

# State

OF

# AMERICA'S LIBRARIES

SPECIAL REPORT: PANDEMIC YEAR TWO



BROADBAND



TOP 10 MOST CHALLENGED BOOKS



LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

AND  
MORE!

# EDITOR'S NOTE

Last year, we approached this report through the lens of the global pandemic, and to be honest, we thought the world would be pretty much back to normal by the time this edition of the *State of America's Libraries* was published. Well, here we are again. As we wrote last year, the most accurate way to tell the stories of America's libraries is through the lens of the challenges and opportunities presented by COVID-19. That's obviously still true.

But what's changed over the last year is equally worthy of our attention. In 2021, libraries found themselves at the center of a culture war as conservative groups led a historic effort to ban and challenge materials that address racism, gender, politics, and sexual identity. These groups sought to pull books from school and public library shelves that share the stories of people who are gay, trans, Black, Indigenous, people of color, immigrants, and refugees. But we know that banning books won't make these realities and lived experiences disappear, nor will it erase our nation's struggles to realize true equity, diversity, and inclusion.

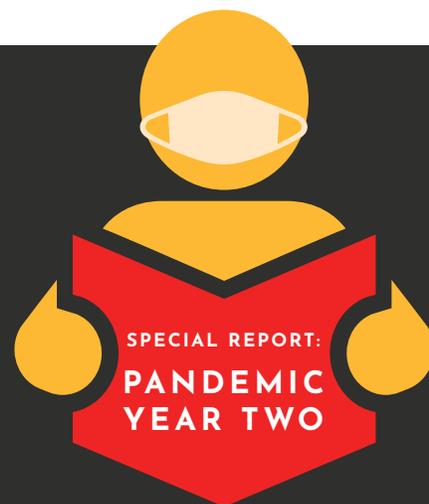
That's why the work of libraries is more essential than ever. Books reach across boundaries and build connections between readers. Reading—especially books that extend beyond our own experiences—expands our worldview. Censorship, on the other hand, divides us and creates barriers.

Undoubtedly, the most widely read part of this report will be the "Top 10 Most Challenged Books" list. And while those titles tell one story, there is another we hope you'll stick around to read: that of the resilience, determination, and innovation of library workers amid an ongoing pandemic, fraught political divides, and budget challenges that force many to do more with less year after year.

This report is not intended to be comprehensive. It's a history we are writing in real time. Now more than ever, we hope reading it inspires you—to get involved in the fight to protect the freedom to read, to advocate for libraries, and to speak up for the value they bring to our communities.

**Stephanie Hlywak**

Director of the Communications and Marketing Office  
American Library Association



## STATE OF AMERICA'S LIBRARIES 2022

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# ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report would not be possible without the dedicated work of staff and members of the following American Library Association (ALA) divisions and offices:

- ALA Editions
- American Association of School Librarians
- Association for Library Service to Children
- Association of College and Research Libraries
- Chapter Relations Office
- Communications and Marketing Office
- Core: Leadership, Infrastructure, Futures
- International Relations Office
- Library and Information Resource Center
- Office of ALA Governance
- Office for Diversity, Literacy, and Outreach Services
- Office for Human Resource Development and Recruitment
- Office for Intellectual Freedom
- Public Library Association
- Public Policy and Advocacy Office
- Public Programs Office
- Reference and User Services Association
- United for Libraries
- Young Adult Library Services Association

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## ABOUT ALA

The American Library Association (ALA) is the foremost national organization providing resources to inspire library and information professionals to transform their communities through essential programs and services. For more than 140 years, ALA has been the trusted voice of libraries, advocating for the profession and the library's role in enhancing learning and ensuring access to information for all. For more information, visit [ala.org](http://ala.org).

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## INTRODUCTION

# LET'S BAND TOGETHER TO FIGHT BOOK BANS

Patricia “Patty” Wong, American Library Association President



There was a hopeful moment last year, as the 2021 *State of America's Library* was going to press, when it seemed that with widespread COVID-19 vaccine availability opening up to most eligible adults in the United States, we might have a relatively “normal” summer. As we

all remember—or are trying to forget—that optimism lasted about six weeks, before many of us put our masks back on and got a crash course in (re)learning the Greek alphabet to track variants.

As a I write this now, we have persevered through the initial pandemic waves and remained resolute in the face of Delta and Omicron. Many states that imposed mask mandates are beginning to lift them, and schoolchildren in some of the largest school districts in the country, including in my home state of California, will be going to class with bare faces for the first time in two years.

Throughout the pandemic, library professionals served their communities in person, online, via phone, bookmobile, and even drone. When demand for the vaccine outstripped supply last year, libraries set up “vaccine hunter” hotlines. Later when jabs were more plentiful, some libraries operated as vaccination sites. It’s been such a privilege to be a part of this profession at a time of such great resolve.

And yet, these remain challenging times to be a library professional. As the pandemic wanes for the time being, we are confronted with a new scourge: an unprecedented uptick in book challenges. And while the focus is often put on the

books that some want to remove from library shelves and curricula, behind every challenge is a library professional who must juggle complicated emotions at a time of incredible stress.

The centerpiece of this report each year is the “Top 10 Most Challenged Books” list, and as you read the following pages, I hope you keep in the front of your mind the very real people who are affected by efforts to restrict the freedom to read.

Library professionals are losing their jobs to protect this fundamental right. And those that make it through challenges can be fundamentally changed. Writing about a book challenge that stretched more than 15 months in 2014, former Iowa school librarian [Kate Lechtenberg](#) remembers:



Boxes of medical supplies await use at Schenectady County (NY) Public Library, which is serving as a COVID-19 vaccination site. PHOTO COURTESY KAREN BRADLEY

“What sticks with me the most is that my effort to follow our selection and reconsideration policies led my school leaders in the building, district, and local teacher’s union to question my professionalism.... I remember crying under my desk in my office, I remember shaking with anger after the meeting in which my union representative and district administrators gently but clearly accused me of violating my ethical commitments as an educator.”

This is personal to me. Not only did I begin my career as a library professional serving children, but I was also a reader who sought stories at my local library to help me understand my place in this world. As a Chinese American with roots in Hawai’i and California, I did not find myself or my community reflected in history books or in stories I read. It was as if I didn’t exist. But today, diverse books create a better lens through which all children can see themselves in library collections. And yet these very titles—the ones addressing cultural invisibility and cultivating understanding—are the ones that are most frequently challenged.

I am reminded of a conversation I had with U.S. Senator Mazie K. Hirono (D-HI) earlier this year. Both of us represent important firsts for the organizations we represent. Hirono is the first female senator to represent Hawai’i and the only first-generation immigrant to serve in the Senate. I am the first Asian American president of the American Library Association. We both have ancestors who have been affected by bigoted acts throughout U.S. history, and as painful as those legacies are to confront, it has never been more essential to do so now. As book challengers

try to ban materials they believe tell an unflattering version of our country’s history, they are restricting us from books that support equity, diversity, and inclusion.

If you are motivated by the stories in this report, here’s how you can help:

- Speak up for the freedom to read and support library staff and educators as we work to address this threat to democracy.
- Vote in local elections and attend school board and city council meetings.
- Contact your state legislators and tell them to vote against censorship bills.
- Report threats to the freedom to read wherever you see them. ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom encourages everyone to report any and all challenges to materials, online resources (including databases), programs, speakers, displays, reading lists, and author visits. No matter is too insignificant.

The struggle against racism, prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination is central to the work of libraries, and as ALA President, I’m grateful to represent libraries and librarians at this critical moment. Thank you for reading. ▶



“Libraries represent values that are core to democracy. Trained and certified librarians and library workers provide services and collections that inform, engage, illuminate and help people of all ages learn more about the world around them.

“Libraries across the country are addressing the effects of historical inequality and systemic racism on library users, especially people of color and those who belong to historically marginalized and minority communities. Library professionals are dedicated to developing collections that allow every person to see themselves in library resources and provide a means to build understanding among all users.”

