroads of many fundamental political, social and economic controversies.³ Numerous constituencies compete for

¹In preparing this document and speaking with library leaders and branch staff, a consistent theme was the conversion of skeptical library staff to an appreciation of youth capabilities, often spurred by their competence in trouble-shooting computer problems for library patrons.

² Use of the terms *youth* and *youth development* have increased in policy circles over the last decade, and are flexibly applied to a broad range of age groups, from school-aged children through the college years. In library circles, however, the term *youth* generally applies to both children and adolescents (e.g., youth service specialists), while adolescents are referred to as *young adults*, and are the focus of a specific library practice community (i.e., *young adult librarians*). Because this paper focuses primarily on the relations between libraries and adolescents, the term *youth* here refers primarily to adolescents, viewed broadly here as the second decade of life, an approach in keeping with the focus of contemporary research on adolescence. Care has been taken, though, to use *young adult* to denote library services dedicated primarily to adolescents.

³As we prepared this manuscript, we were reminded at several junctures of how tempting library stereotypes are to the popular media. One of our favorites figured in the 1946 film classic, “It’s a Wonderful Life.” In that film, an angel grants a despairing George Bailey a glimpse into the fate of his hometown had he not been born. In the well-known scenes that follow, a frantic George roams through a Bedford Falls now fallen from grace, meeting friends impoverished in pocket and spirit. Most mortifying, though, is the fate of his lovely wife. George scours the town in search of her, only to find Mary transformed to a bespeckled, dour spinster, a frightened wallflower from head to toe. At the moment George finds her, she is closing the public library.

its attention, many with more influence and less apparent “baggage” than teenagers. Perhaps then it is not surprising that in a context of multiple competing interests only 11 percent of America’s libraries employ young adult specialists, while young adult services remain among the most vulnerable to budget cuts (Heaviside, Farris, Dunn, Fry, & Carpenter, 1995). Even in libraries where young adult services exist, vigilance is required to assure that the presence and interests of young adults are represented.

Thus, *on paper*, libraries house many assets and pose many opportunities to further the aspirations of twenty-first century adolescents. But those who seek to leverage those assets successfully will require a well-informed respect for the incentives and disincentives for innovation currently operating within most public libraries, especially those specific to young adults. In what follows, we provide an overview of the landscape now emerging between public libraries, young adults, and the growing national movement that advocates for them. As with any new terrain, it is rough and unpredictable in some places, more familiar and navigable in others. And as with any new map, it can be expected to remain informative in some respects, but require revision in others.

That said, this document should provide explorers of this terrain with useful keys to three critical questions: First, what history, structures, and incentives account for the frequently low priority of young adult services within public libraries? Second, what shifts in structures, incentives, and leadership create new openings for innovative involvement with young adults? Third, where are the opportunities within and surrounding public libraries to support, sustain, and institutionalize innovative young adult services into the future?

Although our primary aim is to inform people who are considering new directions in library-based young adult services, we also hope to engage a broader audience among those

concerned with building a more youth-friendly America. As the recent report of the Youth Development Directions Project noted, there is growing consensus among scholars, business people, educators, and policy makers about the needs of twenty-first century youth, and the principles and practices best suited to addressing them. What remains is to delineate these practices and principles within the specific histories and contexts of real institutions with immediate and potential stakes in the future of youth (Youth Development Directions Project, 2000). Although some of the challenges mapped here may be peculiar to public libraries, most are variations on themes confronting all youth-serving organizations. We hope this exploration will prove helpful to similar mapping enterprises with other American institutions.

CREATING THE LIBRARY OF THE FUTURE

Rumors of the imminent demise of the public library are not new to American civic life. Since their inception in the early nineteenth century, public library systems have found themselves in competition with cheap commercial print, and open to the populist accusation of serving only elite interests. Sensitive to both fiscal and political pressure, libraries have tended to respond reluctantly with measured accommodations to popular taste and campaigns to promote the social utility of reading (Williams, 1988). It was not until the early twentieth century and a major infusion of philanthropic capital that libraries achieved a surer financial footing and became a ubiquitous presence in cities and towns across the country.

With the advent of television and other mass media, key aspects of what Patrick Williams has called the library's "problem of purpose" have become more acute. Many institutions, public and private alike, have faced challenges to their identity and viability associated with the "Information Age."⁴ But for the library, each successive displacement of print by alternative media seems to cut closer to the bone of library tradition and function. The TV Age raised basic questions about the relevance of print to public education, and posed the problem of maintaining the links between reading and the library as a public space. The Digital Age and its medium the Internet, have extended and intensified these issues, raising at least three radical and inter-related challenges to the library as an institution:

- *Digitization raises questions about the library's traditional roles and services.* If anything can be digitized and infinitely reproduced, what need is there for the conservation of paper or the rationing of access to it? Will paper books even exist in 25 years? Even more radical, if anything can be copied and even altered, what role remains for concepts such as authorship or intellectual freedom? And who is to say what information is more valuable or who should be able to access it?

⁴The old U.S. Post Office became the Postal Service of today, for example, directly in response to competitive pressures from a diversifying information delivery industry.

- *Digitization places in doubt any need for a “place” for information services.* Cyberspace is a distributed medium placing few limits on the times it can be used or the locations of users. Physical spaces pose multiple constraints and incur multiple costs. Critics ask, is the public library quickly becoming a place of the past?
- *Digitization raises questions about the future of the library’s public constituency.* As the Internet merges with other telecommunications media and becomes as ubiquitous as TV is today, what incentives will draw citizens to visit traditional libraries? Who will want to wait in line when they can find what they want on-line?⁵ And how deep is the public’s resolve to close the “Digital Divide” (Benton Foundation, 1998; Benton Foundation, Weiss, & W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 1996; Molz & Dain, 1999)?

The public library that Americans know today is the product of successive responses to the Information Revolution, culminating in the challenges posed currently by digital technology. The ambition and cohesion of this response varies considerably across library systems, with high technology and traditional practices still in uneasy proximity. Taken as a whole, however, the struggle to re-imagine the “library of the future” stands as one of the more remarkable institutional transformations of the late twentieth century. Some aspects of this transformation are evident to any patron walking through the library’s doors:

- *Where once only bookstacks stood,* open spaces now feature rows of computers integrating access to the library’s collections with the resources of the World Wide Web
- *Where previously print dominated,* collections have steadily diversified, beginning with LPs and microfiche in the 1970s, and proceeding through videos, CDs and DVDs, software, and even power tools

⁵Although the tendency to assume competition between the Internet and the public library is widespread, early research into the relations between the two “information providers” suggests a more complex set of relationships. The 1996 Benton Foundation publication, *Buildings, Books, and Bytes*, reported considerable skepticism about the necessity of maintaining public libraries in an age of digital access, especially among younger respondents. But a recent survey study released by the Urban Libraries Council suggests more compatibility between the two information sources. Among survey respondents who reported using only one information source, the group using only the internet was twice as large (about 20%) as the group using only the library (about 10%). But among the 40 percent using both information sources, the report found no evidence that frequency of internet use was related to the frequency of library use or the reasons that people used the library. Among the same respondents, however, the internet outperformed the public library on ten of sixteen “service characteristics,” particularly those related to ease of access and enjoyment of the process. The results suggests that the relationship between Internet and library resources remains fluid into the near future (Rodger, D’Elia, Jorgensen, & Woelfel, 2000).

- *Where previously prevailed a culture of quiet*, libraries often act now as commons, forums, kiosks, art galleries, and community centers, bustling with conversation and traffic, and open to use of community organizations and civic partners
- *Where once reading dominated*, programs and events aim to inform and enrich lives across the life span, employing a range of media and serving a range of public service aims and outcomes

Other aspects of this sea change may not be so evident. But they have had extensive implications for how the library operates and understands itself:⁶

- *Once organized as traditional municipal agencies*, contemporary public libraries have diversified toward a wide spectrum of administrative and fiscal configurations. They include more large county libraries organized into independent taxing districts, libraries straddling city and county boundaries as unique civic agencies, and diverse arrangements with local polities to maintain independent sources of funding and capital development.
- *Once dependent almost exclusively on tax dollars*, contemporary libraries have followed the general trend among nonprofit organizations and diversified their income sources in a number of directions. They are more likely today to support new initiatives through a mix of federal, state, local, and private income sources, requiring more resources for fiscal management (Clay & Bangs, 2000). They are raising their own capital both through the efforts of “Friends” organizations as well as through new library foundations with more latitude to undertake serious capital campaigns (Hayes & Brown, 1994; Warner, 1998).
- *Once determinedly hierarchical workforces*, library staffs now feature a wider range of roles and a dual specialist-generalist orientation. Like other complex organizations facing the need to adapt quickly, more libraries ask their employees to be competent service generalists in addition to passionate specialists, and to work in project teams to plan and implement service solutions.⁷ The incorporation of technical and computer experts has also infused an alternative ethic of flexibility into the library’s employment culture.
- *Once determinedly building-bound*, libraries and their staffs have extended their presence and reach to civic space and cyberspace, collaborating to link local libraries at the regional, national, and even international levels, and conceiving outreach roles considerably beyond the venerable bookmobile.

⁶For an intriguing overview of the multiple dimensions of change in a venerable but fast changing urban library, see Hedra Peterman’s description of institutional change at the Free Library of Philadelphia (Peterman, 2001).

⁷An interesting example is the Washoe County Public Library, which has been trying to reorganize its professional staff into action teams that bring multidisciplinary capacity to complex problems facing the entire system. The action team structure in turn has informed how the library is organizing youth for community outreach.

Seeking an Equation for Innovation

At the heart of these diverse changes lies a fundamental shift in strategic thinking that has been at least 30 years in the making, and is still developing (Molz & Dain, 1999). It began in the 1960s as a movement to return “libraries to the people,” and reemerged in systems like the Baltimore County Public Library in the 1970s as a deliberate shift toward proactive customer service, and away from static notions of the library’s mission, public roles, and deliverable “products.” It has continued in the efforts of individual libraries and the library profession to rethink traditional planning processes and discover an *equation for innovation* that honors the profession’s core values, secures the institution’s future, and serves the public interest in the Digital Age (Himmel & Wilson, 1998).

One way to think of this shift is in terms of “win-win” thinking—that is, toward a culture of leadership and practice that forecasts changes in service demand and promotes synergies between the interests and assets of constituent groups, from infants to youth to senior citizens, and the assets of the library. As an orientation to management it is both strategic and pragmatic, stressing the need for libraries to become leaner and more efficient in the face of ongoing fiscal pressures. It draws eclectically from both business and public service models, and is willing to cut against the library’s traditional grain. Yet it also reflects a commitment to reconceive the public library as a unique, hybrid institution, a highly adaptable and arguably indispensable bridge between democratic values and technical progress (Benton Foundation et al., 1996). As a challenge to library leaders and their allies, it has particularly entailed amplifying incentives to innovate inside and outside the library.

