Public Libraries, Digital Literacy, and Public Policy: An International Discussion Panel

Larra Clark
Director, Programs on Networks
Office for Information Technology Policy

Marijke Visser
Assistant Director
Office for Information Technology Policy
Agenda for Today

• Set context

• Share experiences from a two-year exploration into digital literacy at the intersection of library practice and national public policy

• Hear from you

• Questions and discussion
Mission: research, education, advocacy, lobbying

– Office of Government Relations (OGR)
– Office for Information Technology Policy (OITP)
Libraries in the U.S.

119,987 libraries in the U.S.

- Public Libraries = 8,951 (16,400 outlets)
- Academic Libraries = 3,689
- School Libraries = 98,460
- Also: Special Libraries, Armed Forces Libraries, and Government Libraries
- Librarians: 166,000+
U.S. Policy Background

• What is driving the broadband policy agenda in the U.S., and where does digital literacy come into play?

  – Economic development and global competition
  – Essential life tasks move online (only)
  – Ubiquitous home broadband
Opening the Policy Window

• What is access?
  – The answer depends on who you ask and effects who is responsible for solving the problem

• Policy window opens
  – American Recovery & Reinvestment Act
  – National Broadband Plan

• A new vision for library services
21st Century Libraries

- Library relevance in Internet age
- Move from “stuff” to “services”
- Digital literacy as a constant for libraries—dealing with different formats and devices
- Contemplation—from information gathering to information synthesis
- Move from “consumption” to “creation”
U.S. Libraries Today & Why We Care About Broadband
Turning Policy into Opportunity: Setting the Stage

• Testing our assumptions about libraries

• Demonstrating that libraries are a key partner for successful digital literacy programs

• Building a task force of library experts
Libraries and Digital Literacy: ALA Assumptions

• Digital literacy is vital to ensuring equal opportunity in a knowledge economy

• Libraries are best positioned to support digital literacy training

• Libraries need additional resources to meet demand for digital literacy training
What is Digital Literacy?
Libraries & Digital Literacy

Digital Literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information.

*It requires both cognitive and technical skills

(American Library Association Digital Literacy Taskforce, 2011)
Library “triple play”

– Physical locations with tech infrastructure

– Staffed by informational professionals

– Robust and diverse electronic content
Digital Literacy Best Practices

- Informal and formal training and learning opportunities are both valuable

- Digital literacy training is most effective in context

- Adequate staffing, staff expertise and adequate public computers are leading barriers for expanding technology services

- Increased importance of partners, outreach and mobile labs
Overall Lessons Learned

• Libraries have similar values about digital literacy, but significant differences in execution make generalizations difficult

• Together, libraries work across the “lifespan” of an individual

• Lifelong learning—for library staff, as well as patrons

• Diverse populations demand diverse solutions
Task Force Recommendations

• **Recommendation I:** Increase Investment in Digital Literacy
• **Recommendation II:** Develop and Sustain Robust Partnerships and Collaborations
• **Recommendation III:** Strengthen and Expand Research and Assessment
• **Recommendation IV:** Increase Access to Digital Literacy Programming
What do you think?
Digital Literacy Resources

• Digital Literacy.gov
  http://www.digitalliteracy.gov/

• Digital Learn.org
  http://digitallearn.org/

• NTIA Broadband Adoption Toolkit
Research Resources


Resources from ALA

• Task Force Report

• Task Force Recommendations

National Conversations on Digital Literacy
  http://www.districtdispatch.org/digilit13/
More Resources from ALA

• U.S. Public Libraries and BTOP Report
  http://www.districtdispatch.org/2013/05/libraries-and-btop-strengthen-communities/

• Digital Literacy and Public Policy through the Library Lens
  http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mpr/vol22/iss1/27/

• ALA filing with the Federal Communications Commission on digital literacy (2012)

• ALA’s literacy advocacy
  http://www.ala.org/advocacy/literacy
Contact Us

Contacts:  Larra Clark

lclark@alawash.org

Marijke Visser

mvisser@alawash.org

• News from ALA “District Dispatch”
  http://www.districtdispatch.org/