

The American Library Association Midwinter Conference

Barometer in a Changing Environment

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The American Library Association (ALA) sponsors two national conferences every year, one in January (known as “Midwinter”) and one in June (known as “Annual”). These conferences offer an opportunity to assess current trends in American libraries and librarianship. In this review, I will introduce four major themes linking the presentations at the ALA Midwinter conference held in Seattle, Washington, January 25-29, 2019.

1. Patron Data & Library Services
2. Design Thinking
3. Library Impact Assessment
4. Service to Communities in Crisis

These themes will be illustrated with examples from the conference presentations. Information on trends was also drawn from interviews conducted January 31-February 1 with managers in the Multnomah County Library System, which operates the public libraries in Portland, Oregon.

Patron Data & Services

The American library world has always been acutely aware of industry and technology trends – and also quick to react to them. Currently, there is a strong sense that corporate practices are molding the *expectations* of consumers, who are becoming accustomed to service that is *immediate* and *personalized*. At ALA Midwinter, it was apparent that libraries have begun to adopt some of the new practices seen in the retail industry, particularly intensive use of patron data to develop and refine services.

Several presenters mentioned the latest trend in online retail, offering *subscriptions* for consumer products. Examples include companies such as Stitch Fix (clothing), Naturebox (food snacks), and Birchbox (make-up and haircare products). These services allow consumers to sign up for regular delivery of a selection of products that has been “curated” by the service provider based on individual customer profiles, use history, and feedback. The companies rely on this patron data to develop and continually enhance personalized service.

American libraries are beginning to emulate this type of service in what has become known as the “subscription economy.” One of the conference presenters, Karen Keefe, described Book Box, a project at the Hinsdale Public Library in

Illinois.¹⁾ Started as a project targeting busy teens, it has now expanded to children and adults. Participants provide information about their reading interests and are then signed up to receive a personalized Book Box every month. The box contains a book selected for each patron, along with edible treats and other give-away items. The Book Box also contains a feedback form, which the library uses to collect data to further refine the patron profile and drive future book selection.

Hinsdale Public Library sees multiple benefits in offering the Book Box service:

- Users and others see the library “brand” on the customized boxes.
- Library increases interaction with users.
- Library gets insight into user behavior (data).
- Librarians can demonstrate their expertise in selection.

According to Keefe and her colleagues, “Subscription services are a smart, scalable way to match the best of hands-on librarianship with an audience primed to expect personalized services and product selection.”²⁾

Both Keefe and another speaker, Kathryn Hamish, spoke about how the subscription model reveals tensions between libraries’ concern for patron data privacy and the possibility of enhancing the library experience for patrons by utilizing their data for personalization.³⁾

Theme Two: Design Thinking

Even as libraries continue to creatively address *what* programs and services a library will offer, there is also strong interest in *how* successful programming and services are created. There was a striking number of panels featuring experts with a background in architecture or design who addressed how to create spaces, programming, and services using “design thinking.”

Three plenary sessions in Midwinter’s Symposium on the Future of Libraries addressed issues of innovative design in various contexts: social, civic, and educational. There were also panels featuring architectural-scale discovery,⁴⁾ speculative design,⁵⁾ and architect-developed frameworks for libraries to better engage their communities.⁶⁾ In addition, there was a recommendation that such techniques for design thinking become part of professional training for librarians.⁷⁾

“Design Thinking” is a process originally developed at the international design firm, IDEO, that has since been adapted for libraries. According to the IDEO website:

“Thinking like a designer can transform the way organizations develop products, services, processes, and strategy. This approach, which IDEO calls design thinking, brings together what is desirable from a human point of view with what is technologically feasible and economically viable. It also allows people who aren’t trained as designers to use creative tools to address a vast range of challenges.”⁸⁾

There were frequent references during the conference to the “Design Thinking Toolkit,” training materials developed to help enable design thinking in libraries.⁹⁾ Libraries are successfully using the strategies in the toolkit to improve on

patron-centered approaches to planning. However, just using *patron-centered* approaches is no longer the only ideal. As one conference presenter, Aimee Thau, explained, the trend has moved from user-centered design (in which stakeholders are consulted), to co-design (in which stakeholders are part of the design team), and is now moving toward user-created design (in which stakeholders *are* the designers).¹⁰⁾ Meanwhile, libraries are making use of the Design Thinking Toolkit to successfully address some of the challenges of designing library spaces and services.

Theme Three: Library Impact Assessment

Planning is one end of a continuum. At the other end is assessment, including evaluation of project outcomes and service impact. This has been a constant theme for all types of libraries for some time and this year's Midwinter was no exception. The necessity of measuring and documenting the library's contribution to the community continues to be addressed with some urgency. Keynote speaker Melinda Gates of the Gates Foundation started off the conference by addressing this theme, arguing that collecting data to show how libraries directly improve the lives of people in their communities is essential in the battle for funding.¹¹⁾

Evidence for the normalization of this "culture of assessment" could be seen in the report from Emily Plagman and Linda Hofschire about Project Outcome¹²⁾. This ongoing Public Library Association project provides an online platform and survey tool free of charge to public libraries in North America, allowing them to administer standard surveys, do data visualization, and document and analyze outcomes. At the same time, the data set (covering over 18,000 programs in nearly 1,400 libraries) is available for macro-level trend analysis and comparisons.