Traditional incentive structures within public libraries have not been entirely friendly toward institutional innovation. Some obstacles to innovation reside in the practice traditions of

professional librarianship. Historically, public libraries have derived their sense of mission and public mandate from the expression of core democratic values, including free and equal access to information, the defense of intellectual freedom, and the promotion of literacy and inquiry as fundamental requirements of citizenship. The powerful hold of these values on the ethos and imagination of library professionals is reflected in the American Library Association's "Library Bill of Rights." For historical reasons, library practice has tended to enact these values in conservative, "hands-off" approaches to public service.⁸ To maximize the freedom of patrons, library policy encouraged staff to respond helpfully to patron inquiries, but to refrain from taking initiative to influence patron preferences or choices. The same tendency to "stay in the background" has militated against the development of marketing or self-promotional capacities within public libraries. As many we interviewed noted, libraries and librarians are not yet good at telling their own stories, tending instead to view with skepticism attempts to market the library's services and assets.

As a workforce, library staff and professionals also pose some challenges to proactive innovation. Although library workforces have slowly diversified racially and socially, they remain less diverse than the populations they serve, especially in larger urban areas (Josey, 1994; Scherdin, 1994a). Recent research using tools like the Meyers-Briggs Assessment suggests that rank and file library staff tend toward introversion and a preference for stability and predictability in the workplace (Scherdin, 1994b). Although labor unions are not as prominent an influence as they are in education, their presence, especially in large urban systems, tends to reinforce the resistance of library workforces to job restructuring or distributed responsibility

⁸According to Patrick Williams, up until the 1930s libraries provided Reader's Advisory Services that created lists of books for readers to read (Williams, 1988). Librarians would select only works of literature that would enhance a reader's knowledge of literature, politics, etc. However, this service was utilized by those few individuals who were already well read and knowledgeable about such topics.

(Lilore, 1984). Ubiquitously tight budgets have also conditioned library staff to think conservatively about new acquisitions or program restructuring.

These features of the library workforce become more problematic when viewed in the context of an ongoing and deepening labor shortage within contemporary libraries. Like many institutions, public libraries after World War II reorganized their labor forces around formal credentialing processes, linking degrees in library science, especially at the master's level, to opportunities for professional advancement. In its day, this development helped enhance the quality of library practice while meeting a heightened demand for trained librarians (Roy & Sheldon, 1998). Today, however, the increased demand for well-trained information professionals has significantly constrained the supply of trained library staff. It is luring increasing numbers of staff away from libraries and into private industry and other settings offering better pay and benefits for advanced information capability, and it has shifted the attention of schools of library and information studies, including those housed in public universities, away from public libraries and toward the labor needs of government and private industry (Ostler, Dahlin, & Willardson, 1995). Under these conditions, library directors and their governing boards are likely to scrutinize carefully the demands they place on veteran professional staff to accommodate new constituencies and modes of practice.

While struggling with these obstacles, skillful leaders have focused on amplifying and rewarding aspects of library professionalism that favor innovation. Library staffs bring extensive human capital to work each day, including superior literacy and expertise in the use of information. They also embrace a core set of values that supports high standards for performance and does not, in principle, exclude more proactive stances toward practice. Further, they are highly identified with a professional community that, through the agency of the American

Library Association, meets regularly to disseminate practice innovations and consider policy development. Perhaps most important, they see themselves increasingly as a “people profession” with a unique mission to connect individuals and communities to the resources necessary for lifelong learning. For most reference librarians, nothing brings greater professional satisfaction than the chance to work one-on-one with patrons to spark learning and turn information into action (Molz & Dain, 1999; Benton Foundation, 1996).

With strengths like these in mind, library leaders have experimented with a number of steps to catalyze and protect innovation in and around their libraries. Taken together, these steps have begun to coalesce as a management strategy for building the library of the future. At the philosophical level, this strategy involves shifting the emphasis of practice away from the conservation of outdated practice models, and taking a fresh look at how the library’s core values can be expressed and extended through innovative outreach to new and old constituents. At the management level, moving to “win-win” often involves seeking strategic alliances with municipal and community partners to shift public perceptions of the library’s relevance and situate library efforts within broader networks of financial and political support. At the operational level, the strategy requires the identification of change agents both within and beyond the current library workforce who both understand the library’s constraints and restructure library resources to pursue new service opportunities. At the fiscal level, it involves diversifying library revenues to create a funding matrix for longer-term initiatives and strengthen the library’s hand in its relation with municipal and sister institutions.

It should be said at the outset, though, that pay for performance—the heaviest arrow in the quivers of most CEOs—is at best a minor option for library directors. Although revenue sources have diversified, most funds are needed to cover program costs. At the same time,

municipal pay grades often constrain how and how much library employees can be compensated. Nor is customer-driven management in libraries without its public critics. Some have warned that the adoption of mass market techniques risks undermining the library's role as an elevator of intellectual standards, becoming instead what one discouraged library professional called "McDonalds of the Mind" (Akey, 1990). Other public critics have warned that market-driven approaches threaten to undermine commitment to equal access by encouraging more fee-for-service and attention to the needs of affluent patrons (Rizer, 1993). For their part, library professionals point out that constant vigilance and vision is required to prevent the tension between efficiency and opportunism from devolving into an aimless pattern of being "all things to all people."⁹

When managed in a prudent and participatory manner, though, there are early signs that the "win-win" approach can extend the library's long-standing commitment to literacy and information access across the life span. This includes engagement with populations that previously would have seemed a bad match to library culture or service priorities. Recognizing opportunity in the growing awareness of linkages between early childhood enrichment and reading success, for example, many libraries have invested in family-based reading and storytelling programs for toddlers and even infants, and sought federal and foundation dollars to extend these programs into disadvantaged communities. In addition to addressing a pressing literacy issue, these programs build loyalty among young parents, and change the perception that libraries have no time or place for youthful noise. At the other end of the continuum, and again seeing opportunity in the aging of America, libraries have forged ahead with a range of

⁹Although "burnout" of the sort that afflicts public school teachers is not yet a prominent theme in the library professional literature, it is clear from conversations with branch librarians that potential stresses in the modern library have multiplied in the last decade, due both to chronic staff shortages and the diversification of library holdings.

innovative services for senior citizens. These range the gamut from investments in large print books to “A to Z” computer courses and outreach services to nursing homes and retirement communities. Although they are often a demanding constituency, seniors have also been welcomed by libraries as service volunteers working with children, parents, the disabled, and one another.¹⁰

¹⁰The American Library Association includes a number of divisions and sub-associations devoted to library practice and program development for specific constituencies, including the disabled, senior citizens, and pre-school children.

THE CHALLENGE OF YOUTH FOR LIBRARIES

Teenagers and young adults are another demanding constituency posing many opportunities for expanded service and sustainable partnerships. Teenagers have always been present in community libraries, whether browsing the paperbacks, completing homework, or in exceptional cases, shelving books as volunteers or interns. But recent surveys by the National Center for Education Statistics suggest that young adults have become a surprisingly large proportion (23%) of daily library patrons, drawn as never before by more diverse media holdings and free access to well-stocked computers.¹¹ Computers are particularly attractive to teenage boys, a population that until recently was thought unreachable by most library professionals (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995). Further, people in the second decade of life are a focus of intense concern in modern America, concerns that include their literacy, access to critical information, and socialization to citizenship and civic contribution. These concerns increasingly are represented by articulate and well-organized advocates who are influencing state and federal funding policies and recruiting local and national partners. The situation thus would seem a promising one for public libraries to find niches in a broader web of supports for adolescents.

Yet for several reasons public libraries have been slow to capitalize on the presence of youth in their buildings and in public awareness. This is not because the case for investing in services to youth has not been eloquently or forcefully stated.¹² Advocates for youth both within and outside the library have pointed out the intersections between youth issues and core library strengths, and issued clear calls for the renewal of young adult services in libraries. There is no

¹¹The National Center for Education Statistics August 1995 report, "Services and Resources for Children and Young Adults in Public Libraries," found that 37 percent of daily patrons were classified by respondent libraries as children, while 23 percent were classified as young adults.

¹²In his excellent compendium of youth service practices, *Connecting Young Adults and Libraries (2nd Edition)*, Patrick Jones lists eighteen reasons that librarians can cite to make the case for investing further in young adult services (Jones, 1998, p. 73).

lack of expertise, institutional sponsorship, or support materials tailored to libraries. Recent publications of the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) and the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), both divisions of the American Library Association, competently orient library leaders as well as young adult specialists to the latest thinking in youth development (Walter, 1995; YALSA, 2000). Through its highly regarded “Serving the Underserved” workshop program, YALSA also deploys a cadre of trainers who are available to work with school and public librarians to improve practice with teenagers.¹³ Excellent materials also have been developed by independent professionals in the field (Bernier & Angeles Public Library, forthcoming; Jones, 1998).

Instead, the slow response of libraries to youth concerns reflects a dominant pattern of disincentives against viewing youth both as an opportunity and a responsibility of the institution. In effect, the tendency remains strong at many levels within the library to draw “zero-sum” conclusions about the match between library interests and youth potential. This has led in turn to a steady decline in the resources allocated to young adult services and service positions, even as evidence shows that youth are growing as a service population. Here we highlight five sources of disincentive toward young adults that operate to varying degrees in most public libraries today (Fitzgibbons, 1990; Jones, 1998; Walter, 1997).

First, adolescence as a stage of development poses a challenge to the library’s collections and service models. Although many common features bind the pre-teen and teen years, literacy levels are not among them. Within the same age groups, youth vary widely in reading ability, literary interests, and exposure to library resources. They are thus frustrating to

¹³According to Linda Wattle, YALSA’s Division Coordinator, “Since the inception of the ‘Serving the Underserved: Improving Customer Service for Young Adults’ program in 1994, 67 trainers have given presentations to over 14,000 librarians and other staff members (ALA, website).”

“peg” in the ways that libraries succeed in serving younger children, their parents, and other subgroups of adults. Further, Young Adult collections often conspicuously exclude categories of literature popular with teens, reflecting both the aesthetics and educational priorities of adult staff. This is one of the service patterns that youth see as particularly “uncool” (Meyers, 1999). In turn, the underuse of Young Adult collections can lead to the erroneous conclusion that youth as readers are marginal to the library’s core clientele, and not worth serious investment.¹⁴

Second, adolescent gregariousness is a poor fit to the library’s traditional culture of quiet and order, and rubs against the policies and practices that protect that culture. For reasons that reflect developmental patterns and after-school schedules, preteens and teens often pass security posts and checkout counters in groups, and are aware of the “buzz” they can create among adults just by entering a room. Library staffs are aware of the potential for conflict between teens and other adults, and monitor teens particularly closely. It is not a far step for branch libraries to devise building hours, space restrictions, behavior norms, and security practices that obstruct the access of youth to the library, and to make assumptions about youth based on ethnicity or style of dress. Although on occasion teens undoubtedly enjoy challenging library staff, the overall climate of surveillance and suspicion they encounter is another “uncool” factor that limits their connection to the library (Meyers, 1999).

