



**International
Federation of
Library
Associations and Institutions**

Engaging in Literacy and Reading Strategies: An IFLA Toolkit for Libraries

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First you learn to read than you read to learn.

“Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society (UNESCO, 2004; 2017).”

Introduction

“Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. It is a tool for daily life in modern society. It is a bulwark against poverty, and a building block of development, an essential complement to investments in roads, dams, clinics and factories. Literacy is a platform for democratisation, and a vehicle for the promotion of cultural and national identity. Especially for girls and women, it is an agent of family health and nutrition. For everyone, everywhere, literacy is, along with education in general, a basic human right.... Literacy is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realise his or her full potential.” – Kofi Annan, UN Literacy Day 1997¹

The National Literacy Strategies IFLA Toolkit was developed by members of the IFLA Working Group on Literacy, chaired by Ingrid Bon. Its objective is to assist countries in developing and improving national literacy and reading strategies from a library perspective.

It provides guidance for library associations, their members and the wider Library and Information Science (LIS) community when engaging with relevant public authorities so that libraries receive the recognition and support necessary to address national literacy needs.

Literacy strategies can exist at different levels, bolstered by different disciplines and organisations, whether national, regional, strategies for the library sector, or individual library strategic plans. complementing each other, delivering stronger, more cost-effective outcomes. All of these strategies have an important role to play in setting objectives, identifying and allocating resources, and establishing the means for measuring success. This document focuses on library engagement in national literacy and reading strategies but the Toolkit may also be of use in the context of national library sectors and individual libraries.

This toolkit focuses on engagement in national literacy and reading strategy efforts through a library and information science perspective. It is designed to be applicable in varied contexts, whether used as a starting point or as a broader outline. It is important that this document be reviewed with local and individual needs, situations, and resources kept in mind.

The first chapter offers a practical framework for planning your engagement, including defining goals and identifying key stakeholders. The second and third chapters outline the arguments for the importance of literacy, and the role of libraries play in bolstering literacy development.

We hope it proves useful.

We gratefully thank Margaret Allen, Imke Behr, Sue Considine, Lucilia Green, Lisa Krolak, Adriaan Langendonk, Kristine Paberza, Jan Richards and Stephen Wyber for their contributions.

Ingrid Bon
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¹ <http://www.un.org/press/en/1997/19970904.SGSM6316.html>

Policy Recommendations by Unesco

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) stated in 2016: *Used strategically, libraries have the potential to play a key role in promoting national literacy efforts, as they are trusted by people in the communities they serve and are in a good position to provide a wide variety of literacy opportunities.* In their Policy Brief² *Using Libraries To Support National Literacy Efforts*, UIL identified the following key policy recommendations:

- 1. Involve libraries in the policy dialogue surrounding literacy and ensure that libraries are an integral part of local and national literacy strategies and efforts.**
Given the library's unique mission, governments should ensure that representatives of the library community are included, along with other public and private literacy stakeholders, in the policy dialogue for the development and implementation of local and national literacy strategies and efforts.
- 2. Enable libraries to provide a literate environment for everyone to develop, enhance and sustain literacy skills within a lifelong learning perspective.**
Governments should ensure that libraries are able to provide free access to reading materials, literacy activities and (online) information in a safe and friendly environment, where families and individuals can read and learn together. Libraries support literacy and learning needs from birth through senior years and are an ideal community space to facilitate intergenerational and family learning.
- 3. Ensure libraries are inclusive and have the knowledge and resources to provide relevant literacy materials in a welcoming space for marginalised, vulnerable and minority language groups.**
Libraries should serve as a convenient hub where diverse groups can find relevant literacy materials and support. This includes materials, services and activities for people with different literacy levels and abilities. Where availability of materials in minority languages is limited, libraries should support the creation of local content relevant to the community.
- 4. Institutionalise professionalisation and invest in ongoing training for all library staff.**
Training should help library staff to be professionals with a service and needs-based approach to modern libraries, including an understanding of literacy challenges and solutions, the process of learning to read and write, and the extent of local and national policies on literacy. Training should also involve using ICTs to develop and sustain literacy skills and teaching digital skills.
- 5. Collect and analyse the data provided by libraries for better informed policy-making and coordination of the various literacy efforts of different stakeholders.**
Libraries should measure and evaluate their literacy activities and services and share their findings with governments and the general public. Libraries need to understand and be able to communicate the impact of their literacy work, including how their literacy efforts can best support the achievement of local and national literacy goals.