In 2019, Project Outcome will expand to include academic libraries. Project organizers would also like to internationalize the tool by allowing translation into languages other than English, Spanish, and French and encouraging use by libraries outside North America.

Service to Communities in Crisis

One of the keynote speakers was Eric Klinenberg, a sociologist at New York University whose research on "social infrastructure" has highlighted the importance of libraries in American society.¹³⁾ Indeed, the integrative and supportive role of public libraries was a touchstone of many of the presentations, including those that focused on libraries involved in creating "resilient"¹⁴⁾ and "healthy"¹⁵⁾ communities and "addressing homelessness and poverty."¹⁶⁾

Comments from both presenters and audience members made frequent reference to the number and scale of problems confronting American society as social welfare systems weaken. The "opioid crisis," an epidemic of drug use which has devastated individuals and communities across the United States in recent years, was mentioned repeatedly. Services for addicted, mentally ill, and/or homeless

individuals has become an increasing part of public library programs. This has created a whole set of new issues for library staff.

According to Katie O'Dell, Programming and Outreach Director, Multnomah County Library, these challenges include:

- How to help all library patrons understand that homeless individuals are also patrons with the right to services
- How to help library staff develop strategies for providing services to those who might be mentally ill
- Training branch library managers to administer Naloxone (a medication used to prevent death in the case of drug overdoses)
- Training staff to maintain library restrooms that may also be utilized as safe places for addicts to inject drugs
- Helping all staff cope with new norms for patron behavior

In Portland, planning is underway for a new library and librarians wonder whether serving the local community means providing shower facilities even when they know this will take the pressure off social service agencies to provide stronger support for the homeless.¹⁷⁾

When libraries come to be defined as a part of “social infrastructure,” it is unsurprising that such issues arise. As result, the boundary between library services and social welfare services and the necessary collaboration between them are critical issues for continued discussion.

Conference presenters introduced various efforts underway to assist public libraries in managing the above pressures. The opioid crisis and what it means for libraries is the focus of a joint Public Library Association-OCLC project that was recently funded by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Studies. In the meantime, library schools are now beginning to offer course work about these social problems as part of their curriculum.

ALA Midwinter provides ample evidence of the challenges faced by American libraries as the context in which they operate – economic, technological, social, and political – undergoes wrenching change. The conference showcases evolving library practice and the impressive competencies of American librarians. At the same time, it is a barometer of sorts – an indicator of fluctuations in American society itself.

¹⁾ Keefe, Karen, “Libraries in the Subscription Economy,” ALA Midwinter, January 27, 2019.

²⁾ Ridgeway Burns, Melissa Martinez, and Karen Keefe, “Book Box: How a Cardboard Box became our Trendiest Teen Program,” *Illinois Library Association Reporter*, vol. 35, no. 6 (December, 2018).

<https://www.ila.org/publications/ila-reporter/article/101/book-box-how-a-cardboard-box-became-our-trendiest-teen-program>. Accessed February 17, 2019.

³⁾ Kathryn Hamish, “Meeting Patrons Where They Are: The Library’s New Place in the Digital World,” ALA Midwinter, January 26, 2019.

⁴⁾ Marie S. A. Sorensen, “Digital Discovery and Architectural Interface Design: Prototyping

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- Architectural-scale Interfaces for Discovery Across Digital and Tangible Collections,” ALA Midwinter, January 26, 2019.
- 5) John Jung, “Speculative Design: Design and Strategy,” ALA Midwinter, January 26, 2019.
 - 6) Sara R. Weiner, Anthony Harris, and Allison Marshall, “Re-Imagining the Public Library,” ALA Midwinter, January 26, 2019.
 - 7) Rachel I. Clarke, “Designing Future Library Leaders: Incorporating Design Thinking, Methods and Principles into Master’s Level Library Education,” ALA Midwinter, January 27, 2019.
 - 8) IDEO U Website: <https://www.ideo.com/pages/design-thinking>. Accessed: February 17, 2019.
 - 9) The toolkit is available online at no cost: <http://designthinkingforlibraries.com> It was developed in a collaboration between the Aarhus Public Library (Denmark) and the Chicago Public Library (U.S.) with funding from the Gates Foundation and is available in 16 languages, including Japanese.
 - 10) Aimee Thau (with Lesley Bain), “Libraries Transform – Civic Innovation,” Plenary Session, ALA Midwinter, January 27, 2019.
 - 11) “A Conversation with Melinda Gates and Nancy Pearl,” Opening Session, ALA Midwinter, January 25, 2019.
 - 12) Emily Plagman and Linda Hofschire, “Project Outcome: Public Library Trends, Results & Impacts,” ALA Midwinter, January 27, 2019.
 - 13) Klinenberg is the author of a new book, *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life* (Crown, 2018).
 - 14) Audrey Barbakoff and Jay Lyman, “Building a Future-Ready Workforce: How Public Libraries Can Create Resilient and Entrepreneurial Communities,” ALA Midwinter, January 26, 2019.
 - 15) Bobbie Newman and Carolyn Martin, “Public Libraries as Partners in Healthy Communities,” ALA Midwinter, January 26, 2019.
 - 16) Julie Winkelstein, et.al. “The Role of Libraries in Addressing Homelessness and Poverty,” ALA Midwinter, January 26, 2019.
 - 17) Interview with Katie O’Dell, Programming and Outreach Director, Multnomah County Library, February 1, 2019.