Third, when libraries do dedicate space to young adults, they often fail to get youth input at the planning stage. As a result these spaces often go underutilized or prove troublesome to manage. Youth find many features of these spaces off-putting and baffling, from their inattention to comfort to their restrictions on food and drink and their often clumsy proximity to

¹⁴Many young adults we interviewed reported that they tend not to use the library in traditional ways. Although they go to the library, use books and materials, they do not necessarily check out materials. Moreover, library staffs report that immigrant families are often reluctant to check out books for fear of losing them and incurring fines.

children's areas. As use of dedicated spaces by youth lags, it can reinforce a prevailing tendency among staff to see libraries as places where teens cannot easily belong.¹⁵

Fourth, staff who specialize in children's and young adult services face status problems within their profession, and may lack training necessary to undertake effective long-term planning and management. Status hierarchies within professions often reflect the status of those who are served, and the library profession has not escaped such classism. Several commentators have observed that children's library positions are often treated as entry-level jobs or fallback positions, resulting in a deterioration of professional respect and institutional influence. As both Kimmel (1979) and Fitzgibbons (1990) note, "the current status insecurity of children's librarians may make them unable to fulfill personal and occupational commitments to the profession—and their commitment to children (Fitzgibbons, 1990; Kimmel, 1979)." It may also make it more difficult for children and youth specialists to advocate for additional colleagues, and receive exposure and development in long-range planning processes.

Finally, some patterns in the library's current demographics may lead planners to conclude that the institution can afford to forego investing in young adult services. Libraries may be concerned that young adults are the most likely to question the future necessity of the institution, as suggested by a recent Benton Foundation survey (Benton Foundation et al., 1996). But they may also take solace from the same survey's finding that libraries are a magnet for young parents seeking supplemental resources for their young children. Thus, although adolescents may represent a gap in the customer pipeline, libraries may assume that they will retrieve these patrons later in life, when they have acquired more "serious" interests.

¹⁵Even in libraries with high teen advocacy there is a tendency for teen planning to fall between the cracks. In preparing this report, we heard many stories of miscues between young adult library staff and architects, for example, who clashed over how to arrange young adult spaces, down to the refusal of an architect in one case to sanction the use of stain-resistant carpets in a young adult area.

Despite such obstacles, advocates for adolescents in libraries have worked to establish a stable location for young adult services within the library profession. The Young Adult (YA) specialty within library staffs includes a recognized practice tradition, a distinct division within ALA, and a well-informed, highly committed membership. After a brief flowering in the 1960s and 1970s, though, YA advocates have had marginal influence in the training of MLS candidates. The latest NCES figures indicate that only a minority of libraries employ either full-time Young Adult Specialists (11%) or part-time Youth Services Specialists (23%).¹⁶ Further, as advocates for an unpopular constituency, they often find themselves at odds with colleagues, and cope with a sense of marginality that undermines their advocacy in the eyes of many colleagues. Finally, the traditions and priorities of YA service remain focused on literacy and collection development, two powerful frameworks for practice that may limit the capacity of young adult librarians to reconceive young adult services. This said, many of today's leaders in reshaping YA services are emerging from the children's and young adult service traditions, including many in the newest wave of library executive directors.

The issues in youth service traced here are by no means peculiar to libraries. Indeed, youth are accustomed to experiences of surveillance and even exclusion, while exposure to ageism, racism, and social class bias is as likely an experience in school, at the mall, or on the street as in the library. For youth, what sets these experiences apart in the library is the contrast they present with the library's safety, openness and accessibility, attractive resources, real and

¹⁶The National Center for Education Statistics defines a Young Adult Specialist/Librarians as "library staff who by education or training has a background in library services for young adults (National Center for Education Statistics, August 1995). Youth Service Specialists/Librarians are trained to serve both children and young adults. However, many libraries assign responsibility for teenagers to adult librarians, beginning with patrons age 12 and above.

virtual, and the presence of staff with information to share. Some libraries are beginning to explore the potential of youth, and it is to what they are learning and doing that we now turn.

FINDING WINNING COMBINATIONS WITH YOUTH: THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

As public institutions, libraries are subject to the same pressures as other government agencies to demonstrate their relevance and to respond adaptively to major social issues. Given significant public anxiety about such issues as education reform and youth violence, it is not surprising that many libraries sponsor and publicize programs for teenagers on a periodic basis. What remains rare is a more comprehensive and long-term approach that sees youth engagement as a strategic opportunity, a winning asset, rather than as a problem to be managed and minimized. Libraries seeking an orienting framework for engaging youth strategically are turning increasingly to the institutional experience of other youth-serving organizations. This experience is best represented in the emerging youth development movement (Pittman, 2000; Youth Development Directions Project, 2000).

The youth development movement emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in part through a critical examination of the problems confronting youth-serving organizations. During that period, organizations such as the YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Campfire Boys and Girls, and others were facing tough questions about their actual reach and impact, especially in the lives of inner-city youth.¹⁷ Some organizations examined their dropout patterns, and found themselves losing youth in the middle teen years in large numbers. Others were pushed by critics to recognize de facto ethnic and class boundaries in their membership. A parallel line of research addressed why some community-based organizations achieved high

¹⁷An influential summary of the misfit between the needs of early adolescents and practices of youth development organizations is found in the December 1992 report of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, *A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Nonschool Hours* (p. 78).

participation and credibility among the groups of youth lost to the traditional organizations (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1992; Halpern, 1999; Heath & McLaughlin, 1993).

When merged with recent thinking about adolescent development, this process began to yield an analysis of success and failure among youth-serving organizations. Since then, this analysis has been honed to a set of principles that many libraries have found useful in thinking about how to engage youth in ways that better serve them and the library. Key principles include:

- *“Problem-free is not fully prepared.”* The lion’s share of attention in traditional social services and even youth-serving organizations has focused on limiting problem behaviors. But poor educational and career outcomes for so-called problem-free youth indicate that much more is needed to guide youth toward successful futures (Pittman, Irby & Ferber, 2000).
- *Youth need a wide range of experiences in diverse settings to develop adaptive skills and the confidence to use them.* Many institutional forces in communities, schools, and the media converge to limit the exposure of youth, and especially disadvantaged youth, to diverse settings, people, places, and problem-solving situations. Breadth of experience is essential to well-informed and confident development (Larson, 2000).
- *Youth thrive in communities that link families, government services, and private and community organizations into a web of supports for family, youth, and children.* No single institution or organization can provide all the experiences youth need to thrive. Yet we have often tried to mandate organizations like schools with comprehensive responsibility for youth development. It is preferable to link the strengths of diverse institutions into networks in which more youth can explore more dimensions of their potential in relative safety (Wynn, Costello, Halpern, & Richman, 1994).
- *Youth thrive in communities that think round-the-clock and beyond the school day to create opportunities for youth development.* Institutions become embedded in unquestioned practices and assumptions, especially when they operate in isolation. Many of these assumptions involve when places like schools, park districts, or libraries should be open. But youth development is a round-the-clock affair, and requires a range of settings flexibly arrayed to respond to youth needs (Cibulka & Kritek, 1996; Dryfoos, 1994).¹⁸

¹⁸Examples of such activities in public library settings include the Third Friday of the Month celebration at the West Boulevard Branch of the Public Library of Charlotte-Mecklenburg County and the Friday night Teen ESCAPE program at the Burien Branch of the King County Library System.

- *Youth thrive in organizations that see them as valuable contributors to their own development and assets to community development.* One of the problems faced by the traditional youth-serving organizations was the tendency to program “for” youth rather than to program “with” and “by” youth. More successful youth organizations create cultures of contribution that value and solicit youth input, and empower youth to address real problems within the organization and community (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002).

Orienting to these and related ideas, more libraries have begun to collaborate *with* youth in ways that would have seemed improbable or even ill-advised to staff, leaders, and board members a decade ago (Walter, 1997; Simone, 1999; American Library Association, 2000). These approaches take seriously the potential of youth to contribute value both inside and beyond the library walls, and to address how library resources might aid the expression of that potential. They also seek connections with other community and youth-serving organizations to extend library resources to a new youth clientele, and define distinctive niches for the library within a web of community supports. And they shift the library’s traditional emphasis on short-term customer encounters toward an alternative model of longer-term responsibility for youth outcomes. Examples of these approaches include:¹⁹

- *Sponsoring and supporting summits and youth events.* As central and attractive civic facilities, libraries can be both impressive and practical locations to convene youth for varied purposes. In turn, many young people welcome opportunities to bridge neighborhood boundaries, work collaboratively with adults, and think big about youth issues and potential. A number of urban libraries, including those in Oakland, Brooklyn, and Philadelphia, have initiated annual youth “summits” both to discuss the youth-library connection, and to explore a wider range of local youth concerns. These summits have provided multiple opportunities to build the library’s credibility with youth, build the credibility of youth among library staff, and give potential partners a view of the library from the inside.
- *Creating places and times for youth.* Although youth are among the most frequent patrons of branch libraries, their claim to space and time in libraries remains limited. When asked, teenagers typically express frustration with the spaces that do exist and the materials provided there. However, a new generation of youth spaces is demonstrating that involving

¹⁹The examples in this section parallel closely Stan Weisner’s excellent summation of six approaches to youth services developed within the Bay Area Youth at Risk Project. (Weisner, 1992).

youth in the design process can change the chemistry between youth and libraries. The enthusiastic debut of thoughtfully designed spaces such as Los Angeles' Teen'scape and Phoenix's Teen Central show that teens will come if the surroundings reflect their interests and the climate is welcoming. Creating new space and time need not be costly; starting with little more than a used couch, snacks, and a few teen planners, many local libraries are attracting youth to read or attend programs with few supervisory headaches.²⁰

- *Selection and creation of young adult materials for youth by youth.* A cornerstone of the training and practice of YA specialists is the selection of young adult literature. But even the most experienced YA librarians face the ongoing challenge of finding books and materials that capture teens' attention. It is increasingly common for libraries to recruit youth reviewers to read and evaluate the "teen appeal" of books and magazines. Further, the youth sections of library web sites increasingly feature original literary work of local teens, including book reviews, poetry, fiction, and commentary.²¹ In many cases, teens take an active role in editing and posting the materials on the web, while some libraries are beginning to involve teens directly in the design and maintenance of the web sites themselves. This can require some negotiation with library technical staffs who worry about the access of teenagers to library networks and databases and the maintenance of an orderly web presence. But considering the time required for a YA librarian to update web pages, the integration of trained, web-savvy youth into web design teams would appear to be a promising frontier for youth involvement in libraries.
- *Training youth for customer support.* Librarians are proud of their professional tradition, and set high standards for customer service. Although teens have a long history of limited employment in libraries, they typically have not been entrusted with direct service to library patrons.²² However, the demand for computer services and the press of children during the afterschool hours have stretched staff resources to the limit, and changed the equation for customer service from youth. In roles such as homework helpers, reading buddies, computer aides, and web page designers, teens with appropriate training and orientation quickly establish themselves as effective supplementary staff and ambassadors to other youth. Further, in libraries situated in multi-cultural and immigrant communities, bilingual youth in roles as translators and cultural mediators establish themselves as key assets who help create

²⁰Such was the case in the Blanch Nixon/Cobbs Creek Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia. Beginning with a used couch, good snacks, some youth planners, and a regular meeting time, adult librarian Jennifer Wright established a Teen Cafe in one corner of an underused basement activity room. There local youth can just hang out, but they also organize discussions of issues affecting teens in the neighborhood. Brooklyn's Teen Time program is exploring the same approach system-wide, establishing after-school safe zones where youth can play board games and participate in structured programs.