– **PATTY WONG, WRITING IN THE NEW YORK TIMES**

# BECAUSE STUDENTS NEED CHALLENGING BOOKS, NOT BOOK CHALLENGES.

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ALA  
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## FIGHTING CENSORSHIP EFFORTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

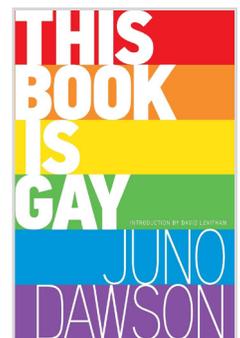
**L**ibrarians have always been on the front lines in the fight to protect the freedom to read. But in 2021, libraries found themselves at the center of attacks orchestrated by conservative parent groups and right-wing media that targeted books about race, gender, and LGBTQIA+ issues for removal from public and school library shelves and, in some cases, included threats of book burning.

The American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF), which tracks book challenges and releases the "Top 10 Most Challenged Books" list each year, determined that in one three-month period alone, between September 1 and November 30, 2021, more than 330 unique cases were reported, doubling the number of reports from 2020 (156 challenges) and putting 2021 totals on pace to break records with 729 challenges to 1,597 books.

### AN UNPRECEDENTED UPTICK

Although many bans and challenges originated from parents, in some cases law enforcement and state legislators got involved.

In Wyoming, a group of residents led by a local pastor filed criminal complaints with local prosecutors, requiring the appointment of a special prosecutor who weighed the possibility of prosecuting public library officials for shelving books some said were obscene in sections intended for children and young adults. The books claimed to be in violation of the law included *This Book is Gay* by Juno Dawson, *How Do You Make a Baby* by Anna Fiske,





**Campbell County (WY) Public Library.** PHOTO: CAMPBELL COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY



**Angie Manfredi, librarian and author of *The (Other) F Word*, signs copies of her book.** PHOTO: ANGIE MANFREDI

*Doing It* by Hannah Witton, *Sex is a Funny Word* by Corey Silverberg, and *Dating and Sex: A Guide for the 21st Century Teen Boy* by Andrew P. Smiler.

In November, [the Associated Press reported](#) that no charges would be filed.

The special prosecutor, Weston County Attorney Michael Stulken, wrote to Campbell County Sheriff Scot Matheny that “[he] cannot ethically bring criminal charges if the facts surrounding a certain matter are not supported by probable cause.” He concluded that the books in question were not obscene and that there was no basis in law for the criminal prosecution of the library staff who had presented the books to the public.

Elsewhere, Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas called for the state’s school boards to remove books he called “pornography.” Abbott also urged state education officials to keep books with “obscene” content out of public schools.

Meanwhile, Texas State Rep. Matt Krause sponsored a [Texas House bill](#) prohibiting schools from teaching lessons that might make students feel “discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress” because of their race. Krause also wrote to a number of Texas school districts, demanding to know if the districts’ libraries included [any](#) of the 849 books listed in his letter. The list, comprising primarily books that address the experiences of Black and LGBTQIA+ people, spurred a number school and public libraries to remove books from library shelves.

Librarian Angie Manfredi put the situation in perspective when she said that some of the book-ban backers don’t want children to learn about the experiences of underrepresented groups, including African Americans and LGBTQIA+ people.

## PUSHING BACK

But librarians spoke up in defense of the freedom to read.

Carolyn Foote, a retired school librarian in Austin, Texas, and three other library professionals are leading a grassroots effort, #FReadom, to push back against censorship efforts and support school librarians.

“[The censorship effort] was so clearly targeting LGBTQ students; it was so clearly targeting race. I don’t want students to feel like they are less than. That’s what brought me to this,” Foote told CNN.

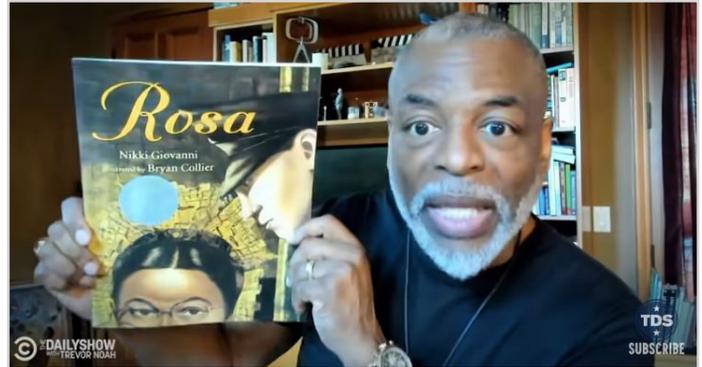
The Virginia Library Association wrote a letter to the [Spotsylvania County School Board](#) and the school division’s superintendent that condemned removing books from the

shelves of school libraries without proper consideration and called it a violation of a student's First Amendment rights.

Moreover, the association spotlighted the work and professionalism of school librarians, noting that “developing a collection for a school library is a process, one that is worked on every day by your collection specialists. They evaluate thousands of titles each year, looking to ensure their accuracy, timeliness, value, and connection to the curriculum.”

The students and parents are also standing up and pushing back. Students at the Central York High School in southern Pennsylvania protested to reinstate materials that had been removed from their library's collection, including a children's book about Rosa Parks, Malala Yousafzai's autobiography, and CNN's *Sesame Street* town hall on racism. Parents and students fought back in Texas, protested in Florida, and fought for the freedom to read in Missouri; organizations donated banned books; and celebrities like LeVar Burton encouraged the masses to read banned books.

“For those of us on that list, it's not a badge of honor,” Jason Reynolds said on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* in December 2021. “People always say, ‘Congratulations. You're doing something right.’ It's like, yeah, but at the same time, there's been access cut for all the young people who might need these books and where they might only get them in schools. You can't take for granted that there might not be a library or bookstore in everybody's community or that there may not be a \$20 bill to go buy that book that they no longer have access to because of these bannings.” ▶



LeVar Burton discusses the perils of book banning on *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*.



The Banned Books Week Coalition selected author Jason Reynolds as the inaugural Honorary Chair for Banned Books Week 2021. CREDIT: JAMES J. REDDINGTON

“We stand opposed to censorship and any effort to coerce belief, suppress opinion, or punish those whose expression does not conform to what is deemed to be orthodox in history, politics, or belief. The unfettered exchange of ideas is essential to the preservation of a free and democratic society. Libraries manifest the promises of the First Amendment by making available the widest possible range of viewpoints, opinions, and ideas, so that every person has the opportunity to freely read and consider information and ideas regardless of their content or the viewpoint of the author. This requires the professional expertise of librarians who work in partnership with their communities to curate collections that serve the information needs of all their users.”

– **THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVE BOARD ON THE WIDESPREAD EFFORTS TO CENSOR BOOKS IN U.S. SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES**

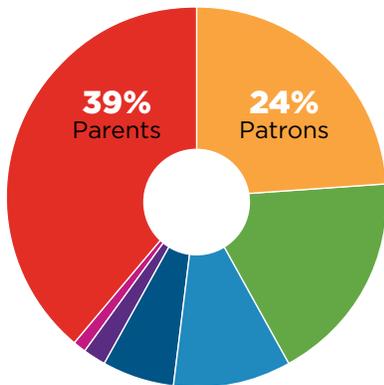
# CENSORSHIP

## BY THE NUMBERS

Books unite us. They reach across boundaries and build connections between readers. Censorship, on the other hand, divides us and creates barriers. In 2021, 1,597 books were affected by censorship attempts. **Learn more at [ala.org/bbooks](https://ala.org/bbooks).**

