

From impact to advocacy: working together toward public library sustainability

Public library
sustainability

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Julia Cottrill

GMMB, Washington, District of Columbia, USA

Fernando Letelier and Pablo Andrade Blanco

*Directorate of Libraries Archives and Museums – BibiloRedes Program,
Santiago, Chile*

Henry García

Ministerio de Cultura – Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá, Colombia

Marcel Chiranov

MC Performance Management, Bucharest, Romania

Yuliya Tkachuk and Tetiana Liubyva

IREX, Kiev, Ukraine

Rachel Crocker and Matthew Vanderwerff

IREX – Beyond Access, Washington, District of Columbia, USA

Giedre Cistoviene, Ineta Krauls-Ward and Eugenijus Stratilatovas

Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, Vilnius, Lithuania

Dan Mount

Civic Agenda, Brussels, Belgium

Agniete Kurutyte

Reading & Writing Foundation, The Hague, The Netherlands, and

Triyono

Coca-Cola Foundation Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to outline the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Global Libraries (GLs) initiative approach to advocacy and how it informs, guides, and integrates impact data to support sustainability of GL program results.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper defines advocacy in the context of GL, and explores the GL grant planning process, tools, and collaboration between advocacy and impact specialists. Results are demonstrated through grantee examples that illustrate a variety of approaches to library advocacy using impact data at local, country, and regional levels.

Findings – The paper demonstrates the importance of identifying community needs, designing impact measures to demonstrate how libraries help to address those needs, and the variety of ways



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impact evidence can be used to effectively advocacy for public libraries. This basic formula can be applied to advocacy efforts ranging from a broad national policy to a small incremental change in perceptions of libraries by local decision makers.

Originality/value – This paper reinforces the essential link between library impact measurement data and successful advocacy.

Keywords Sustainability, Impact, EU, Public libraries, Advocacy, Public library sustainability

Paper type Case study

1. Introduction

The Global Libraries (GL) initiative works to improve public access to computers and the internet at libraries around the world to increase the capacity of these libraries to meet community needs in areas like education, employment, and health. Due to the time-limited nature of foundation funding, GL grantees begin taking steps in the planning stages of each grant program to ensure that the public libraries they support during the program are able to continue to address the needs of the people and communities they serve beyond the life of the grant. For this to happen, governments or other major funders must continually reinvest in public libraries to maintain facilities, upgrade technology, and train library staff.

For this reason, national and local advocacy is a priority in all GL grant programs, and GL has developed a range of processes and tools to guide grantees in effective advocacy. Those grantees that represent national library systems or programs (country grantees) follow a common methodology to identify community needs, design impact measures to demonstrate how public libraries help to address those needs, and persuade decision makers to support policy or funding change in favor of public libraries in the long term. Other GL grantees that do not work at the national level use advocacy goals to guide the impact of their work in other ways.

The processes by which GL country grantees plan and collect impact measurement data are described in Papers 1 and 2. The purpose of this paper is to outline how the GL approach to advocacy informs, guides, and integrates these impact data to support the sustainability of program results at the local, national, and international levels.

Contributors to this paper include impact and advocacy specialists representing country grant programs in Chile, Colombia, Indonesia, Lithuania, Romania, and Ukraine, as well as GL partners and grantee organizations that conduct advocacy at the international level.

1.1 *What is public library advocacy?*

GL defines advocacy as the actions individuals or organizations undertake to influence decision making at the local, regional, state, national, and international levels that help create a desired policy or funding change in support of public libraries.

This definition is based on the principle that when government decision makers understand the impact that libraries have on people's lives, libraries will receive the support they need to sustain the results they have achieved when the grant ends. Because advocacy is a critical lever for sustaining these results, GL approaches library advocacy as an ongoing effort that is integrated into each grant program. All GL country grantees work toward four common advocacy goals that are essential to ensuring sustainability:

- (1) secure allocation of adequate financial resources for public libraries and supporting institutions;
- (2) build understanding of the intrinsic value of public libraries in communities in order to move public libraries higher on political and budgetary agendas;

- (3) accelerate policies or funding mechanisms to extend coverage of broadband so libraries have affordable access; and
- (4) secure improved policies and regulations governing library administration, staffing, facilities, and services.

The first two goals are mandatory, while the second two goals are recommended but may depend on the local context.