²¹An excellent departure point for examining library youth web pages is the "Virtual YA Index" supported by the Suffolk County Public Library (Virtual YA Index Public Libraries With Web Pages for Teens, website).

²²For professional librarians, and especially Branch supervisors, issues of fairness and protection also govern whether a task is deemed appropriate for teenagers. Library staff are particularly reluctant for volunteers, youth or adult, to attempt to provide the public with reference services because these skills are a central focus of library training. To the extent that internet searches constitute reference activities, library staff worry that public expectations of service quality may be inappropriate to youth providers.

a climate of welcome for adults wary of embarrassment and disrespect.²³ In library systems with high staff turnover, it is not uncommon for youth to become useful line staff, trusted to fill in competently across a range of everyday duties. As a branch supervisor in Tucson, Arizona recently remarked, “When it’s busy, when we have research going on, or homework help, the fact that we have [trained youth] to go over there and help somebody open a document, or a website, or help somebody figure out the mouse, or plug in a headset, is just a tremendous help, wonderful to have.”

- *Combining public service with developmental experiences.* Education, employment, and voluntary service typically occupy separate times and places in the lives of teenagers. Libraries, however, are places where learning, service, and employment can be integrated effectively and enjoyably. As Virginia Walters has pointed out, libraries are natural bases for community outreach and service learning activities that harness youth skills, and simultaneously expose teens to the resources of the library (Walter, 1997). Community mapping projects, for example, deploy youth to identify resources for teens in their community and coordinate that information on accessible library databases. Another example is a project developed in Los Angeles by Anthony Bernier. He created an inexpensive 10-week program in which teens agreed to complete six or seven tasks. These included services to the branch and customers such as book reshelving and computer help. But they also involved job shadowing, interviewing a library staffer, and using the branch’s career guidance resources. At the end of this volunteer course, the teens received a letter of recommendation for their next job search, exposure to a professional environment, and a valuable introduction to the library’s employment resources (Bernier & Angeles Public Library, forthcoming).

In turn, these libraries have begun to evolve a repertoire of strategies for finding sustainable, developmental engagements with youth in their communities (Machado, Lentz, Wallace, & Honig-Bear, 2000; Peterman, 2001). These strategies recognize the need to convince diverse constituencies, both inside and surrounding the library, of the untapped potential of youth development for the library’s own future. And they seek to hold the expression of the library’s

²³Sometimes efforts to reach and serve bilingual youth through library programs can communicate the library’s concern for the community as a whole. Among the new programs for youth in the Washoe County Public Library (Reno, NV) is a Spanish Dial-a-Story Team that meets in a library situated in a mall adjacent to a large Mexican community. As the Mexican teens began to access the library’s resources as part of their job, they began also to attract their parents and other local adults to the library to investigate its holdings. By introducing these adults to the “basics” of library use, including the reference catalog and Spanish language collections, they have influenced significantly the presence of local Spanish speakers in the library. This outcome is highly meaningful to the teens themselves.

core values toward youth in creative tension with the accomplishment of the library's long-term strategic objectives. Examples of such strategies include:

- *Incorporating youth voices at multiple levels in the library.* Although young adults are increasingly seen in public libraries, as a group they remain largely unheard. It is not uncommon for libraries to convene small youth advisory groups to solicit young adult viewpoints on library issues. But these groups vary considerably both in their purview and the reach of their membership. More strategic approaches tend to begin from two linked assumptions: first, that youth are an important “market” for library services, and second, that youth have insightful information to share about service demand and provision. These assumptions lead libraries to approach youth input from two new directions. First, they seek youth opinions from a wider range of youth, both service users and non-users, and do so more regularly and frequently. Second, they institutionalize venues for youth input at multiple levels within the organization, from the branch library to the boardroom, and create means to conserve, apply, and update youth input on a regular basis. Although these approaches remain new territory for most libraries, the diversification and intelligent management of youth input could prevent the allotment of resources toward activities that are poorly targeted to youth audiences.
- *Changing the climate for the presence of youth.* Although young people are attracted by computers and other resources, it is clear from recent studies that the daily presence of youth in local libraries remains a struggle for librarians (Meyers, 1999). Several steps can help shift the climate from one of struggle to one of cooperation. First, merely asking local young people to address policies that limit teen participation can yield fresh responses to apparently intractable conflicts with library policies. Recognizing that food and youth go together, many libraries have tasked youth with developing guidelines for the presence of food in the library that addresses the core concerns of librarians for the protection of collections and materials. Second, although space constraints in branches are real, youth input and some creative thinking can help imagine space and time options for teens that accommodate their social needs, minimize disruption to other patrons, and convert teen “trouble-makers” into library allies. Skillful staff development also can soften the attitudes of adult staff toward teenagers and introduce alternative responses to challenging situations. When gatekeepers such as security guards learn to make friendly and respectful contact with youth, for example, they often find their authority enhanced, and they become assets rather than barriers to youth involvement in library programs.²⁴
- *Building the credibility of youth through training.* Training and staff development are a serious commitment in today's public library. When the same commitment is made to youth,

²⁴Relations with security guards are a consistent focus of complaint when youth are asked their opinions about public libraries. The tendency of security guards to profile youth on the basis of clothing or “attitude” is confirmed also by library staff. For their part, security guards tend to view their role in terms of “keeping the peace” and protecting property rather than customer service or support. Further, lines of authority within library branches can be vague regarding security personnel, especially in large systems like Brooklyn where guards work directly for the police department rather than the library, and can incarcerate youth for library violations.

a number of benefits are clear. First and most obvious, youth are empowered with a range of skills, with a chance to explore those skills in a supportive professional environment. Examples of the wide range of current training opportunities include computer and technical trouble-shooting, interactive customer service, conflict resolution, public speaking and presentation, and data collection and analysis. Second, youth are placed in a better position to win over the general public and respond with poise to dissatisfied library customers. Third, training for youth helps assure adult staff that their new youth volunteers are ready for their assignments, leading to greater responsibility for youth and more collegial relations with staff. Fourth, the development of training prompts libraries and their partners to think harder about how to grow capacity in young staff and how to challenge youth in optimal ways. Given that youth training remains an emerging science as well as art, libraries that invest in youth training may find that their expertise becomes a strong suit in attracting public and private partners, particularly in grant proposal development.²⁵

- *Finding and recruiting change agents for youth.* From top management to the branch level, leadership has emerged as an essential ingredient in advocating for youth development within libraries. Particularly characteristic of today's more innovative libraries is a strategic orientation to identify, and empower leaders for change, drawing them both from within and outside the library's professional staff. These change agents then are encouraged to look beyond the traditional priorities of young adult services and experiment with new approaches to service development and delivery. As one leader of a major public library noted, "Nostalgia in the sense of reinventing what used to be is a killer. It gets you nowhere with funders, it gets you nowhere in the long run.... Its got to be some new service you're offering, not bringing it back to the way it used to be."
- *Enhancing youth involvement through strategic community partnerships.* Alliances and partnerships have been essential to library outreach for many decades, and have diversified as the emphasis on libraries as community hubs has grown. The pragmatic importance of initiating partnerships has been reinforced by the embrace of collaborative service delivery models by federal and state grant makers. From a youth development perspective, many libraries are initiating partnerships to extend the involvement of youth in several ways. Some libraries are engaging partners that can open access to groups of youth not normally reached by libraries, and help broker the access of youth to library resources and opportunities.²⁶ Partners are also being tapped to enrich staff development resources and reach more adult

²⁵ In 2001, the Washoe County Library System of Reno, Nevada, in partnership with the Northern Nevada Literacy Council, was awarded a Community Technology Center Grant totaling \$150,865 by the U.S. Department of Education, the only proposal funded in Nevada that year. A distinguishing feature of the Library's proposal was a plan to use youth trained as computer assistants to help adults learn computer skills in community technology centers.

²⁶The Oakland Public Library partners with the Youth Employment Program (YEP), a proven youth employment broker and participant in federal youth employment programs, to help channel minority and low-SES teenagers into the Library's PASS! homework help program. The Enoch Pratt Public Library in Baltimore partners with the federally funded Upward Bound program at the Baltimore County Community College to source volunteers for its youth homework assistance program. The Tucson-Pima Public Library taps a deep and diverse pool of youth volunteers involved in the Youth Advisory Committee of the city's Metropolitan Education Commission (MEC) to staff its Library Sub-Committee.

library staff with alternative approaches to youth practice for all library staff. In a small but growing number of libraries, partner organizations are serving as community outposts for library outreach, providing residents with more familiar settings in which to access library resources.

Undoubtedly, libraries that pursue these strategies will create new challenges for planning, funding, and management. But sustained efforts in these directions can also shift public perceptions of the library's relevance and, in turn, relocate the library as a serious, capable contributor to regional planning and problem solving. Further, many library directors come to see their youth development programs as catalysts for broader restructuring processes applicable to all public service arenas. Recent developments at the Free Library of Philadelphia (FLP) pose an intriguing example.

In the early 1990s, FLP acquired funds from the Gates Foundation and local foundations to support programs to train youth as technology aides in a small number of inner city branches, and expose other youth to technology resources. The library recruited staff to implement this training, including staff with no previous library experience. In the late 1990s, as calls to address academic performance in public schools intensified, this training capability was redirected to build a city-wide homework help program (LEAP) that employed teenagers as academic and computer assistants.²⁷ The teens soon became an asset valued by adult staff, while the LEAP program attracted positive media attention and public recognition to the library. Library staff were recruited to participate in citywide discussions to develop a coordinated child development strategy in Philadelphia, while other city agencies began to request help in training youth employees. Somewhat unexpectedly, FLP has emerged as one of the largest youth employers in

²⁷In its early phases, the name "LEAP" was derived from "Learn, Enjoy, and Play." As the program gained in scope and ambition, particularly with the integration of technology, the library began to search for a new name. The name has proven popular with city politicians and community advocates, however, as the pressure to provide afterschool academic help has grown. LEAP remains, though not as an acronym.

the city, and an acknowledged expert in youth development training. Further, FLP's emerging expertise in staff training has become its chief vehicle for linking its partnerships at the municipal level—bureaucracies like the Parks and Recreation Department—to the development of local alliances between branch library staff and their community counterparts in other agencies.

THE POLICY CONTEXT FOR LIBRARIES AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

As noted earlier, the tendency to view youth as a problem to solve rather than an asset to value is by no means peculiar to public libraries. Anxiety about teenagers has long vied with the worship of youth as a seminal tension in American culture (Males, 1996; Palladino, 1996). It is also the traditional reference point for policies toward youth at all levels of American government.

Whether the issues involve education, labor, health, or juvenile justice, the tactics of alarm often have been used to build arguments for investment in youth programs and resources.