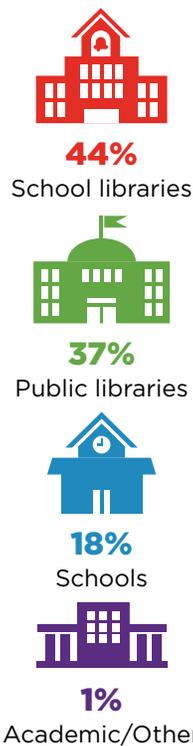


### WHO INITIATES CHALLENGES?



Statistics based on 715 responses

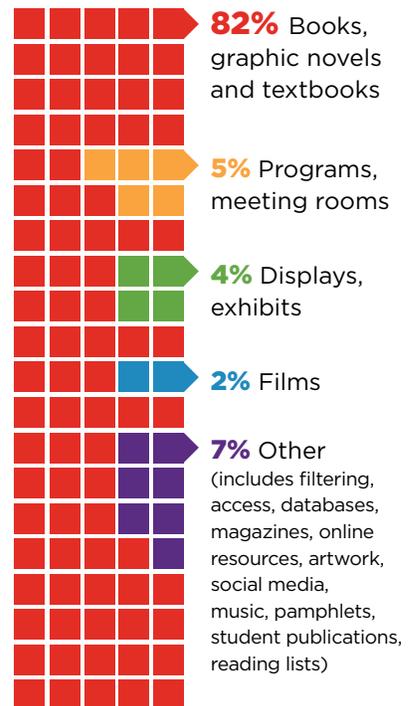
### WHERE DO CHALLENGES TAKE PLACE?



Statistics based on 729 responses

### BOOKS AND BEYOND

The ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom tracked **729 challenges** in 2021. Here's the breakdown:



### REASONS FOR CHALLENGES



Each word and phrase in this graphic is cited from 2021 censorship reports

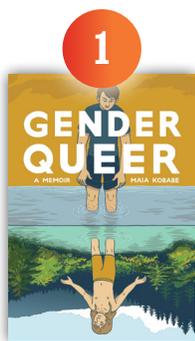
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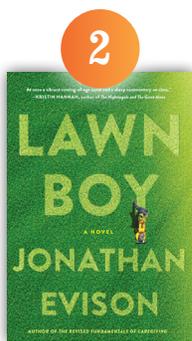
OFFICE FOR  
Intellectual Freedom  
American Library Association

# TOP 10 MOST CHALLENGED BOOKS OF 2021

The American Library Association tracked **729 challenges** to library, school, and university materials and services in 2021. Of the 1,597 individual books that were challenged or banned in 2021, here are the top 10 most challenged:



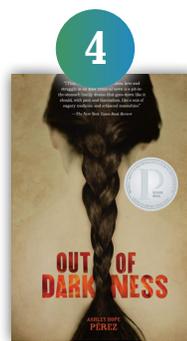
**Gender Queer**  
By Maia Kobabe  
REASONS: Banned, challenged, and restricted for LGBTQIA+ content and because it was considered to have sexually explicit images



**Lawn Boy**  
By Jonathan Evison  
REASONS: Banned and challenged for LGBTQIA+ content and because it was considered to be sexually explicit



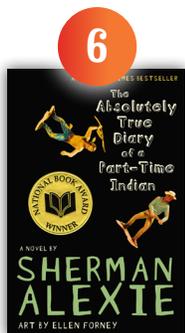
**All Boys Aren't Blue**  
By George M. Johnson  
REASONS: Banned and challenged for LGBTQIA+ content, profanity, and because it was considered to be sexually explicit



**Out of Darkness**  
By Ashley Hope Perez  
REASONS: Banned, challenged, and restricted for depictions of abuse and because it was considered to be sexually explicit



**The Hate U Give**  
By Angie Thomas  
REASONS: Banned and challenged for profanity, violence, and it was thought to promote an anti-police message and indoctrination of a social agenda



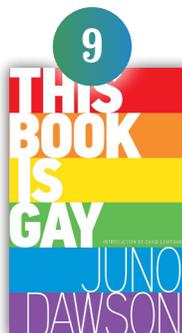
**The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian**  
By Sherman Alexie  
REASONS: Banned and challenged for profanity, sexual references, and use of a derogatory term



**Me and Earl and the Dying Girl**  
By Jesse Andrews  
REASONS: Banned and challenged because it was considered sexually explicit and degrading to women



**The Bluest Eye**  
By Toni Morrison  
REASONS: Banned and challenged because it depicts child sexual abuse and was considered sexually explicit



**This Book is Gay**  
By Juno Dawson  
REASONS: Banned, challenged, relocated, and restricted for providing sexual education and LGBTQIA+ content



**Beyond Magenta**  
By Susan Kuklin  
REASONS: Banned and challenged for LGBTQIA+ content and because it was considered to be sexually explicit



Photographs from “Voices from the African Diaspora: The Black Experience in Bethlehem, Pa.”

# CENTERING EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

**B**ooks that are frequent targets for bans include those that deal with racism and racial justice as well as stories that center the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

But just as libraries are pushing back against attempts to censor diverse books, they are getting more innovative about supporting equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts in their buildings or communities by prioritizing EDI-specific programming, as well.

Bethlehem (PA) Area Public Library’s oral history project, “Voices from the African Diaspora: The Black Experience in Bethlehem, Pa.,” for example, sought to document the history of Bethlehem’s Black community in a majority-white town, telling the stories of community members like Sharon

King, whose mother was the town’s first Black police officer.

Diverse library programming also raised awareness about annual cultural celebrations, such as the Monroe County (IN) Library’s Lunar New Year commemoration.

Sometimes, EDI programming requires



**George Oberle, Director of the Center for Mason Legacies, History Librarian, and Assistant Professor at George Mason University.**



**The Penny Panel of the Memorial to the Enslaved People of George Mason.**



**The Providence (RI) Public Library.**

communities to confront painful histories. George D. Oberle, director of the Center for Mason Legacies, history librarian, and assistant professor at George Mason University, established a research center to examine the legacy of the university's namesake, his ancestors and heirs, and the people he enslaved. Outcomes from this work include numerous educational resources for the GMU community, including a robust website with an array of primary source materials and a memorial recognizing the individuals enslaved by George Mason in the center of campus.

## DIVERSIFYING THE WORKFORCE

Numbers show that the library profession continues to lack diversity when it comes to race and ethnicity; as of 2020, the Department for Professional Employees reported that approximately 83% of librarians in the U.S. are white, despite ongoing efforts to diversify the profession. As

Twanna Hodge, diversity, equity, and inclusion librarian at the University of Florida's George A. Smathers Libraries in Gainesville, and Jamia Williams, health sciences librarian at SUNY Brockport's Drake Memorial Library, wrote in *American Libraries* magazine, "Centering BIPOC voices must be incorporated into every aspect of librarianship."

The work to bring the library and information services sector into greater alignment with the communities that libraries serve has to be swift and intentional.

In 2021, the American Library Association's Committee on Diversity developed the *DEI Scorecard for Library and Information Organizations*, an evaluative tool that measures effectiveness in diversity, equity, and inclusion in the recruitment, hiring, retention, and promotion of people of color. The committee created the template to assist administrators and other decision-makers with gathering actionable data for strengthening diversity, equity, and inclusion in their institutions.

The *Spectrum Scholarship Program*, another ALA initiative, seeks to bring diversity and inclusion to the library field by supporting new generations of racially and ethnically diverse library students. In 2021, 60 new scholars were admitted to the cohort. Since 1997, ALA has awarded more than 1,300 Spectrum Scholarships. During the 2021 application cycle, the Spectrum Scholarship Program received four times as many applications as there were available scholarships, prompting Tracie D. Hall, ALA Executive Director, to identify "equity, diversity, and inclusion in library services and the LIS workforce" as one of the priorities that "unites all of the Association's work."

## DIVERSIFYING THE COLLECTION

Everyone deserves to see themselves reflected in their library's collection.

That was at the heart of the work that the Providence (RI) Public Library (PPL) engaged in through its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Collections Committee.

PPL surveyed residents, inventoried EDI-related projects and programs at the library and in the community, and sponsored training sessions with the Racial Equity Institute, as well as a staff learning circle based on *The New York Times'* 1619 Project.