(UIL Policy Brief #6, *Using Libraries to Support National Literacy Efforts*, 2016)

² <http://uil.unesco.org/literacy/libraries-and-literacy-using-libraries-support-national-literacy-efforts-uil-policy-brief-6>

Summary

This summary highlights the most essential points of the toolkit. Please read the attached toolkit for greater details.

- 1. Planning your engagement concerning (National) Literacy Strategies**
 - a. Conduct a preliminary analysis of the current situation – is there an existing strategy?
 - b. Identify what needs to change, what can be re-purposed, modified, or amplified.
 - c. Define your goals.
 - d. Map out the targets of your advocacy, important stakeholders, and potential partners.
 - e. Evaluate these targets, stakeholders and partners, and determine the most efficient way to communicate and achieve results.

- 2. Making the case for literacy: Arguments (to be supported with research and data where possible)**
 - a. Higher literacy levels are linked to successful knowledge societies.
 - b. Illiteracy or low literacy is associated with societal costs, such as unemployment, poor health, or unsustainable inequality.
 - c. Universal literacy can be a driver of greater fairness, especially for marginalised groups.
 - d. Literacy is key to social integration and civic participation.
 - e. Literacy, and in particular more advanced forms of literacy, are increasingly essential in order to survive, and thrive, in a digital world.
 - f. Literacy enables people to make more effective use of other government services.
 - g. Universal literacy features in the UN 2030 Agenda and is a core component of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

- 3. Making the case for libraries in supporting literacy efforts: Arguments to be supported with research and data where possible)**
 - a. Libraries are well-trusted, safe and friendly spaces, supporting lifelong learning and community development.
 - b. Libraries already exist and are ready to contribute. They can represent a low-cost means of delivering literacy strategies.
 - c. Libraries are deeply embedded in their communities, with a in-depth understand of the needs of their users. They often maintain strong networks of relationships with other community and business organisations.
 - d. Many librarians are specifically trained in providing support to younger readers for example, and can complement the work of schools and school libraries.
 - e. Libraries are open to people throughout their lives, not just during childhood, making them a vital first stop for people looking to improve their literacy.
 - f. Libraries promote not just literacy, but also a love of reading. Building a reading habit has been shown to improve results at school and elsewhere.

Libraries also support the demand for books throughout an individual's lifetime.

- g. A number of countries already recognise the role of libraries in delivering literacy.

4. Building the case with evidence and data

- a. Data and evidence are essential in order to justify change, such as the creation or updating of a literacy strategy. Your arguments are strengthened by the presence of evidence-based strategies.
- b. There is a lot of data at the international level on literacy, including on the impacts of high – or low – literacy on other policy areas such as health or employment. Expand your search for evidence beyond the field of library and information science. A wealth of information on the impacts of high or low literacy levels exists in other policy areas and disciplines such as the health sciences, economics, and business management.
- c. Collect examples of library programs that demonstrate the positive impact of their work on literacy through data. This provides vital evidence in campaigning to get libraries involved in national literacy strategies.
- d. Stories also have a powerful impact. IFLA's SDG Stories initiative provides a portal to find – and post – examples of what libraries are achieving on a global scale.

5. Delivering your arguments

- a. Delivery is key to an argument's effectiveness.
- b. Collect ideas and advice from other resources on advocacy, and apply these to your own efforts.
- c. Anyone, through their experience and ideas, can be a strong advocate for the library's role in supporting the implementation of modern literacy and reading strategies.

1. Planning your engagement around literacy strategies

There are a number of reasons why libraries should engage in national strategy-setting. Engagement at the national or state level makes it easier for libraries to benefit from available funding sources, whether from government or private entities. Involvement in national strategy-setting creates new opportunities for library visibility, acting as a basis for forming new partnerships at all level. Most importantly, it helps libraries realise the shared goal of a universally literate, informed, and participatory society.