Unfortunately, the policies of alarm have too often demonized youth and focused too narrowly on short-term solutions to isolated problems. This, together with a general reluctance to conceive policy as a tool for social change, has restricted America's options when it comes to crafting a coherent, long-term youth agenda (Walker, 2000).

More recently, however, the emergence of a coordinated movement to promote youth development has begun to influence the attitudes of regional and local funders and shape the priorities of policy makers and legislators. More legislation is recognizing the value of a "whole-child" perspective in preventing problem behaviors, and encouraging partnership among public and nonprofit service providers to implement diverse services for all young people, and particularly disadvantaged youth. This in turn opens new avenues of collaboration that can play to public library strengths, build political credibility, and renew the capacity of libraries to reach underserved young adults. In this section, we examine the current and emerging sources of support for library-based youth development, and map the policy issues that bear most on the capacity of libraries to invest further in young adult services.

Four general observations are warranted, however, before proceeding. First, it is critical to appreciate that most funding for public libraries in the United States derives from local and

regional sources. As of the mid-1990s, more than 78 percent of funding for public libraries came from local funders, public, and private, while about 12 percent derived from state sources, and just over 1 percent originated from federal sources (Molz & Dain, 1999; Statistics, 2000).

Despite the fact that this figure may understate a portion of federal resources channeled through state library agencies, its implications are clear. In matters of policy and fundraising, local politics and community priorities occupy center stage in the strategic considerations of public library leaders.

Second, to the degree that public libraries engage federal and state resources, they do so cautiously. Library professionals locally and nationally remain vigilant about their commitment to First Amendment protections and the equitable provision of library services. As a result, they have long tangled with politicians and citizens over issues of censorship couched in the rhetoric of decency, literary quality, or more recently, child protection. They have also resisted policies to target library services strictly on the basis of socioeconomic or minority status, fearing the introduction of deleterious distinctions among patrons. Given that governments often leverage funding based on conformity to specific policies and regulations, libraries have tended to proceed cautiously in building capacity that depends on federal and state revenues over extended periods.

Third, although public libraries maintain partnerships across a range of organizations, experience has made them wary of entanglements with larger and better-funded public bureaucracies with a central concern for children and families. Given their professional competencies and breadth of mission, more libraries are being invited to municipal and regional planning tables as valued collaborators (McCook, 2000). Once at the table, however, withdrawal becomes politically costly, and considerable political savvy can be required to protect the library's resources against exploitation by sister institutions with deeper pockets, powerful allies

and intractable problems to solve. In the case of schools, for example, public libraries must often resist pressure to take over the administration of chronically underfunded school libraries, citing both the distinctive educational expertise of professional school librarianship and the responsibility of states and school districts to fund school libraries directly. It is not unknown for local branch libraries to be tapped to house recreational and social service functions, or for library leadership even to be asked to administer functions as far-afield as food stamp programs.²⁸ In general, library leaders listen closely for efforts by sister institutions and public officials to use the library's own fiscal challenges as leverage to task the library with ill-fitting roles and responsibilities.

Finally, libraries and youth-serving organizations share a commitment to broad democratic values, such as equal access to opportunity and the value of lifelong learning. They are also collaborating increasingly on a wide range of service ventures for children and families, with much evidence of mutual benefit and enhanced community impact (Fitzgibbons, 2000; Pottle, 2001; Sagawa & Segal, 2000). However, differences between the cultures of libraries and youth organizations, though narrowing, can complicate such partnerships and should not be overlooked. For example, the professional traditions of library service tend to focus on achieving excellence in short-term transactions with patrons. Excellence in youth work, on the other hand, emphasizes the establishment of sustained relationships with young people and steady effort toward more long-term outcomes. Professional identification is also more highly

²⁸The director of one large urban library recounted how he came to a planning meeting prepared to engage broad educational issues for his city's children, and was pressured instead to administer the city's food stamp program, which had reached a crisis state. City officials argued that the library was among the most accessible and ubiquitous community-based public facilities in the city, and would help overcome bureaucratic barriers posed by the city's current health and human service bureaucracy. The director, who in general maintained a consistent "win-win" attitude toward new service enterprises, saw multiple liabilities for the library staff and administration, and refused the offer.

developed and organized among public librarians than is true among youth workers. Youth workers still identify primarily with their organizations and their missions, describing themselves as extension workers, park workers, youth ministers, or Y workers, and often aligning themselves with practice traditions specific to their organizations.

However, it is the fiscal instability of many youth-serving organizations that poses the greatest challenge to sustained collaboration. Labor force dynamics are even more constrained in the youth service sector than in libraries. Low salaries, limited benefits, and difficult working conditions are all disincentives for staff to remain in youth service positions. As a result, investments in mentoring, training and supervision of new staff often have a limited return. As with most not-for-profit organizations, funding remains a chronic preoccupation, and shifts in budget prospects can force the reevaluation of service commitments, sometimes on short notice. Indeed, one of the highest priorities of the youth development movement has been to decrease destructive competition among youth-serving organizations, including libraries, by encouraging funding coordination and administrative reform (Youth Development Directions Project, 2000; Cahill, 1996).

The American Library Association and Other Library Organizations

Although public library decision making is primarily a local affair, public library directors and professional librarians are guided by a strong professional organization, the American Library Association (ALA), and its division, the Public Library Organization (PLA). At 60,000 members, ALA is now the largest library organization in the world, with an annual operating budget in excess of \$40 million (American Library Association, 2000). The ALA is a significant unifying force in public library policy, which it influences at the local level by authoritative

information and advocacy rather than by standard-setting or direct influence over libraries.²⁹

ALA also maintains a strong lobbying capacity in Washington, DC, mobilizing its membership in support of consensus positions, and monitoring the diffusion of federal influence through state legislatures. ALA includes an important specialist division YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association) that promotes attention to best practices in librarianship for young adults. ALA does not accredit library systems, but it does accredit schools of information and library studies and reviews standards for professional library degrees.

Although policy and professional practice are dual priorities of ALA, three general trends within ALA are affecting its stance toward youth development. First, ALA has directed much of its recent policy agenda toward shaping the conversation about libraries and technology at the federal and state levels. Policy positions regarding children and youth are most forcefully and clearly articulated at points of intersection with technology issues, such as the rights of children to access information on the internet.

Second, and reflecting the values of the profession as well as the imperatives of effective advocacy, ALA policy initiatives focus on themes with broad application across the life span rather than on the needs of specific constituencies. ALAction 2005 (American Library Association, website), a recent planning document, frames its “action areas” and “areas of interest and activity” broadly to cover multiple age and interest groups. Where children and youth are the focus, in the publications and forums of YALSA and ALSC, more attention is

²⁹In 1998, the ALA’s Public Library Association issued a planning model that included a list of possible “service responses” reflecting the full breadth of a contemporary agenda for public libraries. The fourteen basic services include: basic literacy, business and career information, commons (community meeting rooms), community referral, consumer information, cultural awareness, current topics and titles, formal learning support, general information, government information, information literacy, lifelong learning, local history, and genealogy.

directed to issues of professional practice rather than to policy and public advocacy, in line with the most pressing concerns of their members.

Third, attention to youth and children's policy is becoming more pervasive and prominent at all levels of discourse within ALA. Although the ALA's latest general policy statement on Young Adult services stops short of advocating a collaborative approach to youth, it commits libraries to promoting positive developmental outcomes through innovation in information services.³⁰ The ALA's 2001 congressional priorities urged its general membership to lobby for improved school library funding as well as for two large, general legislative programs for children and youth (see next section), the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (H.R. 323) and the Younger Americans Act (H.R. 17). This reflects a growing emphasis within ALA on opportunities to support libraries as centers of community as well as partners in a web of community supports.³¹

Although the ALA dominates the field of support organizations for public libraries, smaller professional organizations are playing a key role in advocating youth development approaches to young adult services. The Urban Libraries Council (ULC) headquartered in Evanston, Illinois, includes about 140 metropolitan libraries and affiliated organizations.³² With a particular focus on leadership development, it orients library leaders through meetings,

³⁰From the ALA 2001 Policy Manual: "The American Library Association recognizes that the future of libraries and of society itself depends upon the preparedness of youth to carry adult responsibilities for business, government, parenthood and other leadership. Children and young adults cannot fulfill their potential or that of society without high quality library opportunities through both public and school libraries (ALA, website). ALA is committed to the support and development of resources and services for children and young adults through both school and public libraries."

³¹Although ALSC tends to focus more attention on the pre-adolescent years, it shares members and interests with YALSA and a broad concern for the nexus between libraries, children, and families. Objective 6 of ALSC's latest 5-year strategic plan focuses on the need to advocate for key legislation affecting children and families (Association for Library Services to Children, 2000).

³²Currently ULC provides technical assistance to the Wallace-Reader's Digest's Fund's Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development Initiative. Contact: info@urbanlibraries.org.

workshops, publications, and ongoing research to openings for innovation in four strategic areas: libraries as community assets; libraries in the lives of urban youth; leadership and staff capacity building; and forecasting future library environments. Its urban youth agenda focuses on exposing library leaders to the youth development movement as an alternative framework for conceiving and planning library options for urban youth.

Libraries for the Future (LFF), is a national nonprofit organization “dedicated to helping libraries achieve their historical mission in an interactive environment (Libraries for the Future, website).”³³ Its “Access Alliance” provides support services to assist libraries in diversifying their constituencies, restructuring service delivery, and resituating themselves as community development assets. “Access Youth,” a program component of the Alliance, provides a diverse framework for library-based afterschool enrichment that also reflects the emphasis of youth development on civic participation, active learning, and information access. LFF also offers a range of professional development and fund-raising options for Alliance libraries.

Federal Overview of Public Libraries

Although the proportion of public library costs covered directly by federal dollars remains minor, the pace of federal involvement in library funding and policy has quickened noticeably in the last decade. The twin goals of expanding universal access to the Internet and shrinking the “Digital Divide” have merged with more traditional library commitments to literacy and collection development to shape the contemporary federal agenda for public libraries. In particular, the federal government has reorganized its administration of library revenues and policies to spur libraries to improve their technology infrastructure. The two federal entities that deal most

³³Quoted from Internet webpage (Libraries for the Future, website).

directly with public libraries are the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and the School and Library Division (SLD) of the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC).