This work is consistent with the [call to action](#) issued by the Public Library Association, a division of ALA, to end systemic racism and injustice. It has called on public library workers to invest in alternatives to policing and security guards within library spaces; develop racial equity action plans; develop and fund programs, services, and collections that “center the voices and experiences of people of color and shift power to communities for co-curation and co-creation”; and support scholarship programs and BIPOC-led caucuses and associations.

## CHANGING THE SUBJECT (HEADINGS)

In November, the Library of Congress, which maintains the Library of Congress Subject Headings, [announced its decision](#) to replace the subject headings “aliens” and “illegal aliens” with the new headings “noncitizens” and “illegal immigration.”

It was a move [praised by ALA President Patricia “Patty” Wong](#), who stated, “We are pleased that the Library of Congress is replacing these subject headings, which are both outdated and dehumanizing. This update better reflects common terminology and respects library users and library workers from all backgrounds. It also reflects the core value of social justice for ALA members, who have been at the vanguard of this change for years.”

## LIBRARIANS FIGHTING AAPI HATE

2021 saw a surge in incidents of hate against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. [The Stop AAPI Hate Coalition](#) at San Francisco State University tracked more than 10,000 incidents of hate from March 2020 through September 2021.

Librarians from the AAPI community lifted their voices against the rising tide of hate. The Asian Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA), one of the six National Associations of Librarians of Color, [condemned “the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes that have permeated our country over the past year.”](#)

As library organizations rallied around the AAPI community, library leaders also emerged from the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities, including ALA President Patty Wong, the Association’s first Chinese American president, and ALA President-elect Lessa Kanani’opua Pelayo-Lozada. Maria Taesil Hudson McCauley was also elected the first Asian American president of the Public Library Association (PLA), an ALA division.

[Wong told \*American Libraries\* magazine](#), “This is both an opportunity and a responsibility to advocate for the support of libraries and communities in pursuit of racial and social equity for all. I hope to bring Asian and Asian-American communities, businesses, nonprofits, publishers, and leaders together with library workers to advocate for action and engagement to benefit all people of color.” ▶

## A FRESH START

Library EDI efforts extended to patrons attempting to re-enter society after serving prison time, who often face discrimination in housing and employment.

[Libraries Build Business](#), a national initiative of ALA supported by Google.org, helped get the [New Start Entrepreneurship Incubator](#) project off the ground.

The Gwinnett County (GA) Public Library created the program to help community members who have served time in jail or prison to create their own businesses, which includes a six-month program of training so that formerly incarcerated people can overcome barriers to professional success.

Participants include budding entrepreneurs like Kevin Moore, who plans to start a small moving company. Kevin’s re-entry into society after his prison time has been challenging, as he experienced housing and job discrimination. But with his business plan and determination, Kevin can have a true opportunity at a second chance.





New York Public Library's iconic lions masked up during the pandemic. IMAGE COURTESY NYPL

## FIGHTING DISINFORMATION

Studies have shown that libraries are among the most trusted institutions in our country. That's why libraries took a leading role in providing accurate information to communities during the pandemic, even as a secondary pestilence continued to threaten the nation: disinformation.

It showed up in many variants, ranging from disinformation about COVID-19, including its origins, to false news about the outcome of the 2020 presidential election and the January 6 insurrection.

The World Health Organization refers to the phenomenon as an “infodemic,” an overabundance of information, some accurate and some not, that undermines trust and makes it difficult for people trying to find reliable sources.

Although disinformation has been exacerbated by the conditions of the pandemic, the problem is not new. And libraries and library professionals found themselves in unique positions to help users access reliable

information about topics ranging from election security to mRNA vaccines.

Nicole A. Cooke, the Augusta Baker Endowed Chair and an associate professor at the School of Library and Information Science at the University of South Carolina, believes that the profession offers essential tools to thwart disinformation attempts.

Speaking in August 2021, Cooke said, “Knowledge of information behavior and meta literacy skills can aid LIS professionals and the public in combating the effects of fake news.”

Partnerships with academia offer one positive way forward. Iowa State University's Greenlee School of Journalism held a virtual fake news workshop at the Ames Public Library. During the event, “Facing Facts: The Truth About Fake News and What To Do About It,” graduate students in psychology discussed the “subconscious power of fake news and how our brains operate under it.”

## JANUARY 6

The January 6 insurrection—itsself fueled by distortions, grievances, and outright lies—marked a new day for misinformation.

In its roundup, “[The Jan. 6 Capitol attack: A year of debunking false narratives](#),” the Poynter Institute’s PolitiFact refuted various false claims, including the theory that the riot was driven by left-wing antifa activists in disguise and that Vice President Mike Pence had the power to overturn the presidential election results.

In the wake of the insurrection, the Pierce County (WA) Library System in Tacoma provided information resources to help patrons better understand the events. [Find the Facts: Resources for Unfolding Events](#) offered links to articles, opposing viewpoints, interpretations of the U.S. Constitution, fact checking sites, information on hate, extremism, and white supremacy, and details on how to contact local, state and federal officials.

## BOOSTING VACCINE CONFIDENCE ACROSS THE COUNTRY



**Communities for Immunity**

Museums and Libraries as Trusted Community Partners

The rapid roll out of COVID-19 vaccines in Spring 2021 engendered great

celebration from many—but it also provided fodder for others to spread pernicious misinformation.

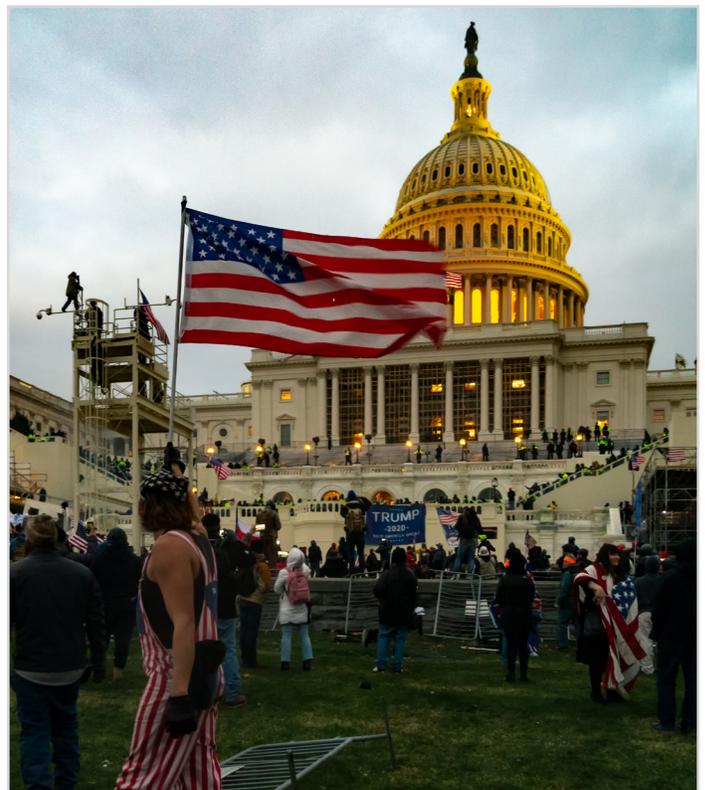
Libraries were well-positioned as trusted community anchors to fight back against this tide.

Communities for Immunity, an unprecedented collaboration among libraries and museums to boost COVID-19 information and vaccine confidence, provided funding to libraries, museums, science centers, and other cultural institutions to enhance vaccine confidence where it matters most: at the local level.

Grant recipients included The C. Williams Rush Museum of African American Arts & Culture in Kingstree, South Carolina, which planned to highlight the accomplishments of Black medical personnel from South Carolina history to show examples of how past health threats and medical



Ames (IA) Public Library and a screenshot from a fake news workshop held there. PHOTO: AMES PUBLIC LIBRARY



The riot at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. PHOTO: TYLER MERBLER, CC BY 2.0 VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

disparities have been overcome through persistence, education, and science.