For governments, including libraries in national strategy-setting offers an opportunity to draw on key existing resources in promoting literacy and reading. Such efforts can then mobilise all actors in the literacy field around common goals, allowing for reflection on whether key populations or types of literacy are overlooked, and increasing credibility when working with donors or funding entities.

Even so, each country – and in many cases, each state within a country – is structured in a different way. Consequently, library associations and libraries also operate in different ways. Therefore, it is best to begin with an assessment of the current national picture. When conducting a needs assessment, you will need to answer the following questions:

Does your country already have a national literacy strategy in place?

Identify the existing documents that define how your country aims to build literacy skills and promote reading. This may be a stand-alone strategy, or part of a broader plan, for example, plans addressing curriculum and education or workforce development skills. It may also be spread across different documents (e.g. literacy strategies targeting children, literacy strategies for secondary language acquisition).

If strategies are located, carefully review all documents. Consider whether or not the strategic plan reflects the role of libraries and the contribution libraries can offer. Were libraries involved in its development? Does it provide financial or legal support to libraries involved in its implementation or promotion?

Even if there is no mention of libraries, does it contain reference to activities where libraries have a particularly strong contribution to make, for example community or informal learning, encouraging a love of reading, or support for early childhood education?

Under such examination, the following scenarios may be uncovered, amongst others, each of which implies different needs:

- There is no literacy and/or reading strategy.
- The current strategy does not recognise the contribution that libraries can make.
- The current strategy does not provide funding or legal support for library literacy support services.
- The current strategy is outdated and does not include consideration of digital tools.
- The current strategy is focused on school-aged children, and does not take into consideration the literacy needs of adults.

- The current strategy is focused on basic literacy and does not adequately target more advanced forms of literacy.
- The current strategy does not address the importance of developing a lifelong love of reading.

What needs to change?

Once needs and areas for improvement are identified, goals and objectives can be determined. It is important to be clear about your goals and objectives so that advocacy and communication efforts are focused and consistent in their presentation. What one change would have most impact? Can you then summarise your objective in one sentence? Can you explain it in a short letter to a senior politician or newspaper? In a tweet? Develop a short elevator speech and practice its delivery.

Potentially relevant objectives include:

- Ensuring that literacy and reading strategies are focused on people throughout their lives by including commitments, and targets, for lifelong literacy.
- Developing higher levels of school-readiness by establishing and supporting programs that target parents and pre-school aged children.
- Updating the strategy to include digital tools and literacy in digital spaces and across digital platforms.
- Ensuring that the strategy includes a focus on developing a love of reading as a factor in building literacy skills.
- Including more advanced forms of literacy in the strategy as commitments or targets.
- Overcoming the continuation of low literacy across generations.

For individual libraries goals include:

- Raising the profile of libraries in literacy and reading strategies by recognising these explicitly as a partner.
- Ensuring that, where resources are available, libraries receive a share, or at least are eligible to apply.
- Promoting the inclusion of libraries in literacy networks at local, regional and national levels.
- Start a literacy network, if one does not exist.

Who matters in the field?

Where there are plans and strategies in place, it is best to advocate for amendments or updates to these existing documents, so that the role of the library (and support for it) is taken into account.

First, create a list of those who have decision-making power over existing literacy strategies, or the creation of such plans. Identify who, if any of them, is in your immediate sphere of influence – i.e. because you have contacts there. Options can include:

- Ministry of Education (education agencies, education departments)
- Ministry of Culture (cultural agencies, cultural organisations)
- Ministry of Skills (sometimes also referred to as a department of labour)

Who is responsible within these organisations? Is there a department or directorate that oversees literacy efforts? Try to find an organisation chart that maps out who is responsible for what.

Second, consider who shapes the approach and focus of the government currently in power. Options may include:

- Parliamentary committees
- Prominent journalists and commentators (including on radio, TV and the internet)
- Think-tanks and academics
- Foundations and charities
- Local affiliates of organisations such as the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY)
- UNESCO National Commissions/Offices
- Local political or site-based organisations

Finally, identify potential partners – organisations that are most likely to be involved in delivering and designing literacy strategies or plans. While some may be potential competitors for funding, many will help to advocate on behalf of library involvement to ensure the inclusion of libraries and librarians in national strategy development.