The IMLS and its Office of Library Services was created by Congress through the Museum and Library Services Act of 1996. It is currently the federal agency charged most directly with the support and development of all categories of libraries, including public libraries, in the United States. In function and status the IMLS is considered a “sister agency” of the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities.³⁴ IMLS is the primary administrator of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), which provides seed funds for new projects in public libraries as well as medical libraries, university libraries, and schools of information and library studies (\$197,602,000 in FY 2002). IMLS channels the majority of LSTA funds through state library agencies, which review grant proposals and audit their implementation by library systems (\$149,014,000 in FY 2002). Beyond a small administrative outlay, the balance of IMLS resources fund a library leadership development program and non-competitive Congressionally directed grants. The generally collegial relations between the IMLS, state library agencies, state library associations, and library systems may signal that a more sophisticated approach toward national library policy is emerging from Washington, DC (Molz & Dain, 1999). Included in the proposed 7-percent budget increase for

³⁴The genesis of the IMLS reflects much about both the opportunities and tensions facing public libraries in the twenty-first century. Before 1996, federal library programs had been administered by an Office of Library Services within the Department of Education. Libraries were considered to be part of the American educational infrastructure, and location within the Department was seen as consistent with ongoing federal attempts to forge a more coherent national education strategy. However, in the view of many, the interests of libraries remained at the periphery of the Department, and support for priorities such as increased funding for school libraries continued to slip as the federal move toward high stakes standards picked up steam in the early 1990s. In the mid-90s the American Library Association initiated a campaign to extract libraries from DOE and wed them instead to institutions like museums with similar commitments to enrichment education and lifelong learning. Although many library directors are pleased with the early responsiveness of the IMLS, they are unsure whether removal from a cabinet-level Department will place library funding on a firmer footing, or render libraries more vulnerable to bureaucratic isolation and the sorts of scapegoat politics encounter by the NEA, NEH, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

IMLS for FY 2003, for example, is a \$10 million competitive grant program targeted specifically to improving recruitment to the library profession.

The key shift in federal spending during the past decade has been away from bricks-and-mortar, the emphasis of the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA), and toward technology infrastructure, the focus of LSTA. This shift is reflected in the range of library and investment categories currently funded by IMLS, including education, promoting libraries as centers of lifelong learning; improving access to information; supporting library use for all ages; enhancing libraries as sites of civic engagement; and studying and preserving artifacts and information about the American experience. Consistent with most federal funding, IMLS requires attention to building community-based partnerships, particularly in support of afterschool and technology literacy programs for students at risk. The programming framework advanced by the IMLS already acknowledges the influence of youth development ideas and practices and opens up a set of opportunities for libraries that can incorporate a youth development agenda in their broader vision of library service to the community.

The second federal agency with a significant impact on public library finances is the Universal Service Access Company (USAC), and its Schools and Libraries Division (SLD). USAC, a private, nonprofit corporation created by the Telecommunications Act of 1996, is responsible for ensuring access to affordable telecommunications services for all Americans. It administers the Universal Service Fund, which was created in 1983 to serve low-income populations. The Telecommunications Act identified libraries as a critical public venue for information access, and made the American Library Association an active party to an often contentious, high-stakes debate over national technology policy, in company with many high-

technology, mass media, and communication interests. It is a role the ALA has embraced, but not without significant pressure on its financial resources and policy priorities.

One overarching goal of the legislation was to make the Internet and other computer-based resources available to all residents of the United States. To achieve this goal, the Act established the Universal Service Program for Schools and Libraries so that public institutions with missions that involve education could purchase software, computers, and other information technologies at a reduced rate (known as the E-Rate). Funded at up to \$2.25 billion annually by the telecommunications industry, the program currently provides discounts of 20 to 90 percent on telecommunications services, Internet access, and internal connections. As of November 2000, more than 4,500 libraries had received about \$77 million in discounted services. The level of discounts that schools and libraries are eligible to receive depends on economic need and location, rural or urban (Molz & Dain, 1999).

In addition to the attention they pay to IMLS and USAC, public libraries and the ALA are careful to track federal and state legislation that affects their operational integrity and core philosophical values. Copyright issues, for example, are of ongoing concern to public libraries, which have fought to preserve “acceptable use” policies over more restrictive definitions of intellectual property in the public domain. These issues have multiplied in complexity with the advent of digital technologies. The Uniform Computer Information Technologies Act (UCITA) advanced in 2001 aims to standardize the laws that relate to digital information, especially the licensing of software. Reflecting the interests of the software industry, it proposes to shift the status of software consumers from owners to licensees with limited proprietary rights subject to license provisions set by the vendor. Currently the American Library Association opposes this act because, if passed, it could complicate the ability of libraries to deploy a wide array of

software for patrons. This in turn could significantly constrain access and exposure to digital resources among youth on the far side of the “Digital Divide.”

Of even greater concern to the contemporary library profession are mounting federal and state efforts to restrict the exposure of minors to violent and sexually explicit content. Recurring movements to censor collections are a ubiquitous feature of the library landscape. But the stakes have risen dramatically in the last decade as the challenges posed by easy and random access to Internet violence and pornography have collided with the library’s need to maximize its resources for technology development. The range of issues crystallized in December 2000 with the passage of the Child Internet Protection Act (CIPA), which requires libraries to develop Internet safety policies that restrict children’s access to inappropriate or harmful materials. Complicating matters is the threat to withhold federal LSTA and E-Rate funds from libraries that do not filter Internet content up to federal specifications. In many states, the situation has become even more complex with the passage of state CIPA regulations, some more stringent than the federal version.

CIPA and its state variants illustrate the sometimes painful dilemmas faced by library systems in responding strategically and responsibly to the challenges of digital media. On the one hand, the library profession views First Amendment protection both as a public duty and a “bread-and-butter” issue. Yielding on First Amendment issues places the library on a slippery slope toward further interference in the collections and professional activities, and jeopardizes a key facet of its public reputation. Further, exposing minors to objectionable Web-based material opens the library to unpredictable legal risk from parents and hostile third parties. This risk is compounded by the fickle performance of current filtering technologies as well as the skill of patrons, youth included, at circumventing such restrictions. Finally, the imposition of filters

could fatally hamper library efforts to attract youth to use library computers, as well as complicate the employment of youth as computer and technical aides.

On the other hand, unwillingness to grapple with the public concern about child protection could cost libraries both in the short and long term. The 1990s marked an extension of the claim of libraries to new categories of federal and state funds, as well as an enhancement of the profession's influence in Washington. Although they are still a small fraction of the total cost of technology development, libraries are increasingly "on the screens" of legislators and policy makers in new and promising ways. Further, the fact that state institutions mediate the allocation of federal dollars means that states can further entail this allocation with additional rules, diverting valuable staff time to tracking these regulations. Moreover, the public tone of the current child-protection debate can be a public relations nightmare for local libraries. The issue muddies an otherwise deep and clear pool of political and popular support for library development in local communities, and offer opponents an easy target for criticism. It also risks dampening the resolve of library staff, many of whom share the concerns of their fellow parents and citizens, to embrace fully the library's digital transformation and its implications for youth involvement.

Public libraries are not without their allies and resources in addressing these dilemmas. In the case of CIPA, the American Library Association has mobilized both its public relations and legal arms to shape opinion at large and within the profession on the issues, while challenging the Act in court. Further, many libraries have positioned their recent applications for E-Rate funding to exploit loopholes within CIPA that exempt certain categories of the telecommunication process from the Internet filtering requirement. Specifically, since CIPA subjects only the Internet and intranets to filtering requirements, this opens the opportunity to

restrict E-Rate proposals to phone line (and perhaps T-1 line) installation, freeing non-federal funds for Internet development. Finally, since state library agencies administer LSTA and E-Rate dollars, public libraries can work with their state library officers to advocate compromise alternatives to full filtering of computers, such as dedicating only a portion of computer terminals to filtering, and holding parents responsible for monitoring the uses that children make of library computers. Whatever the outcome of the current debate over CIPA, these dilemmas will remain features of the terrain confronting the increasingly digital library into the near future.

Youth Development Influence at the Federal and State Levels

Funds earmarked for library development have sustained limited growth, however, federal and state programs aimed at children and youth have expanded significantly in the last 10 years. These programs wax and wane to some degree with the political tides, but public concern for issues such as education, crime, and employability is likely to sustain pressure for a more strategic approach to youth development at both the federal and state levels. From the perspectives of libraries and youth development, these federal opportunities are distinguished from prior generations of federal and state funding in three ways. First, the perspectives on youth embodied in these programs increasingly reflect the influence of a well-organized youth development movement, represented by organizations such as the National Collaboration of Youth.³⁵ At the federal level, an interagency effort has been underway to integrate a common core of youth development concepts into the grant programs of a wide range of agencies, including the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Labor, and Justice. More grant announcements targeting youth emphasize the promotion of resilience and “soft skills” in

³⁵ For more information see www.nydic.org.

tandem with the reduction of risk behaviors, and require potential grantees to involve youth actively in grant planning processes.³⁶

Second, most federal grant programs now stipulate collaborative models of service provision, often targeting funding to groups of providers rather than individual grantees. Although this requires applicants to manage collaborative relationships, it also allows partners to contribute specific strengths to a wider matrix of youth resources.

Third, the provision of quality information to youth in areas such as workforce development and disease prevention has become a common funding priority, opening multiple opportunities for libraries to contribute information services to partners and communities.

Youth development considerations have become influential with regard to two policy agendas—preparing the next generation of workers and enriching the value of after-school time. These are potential opportunities to support library-based youth development. They are discussed below:

Preparing the Next Generation of American Workers

Recent research suggests that despite a record level of youth employment, increasing numbers of older youth lack key information and know-how to navigate the transition from high school into the decisions of early adulthood (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). In response, a broad and largely bipartisan consensus has emerged that educational and business interests must work more closely and collaboratively to improve the job readiness of young Americans. Organizations such as the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) have established networks of exemplary

³⁶The U.S. Department of Labor's SCANS defines a range of skills and competencies that are necessary to the success of workers in the twenty-first century. These skills, sometimes referred to as soft skills, include the capacity to work in teams, general learning, technical and information access skills, self- and time-management, and the ability to engage in self-improvement through feedback (U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, website).

youth employment agencies both to influence state and local policy, and disseminate information about effective practices associated with youth development outcomes.

This advocacy is reflected in the youth development orientation of the youth sections of the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 (PL 105-220). The WIA framework for youth employment provides for the appointment of Youth Advisory Councils that include youth representatives to review plans for youth employment initiatives. It lowers from 16 to 14 the threshold age for youth to qualify for employment preparation training, and expands the conception of training to include general academic skills, access to career planning information, leadership development, and job shadowing activities as components of Youth Opportunity Grants. It also promotes more sustained youth employment experience by integrating funding for summer and year-round jobs, and providing more support for follow-up services to youth such as counseling.

In most states, the implementation phase of WIA is just concluding, with local WIA Boards busy establishing their Youth Advisory Councils. Among the roles of these Councils is to identify potential community partners to provide a range of relevant services. Many libraries already collaborate with youth employment organizations, and would appear to be well positioned to approach Councils as potential partners, emphasizing three strengths. First, their branch locations are likely to overlap designated Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities, the target areas for Youth Opportunity Grants. Second, the new roles now being explored for (and by) youth in libraries corresponds well to the sorts of enriched employment that WIA seeks for disadvantaged youth. To the extent that libraries can demonstrate a commitment to employing at-risk youth, they would make ideal locations for subsidized job placements. Third, the WIA's emphasis on training and information maps to two of the library's bedrock strengths,

especially as libraries have invested in career development materials and software. Thus, WIA could help libraries fund youth employment that clearly benefits library staff, while also providing support for extension of vital information services to young adults in poverty.