The Kansas City (MO) Public Library planned to marshal in-person consultations at multiple library branches and mail materials to reach vaccine-hesitant individuals in their service area. Staff also committed to preserve and share the stories of previously vaccine-hesitant individuals who were later vaccinated, translate materials into new languages, offer vaccine clinics at their branches, and facilitate conversations between youth and medical professionals about the vaccine.

“Access to information about vaccines and trusted messengers to effectively convey it locally is a matter of life and death. America’s 117,000 libraries provide both, serving communities at greatest risk of contracting the coronavirus and those most hesitant to receive the vaccine,” said Patty Wong, President of the American Library Association, of these efforts. ▶

**5 RULES TO HELP DECISION-MAKING**

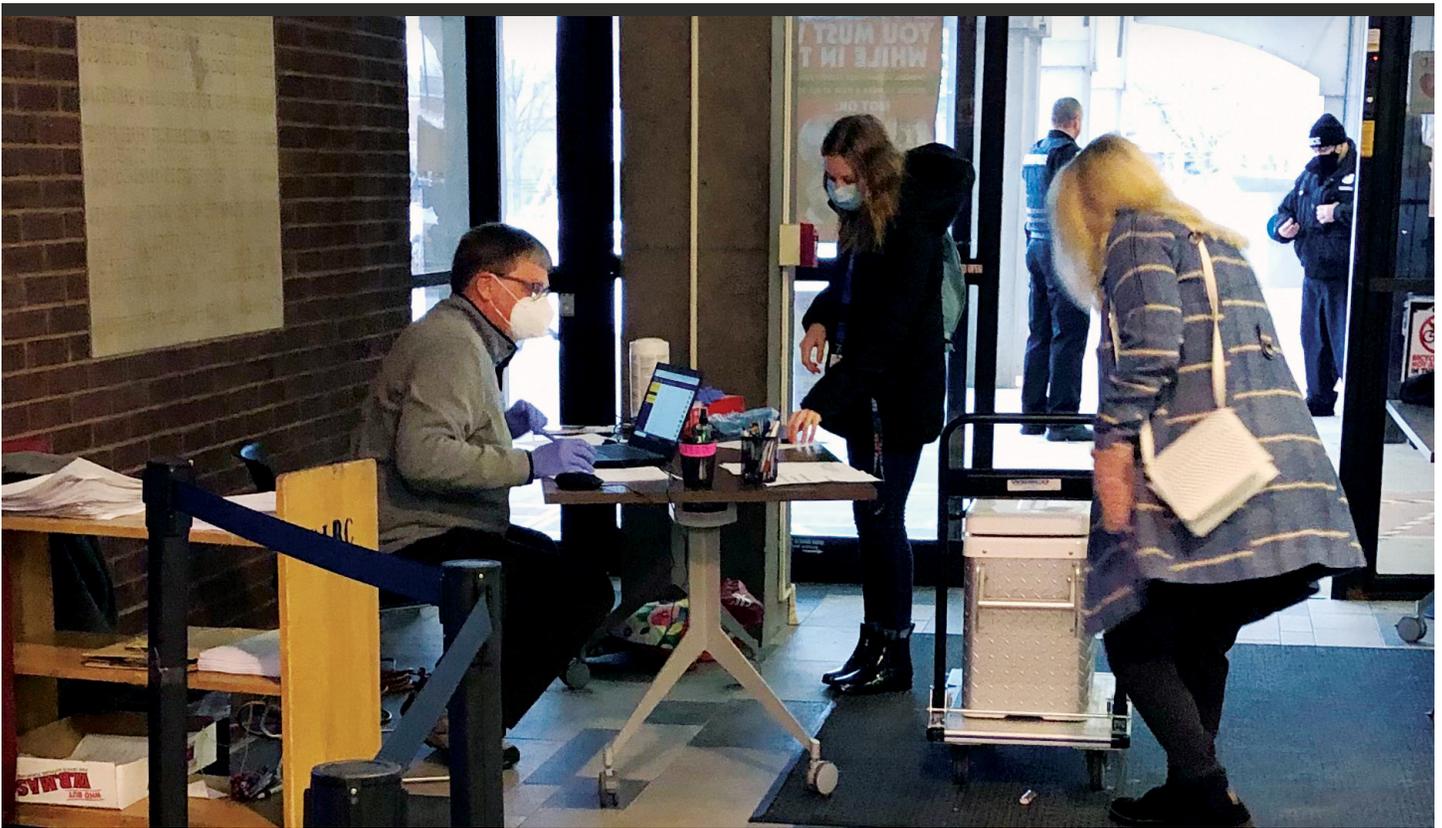
- 1 Most data will be flawed or incomplete. Be honest and transparent about this.
- 2 We may never have a “final answer” for many questions. Consider when to act: Do you wait for certainty or act on the evidence you have?
- 3 Acknowledge complexity, admit ignorance, and be open to exploring paradoxes.
- 4 Different people interpret data differently. Seek outside perspectives for solutions.
- 5 Observing real-world interventions can complement the findings of controlled trials and other forms of evidence.

**This resource was adapted by the REOpening Archives, Libraries, and Museums (REALM) is a research partnership between OCLC, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and Battelle. It’s an overview of an article published in BMJ titled, “Managing uncertainty in the covid-19 era” by Rutter, Wolpert, and Greenhalgh. They write: “Because uncertainty is inevitable in pandemics, simple rules can help decision-making even as uncertainties continue to multiply for archives, libraries, and museums. COVID-19 is a complex problem in a complex system; uncontested facts tend to be elusive. Most decisions must be based on information that is flawed, uncertain, proximate, or sparse. By carefully evaluating how these imperfect responses unfold in messy, real-world settings, you can help to build the multifaceted evidence base needed to continue operating and serving your communities.”**

“I do believe that libraries are citadels of knowledge and empathy, and they’ve been extraordinarily important in my life. And I want to thank all the librarians out there, whether you’re in a small town, big city, you’re opening up the world for our children, giving them access to possibilities that they might not otherwise have, creating safe spaces where reading is cool. You mean a lot to not just those individuals who benefit from your work, but you mean a lot to our democracy and our country. We appreciate you. Keep it up.”



– **BARACK OBAMA, SPEAKING TO LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS AT ALA'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN JUNE 2021**



A health care worker from Schenectady County (NY) Public Health Services (right) wheels in the vaccine while David Bradley (left), a member of Friends of the Schenectady County Public Library (SCPL) and spouse of SCPL Director Karen Bradley, checks in vaccine recipients. PHOTO: KAREN BRADLEY

## ONGOING LIBRARY RESPONSE TO COVID-19

As with every sector of society, libraries were hard hit by the pandemic.

Especially impacted were libraries that support underserved populations. Thanks to funding from several philanthropic foundations, these libraries could get much-needed help.

The [ALA COVID Library Relief Fund](#) assisted public, school, academic, and tribal libraries across the United States and U.S. Territories experiencing COVID-related economic hardship.

Libraries could apply for funds from a \$1.25 million pot, with grants ranging from \$30,000 to \$50,000 to remedy libraries, library systems, and districts that saw a substantial

reduction in funding that impaired their ability to provide services.

The grants were aimed at libraries with underserved populations or those in low- to moderate-income groups. They funded staff salaries, materials, technology, and in-person or virtual services.

[ALA Executive Director Tracie D. Hall](#) said the funds would “tackle digital equity, supporting educational persistence, workforce reskilling, and community recovery more broadly, efforts that will undoubtedly require fully staffed and fully funded libraries.”

Recipients included the Oneida Nation Library in Wisconsin, which saw its budget shrink by 67% and

was forced to close one of only two libraries. The library system received a \$40,000 grant for new laptops, hotspots, computers, and training. This enabled the library to boost literacy programs and will help buy kits for the summer and fall reading programs, new activity kits for elders, and new books for all age groups.