Sometimes these potential partners have strong connections with funding agencies, decision makers and other stakeholders, and they may be willing to use their own channels to lobby directly on behalf of libraries. Such players may include:

- Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), or Lions/Rotary Clubs
- Reading (and writing) Foundations
- Agencies working with specific, disengaged target audiences e.g. unemployed/low income groups, indigenous communities, immigrants and refugees
- Schools, pre-schools, daycare centres, youth healthcare centres and adult education centres
- Book and literacy centres
- Publishers

Further questions to explore:

- Who is most important for achieving what you want to achieve?
- With whom do you have the best contacts? Where do you need to invest effort to win support? Is the effort expended worth it?
- What do the individuals you have identified think about libraries? Do they view libraries in a negative or positive light? Are they active or passive?
- What are their goals, in general and for a literacy strategy? Are these goals aligned with yours?

Use this information to map out and plan your advocacy targets and effort, making sure to focus on the people and organisations that are the most important and useful for this work. Remember also that you do not need to advocate to someone directly. You can work through partners who believe in your cause, and may have a more powerful voice.

Wrapping up: What are the elements of a good strategy process?

- Assess the current situation – is there an existing strategy?
- Evaluate what needs to change.
- Define your goals.
- Develop proposals for changes to improve the current literacy and reading strategy.
- Map out the targets of your advocacy, important influencers, and potential partners.
- Evaluate these targets, influencers and partners, and think about how to best use your time to achieve optimal results.

2. Making the Case for Literacy: Why Literacy Matters More than Ever

Few are those who claim that literacy is not important – it is a clear goal in the UN's 2030 Agenda. However, there are many other priorities competing for attention and resources, even within broader education policy. It is vital to be able to articulate why literacy, in particular, deserves attention.

“Literacy stands at the heart of the 2030 Agenda. It is a foundation for human rights, gender equality, and sustainable societies. It is essential to all our efforts to end extreme poverty and promote well-being for all people. That is why the Sustainable Development Goals aim for universal access to quality education and learning opportunities throughout people’s lives. One of the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 4 is to ensure that all young people achieve literacy and numeracy and that a substantial proportion of adults who lack these skills are given the opportunity to acquire them.

Fifty years ago, International Literacy Day was proclaimed to promote literacy as a tool to empower individuals, communities and societies. We have made significant progress over the past five decades, but the world is still very far from universal literacy. And today, with the world becoming increasingly digitised and information rich, new opportunities and challenges are emerging” – Ban Ki-Moon, UN Literacy Day September 2016³

In today’s fast-paced and ever-evolving society, a wide set of knowledge, skills and competencies are essential for participation in social, economic, cultural and civic life. Literacy is a key competency. When we talk about literacy we refer to the OECD definition: “The ability to understand, evaluate, use and engage with written text to participate in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential”. Literacy is essential for developing further skills that enable workers to function effectively and safely in their workplace. Literacy is what enables a human being to remain connected to the complex, digital in which we live.

Although literacy has been high on the development agenda over the past decades, there are still 750 million adults (two-thirds of whom are women), 115 million young people and some 250 million children of primary school age who lack basic reading, numeracy and writing skills. Furthermore, 124 million children and adolescents receive no schooling at all (UIS, 2017) and grow up without sufficient literacy skills.

People with low literacy levels can be found in any nation. For example, in the European Union one in five adults aged 15-65 has significant difficulties in reading, numeracy and writing, even after attending compulsory schooling.

The OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) indicates that adults in technology-rich environments who have low levels of proficiencies in literacy, numeracy and problem-solving face a higher risk of unemployment, a higher incidence of poverty and social

³ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sgsm18044.doc.htm>

exclusion, higher health risks and lower life expectancy, while their children face higher risks of educational underachievement (OECD, 2016).

Without sufficient literacy skills, people are “more vulnerable to ill health, exploitation and human rights abuse. They are more likely to be unemployed and paid less. Unable to read or write, they are held back from their full potential, and whole communities are locked into vicious cycles of poverty that lay the conditions for violence and strife” (Irina Bokova)⁴.