Enriching the Value of Afterschool Time

During the late 1980s, two powerful issues converged to drive a reappraisal of the way schools are organized and relationships between schools and their communities. The first issue involved community safety, with statistics revealing that the afterschool hours were the most likely period for youth to become involved in high-risk activities (Synder & Sickmund, 1999). The second issue involved a long-standing and seemingly intractable lag in the academic achievement of American youngsters, and in particular a widening gap between achievement in the suburbs and cities, and between white and minority Americans (Hornbeck et al., 1989). The convergence of these issues precipitated a growing, bipartisan call to enhance the safety of schools, reform educational practices, and extend school hours, and the school year if necessary, to spur higher academic achievement.

The same convergence was among the strongest catalysts behind the emergence of the today's youth development movement (Dryfoos, 1994). Youth development advocates responded to the call for greater school accountability by stressing the need to deepen support for students, parents, and teachers, especially in disadvantaged communities. For students to learn, it was argued, the "whole child" needs to be nurtured through exposure to athletics, arts, and music—the "extracurriculum" most vulnerable to budget cuts—and provision for health and family services (Clark, 1983; Lee, Smith, Perry, & Smylie, 1999). For parents and teachers to succeed, the resources of communities must be enhanced, mobilized, and allied to schools in effective ways. For some advocates, the surest path toward these objectives was through the creation of

full-service schools that extend the hours and uses of school buildings and concentrate community services and after school recreational and enrichment opportunities on school sites. Others have argued for neighborhood service networks that link schools in a deepened, distributed web of community supports for children and families (Wynn, 1997; Wynn, Costello, Halpern, & Richman, 1994).

Ten years of experimentation have yielded a wide range of options for school-based and school-linked services, many showing early evidence of effectiveness in linking school achievement to positive youth development (Wang, Haertel, & Wlaberg, 1995). A coordinated movement to support community schools has emerged, most notably in the agenda of the Coalition for Community Schools, a broad-based organization devoted to expanding best practices in community schooling around the country (Coalition for Community Schools, website). This consensus about the links between child development, community safety, and development, and academic success in turn has influenced recent federal legislation. The 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant program, funded at \$846 million in FY2001, includes support for partnerships between schools and community organizations, including libraries, to coordinate the delivery of services and enrichment experiences for school students and their families (21st Century Community Learning Centers, website). A legislative priority of the American Library Association in 2001 is to gain support for an amendment to the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Act that would include public libraries along with public schools as primary grantees (The Library of Congress, website). But short of this development, both federal and state departments of education, justice, and public health now offer funding programs for after school program development that play well to the information services and after school management expertise now established in a growing number of public libraries.

Although the influence of the youth development framework over federal and state legislation cannot be indefinitely assumed, it continues to draw bipartisan support. The Younger Americans Act (H.R. 17) introduced during the 107th Congress (January, 2001) reflects a broad, concerted effort to advance a comprehensive youth development agenda for youth and communities.³⁷ Modeled on the highly successful Older Americans Act, it would allocate up to \$2 billion to mobilize matching state and local resources to pursue youth development objectives through collaborative, community-based partnerships. Again, the outcomes envisioned emphasize the needs of youth for information access, enriched employment, and connection to concerned adults—all of which are strengths of the new generation of young adult services now emerging in public libraries. Although the fate of this specific legislation remains unclear, it is likely that the alliance of community advocates, commercial interests, and educational reformers backing it will continue to advance a broader developmental agenda for youth for the foreseeable future.

Resources and Issues at the State Level

The latest federal statistics place average state support for public libraries at about 12 percent of a library's annual operating revenue (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). This represents a significant increase over support levels in 1975, although as Molz and Dain note, the commitment to public libraries cannot compare with state expenditures for public schools (Molz and Dain, 1999). Nonetheless, the involvement of states in library services has diversified in this period, reflecting the expansion of library roles in education and electronic information

³⁷It is not the first attempt at comprehensive youth development legislation. The Young Americans Act of 1989 advanced a similar agenda and was approved by Congress, but funding was never authorized. The content of this Act is described in the Carnegie Corporation's 1992 report, *A Matter of Time* (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1992).

management, as well as more sophisticated lobbying of state capitals by state library organizations and local library constituencies.

Currently, most state governments provide some direct support for library construction, technology infrastructure, and other capital improvements in legislation specifically targeted to public libraries. These funds could increase if current initiatives to authorize library construction expenditures through the federal LSTA are approved in Congress. In addition, all states maintain state library agencies charged with providing a diverse range of services to public libraries. These agencies vary widely in their institutional location (freestanding departments; independent commissions; sections within departments of education) as well as their annual operating budgets. All are charged with the administration of LSTA grants, the maintenance of library statistics, sponsorship of professional development programs, and the pursuit of library evaluation and research. Most also provide services to local libraries such as the review of “E-Rate” technology plans, acting as liaisons to state government officers, and drafting legislation in collaboration with library systems and state library organizations (Himmel, 2001; National Center for Education Statistics, 2000).

The library profession also organizes and mobilizes itself at the state level. Every state includes a state library association, which seeks to identify and address library issues at the state level and advocates for the interests of libraries and library professionals in municipal and state assemblies. Like the state library agencies, these associations vary widely in the size of their membership and their operating budgets, which comprise both member dues and private sources of support. Independently chartered and institutionally independent of the American Library Association, state library associations each appoint one representative to the ALA governing council and maintain close contact with the ALA on legislative issues linking federal action to

their state lawmakers. Reflecting broad consensus within the library profession, they tend to align easily with most ALA policy positions. They also work closely with state library agencies, and include state agency personnel on their governing boards in *ex officio* positions.

Several factors appear to influence the attention given to young adult services at the state level as well as the particular youth issues given priority. First, and not surprisingly, states in which youth policy is a high priority tend to include institutions such as libraries more strategically in comprehensive networks of youth and family resources. In response to concerted lobbying from youth development advocates, states such as New York and California are beginning to craft legislation that links library resources to specific needs in the youth population. Second, it seems likely that state library agencies and state associations with dedicated capacity in the young adult arena appear better able to advocate for state dollars for library-based youth initiatives. A recent survey indicates that state library agencies and library associations vary considerably in the resources they devote to young adult advocacy (Anderson & Bradford, 2001). Since libraries tend to vary the constituency groups who are prioritized in LSTA proposals, and state library agencies review these proposals, the presence of youth advocates within state library agencies helps improve the chances of funding for youth-oriented proposals. Third, the specific location of a state library within state government may also influence the degree and direction of state funding for library programs with youth. Particularly for those state library agencies nested within state education departments, the emphases of current school reform are more likely to push library programs toward academic support models.

When strong youth advocacy in state library agencies and library associations comes together with an emerging state youth development agenda, however, it can open interesting opportunities for library-based youth work. In California in the early 1990s, for example, the

Bay Area Library and Information System (BALIS) accessed LSCA funds with the help of the California Library Service Board to establish the Bay Area Youth at Risk Project (Weisner, 1992). Coordinating the efforts of nine library systems across three counties, BALIS was able to support experimentation in a variety of service directions, culminating in a blueprint for six distinct models of innovative services that remains an excellent guide to the field. More recently, the State Library of California and the California Library Association collaborated to help design the “Youth Mentoring and Safe Communities Grant Program,” a library-based afterschool assistance program with an annual appropriation of \$2.5 million. Administered through the State Librarian, the program solicited proposals for a range of local academic and information services, and support development of library-based career, homework, and mentoring centers. The product of many factors, the program owes much to the work of full-time young adult service consultants in both the state library and state association who engaged library leaders from around the state to craft the legislation and lobby lawmakers.

Factors Influencing Library Youth Investment at the Local and Regional Levels

It is difficult to generalize about relationships between the organizational characteristics of library systems and their capacity to innovate in the area of young adult services. Over the last 50 years, public libraries have developed a broad range of administrative and fiscal structures, reflecting the specific politics and economics of their regions as well as the collective experience of the library profession (Molz & Dain, 1999; Warner, 1998). Further, groundbreaking work with youth is happening across all library variations—civil service or union, urban or rural,

county or municipal, city department or independent tax district.³⁸ Nonetheless, some broad factors appear to have an impact on the willingness and readiness of libraries to re-imagine their young adult services. Here we briefly mention five.

First, the capacity of public libraries to innovate is inevitably sensitive to the general economic and demographic health of the regions in which they operate. Because most libraries depend on property taxes for their core operating budgets, fluctuations both in population and assessed property values will directly impact the latitude of libraries to field new programs and institutionalize successful innovations. Fluctuations in local revenue can also affect a library's capacity to meet the matching requirements of some federal and state grant programs. Planning for innovation in such an environment must include reasonable forecasts of the revenue necessary and available to carry innovation forward.

Second, given this general economic reality, the degree to which libraries have both political and fiscal autonomy influences their latitude to pursue new program directions. At the political level, there is considerable variation in the relationships between city councils or county boards and library executive directors. To the degree that executive directors are independent of political patronage and are supported by strong library boards, they are usually in a stronger position to bargain with local politicians and sister institutions. At the fiscal level, administrative arrangements that reduce the dependence of libraries on property tax decisions made by other government units should permit more stable long-term planning. In this regard, the growing trend toward independent taxing districts does appear to advantage libraries in sustaining

³⁸The nine library systems currently involved in the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds' *Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development* Initiative reflect this diversity. They include exemplars of municipal library departments with strong union influence (e.g., Free Library of Philadelphia), systems straddling city and county boundaries (e.g., Tucson-Pima Public Library), and county libraries defining independent taxing districts (e.g., King County Public Library).

strategic planning. But even within these arrangements libraries must remain vigilant to anticipate when shifts in the political wind may cause local officials and voters to question library tax rates or spending priorities.

Third, the general tone and culture of labor relations in a region will likely impact both the general climate of labor relations within libraries and the means by which compensation issues are adjudicated. In general, today's library workforce is underpaid in comparison with both private-sector information professionals and public-sector workers such as teachers. Thus the potential is always present for increases in turnover and labor unrest, particularly in systems in which wage rates are driven by politicized budgetary processes rather than a more stable civil service agreement. Further, no union has emerged specifically to represent library workers or, as in the case of teachers, to advance an agenda for libraries from the worker's point of view. Instead, librarians tend to be represented by broader municipal unions with little sensitivity to the staff constraints of the new community-oriented library. Not surprisingly, many executive directors report challenging experiences with unions as they strive to create more fluid job categories and maximize the productivity of short-staffed departments.

Fourth, cities and regions that are developing broad civic agendas and coordinated processes for youth development tend to be more supportive environments in which to innovate young adult services. In other words, although it is important for libraries to "get to the table" and help shape human service agendas, it also matters who else is at the table and how the table is set. In cities like Chicago, Jacksonville, Philadelphia, Oakland, Savannah, and Tucson, support for the integration of young adult services has come from the highest levels of city government. As a result, libraries are more likely to be welcomed into executive planning processes at earlier stages of strategic development. This in turn helps library leaders identify

well-funded potential partners in a climate that coordinates the funding efforts of allied agencies and limits competition for public and private dollars among not-for-profit agencies (Urban Strategies Council, 1996; Force, 1995).