A \$45,000 grant helped the North Miami (FL) Public Library, serving 63,000 in an economically challenged, widely diverse community located in the city's heart. The funds enabled the library, which suffered a 30% staff reduction following budget cuts, to hire a much-needed youth services librarian and obtain new resources to support children, teens, and families.

Serving a community where all of its students are eligible for the free and reduced lunch program, the libraries in Brooks County (GA) schools are the sole source of books for many students. With the \$40,000 grant, three schools and their 1,500 students received new books and other resources, including crucial access to e-books for those who attended remotely. The grant also provided funds needed to hire part-time staff.

A \$40,000 grant supported new scanning technology and the purchase of mobile hotspots for the Glendale (AZ) Community College Library, which serves 15,000 students, many of whom cannot afford internet access at home. More than half are the first generation in their families to go to college.

Through another ALA grant program, American Rescue Plan: Humanities Grants for Libraries, libraries recovering from the pandemic received relief to restore and sustain their core activities. Up to 200 libraries of all types—public, tribal, K-12, academic, special, and prison—received \$10,000.

Among those receiving funds was the Palmas Academy in Humacao, Puerto Rico, which had to furlough its only librarian and close its library's doors due to budget constraints. Before closing, this school library was the main hub for humanities-centered activities in the community. Thanks to the grant funds, the library reopened, hired staff, and welcomed back students.

The Irish Cultural Center in Phoenix, home to more than 10,000 volumes and archival material, was hard hit by the pandemic and had not fully reopened since closing in March 2020. A grant allowed the organization to bring



The North Miami (FL) Public Library.



Students in the library at Palmas Academy in Humacao, Puerto Rico. PHOTO: PALMAS ACADEMY

back monthly Irish history book discussions and fund staff salaries.

Also benefiting was the Jane Morgan Memorial Library in the rural village of Cambria, Wisconsin. Grant funds

enabled the library to offer programming to its large population of migrant workers.

## VACCINATION NATION

Libraries on the forefront of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout included the Prince George's County (MD) Memorial Library System, which offered the service of “vaccine hunting” in April 2021. This involved utilizing people with online detecting skills who volunteered to help others in the community find vaccine appointments at a time when they were difficult to come by.

The majority Black, Latino, and immigrant community of more than 900,000 was the hardest hit jurisdiction in Maryland, with more than 18% of the state's cases, even though it only comprised 19% of the population.

In Ohio, the Cuyahoga County Public Library partnered with the county's board of health to help residents navigate the online appointment system, while some branches distributed free bus passes to people using public transportation to reach vaccination sites.

Libraries also served as vaccination sites, including the Schenectady County (NY) Public Library. In January 2021,



**A FEMA staff member helps a resident schedule a vaccination appointment at the Parma branch of the Cuyahoga County Public Library in March 2021.** CUYAHOGA COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

health care workers were vaccinating 100-150 people per day at the library. The library provided support by printing forms, information, and vaccine cards.

The Noble County (IN) Public Library used space normally used for meetings and private events for a vaccination clinic.

“We have a lot of people in the county coming into the library that have probably never been here before,” said library director Sandy Petrie. ▀

## NEW VARIANTS, NEW STRATEGIES

In Delaware, the Division of Public Health (DPH) approached the Delaware Division of Libraries (DDL) with a plan to distribute more than 75,000 BinaxNOW antigen self-tests through the state's public libraries for three months from summer to fall 2021. “I think it's a slam dunk that [health departments] would think of libraries,” says Alta Porterfield, statewide social innovator at DDL.

The initiative—which ran at 32 of Delaware's 33 public libraries—was “a very easy transition” for library workers, says Porterfield, since they already have experience in public-facing roles and materials distribution.



**Kathy McFadden (right), a staffer at Sussex County (DE) Libraries, hands out rapid, at-home COVID-19 testing kits during a drive-through distribution event at Seaford (DE) District Library in August 2021.** PHOTO: DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF LIBRARIES

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## LIBRARIES CONNECT COMMUNITIES TO BROADBAND

In January 2021, the American Library Association Council, the governing body of ALA, declared that universal access to affordable high-capacity broadband is a basic human right for all.

Library professionals know firsthand that broadband networks and services drive robust, resilient, and effective societies and economies, and that access to high-speed internet connectivity is essential for education, professional success, healthcare, and civic engagement.

The path toward universal broadband will flow through libraries, which in 2021 continued to play a pivotal role in supporting a nation recovering from the pandemic.

Libraries further extended their technology services and resources in the face of pandemic limitations, a fact confirmed by the *2020 Public Library Technology Survey report*, released in September 2021, from the Public Library Association, a division of ALA.

More than half of the libraries reported circulating technology, including laptops, hotspots, and tablets, for off-site use. The same percentage reported providing streaming programs, including storytimes and author events.

By leaving on or extending their Wi-Fi signals, libraries provided 24/7 internet access to anyone logging on inside or outside library buildings.

The study found that 93% of public libraries provide or plan to provide free Wi-Fi access on their grounds even when their buildings are closed to the public, while 44% of public libraries have moved routers outdoors to improve public access, and 23% of libraries surveyed also provide Wi-Fi hotspots for patrons to check out and use at home.

The survey, too, revealed disparities among rural and urban libraries. In fact, 34.6% of libraries, including those in rural areas, cannot improve bandwidth because faster speeds are not available.

## FEDERAL INVESTMENT FUELED BY LIBRARY ADVOCATES

The nation's libraries also benefited from significant investments in broadband funding through several new programs. Established as part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, the new \$7.17 billion Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) program allowed libraries and schools to purchase and distribute technology necessary for remote learning, working from home, virtual healthcare visits, and more.

ALA contributed rulemaking for ECF and worked with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to promote the funding through the FCC's E-rate program. Participating libraries received 100% reimbursement for the cost of hotspots and other Wi-Fi-capable devices such as modems, routers, laptops, and tablets.

Additionally, libraries were among the first stops for families who struggled to afford internet service during the COVID-19 pandemic. ALA and local libraries helped distribute information about the \$3.2 billion Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program, administered by the FCC, which provided a discount of up to \$50 per month for broadband service (or up to \$75 per month on qualifying tribal lands) and a one-time discount of up to \$100 for a laptop, desktop, or tablet computer purchased through a participating provider.

## A MATTER OF EQUITY

The FCC estimates that 19 million Americans lack broadband internet access, but the real number may be higher, and some librarians point out that social justice efforts must include advocacy and support for communities where these people live.

The impact is real, according to Erin Hollingsworth, a librarian at North Slope Borough School District (NSBSD) in Utqiagvik, Alaska. NSBSD is the northernmost and largest school district by area in the U.S., covering 89,000 square miles and consisting of eight villages accessible only by plane. Efforts to provide access for remote learning during the pandemic were hindered, she said during ALA's Annual Conference in June 2021, and solutions offered were not applicable to remote Alaskan villages.

"It feels as though they're working from an assumption that internet is available, and that's not necessarily the case,"



**Prince George's County (MD) Memorial Library System promotes free parking-lot accessible Wi-Fi to anyone with a library card.**

she said. Affordable connectivity is not an option in the region—four of the eight villages are connected via satellite, which is not high-speed.

Librarians in Haralson County, Georgia, with a population of 25,000 in the Appalachian foothills about an hour from Atlanta, drove around in buses to distribute mobile hotspots, books, and assignments for students. With 100% of K–12 students qualifying for free or reduced-cost lunch, the county still lacks the infrastructure to make high speed broadband a reality.

"Literally there were children who were unable to access education during COVID-19 unless they traveled somewhere or a mobile unit came and brought a hotspot," Angela Branyon, assistant professor at the University of West Georgia in Carrollton, said. "It's just amazing that we're an hour away from a nonstop flight to anywhere in the world, and we can't get internet." ▶

## LIBRARIES ADVANCING DIGITAL LITERACY

In addition to broadband access, *The 2020 Public Library Technology Survey* showed that libraries play an essential role in advancing digital literacy:

- More than 88% of all public libraries offer formal or informal digital literacy programming.
- More than one-third (36.7%) of public libraries have dedicated digital literacy and technology programs and training staff.
- More than one in five libraries provide classes or informal help related to coding, computer programming, robotics, and 3D printing.