In addition to directly driving supportive policy or funding change, advocacy can help raise the profile of public libraries and secure a role for library leaders in important funding and policy decisions, which further supports sustainability of program results.

1.2 What does public library advocacy look like?

Public library advocacy may include a range of tactics, including community outreach, advertising, public relations, public events, and meeting with decision makers. In practice, many advocacy activities are conducted by library staff and leaders at the local level because that is where most library funding decisions are made.

Focussed advocacy efforts can enable public libraries to overcome a range of common challenges that could otherwise hinder the sustainability of GL program results. For instance:

- (1) inadequate local funding for library services: grantees, library staff, and other supporters can advocate for public officials to create new funding mechanisms for libraries;
- (2) high turnover or lack of leadership among library staff: grantees, library staff, and other supporters can advocate for public officials to codify regulations that establish minimum qualifications for librarians or an ongoing process for professional training; and
- (3) outdated computer and internet services throughout the library system: grantees, library staff, and other supporters can advocate for policies or guidelines that determine how often technology should be replaced.

1.3 Advocacy drives impact measurement

Providing evidence of how people's lives have been directly impacted through library programs and services is one of the most important elements of effective advocacy at any level. Therefore, it is critically important that the right data are collected to support the unique library advocacy opportunities in a particular community, country, or region. To ensure that impact measurement supports advocacy, GL grantees work with local stakeholders to design library programs that both meet community needs and take into account the stated priorities of national and local government stakeholders, such as employment or digital inclusion. In this way, advocacy opportunities inform even the earliest decisions about the impact that grantees will seek and measure.

After a GL grant program ends, public libraries in the country or region that it served will continue to need impact data to support ongoing advocacy efforts. GL grantees work throughout the life of the grant program to meet this need in several ways: by designing impact measurement frameworks that can be reasonably sustained by local librarians; by training librarians during the grant program about the importance of collecting impact data for future advocacy; and by moving to formalize a system at the end of the grant program for librarians to continue collecting and sharing these data.

1.4 GLs supports using impact evidence in advocacy at every level

Supporting effective advocacy by grantees – and ensuring that those advocacy activities are supported by relevant impact data – is a GL priority at the local, national, and regional levels.

At the local level, GL’s work focusses on increasing the advocacy capacity of library staff and supporters. Each grant program works throughout the life of the grant to ensure that advocacy becomes a permanent part of local library systems after the grant ends, driven by library staff and leaders in each country. Library staff are trained in advocacy concepts and skills, and equipped with tools to help them seek policy and funding change at the local level. These advocacy support tools include an emphasis on how to use both qualitative and quantitative impact evidence in advocacy.

Development of an advocacy training curriculum for public libraries: a central GL resource for supporting local library advocacy is a training curriculum called “Turning the page: supporting libraries, strengthening communities” (Global Libraries, 2015). The curriculum is a comprehensive beginner’s guide to advocacy, designed to help public library staff and partners build the knowledge and skills they need to effectively advocate for funding and support. It was originally developed by the Public Library Association in the USA, in collaboration with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The curriculum was adapted by GL advocacy and training specialists for global use in 2011, and was updated in 2014 to reflect the experiences and successes of GL grantees and make it accessible to other library networks, associations, and partners in the GL community.

GL also supports national-level advocacy efforts to both country grantees and other grantees when appropriate. The following are examples of GL-supported advocacy efforts:

- (1) Embedding a dedicated advocacy specialist in each country grant program: the advocacy specialist works closely with GL to design an advocacy strategy that has clear goals and success indicators. This person also develops and manages an advocacy team, which can include local and international consultants, advocacy strategists, marketing companies, public affairs experts, media outlets, members of the library community, and national library associations. Importantly, advocacy specialists for each country grant also collaborate with similarly embedded impact specialists to coordinate impact and advocacy activities throughout the life of a grant, including identifying local community needs and government priorities, defining the type of impact data that will be most useful in advocacy activities, and reporting impact data in a way that is compelling to government decision makers. For an example of collaboration between advocacy and impact specialists, see Section 2.5.
- (2) Providing ongoing support and opportunities for advocacy knowledge-sharing among grantees: GL established an Advocacy Work Group (AWG), which is comprised of advocacy specialists from GL country grants and representatives from other GL grants where advocacy is essential to their success, to ensure that GL grantees have sufficient support to reach their advocacy goals and objectives. AWG members share their advocacy experiences and lessons learned, advise GL on advocacy support that grantees need, and help to develop advocacy tools and resources to assist grantees.