As the world grows ever more digitised and networked, it is even more important that every citizen is given the skills that literacy affords so that they can find gainful employment, increase personal skills, take part in social activities, and participate politically.

Literacy learning is not something that stops when an individual leaves school or achieves a certain educational level. The acquisition and development of literacy skills takes place before, during and after formal education, in and out of school, and through informal learning, throughout a person’s life. It is never too early or too late to improve literacy skills (UIL, 2017).

Moreover, with the proliferation of the internet and technology, the conventional concept of literacy being a set of reading, writing and counting skills, has evolved. It is now understood to include means of identifying, understanding, interpreting, creating, and communicating in increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich and hyper-connected societies and economies. This also implies new and more advanced forms of literacy.

Therefore, in order to reach the literacy targets of the UN Sustainable Development Goal SDG 4, countries need to adopt a life-long approach to literacy learning.

Arguments for focusing on literacy:

1. Higher literacy levels are linked to successful knowledge societies.
2. Low-literacy is associated with high societal costs, such as unemployment, poor health, or unsustainable inequality.
3. Literacy can be a driver of greater fairness, especially for marginalised groups.
4. Literacy is key to social integration and civic participation.
5. Literacy, and in particular more advanced forms of literacy, are increasingly essential in order to survive, and thrive, in a digital world.
6. Literacy enables people to make more effective use of government services.
7. Universal literacy features in the UN 2030 Agenda, and is a core component of the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), as well as the Progress in International Reading and Literacy Survey (PIRLS).

⁴ <https://www.compassion.com/world-days/international-literacy-day.htm>

3. Opportunities for Library Support of Literacy Efforts

When people think of literacy, they tend to think of narrowly focused, formal education efforts where people do indeed learn to read and write. Strategies and other initiatives also run the risk of using this narrow definition of literacy. In complementing the work of schools, pre-schools and families, libraries bring with them a tradition of supporting literacy, and a love of reading, among people of all ages. Therefore, it is important to advocate for the involvement of libraries and librarians in the development of literacy initiatives, so that literacy is more broadly associated with lifelong learning.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.6 centres on literacy, stating: ‘By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy’.

Literacy development begins at birth. Therefore, public and school libraries often devote special attention to supporting early literacy skill development and family reading, especially for families with low literacy skills. Early literacy skill development contributes to a larger vocabulary, stimulates brain development, and builds emotional bonds between children and adults. Being read to for at least 15 minutes a day during (early) childhood promotes a growing engagement with language and reading, supports the development of interpersonal skills, and puts children as much as one year ahead of those who are not being read to (Krashen, 2004).

For young people and adults at all levels of literacy proficiency, libraries are an excellent resource. They enable users to locate relevant information through reading materials, and by providing access to public computers equipped with internet access, in addition to the support available with readers advisory, publicly funded databases, and programming. Having access to a public library is also crucial for adults and families with low literacy skills as it is an accessible, trusted and safe place to improve the literacy skills they did not attain during their formal education (UIL, 2016). School libraries support the development of critical research and evaluation skills through instructional partnership efforts, and collections built around the curriculum.

Beyond supporting the development of pure literacy skills, building a strong reading culture fosters independent readers and learners of all ages; readers and learners who are better able to take on the world and seize the opportunities it presents. This, in turn, promotes creativity, innovation, and employability, thus strengthening society.

Community Focused Library Programming

The engagement of the community is key to developing a national literacy strategy. Libraries are ideally placed to be leaders in the field. They are more than simply service providers offering and supporting literacy programs. They are active and trusted connectors, with a deep knowledge of their community’s needs, and often seen as more welcoming than commercial venues.

In 2012 Dr. R. David Lankes, Director of the School of Library and Information Science at the University of South Carolina, tweeted the much-quoted observation ‘Bad libraries build

collections, good libraries build services ...Great libraries build communities.’⁵ Lankes has subsequently argued that the people within a community are the library’s most essential and valuable collection.

Libraries do not need to limit themselves to their buildings. There are many examples of successful delivery of library services in places such as community centres, local parks, health clinics, workplaces, and outdoors venues. Such measures can also make it easier to reach marginalised populations.