# FEDERAL FUNDING, LEGISLATION, AND ADVOCACY

**L**ibraries in 2021 saw unprecedented levels of federal funding, from pandemic recovery legislation to annual appropriations, beginning with the \$1.9 trillion [American Rescue Plan Act \(ARPA\)](#). The largest spending bill ever approved by Congress, ARPA included \$200 million for the [Institute of Museum and Library Services \(IMLS\)](#), the only source of federal funding dedicated to America's libraries. Of the \$200 million for IMLS, 89% (\$178 million) was allocated for state library administrative agencies.

In addition to the one-time influx of funding through ARPA, libraries won increases in annual congressional appropriations for Fiscal Year 2021. IMLS received an additional \$5 million, a record [eighth consecutive increase](#) for the agency. [Innovative Approaches to Literacy \(IAL\)](#), a federal program administered by the Department of

Education supporting school libraries and non-profit literacy organizations, also saw a \$1 million increase above FY 2020 appropriations.

American Library Association advocates [worked](#) to ensure libraries would be eligible for additional funding in any broadband provisions negotiated in proposed infrastructure spending throughout 2021. The [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#), signed into law in November 2021, included unparalleled funding for digital equity programs. In addition to providing an additional \$43 billion for broadband deployment, the legislation included \$2.75 billion in new investments in digital inclusion through the [Digital Equity Act](#). The legislation would support libraries and other community organizations to help individuals develop the skills and the confidence to put that internet connection



to use. ALA weighed in early to influence the design of the forthcoming grant programs and will provide guidance for libraries of all kinds to access the funds in 2022.

Libraries may be eligible to receive funding for library infrastructure through another program established through ARPA. The Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund provides \$10 billion in available funding for eligible states, territories, and tribal communities to ensure individuals' access to high quality broadband, the implementation of broadband infrastructure improvements, and the enhancement of the overall quality of education, work, and telehealth as a direct response to the ongoing public health emergency. Funds will be allocated from the U.S. Department of the Treasury to states. Through its new resources, ALA is promoting the federal program to assist

state chapters and local libraries in accessing funds as the program develops in 2022.

ALA led a campaign throughout the year to garner support for federal legislation to provide funding exclusively for public library facilities for the first time since 1997. Library champions in the House and Senate introduced the Build America's Libraries Act in early 2021 to designate funds for construction of modern libraries in underserved and disadvantaged communities as well as renovation and enhancement of facilities to reduce the risk of COVID-19 and vulnerability to natural disasters. Though advocates garnered strong support for the Build America's Libraries Act, the bill was not included in the hotly debated congressional spending packages, which were significantly paired down.

Library workers also benefited significantly from the government's response to the health emergency when the U.S. Department of Education (ED) announced a change to Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program rules. For a limited period of time, borrowers can receive credit for past periods of repayment that would otherwise not qualify for PSLF. Many library workers previously denied eligibility have received tens of thousands of dollars in loan forgiveness. Having long advocated with education coalition partners for changes to PSLF, ALA encouraged library workers in all contexts to ascertain their eligibility for the program before the waiver ends on October 31, 2022. ▸

"Advocacy as disruption? Yes! What if we revolutionize the way we fund and equip our libraries in order to confront head-on the inequities that we often decry on our protest posters and in our institutional committees? What if our lowest-income neighborhoods become home to our most well-funded and well-staffed school libraries? What if universities that serve the highest percentage of first-generation college students shift a larger portion of their budgets to their libraries? What if library trustees become adamant that their mayor or city manager help them respond to rising high school dropout rates by establishing a standalone public library for young adults in a shopping center facing low tenancy? What if we connect the dots between library and community disinvestment and position our advocacy efforts to counter them both? I believe we can. What's more, I believe we must."



– **TRACIE D. HALL, ALA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR IN THE MARCH 2021 ISSUE OF AMERICAN LIBRARIES**



## HOW WE READ IN 2021

**W**hen Americans sat down to read a book in 2021, one in three elected to look at an electronic device rather than a print book.

A study by the [Pew Research Center](#) found that print was still the reader's primary choice, with 65% of adults saying they read a print book. But the study also showed that e-book consumption has begun to go into overdrive, with uptick from 25% to 30% since 2019.

That surge has impacted libraries, which have seen increased demand for e-books. But libraries have also had to wrestle with a licensing system from publishers that has hampered their ability to meet that demand. The biggest challenge has been the reluctance of e-book publishers to provide the materials and the often exorbitant costs associated with them.

Whereas libraries can buy print books in bulk and, under the “first-sale doctrine,” can lend the books to an unlimited number of readers for free, digital content is a different story altogether. Publishers sell e-books to third-party vendors such as OverDrive that, in turn, sell the rights to libraries.

According to [OverDrive](#), patrons worldwide checked out half a billion items in 2021, a new record. In states and cities across the U.S., e-book demand is rising. In Massachusetts, for example, the Library eBooks and Audiobooks program, which provides digital assets to patrons at 377 state libraries, saw demand climb by more than 40%.

As Michelle Jeske, Immediate Past President of the Public Library Association (PLA) and Denver city librarian, [told the](#)

*New Yorker*, at the Denver Public Library, digital checkouts have grown at a rate greater than 60%, to 2.3 million, while spending on digital content went up by one-fifth.

But e-book rights have a limited shelf life and are often sold at above-retail rates.

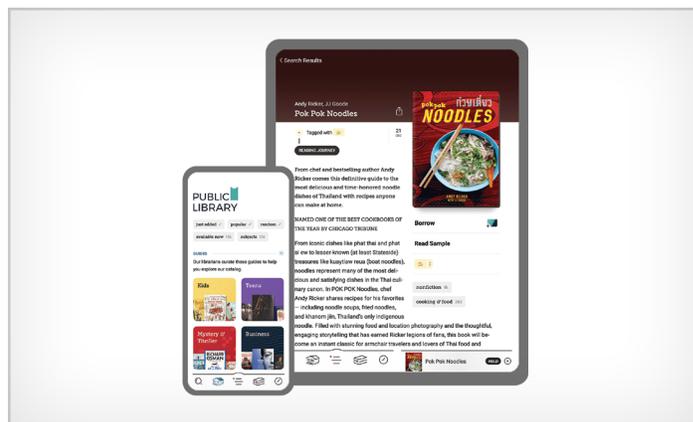
According to [research from the American Library Association](#), for popular trade e-books, libraries often pay \$55 for one copy that expires after 2 years (or \$550 for one copy for 20 years). Meanwhile, a consumer will pay about \$15 for perpetual use. By comparison, libraries can purchase hardcover books for around \$18-20. The challenges don't end there: non-price terms are similarly problematic, such as the ability to archive and preserve works or develop versions for people with disabilities.

But there were some positive rumblings of change in 2021.

One provider, Amazon, which had been [withholding e-books from libraries](#), started to loosen its grip. In 2021, [Amazon announced a deal](#) with the Boston-based Digital Public Library of America to start licensing its e-books to public libraries.

As we move into 2022, libraries continue to fight for equitable access to e-books.

The American Library Association Digital Content Working Group issued a [paper](#) calling on publishers to offer licensing models that are cost-effective and flexible and for library digital content providers to revamp platforms to support flexible licensing models, robust collections, and enhance accessibility features.



Overdrive's Libby app connects readers to e-books.

Efforts are continuing on the legislative front, only to meet with continued resistance from publishers and even from at least one governor.

Maryland passed a [law](#) requiring publishers licensing “an electronic literary product” to consumers to also license the content to public libraries “on reasonable terms.” The Association of American Publishers took legal action, obtaining a [preliminary injunction](#) from the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland.

And in New York, Governor [Kathy Hochul vetoed legislation](#) that would require publishers to offer licenses for electronic books to libraries under reasonable terms.