Finally, GL has supported a significant coordinated public library advocacy effort among grantees and partners at the regional level, by commissioning impact research across the European Union (EU) and supporting grantee efforts to promote the findings to EU decision makers, both individually and collectively. For more detail about this effort, see Section 3.

2. Grantee experiences: GL advocacy specialists use impact assessment evidence in public library advocacy

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GL grantees have a wide range of experiences conducting and supporting public library advocacy. Successful advocacy activities may take a different form in each country, based on national and local community needs and the policy or funding opportunities that exist. It is also important to note that valuable progress achieved through library advocacy may be wide and sweeping like national policy or small and incremental like influencing perceptions about libraries among local government leaders, because many small changes can add up to create an environment favorable to public libraries, which may help future advocacy efforts succeed.

The following examples illustrate at a high level the range of GL grantee experiences collecting and applying performance measurements, impact data, and other evidence in successful advocacy activities.

2.1 Creating a central library database to support advocacy in Chile

One of the goals of the National System of Public Libraries in Chile (Sistema Nacional de Bibliotecas Públicas, or SNBP) is to improve public access to information about local library services and management. BiblioRedes, the GL country grant program in Chile, has developed an online data reporting system to support this goal and ensure that publicly available information about libraries is reliable, up-to-date, relevant to the public, and delivered in a way that focusses on the positive results libraries have achieved.

This online system aggregates records about library services – such as the number of users, materials loaned, technology used, and training provided – from different databases into a single “data warehouse.” To develop this system, the BiblioRedes team worked with SNBP to improve existing data and establish standards for its delivery. This project included three stages that target different audiences and needs:

- (1) The first stage was to provide regional public libraries with Sharepoint web access to the statistical reports they use most often, so they have detailed and relevant information about their own services and progress toward their local goals. Video tutorials explain step by step how to access the information for use in planning and advocacy.
- (2) The second stage was to develop an online tool that allows users to create customized reports using real-time library data that has been collected on several fronts, and to provide an online public repository of reports on the work of public libraries, library user studies, and analysis of library services that users can download. Both are essential components of the web site BiblioRedes designed as an online advocacy tool for libraries.
- (3) The third stage will be to train library staff to find and create reports that allow them to raise their visibility with local leaders. Trained library staff will be able to present data about their services through a user-friendly and visual system that can be updated in real-time. This training will be conducted entirely via an

e-learning platform and will be part of the continuing education program of the SNBP's Diploma in Public Libraries.

Together, these stages have established a system for delivering data about public library users and services in Chile so library staff can accurately describe their work in their communities and districts.

2.2 Impact and advocacy assessment for public libraries in Colombia

As part of the National Literacy Plan "Reading is My Story," the Ministry of Culture of Colombia executed the first phase of the GL-supported project "Use and Appropriation of ICT in the National Network of Public Libraries" between September 2011 and May 2014. The goal of the project was for public libraries to be recognized as spaces that use technology in creative and innovative ways to respond to the needs and interests of people in the community, and contribute to their human, social, and economic development.

In Colombia, library data collected through national surveys and the GL impact assessment process are the main inputs that justify the support that public libraries receive from the state, civil society, and the private sector. Therefore, coordination of advocacy and impact assessment activities in Colombia has been fundamental to positioning public libraries favorably among decision makers and promoting their services. To align these efforts, the first phase of the project included the following components:

- (1) Conducting a national study on the impact of public library services: as part of the first phase of this project, from July to September 2013 the project team conducted the first National Assessment of the National Network of Public Libraries in Colombia, including the Common Impact Measurement System (CIMS) indicators defined by GL to assess the impact of library services (see Paper 2, "The evolution of global libraries' performance measurement and impact assessment systems" for more information on the CIMS indicators). This survey assessed the physical and technological infrastructure conditions of all public libraries and the information needs of their actual and potential users. In early 2014 the project team hired the Regional Center for Book Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLALC) to conduct a thorough analysis of the results and establish benchmarks in some relevant indicators for the public library sector.
- (2) Packaging the study findings for use in advocacy: the most important findings from the national assessment were published in a special edition book in Spanish and English, alongside a series of photographs of Colombian public libraries. This publication has been essential for establishing dialogue with new stakeholders and potential funders about the role of the library sector. The project team also used findings from the national assessment to develop two infographics – one about the information needs, uses, and perceptions of actual and potential library users, and one about the physical and technological infrastructure conditions of public libraries. Public library leaders in Colombia used these tools to demonstrate to decision makers where libraries are supporting community development and where more funding is needed to support the work of the library sector.
- (3) Conducting targeted advocacy activities: some findings from the national assessment have been especially valuable in library advocacy. For instance, the study showed that people use computers at public libraries to conduct online government transactions, which helped draw attention from the Ministry of Information and Communications Technologies of Colombia and led to the

creation of a new “Online Government” project in public libraries in Colombia, including digital content, training, and outreach materials to promote this use. Library impact data broken down by region was also shared with the Departmental Public Library Networks in Colombia, for library leaders to use with their target audiences and strategic partners. Other impact data that highlight the use of technology in public libraries have been used systematically in Colombia in meetings with potential library partners, foundations interested in improving the physical and technological infrastructure of libraries, government authorities responsible for planning technological resources for libraries, and private funders.

2.3 Sustaining local library services in Indonesia through community advocacy

The public library of West Kotawaringin District in Central Borneo Province, Indonesia, is one of the partners of the PerpuSeru Program that has succeeded in undertaking advocacy activities with support from GL. The library makes a significant contribution to building local knowledge and skills through training courses, including those related to computers. Computer services provided there have been optimized to serve the community, and include web design, online marketing, social media, and computer networking.

The main challenge for the West Kotawaringin District Library is the lack of both quantity and quality of human resources. To address this challenge, library staff conduct advocacy to bring in external experts – like teachers, computer experts, and business leaders – to volunteer their time providing services in the library. This framework results in a mutual benefit principle for both the library (which secures experts for free) and the experts (who take advantage of computer and internet access, meeting space, and the trusted image of the library).

The library is of particular concern to the local government because it drives a significant change on the economic activity of the community. For instance, local craftsmen have learned to market their products online after developing digital skills at the library. Based on this type of impact, advocacy conducted by the staff of the West Kotawaringin District Library to the local government has resulted in an annual increase in its budget every year from 2012 to 2014, and a special dispensation in 2014 to improve a dedicated computer space for children and adults.

Because of this advocacy success, the library has become a learning center for library staff development in Central Borneo Province. Staff from seven local libraries in other districts have visited the West Kotawaringin District Library to learn how they can use evidence of their impact in library advocacy.

2.4 Supporting local farmers through government partnership with Romanian public libraries

Throughout the implementation of Biblionet, the GL country grant program in Romania, the program team actively sought opportunities for public libraries to deliver new services that would add value in their communities and improve library sustainability. In 2011 the program team approached the Romanian Agency for Payments and Interventions in Agriculture (APIA), which manages a multi-billion euro budget and is responsible for subsidizing farming activities based on EU regulations, to discuss a possible partnership. Before meeting with the agency, the Biblionet team learned that APIA processed farming subsidy applications at only few centers in each county, requiring many farmers to make long trips to complete applications, often seven days a week. The agency had also recently moved to an online platform for applications in an attempt to improve efficiency.

At the time, Biblionet supported approximately 850 public libraries in Romania, encompassing more than 3,200 modern workstations connected to the internet and more than 1,200 librarians trained to use them.

Biblionet partnered with APIA to facilitate this application process through public libraries, driving farmers to their local libraries to use the computers there to complete their applications instead of traveling to processing centers, while APIA provided technical assistance. In many communities, the mayors immediately recognized the benefits of this partnership and began to organize and promote it locally.

Between 2011 and 2014, Romanian public libraries helped more than 116,000 farmers submit applications for farming subsidies totaling US\$205 million. In 2012 alone, APIA experts trained more than 1,000 librarians and 150 city hall employees to understand the process and help farmers fill out subsidy application forms. By allowing farmers to complete their subsidy applications close to home, this partnership saved more than 230,000 working days and approximately US\$1.25 million in transportation costs.