(日本語抄録) アメリカ図書館協会 2019年ミッドウィンター大会

社会変動が見える窓として

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2019年1月25日～29日にシアトルにおいて、アメリカ図書館協会のミッドウィンター大会が開催されました。この大会の様々なセッションによって、アメリカの図書館や図書館学の動向だけではなく、アメリカ社会の経済的な、社会的な変動も窺えます。今年の発表を分析すると、概ね、四つのテーマが取り上げられていました。それは、下記の通りです。

①利用者データに基づいた図書館サービス

最近のアメリカの小売業の人気サービスは、商品「購読」です。逐次刊行物の購読と同じように、消費物をメーカーから定期的に送ってくるようなサービスが増えています。顧客が個人プロフィールのためのアンケートを提出した後、そのデータを元に会社側で、本人のニーズに合うような商品を選び、届けます。顧客は商品をそのまま引き受けるか、返すかということ判断します。会社は顧客のフィードバックを利用しながら、サービスの改良を目指します。個人データが蓄積すればするほど顧客の満足度を高めて行きます。ある図書館は、商品「購読」のモデルを倣って「本箱」というサービスを開始しています。図書館の利用者のプロフィールを元に本を選書し、定期的に利用者に提供するサービスです。自動的なカスタマイズされたようなサービスでない限り、多くの人々が、特に若者が図書館から離れていく。これを防ごうとしている対策の一つです。

②「デザイン思考」による図書館サービスの設計

アメリカの図書館界は、昔から、利用者を中心に 図書館のサービスやプログラムの計画をするよう努力してきました。建築家やデザイナーの領域でも、顧客のニーズを把握し、それをうまく表現するのが最も重要な概念となっています。デザイン分野では、顧客のビジョンを引き出す方法の一つに、「デザイン思考」という IDEO 社の開発したテクニックがあります。図書館のための「デザイン思考」の手引きや教材もあり、その日本語版も公開されています。大会の発表者たちの間では、この手引きが好評で、頻繁に論及されました。「デザイン思考」では、利用者中心のアプローチが常識になっていることを確認できます。しかし、大会で発表していたあるデザイナーは、より理想的なデザインシンキングを説明しました。それは、利用者を中心に計画するだけでなく、**利用者と一緒に**計画する、もしくは**利用者に計画をしてもらう**という概念に変わりつつあるということでした。図書館界にとって、新しい挑戦がはじまりました。

③図書館のインパクト評価

図書館サービスの評価は、ますます経営の焦点になっています。それは、サービスの改良を目的としていますが、公共図書館の場合、自治体からの予算を確保するため、図書館の利用者、コミュニティへの効果がわかる証拠が不可欠だという事実もあります。サービス評価の概念、評価の仕方、等の様々な視点を考えることが、今大会の重要なテーマの一つになりました。好評を集めているアメリカの公共図書館協会の Project Outcome も紹介されまし

た。これは、北米（カナダとアメリカ）の公共図書館向けのオンラインアンケート調査と調査データ分析のサービスです。現時点で、このプロジェクトのデータベースに、図書館4千館以上、図書館のプログラム、サービス1万8千以上の調査データが蓄積されています。独自の図書館のデータ分析、表示、さらに、他図書館との比較をすることによって図書館利用者へのインパクトを見せることができます。北米以外の国々の図書館も利用できるように、米国公共図書館協会が新しいプログラムを計画中です。

④コミュニティの苦境と図書館サービス

アメリカ人の経済的、社会的な苦難や社会福祉関係のサービスの衰えを背景に、麻薬中毒者、ホームレス、精神病患者等の図書館利用が増えつつあります。公共図書館の職員は対応策を模索しています。大会の参加者の疲弊が目立っていました。図書館では、昔のような利用者行動を期待できないケースが増えています。精神病患者による職員への暴行、麻薬中毒者による便所汚染の清掃、時には過剰摂取で倒れるため、応急処置等は、図書館職員の日常になってきました。図書館のライブラリアン、マネジャーの悩みが増える一方であるため、図書館界は対策を考えるようになりました。OCLC社は助成金をもらい、麻薬中毒者の図書館利用状況、等を調査し、白書の出版やその公開など、具体的に図書館が行うべき対策紹介を目的とする活動をしています。