Libraries can also offer a means of getting communities involved in the definition of literacy and reading strategies. Through consultations, experiences, or by simply getting people talking about literacy and the need to break down the stigma of low reading and writing skills, libraries contribute to the development of a more inclusive, more effective strategy.

Precedents from Around the World

A number of countries have already recognised the role of libraries in national literacy strategies, having engaged libraries and library associations in the policy-making process.

Angola and Malta acknowledge libraries as key complement to schools in the development of literacy and reading skills among children. Libraries are given a part to play in supporting adult and lifelong learning in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, Malta (again), and Indonesia. The library’s contribution to reading promotion is highlighted in Italy, Spain, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mozambique, while Malta and Finland both recognise how libraries can promote the development of higher forms of literacy.

A number of these strategies have been developed by, or in collaboration with, librarians and library associations, with the strategies in Malta, Papua New Guinea, Australia and the Netherlands offering good examples. Sometimes, national or state libraries have their own strategies, such as the Literacy Strategy of the State Library of Western Australia: *Literacy Matters*⁶.

More information on these strategies can be found on the resources page⁷.

Arguments for including libraries in literacy strategies

- Libraries are well-trusted, safe and friendly spaces, supporting lifelong learning and community development.
- Libraries already exist and are ready to contribute. They can represent a low-cost means for delivery of literacy strategies.
- Libraries are well embedded in their communities, and understand well the needs of their users, as well as holding pre-existing relationships with other actors and agencies.

⁵ <https://twitter.com/rdlankes/status/166525664319639552?lang=en>

⁶ State Library of Western Australia (2017), *Literacy Strategy of the State Library of Western Australia: Literacy Matters*, <https://www.slwa.wa.gov.au/our-services/learning-literacy-and-languages/literacy>, accessed on 7 May 2019

⁷ [Start.me website](#)

- Many librarians are specifically trained in providing support, for example to younger readers, and can complement the work of schools and school-based librarians.
- Libraries are open to people throughout their lives, not just during childhood, making them a vital hub for lifelong literacy development and learning.
- Libraries promote not just literacy, but also a love of reading. Building a reading habit has been shown to improve results at school and elsewhere and to support a demand for books later in life.
- It's been done before! Libraries are already cited in a number of literacy and reading strategies.

4. Building the Case for Literacy: Evidence and Data

In arguing for the need for a (renewed) literacy strategy, it is important to support your argument with evidence. Sometimes, stories and anecdotes will prove most powerful. In other situations, hard data is required.

It is widely recognised that governments should base their policies and strategies on evidence and data. In promoting literacy and reading strategies and efforts involving libraries, it is important to provide facts, figures, and anecdotal evidence. These can help you, and your allies, encourage decision-makers toward action.

Evidence-Based Literacy Strategies

Consider using data on literacy (national, regional, and local) to make your case. Traditionally, literacy is assessed by judging whether an individual can read and write, with understanding, a short simple statement about their everyday lives, and is collected for adults (people aged 15 and above, by gender), and youth (people aged 15-24, by gender).

International organisations working in the field, such as UNESCO and OECD⁷ work with more sophisticated and detailed break-downs and measures of literacy. For example, the OECD's PISA study focuses on different levels and types of literacy, allowing for comparison with figures on socioeconomic characteristics (income, migrant background, reading habits at home). Meanwhile, UNESCO has, working with IFLA, defined ways of measuring more advanced forms of literacy, such as media and information literacy.

By defining statistical methodologies, these organisations make it possible for governments (and libraries) not only to measure progress over time, but also to compare performance between regions and countries. These same organisations also publish this material, making it possible for libraries to use this information when advocating for their participation in literacy strategy development and deployment.

National or regional data in particular can be useful when it helps to identify areas where change is necessary, for example to develop literacy among adults, or to provide more reading support. For example, this sort of data can demonstrate the costs of low childhood literacy later in life⁹, the link between low literacy and bad health¹⁰, or the risk of certain parts of the population being left behind¹¹. All make for powerful arguments for strong literacy strategies, with libraries at their heart.