The Biblionet team applied the impressive results of this program in its advocacy efforts and promotional materials. In some communities this resulted in local policy change, with mayors taking ownership of the subsidy application process and purchasing computers so they could offer the service at city hall. The success of this partnership also helped the Biblionet team build other partnerships related to providing highly targeted training services in public libraries, such as financial education and even medical training.

2.5 Collecting and using return on investment (ROI) data for advocacy in Ukraine

Especially in a time of tightening budgets, the need to understand and clearly explain the value of library services is critical to the survival of public libraries. In Ukraine, the Bibliomist program decided to calculate the ROI of public libraries to allow library directors to make better decisions to maximize their impact and reach, to help governments make sure their money is wisely spent, and to enable libraries to better advocate for funding.

ROI data can be a powerful tool to prove the relevance and importance of libraries, showing concrete benefits of library services to communities. To calculate ROI the Bibliomist team adapted a formula used by businesses, comparing the cost of providing library services with the monetary benefit of those services across Ukraine (see Paper 4, “Innovative impact planning and assessment through global libraries” for detailed methodology). For instance, one city library in Ukraine calculated the ROI for its computer courses as 257 percent, meaning that each hryvnia invested in providing the service returned 2.57 hryvnias worth of benefits for the community.

Every step of the process to assess library ROI in Ukraine was a compromise between impact and advocacy priorities, beginning with selecting which library services to measure. The Bibliomist impact and advocacy specialists worked together to ensure that the data would be useful in later advocacy, opting to assess the most common services that most or all libraries provide, those that are strategically important for government leaders, and the most innovative services that are consistently monitored. When the national ROI data had been collected, the Bibliomist team paired it with other impact data and used the combination in two ways (Bibliomist, 2014):

- (1) Advocating for the inclusion of public libraries in national government initiatives: the Bibliomist team presented data to the National Agency for E-Governance, demonstrating that libraries teach both community members and local officials to use e-government tools and resources for a modest cost. As a result, the agency

agreed to include public libraries in the Ukrainian National Action Plan of the Open Government Partnership to implement the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (the Government of Ukraine) commitments taken under this larger international initiative. Public libraries are now officially considered dissemination points for government information and training sites for e-governance. The team also shared data with the Central Election Commission (CEC) about how public libraries work to provide voter education to internally displaced people, and CEC is now considering using public libraries to educate voters and disseminate information during upcoming local elections. Bibliomist has also encouraged the Ministry of Culture to use impact and ROI data when presenting the role of libraries to other government agencies.

- (2) Teaching librarians to build stronger advocacy arguments: the Bibliomist team created an infographic featuring key findings from the ROI assessment and encouraged librarians to create one-minute messages to their local government officials quoting ROI numbers to convince them to allocate more funding for new library services. Bibliomist also trained librarians in Ukraine to use ROI data to respond quickly to unfavorable government decisions or policies, by demonstrating library contributions to solving community issues and comparing the cost of this work with local budgets designated for those issues. In a period of tight budgets across the country, librarians were therefore equipped with relevant talking points to support their arguments against budget cuts.

The Bibliomist team learned that to build stronger advocacy arguments, it was better to quote lower ROI numbers and be transparent about the methodology than to risk giving higher but less credible results. While the Bibliomist advocacy specialist was naturally interested in impressive data and the impact specialist was more focussed on reliable data and realistic ways to collect it, an open dialogue about the challenges of data collection, advocacy needs, and the limitations of ROI measurement helped ensure the success of the project.

2.6 Leveraging available impact data to support advocacy

Beyond Access, which is implemented by IREX, first received GL funding in 2011 to build momentum for library-based collaboration with development initiatives. Beyond Access projects operate on shorter timelines than GL country grant programs, and one of the early challenges it faced was the realization that advocacy activities to support scaling efforts had to begin before rich project-specific impact data could be collected. Through its early pilots and scaling efforts, Beyond Access developed the following approach to advocacy, which remained grounded in impact data, even when project-specific data were not available:

- (1) Identify national priorities: the Beyond Access Philippines project began 2013. Through the pilot phase, Beyond Access identified the Philippine Digital Strategy[1] as an anchor for the project. The Philippine Digital Strategy is a key political document that outlines the government's approach to leveraging computer and internet access to improve governance and promote inclusive economic growth. This includes prioritizing policies aimed at increasing access to information and improving digital skills. While Beyond Access only had early project data to support the role of libraries in these areas, it was able to rely heavily on existing GL impact data about the role of libraries in contributing to digital skills.