Fifth, educational reform initiatives are now underway in most cities and regions in the United States, reflecting deep-seated public concern for academic improvement, and driven by federal and state mandates for educational accountability. The tone and direction of these initiatives can have considerable impact on opportunities to develop and fund young adult services. Where a broader youth development agenda is absent, libraries will more likely be pressured to focus narrowly on support services for schools, ranging from homework help to the operation of school libraries. Although they may present opportunities for funding and service, high-stakes testing and standards-based schooling can constrain the options of libraries to explore youth service alternatives, and pressure librarians to support learning objectives incompatible with their commitment to enriched, self-directed learning. In places where educational reform and youth development are in conversation, impressive opportunities for libraries emerge. In Chicago, for example, libraries provide a range of homework help services. But they have also been recruited into an alliance with high schools and the Chicago Park District to form “campuses” of after school activities in local communities (Wynn, 2001). Called “After School Matters,” this framework should provide the Chicago Public Library with multiple options for reaching neighborhood youth, connecting neighborhood partners, and sustaining a longer-range youth service strategy.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND POLICY

Close to 200 years ago, public libraries were founded to promote and preserve democracy by assuring residents of the United States free access to information of all kinds. Implicit in this mission were the preservation of the cultural legacy and the promotion of literacy, both of which were considered basic to an informed citizenry. Although their role as conservators means that public libraries do not change easily, the library profession and public library trustees have risen to challenges raised at each stage of the information revolution. In this light, the call to reconceive and invigorate the library's commitment to young adults, and in particular underserved youth, is consistent with a longer-term effort to boost incentives for innovation at every level of the institution.

In this document, we have attempted to provide a broad overview of the issues posed by the intersection of the public library with the needs of today's youth and the emerging youth development movement. For libraries, the question at hand is not whether they own a share of responsibility for supporting American youth. This has been a part of their public mission and is a growing concern of many in the profession. At issue instead are two related questions: Can the library afford to increase its investment in services for youth in a context of budgetary constraint and competing constituency interests? And, what forms and directions should this investment take?

One thesis explored in this document, based in a young but growing body of research, is that investment in more active and varied roles for youth can yield benefits for the library and the public as well as youth themselves. In effect, investment in a more active approach to youth development need not be a "zero-sum game." Although most evidence remains anecdotal, it does suggest that with training and supervision, youth can grow from shelving books to become

versatile ambassadors for the library to the entire community. They already provide invaluable support around the country in roles such as technology coaches, story tellers, and bilingual aides, relieving adult staff to spend more time applying their professional skills. Moreover, working *with* as well as *for* youth, and exploiting new media like the World Wide Web, libraries are overcoming old stereotypes, reaching a wider youth audience, making the library more attractive and welcoming, and drawing more youth into innovative programs. These changes may also reduce stress on professional staff, and position the library to attract new partners and sources of support for youth development. In the process, the library's credibility as a center of community life is enhanced. Time will tell if this change in orientation toward youth also builds the attachment of tomorrow's next generation of taxpayers and community leaders to the library.

At the same time, our inquiry suggests that a few key disincentives continue to block the access of youth to library services, making the transition to a more youth-friendly library more challenging. Moreover, working collaboratively with youth requires of library staff a broadened range of skills and experiences that demand a commitment to young adult services from library leadership and the cultivation of new leadership for youth development at many levels of the institution. In the challenging political and fiscal environments in which libraries operate, research can and should be brought to bear to inform library leaders about the youth they aim to serve and the processes best designed to engage them. Here we propose four arenas for research that are critical to effective decision making and policy development regarding youth.

- *Participation.* Who are the youth in poor and underserved communities, and what needs and assets might they bring to an engagement with the library? Who are the library's "regular customers," and how do they differ from youth who enter libraries infrequently or not at all? What approaches to programming attract and keep youth who otherwise do not frequent libraries? Across organizations serving youth, there remains a deficit of information about youth and their perspectives that continues to hamper effective program development. In public libraries, this deficit is complicated further by a heightened vigilance regarding issues of privacy and confidentiality, and a reluctance to conserve information about the behavior or

borrowing habits of individual patrons.³⁹ Close collaboration between library leaders and researchers is required to develop participation studies that honor library values but reveal the factors that influence when and why youth participate in library activities.

- *Programming.* As we have seen, a number of promising program models have emerged from the dialogue between the library's young adult tradition and youth development principles. But against what criteria should libraries choose directions for program development? What constitutes "best practice" in library-based youth development programs? What assets and supports are necessary to help young adults succeed in collaborative projects with adults and their peers? And what outcomes for youth are appropriate to expect in programs of varying length and intensity? Research in all these areas is essential if library leaders are to select programs relevant to youth needs, set appropriate performance targets, apply knowledge to improve programs, and convince funders and constituents that programs are reaching their goals.
- *Partnership.* Public and private funders have made a significant commitment to partnership and collaboration as vehicles for youth development and organizational change. And there certainly are anecdotal accounts of partnerships between libraries and external partners, public and private, that yield mutual advantage and exchanges of expertise. However, collaboration can also be time-intensive and inefficient, and demands a skill set gained more through experience than formal training. What, then, is a "good" partnership for libraries? What criteria should determine when the library should pursue a goal for youth through organizational partnership and determine how to choose an external partner? What incentives and education dispose library staff to collaborate more strategically and effectively, and what do other youth professionals need to know about the library as a partner? What management practices help libraries conserve accruing wisdom about strategic collaboration for purposes of decision-making?
- *Cost and Finance.* Although libraries are guided in their choices by strong core principles, they also must think about policies in terms of dollars and cents. In the case of youth development, particularly in the context of partnership, the calculation of "real" costs and assets can become quite complex and difficult to communicate. In assessing the costs of a program, for example, what is the best way to represent sometimes significant "in-kind" assets from both library staff, partners, and youth themselves? Is it possible to construct

³⁹Research and evaluation in the youth development field have benefited enormously from the use of sophisticated databases that can track a young person's involvement over time, and relate that information to information about biography, family, personality, or community. At first glance, maintaining such databases would seem to be a natural function for libraries, even a contribution they could make to community partnerships. However, key features of information management within libraries pose significant obstacles to youth development evaluation. First, as a matter of policy, libraries resist collecting all but the minimum categories of patron information necessary to track short-term borrowing. There is no guarantee that information as simple as age or gender will be linked to a patron's library computer record. Second, most public library databases deliberately purge any link between a borrower and the materials he has borrowed as soon as those materials are returned. A patron record contains no information about prior borrowing content, while material records (e.g., a book) contain no links to specific patrons. Some fundamental adjustments would be necessary to render these data suitable to the requirements of participation research.

metrics of per capita cost that permit meaningful comparisons between programs of similar intent or content? More broadly, what are the primary categories of expenditure to consider when planning library-based young adult services, especially those involving more active roles for youth? And how do the budgetary practices of public libraries compliment or conflict with parallel processes in various types of partner organizations?

These and related questions are the current focus of the national evaluation of the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds' *Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development* (PLPYD) Initiative. This initiative now funds nine library systems throughout the United States to apply youth development thinking to the creation of new programs for and with youth, and engage community partners to enrich each library's youth service repertoire, and reach a wider range of young people.⁴⁰ In addition to the questions listed here, the national evaluation, under the direction of Chapin Hall Center for Children, aims to understand the processes by which libraries become more effective participants in networks of support for children, youth, and families. PLPYD poses an exceptional opportunity to study processes of innovation in young adult services at multiple levels, from the experience of youth participants to the management and financial decisions involved in program development. A report on the outcomes of this evaluation will become available in Fall 2003.

The analysis pursued here does point toward some broad recommendations regarding policy development and the advancement of young adult services in libraries. Three are offered here. First, the evidence suggests that libraries currently make minimal use of federal grant programs targeting youth. Given the growing influence of the youth development framework in federal and state funding strategies, libraries should reassess their traditional caution about

⁴⁰The PLPYD grantees are: Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, Maryland; Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, New York; Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenberg County, Charlotte, North Carolina; Fort Bend County Library, Richmond Texas; Oakland Public Library, Oakland, California; Free Library of Philadelphia Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Washoe Library Foundation, Reno, Nevada; King County Library System, Seattle, Washington; and Friends of the Tucson Public Library, Tucson, Arizona.

government aid, and look beyond the IMLS for resources to launch innovative youth programs and connect with community partners. This is not to suggest that library directors should chase every federal grant opportunity and go with whatever bears fruit. This approach would only exacerbate the pressure already at work within libraries to be all things to all people, and saddle administrators with additional bureaucratic headaches. Rather, the diversity of federal and state grant opportunities should be integrated into a library's strategic consideration of the most pressing issues facing youth in local communities, and the best ways for the library to respond. More attention then can be directed to those grant opportunities that match youth needs and build long-term library capacity. Thorough acquaintance with the youth development framework should enhance a library's competitiveness in pursuing federal and state opportunities. The ALA could help further by aligning itself publicly with the federal government's recently published "Blueprint for Youth," and lobbying systematically for more attention to roles for public libraries across the range of federal departments and grant programs aligned with the Blueprint.⁴¹

Second, the American Library Association has built a considerable reputation as an effective lobbyist both for the library profession and the public interest in matters of intellectual freedom. More recently it has begun to track youth development opportunities at the federal and state levels in its policy publications. Continuing in this direction, it makes sense for the ALA and its affiliates to raise the profile of young adult services and youth development in promotional events such as the current "@ Your Library" campaign. ALA could also enhance policy awareness and capabilities within the ranks of librarians who work with teens and pre-teens by encouraging more attention to policy issues in organizations like the Young Adult

⁴¹The Blueprint for Youth and its affiliated departments and organizations are listed at the website of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, The Administration for Children and Families (Administration for Children and Families, website).

Library Services Association (YALSA) and the Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC).

Third, state library agencies are the primary recipients of federal IMLS funds, and can help public libraries secure state and federal funding for youth initiatives in numerous ways. But state library agencies around the country vary considerably in their commitment to youth advocacy. State library agencies should be encouraged to increase the resources they devote to youth services, and help public libraries increase their access to federal and state resources for youth development. State library agencies could prove particularly effective in connecting youth development concerns to the new federal initiative to support the recruitment of a new generation of professional librarians.

Finally, one key to deepening support for young adult services and the presence of youth in libraries is to orient all staff to the needs of youth and the potential value they could contribute. However, most graduate schools of information and library science pay at best cursory attention to services for children and youth, and practically no attention to child or adolescent development. The youth development framework offers a compelling synthesis of developmental theory and program applications. In turn, YALSA has developed thoughtful materials linking this general framework to library practice for both generalists and young adult specialists (Vaillancourt, 2000). As the accrediting body for library education, the ALA could influence schools of information and library studies to reexamine their commitment to young adult services and include youth development as a component of curricula. Thought also should be given to recognizing the value of alternative credentials for young adult service positions, sponsoring joint degree programs with other academic departments focused on youth (e.g.,

education, psychology, human development), and delineating career paths within libraries for professionals with youth development training.

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