⁷ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

⁸ OECD, 2010, *The High Cost of Low Educational Performance*

⁹ OECD, 2018, *Association between Literacy and Self-Rated Poor Health in 33 High- and Upper-Middle-Income Countries*, OECD Education Working Paper No. 165,

[http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=EDU/WKP\(2018\)1&docLanguage=En](http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=EDU/WKP(2018)1&docLanguage=En)

¹⁰ For example, older people: Barrett, G. and W. Riddell (2016), "Ageing and Literacy Skills: Evidence from IALS, ALL And PIAAC", OECD Education Working Papers, No. 145, OECD Publishing, Paris.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5ilphd2twps1-en>

Data in the Library Environment

As a first step, it is important for libraries themselves to collect and make use of (inter(national) and local) data. It can facilitate the identification of issues, support the optimisation of resources, drive innovation, and allow for benchmarking and assessment.

Data and evidence-gathering should not only focus on things like numbers of users, numbers of computers, or numbers of books. It should also look at the results of libraries' work – the impact it has on users and communities.

In the case of literacy, this can involve direct testing, measurement of confidence, or assessment of improvements in ability in everyday, functional situations. Do people taking part in reading programmes report greater ease in dealing with information? Do their exam results improve? This is harder, but also more powerful as an indicator of success.

IFLA is working to build the capacity of libraries to collect and use data, including through the [Library Map of the World](#), and the work of the [Statistics and Evaluation Section](#). See the annex for a longer discussion of impact assessment.

Application of Library Impact Studies

Data and evidence can also help you argue for the role of libraries in general and your library (association) in particular in delivering literacy and reading strategies and efforts. Clearly, the sort of data that libraries gather about their own work, as mentioned above, is critical here. IFLA strongly encourages libraries and library associations to invest in this, in order to provide the most relevant possible information. This is the most powerful evidence of why supporting libraries is worthwhile.

The SDG Stories featured on the IFLA Library Map of the World is a single portal that includes examples of libraries contributing to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. All stories featured include indications and evidence of impact, and can be filtered to show those relevant to SDG4 (education). The more stories are submitted, the more useful the portal becomes for everyone, so we encourage you to share yours. The [Storytelling Manual](#) created by IFLA offers guidance on how to submit your story.

Summary

- Data and evidence are essential in order to justify change, such as the creation or updating of a literacy strategy. Arguments supported by data and evidence are stronger.
- There is a significant amount of data at the international level on literacy, including on the impacts of high – or low – literacy on other policy areas such as health or employment.
- Regional and national library associations house many examples of data on the impact of library programming on literacy development. This is vital evidence when campaigning to get libraries involved in national literacy strategies.
- Stories also have a powerful impact. IFLA's SDG Stories initiative provides a portal to find and post examples of what libraries are achieving on the ground.

5. Sharing the Case for Literacy

Knowing how to communicate an argument is an important part of the advocacy process. You will need to promote your position to your target group, as well as to other stakeholders. With practice, everyone can learn how to make a strong argument.

Once you have defined your goals, established your arguments, and found the data and evidence to support your position, you need to learn how to deliver these effectively.

There are many ways of communicating an argument:

- meetings with individual decision-makers or influencers
- appearances in conferences and public meetings
- editorials in newspapers or articles online
- interviews on radio or television shows
- social media campaigns.

All of these venues offer opportunities to make your arguments. Please note that the ways of communicating mentioned above are not in a hierarchy. Each channel has its own unique features, advantages and disadvantages, and there are various resources available to help you effectively communicate your message using each one. You should do whatever works best in your own context

What is standard though is that your message should highlight why literacy and reading are important, and why libraries play such a vital role in their development. Explain the problem you are seeking to address using accessible language, and propose a solution.

In doing so, as set out in the first section of this toolkit, to be clear and concise. If you can make your argument in ten pages, can you make it in five? In one? In half a page? Make sure that you are focused on the most important information, the crucial argument. The more important the person you are talking to, the less time they are likely to have when speaking to you.

Furthermore, be consistent in your arguments, so that people are easily able to remember and repeat your points. It is also important to think about the person you are talking to. What are their priorities? What are their interests? What do they want to hear? How can your message connect with their goals or their mission?

Be sure to call on support from other influencers. Sympathetic journalists, celebrities, politicians, or non-governmental organisations can be very effective in making the case for investment in literacy and libraries. Coordinate with them, and ask them to amplify your points.