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- (2) Frame project targets around those priorities: to align the project with the Philippine Digital Strategy, Beyond Access set three impact targets:
- a total of 36,000 people gain and improve digital literacy skills through public library services;
 - a total of 25,000 people access e-government services through the public library; and
 - a total of 20,000 people access workforce development services through the public library.

These targets served two key purposes. First, they provided a clear way to describe the desired impact of the project which was critical to getting partners on board. Second, these targets coalesced library activities and Beyond Access impact assessment around a few concrete areas.

- (3) Use data from other countries to support the role of public libraries: the targets set for the project were supported by evidence from GL programs. For example, in line with the Philippine Digital Strategy's goal of using computer and internet access to improve government services, and the Beyond Access Philippines goal of public libraries in the project assisting 25,000 people in accessing e-government services, Beyond Access developed an advocacy document that described how libraries had extended the reach of government and business services through libraries in Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, and the Philippines (Beyond Access, 2014).

In Beyond Access's leaner approach, shorter timeline, and reliance on partnership and cost-sharing (see Paper 2, "The evolution of global libraries' performance measurement and impact assessment systems" for more information on IREX's Beyond Access initiative), advocacy is critical not only for long-term sustainability but also for initial project development and implementation. As such, Beyond Access found ways to make use of the impact data available from other countries to help frame and support its advocacy efforts.

3. International advocacy: collecting library impact data for advocacy in the EU

In 2010, the European Commission (EC) – the executive body of the EU – put forward its Europe 2020 Growth Strategy (EU2020), (European Commission, 2010) which set a series of ambitious objectives in many development areas related to how individuals access information. Significant areas where the EC set targets included employment, innovation, lifelong learning, and social inclusion. EU2020 called for EU member states to meet milestones in these and other areas by 2020, with the help of local partners.

GL and its grantees in the EU recognized this strategy as a major opportunity for public libraries to gain greater visibility in social policies and a stronger foothold in public funding, and undertook a regional effort to collect impact data demonstrating how libraries support EU2020 priorities.

3.1 Rationale for a cross-European impact study

GL country grantees in Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania had observed that the societal benefits public libraries provide were not well understood by EU policy makers. Core library services like access to technology were often limited or cut due to lack of public funding, and public libraries were rarely mentioned in policies at either the EU or national level, which made it difficult for libraries to benefit from those policies.

In their efforts to communicate to decision makers that library services can support EU priorities like employment and education, public libraries in the EU had previously relied on local or anecdotal evidence. Data about the benefits that public libraries provide to individuals and communities in the EU were limited.

3.2 Building the evidence base for public libraries: priorities and process

In late 2012, with funding decisions about EU2020 objectives on the horizon, GL commissioned a study of 17 EU countries to measure the impact of public library services on social and economic priorities identified in the strategy (Quick *et al.*, 2013a). The study – the largest of its kind ever conducted – included three main components:

- (1) quantitative and qualitative research in the form of surveys among public library users (sample size 12,537), library computer users (sample size 11,716), and the general public (sample size 17,816);
- (2) interviews with public library users and staff (four group discussions with library computer users and five in-depth interviews with library managers and senior managers in each country); and
- (3) desk research about the availability of public libraries and library computer access.

TNS, an independent global research company, conducted the study in Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and the UK (Quick *et al.*, 2013b) (qualitative-only research was also conducted in Sweden). These countries were selected to ensure broad regional representation. Together, the participating countries covered more than 90 percent of the EU population at the time of the study; therefore the results could be generally considered as the EU-wide average.

Since the study was designed with a coordinated advocacy effort in mind, the goal of collecting impact data that would be compelling to EU decision makers guided elements of the survey design:

- (1) GL advocacy and impact specialists in the EU worked together to identify focus areas for the study that would be most applicable to advocacy. They discussed how public libraries as institutions can help meet specific EU2020 policy objectives, and three priority areas emerged:
 - non-formal and informal learning: new skills and knowledge gained through learning experiences such as organized group trainings and one-on-one consultations with librarians;
 - social inclusion: access to use public services like resources for employment, training, housing, and health among disadvantaged and socially excluded members of society; and
 - digital inclusion: access and skills to take advantage of the benefits of digital technology.
- (2) Researchers aligned the survey questions with how the EU2020 priorities were described and how EU social and economic data were defined in official sources, so the results could be compared with existing public data.
- (3) GL grantees reviewed the survey instrument to ensure that it captured the impact measurements most likely to be useful in their advocacy efforts.