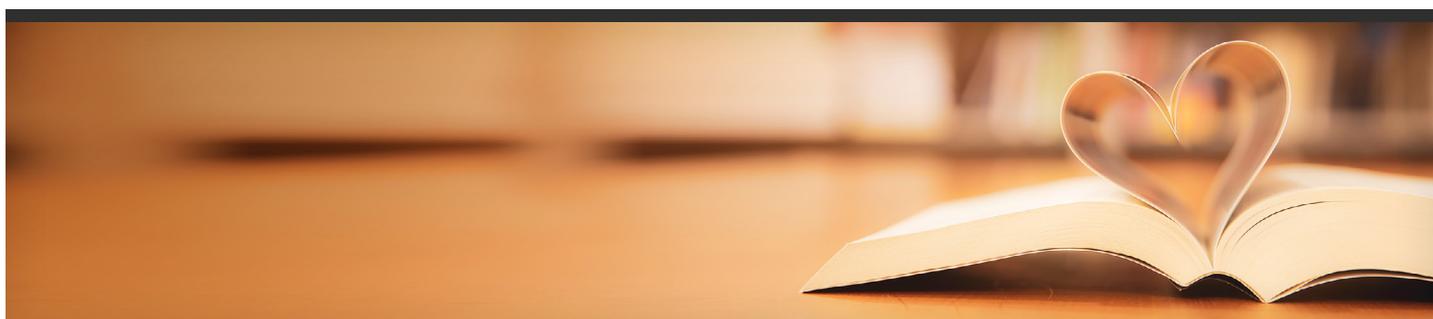
But moving into 2022, the trend is toward more legislative intervention, as more states are introducing library e-book bills. ▶

## WAITING IN VAIN

While patrons continue to discover and rely on digital content, libraries are engaged in a behind-the-scenes fight for fair pricing, multiple licensing models, and full access to digital content from publishers.

Michael Blackwell, director, St. Mary's County Library in Maryland and member of the ALA Joint Digital Content Working Group, explained what library users should know about this hidden struggle:

“The most important thing to know is that libraries do not own most or nearly any of the digital content. Instead, we license it. Unlike with a print book, which we buy, own, and circulate, digital content circulation is still owned by the publishers, who can set limits on the length of time we have the rights to share it or even say we cannot even have a license at all.... It is nearly impossible to build a collection as deep and rich as what we offer in print, even as demand surges for digital in libraries, especially in the wake of the COVID pandemic. Readers see less variety and have longer waits for the best-known content, especially as libraries are increasingly stretched by having to meet demand for digital while still providing print without notable increases in funding.”



## SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

**L**ibraries remain resilient and robust in the face of a variety of challenges – misinformation about vaccines and elections, censorship attempts, a rising tide of xenophobia and homophobia, and even direct threats.

But now more than ever they need our support, so they can remain the heart and soul of their communities.

Libraries need people to get involved: to spread the word about the value of the library to neighbors, friends and decision-makers.

Public libraries, which often provide ever expanding services with dwindling budgets, staff, and resources, can benefit from your support and advocacy. You can add your voice to the chorus of decision makers by joining a library board or a Friends group. Friends groups advocate for libraries on such issues as local referenda or proposed budget increases or cuts, raise funds, sponsor events, and host used book sales. You can even organize your own Friends group.

You can also make a difference by advocating for school librarians. More than 60 education and library research studies have produced clear evidence that school library programs staffed by qualified school librarians have a positive impact on student academic achievement. They provide the foundation for future academic success and lifelong learning.

Although libraries receive funding from local sources like property taxes, they are also dependent on federal funds, including grants through the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) and the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) grants from the Department of Education. These funding sources are precarious and often subject to a political tug-of-war in Washington, with threats of cuts

and even elimination of funds. Call your elected officials and urge them to ensure that libraries continue to have the financial support they need.

Your donations can go a long way to providing valuable assistance to libraries. State and national associations help libraries in need. The American Library Association has provided financial support to communities in need, including \$15,000 to assist libraries in Louisiana and New Jersey impacted by Hurricane Ida, and \$12,000 to help restore public libraries in Haiti following a devastating earthquake.

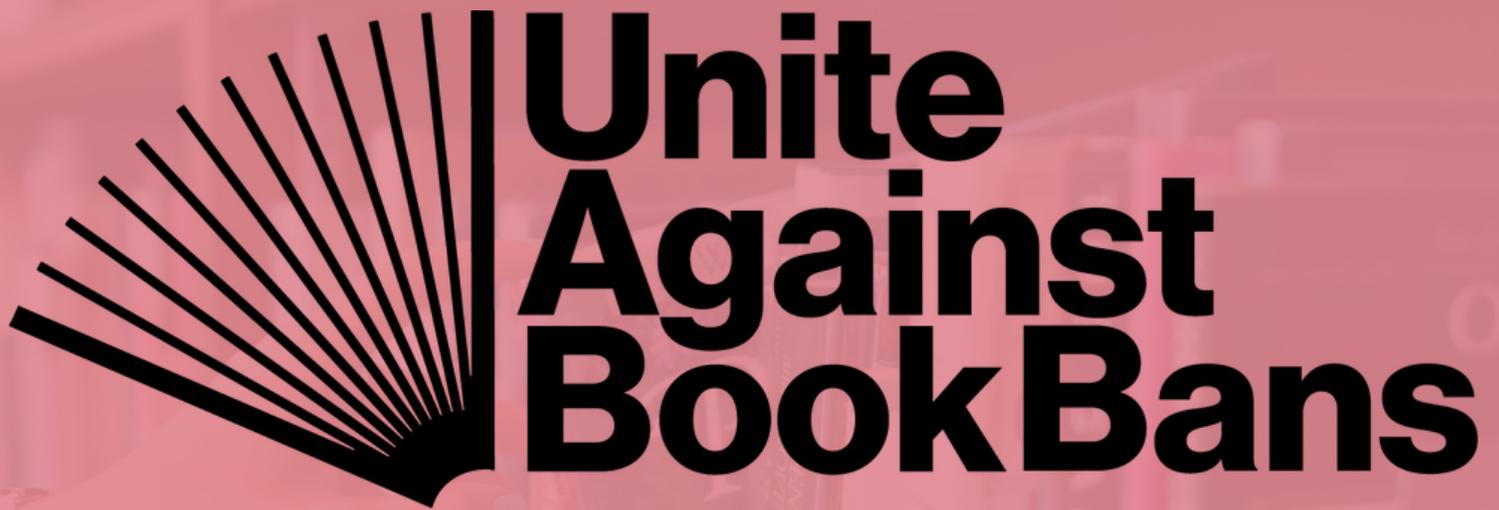
Library associations partner with foundations, philanthropies, and corporations to promote literacy and public awareness. One ALA program, Libraries Transforming Communities, provides grants to small and rural libraries. In a partnership with the Dollar General Literacy Foundation, ALA awarded grants to 16 public libraries to provide services to English language learners or adults in need of basic education or workforce development. Recipients included the Siouxland (SD) Libraries, which used the grants to expand collection development and remove barriers that English Language Learners may face when accessing their collections by hiring translators for online library services and tour guides to explain how to use library services.

You can also support the work of libraries on social media. Share ALA's social media posts and graphics. And you can donate to ALA or become an ALA member. A donation to the American Library Association will help strengthen public, school, academic and special libraries across the country.

The state of America's libraries will remain healthy as long as library supporters advocate for their survival. ▀

**In 2021, the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) tracked 729 challenges to library, school, and university materials and services, representing challenges to 1,597 individual book titles.**

**This is the largest number of attempted book bans in public and school libraries since OIF began tracking challenges 20 years ago.**



**Unite Against Book Bans** is a national call to action to empower readers everywhere to stand together in the fight against censorship.

**Join the movement.**

**[uniteagainstbookbans.org](https://uniteagainstbookbans.org) | [#UniteAgainstBookBans](https://twitter.com/UniteAgainstBookBans)**