Further support can be found in training materials for IFLA's International Advocacy Programme [IAP](#), as well as in [IFLA's 10-Minute Library Advocate series](#).

Summary

- The way you deliver your arguments is key to their effectiveness.
- Locate ideas and advice from other resources on advocacy, and apply them to your own work.



- Everyone, through their experience and ideas, can be a strong advocate for modern literacy and reading strategies, and the expansive role libraries should play in the development and delivery of those efforts.

Annex 1: Resources

IFLA's Literacy and Reading Section will keep an updated webpage with links to relevant documents, websites and other resources: <https://start.me/p/Z9eygL/startpagina>

The [IFLA Library](#) contains a rich collection of papers submitted and presented at World Library and Information Congresses. Searching for 'literacy' provides many valuable examples of projects and research into libraries' contribution to building literacy.

Annex 2: Impact assessment

Impact is the effect of the service (event, activity) on an individual or a group – what change does it lead to? Impact assessment is the gathering of meaningful data that will confirm or otherwise whether a service or activity has achieved its goals. As highlighted in the rest of this toolkit, evidence from properly conducted impact assessments can provide very strong arguments.

A first step is to define your overall goals clearly and effectively. What is the overall change you want to see. For example, in the case of a literacy strategy, it could be to help older workers adjust to digital ways of working, to improve literacy levels among marginalised groups, or to ensure higher levels of school-readiness among children.

You should then define a clear impact objective. What exactly do you want to see change during the lifetime of your intervention? You can check your idea against the SMART framework:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Time-Bound

For example, linked to the above ideas, you could look at defining a programme which enables older workers to understand how information is set out on a website or e-mail, how to use links or spell-check, through a mixture of workplace interventions and evening classes at the library.

Third, you need to define impact indicators. These indicators are tied to the overall objectives, and should give as good an idea as possible about the direct impact that your programme is having. Importantly, the methods you choose should be realistic – are you using questionnaires, interviews, stories, images, tests, surveys, or large-scale data gathering? Do not forget that you will need to measure at least twice (see below).

The indicators and collection methodologies you choose are unlikely to be perfect – other factors may affect the people taking part in your experiment (other training or support, personal circumstances) – but can give a good idea of success.

To take the example of the scheme with older workers, for example, these could be either a practical test of ability to find and read information online, a more subjective question about how confident they feel, or an assessment by their employers of improvements.

Finally, you need to define the baseline. This is crucial in order to understand where you are coming from. Again, in the case give, this could be an initial test, survey of confidence, or conversations with employers. The baseline provides something with which to compare the results of your assessment.

Clearly public libraries undertake a lot of activities and programmes and each of them has a specific goal to be reached. The objectives and indicators chosen will vary, as will the data sources. While a national level strategy may use international data such as PISA, PIRLS or PIAAC, individual libraries will rely on very different tools. These reflect the sorts of changes that an intervention at a given level can expect to influence. The below figure sets out the types of impact that are possible.

In general, the public library and its reading programmes will focus on the first level: Changes in knowledge and skills. But the effect of improving the literacy rate in a community are affecting all other levels as well.

On the evaluation of reading programmes usually the data collecting is limited to the number of participants but more important is to be able to compare groups that participated and those who did not participate.

For example, children who participated in summer reading programmes may show a smaller decline in reading skills if compared with children who did not participate. For the data collecting on this level the library needs to work closely with schools.

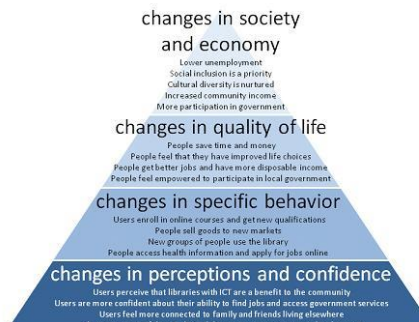


Figure reproduced from the Global Libraries Impact Planning and Assessment Roadmap (2008) in: Streatfield, D.R. and Markless, S. (2009), What is impact assessment and why is it important? Performance Measurement and Metrics, Vol. 10 Issue 2, pp.134-141, <https://doi.org/10.1108/14678040911005473>