3.3 Key findings of the cross-European impact study

The study found clear evidence of the social and economic impact of public libraries and library services, including in the priority areas identified above:

- (1) nearly 100 million EU adults had used a public library in the last year, and 14 million had used a computer at the library to access the internet;
- (2) for 1.5 million adults (most frequently Roma, the disabled, the elderly, and the unemployed), public libraries were the only option for accessing the internet; another 1.9 million people had no other free source of internet access;
- (3) in total, 24 million adults (one in four public library users) had participated in learning activities at the public library in the last year – particularly senior citizens, ethnic minorities, and the unemployed – including 2.3 million who took a computer training course at the library;
- (4) in the last year, 1.5 million adults in the EU had used public library computers to apply for jobs and a quarter of a million secured jobs this way;
- (5) of those using internet in the public library, 83 percent reported a positive benefit across a range of areas, including helping them save time and money, improving their skills, providing access to government services, and increasing their access to employment and health-related resources; and
- (6) more than 70 percent of public library users believed that libraries are effective at meeting the needs of their local communities and more than half believed public libraries deserve more financial support than they receive now.

3.4 Use of cross-European impact study findings in advocacy

In early 2013, TNS and GL hosted a meeting of GL grantees and partners throughout the European public library community, including representatives from every country involved in the impact study. At the meeting TNS presented the study findings in depth, and GL facilitated discussions among participants about strategies for packaging and using the findings in their own advocacy activities.

The following are two examples of how the study findings were used for advocacy by GL grantees, at the national and international levels.

Public promotion and advocacy around impact data in Lithuania. Libraries for Innovation 2, a continuation of the GL country grant program in Lithuania, promoted the study findings widely through a range of communication channels to reach several target audiences: librarians, decision makers on both the national and local levels, library partners, academic institutions, and library users. Libraries for innovation 2 is implemented by the National Library of Lithuania:

- (1) Publications: the team began by preparing a series of public-facing resources that packaged the most important findings for various audiences, including a research report of the findings in Lithuania (published by the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania) (Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, 2013a) and a calendar that combined key study findings with other statistics to counteract common misperceptions about public libraries. The program team also worked with national and local news outlets and library web sites to run stories about the findings and call attention to the role of public libraries in Lithuania.

- (2) Grantee advocacy activities: the National Library of Lithuania organized an international conference, “Libraries Empower Social Changes 2013: Experiences of the Baltic Sea Region,” which was held at the Parliament of Lithuania as one of the events celebrating the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the EU (Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, 2013b). Participants and speakers included Lithuanian and international librarians, members of central and local governments, academics, and library partners. After the conference, popular online news portals and national television and radio outlets reported on the event and the research findings. The program team also used the findings to advocate to a Member of European Parliament from Lithuania, Vilija Blinkeviciute, to promote a Written Declaration about the impact of public libraries (see example below).
- (3) Library advocacy activities: in addition to conducting national advocacy activities, the National Library of Lithuania worked closely with public libraries, consulting with library associations to prepare them to share the findings in meetings with decision makers, and developing a leaflet with key findings for librarians to use in local advocacy. With this support, local public libraries in Lithuania used the study findings to support their arguments in annual presentations and reports to local government, in project funding applications, and to negotiate with central government representatives for a pay increase for librarians.
- (4) Key outcomes: several important changes in national library policy occurred during the two years following the initial dissemination of the study findings and subsequent advocacy activities in Lithuania. Most importantly, a working group hosted by the Ministry of Culture and comprised of librarians, library partners, academics, and politicians collaborated to prepare a new set of national “Library Development Guidelines.” This official document will signify priorities, strategy, and overall guidelines for development in the library field (Republic of Lithuania, 2013). Library staff across Lithuania also received a pay increase. Finally, the National Library of Lithuania observed greater overall awareness of the social impact of public libraries among decision makers and library partners, some of whom subsequently joined a steering committee for Libraries for Innovation 2.

European Parliament Written Declaration on the impact of public libraries in European communities. From October 2013 to January 7, 2014, GL grantee Civic Agenda led an international advocacy campaign in support of European Parliament Written Declaration 0016/2013 (European Parliament, 2013) “on the impact of public libraries in European communities.” The objective of the campaign was to mobilize and empower advocates in the EU to raise awareness among Members of EU Parliament (MEPs) of the economic and social impact of European public libraries. Written Declarations that secure signatures from more than half of MEPs are formally recognized by the EU Parliament. The content of the Written Declaration was drafted by Civic Agenda drawing upon data from the cross-European impact study.

- (1) Campaign strategy: since MEPs are most receptive to messages from their constituents or colleagues, a key element of this approach was a focus on empowering other advocates to convey a coordinated message. The overarching strategy of the advocacy campaign included three related components:
 - First, to exert maximum online presence, Civic Agenda developed a campaign web site and directed audiences to the site through multiple

social media channels. The web site hosted basic information necessary for national-level library advocates to engage with their MEPs, including copies of the Written Declaration, template outreach materials, and national MEP e-mail contact lists in all 24 EU languages (Public Libraries 2020) (n.d.). A campaign Facebook page (Public Libraries 2020) (n.d.) provided a focal point for attracting new advocates, providing them with advocacy messages and tools and inspiring them to act, while a campaign Twitter account delivered a steady stream of campaign updates to national advocates.

- The campaign was successful in mobilizing a network of library advocates at the Member State level via outreach to national, regional, and international library associations.
 - Finally, the campaign worked with the staff of the 11 initial signatories of the Written Declaration to persuade their colleagues to sign. This strategy allowed the campaign to identify a group of 25 core Parliamentary supporters who carried out a number of key campaign support actions. Civic Agenda also coordinated with the European Parliament Library and the EC Central Library to campaign at the European Parliament in Brussels and Strasbourg, distributing flyers and campaign materials and recruiting a team of volunteers to help campaign door-to-door to all 766 MEP offices. Though time intensive, this approach was one of the most effective ways of securing additional signatures and engaging directly with MEPs and their staff.
- (2) Key outcomes: at the end of the three-month advocacy campaign, the 214 MEP signatures secured for Written Declaration 0016/2013 put it in the top 15 percent of all Written Declarations registered in the last 12 months. While the campaign did not achieve formal recognition for the Written Declaration, the efforts succeeded in raising awareness about public libraries among MEPs and mobilizing advocates across the EU, and the results will directly inform and support future library advocacy. Key outcomes include:
- More than one in four MEPs across the EU supported the Written Declaration. During its three-month campaign window, the Written Declaration received 214 MEP signatures (28 percent of the European Parliament), representing all 28 EU Member States.
 - The campaign engaged a large online audience through social media. Posts on the Written Declaration Facebook campaign page reached an average of 5,000 people per week, and high-profile library advocates shared campaign messages with more than two million followers on Twitter.
 - The central online campaign remotely activated and empowered a number of national campaigns at the Member State level. Library staff and users contacted their MEPs through letters, e-mails, social media, petitions, and customized campaign materials.
 - The campaign secured the endorsement and staff support of the European Parliament Library and the EC Central Library.
 - The campaign established a base of support for future public library advocacy at the EU level. In addition to the 214 MEPs who demonstrated

support for public libraries by signing the Written Declaration, the campaign identified a number of especially vocal Parliamentary supporters who can be tapped to help drive future advocacy.

4. European impact study in action: advocacy lessons from Public Libraries 2020

In the EU, many policies that originate at the international level are then implemented at the Member State level. As GL grantees in the EU began to think increasingly about the sustainability of their projects and work toward national-level decision makers, the need for a coordinated advocacy effort at the EU level became obvious. GL issued a new grant to organize the individual efforts of its country grantees and partners into a single coordinated advocacy effort at the EU level, called Public Libraries 2020 (PL2020).

4.1 Public Libraries 2020 advocacy goals and activities

PL2020 was established in January 2014, led by the Reading & Writing Foundation, which was founded by Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands. At the time, the approaching European Parliament elections and EC elections made it an ideal time to inform new EU policy makers (MEPs and EC officials) about the contribution that public libraries bring to EU2020 strategic objectives. The specific goals of PL2020 were as follows:

- (1) by 2020 there will be an increase of EU policies supporting the work of public libraries; and
- (2) by 2016 there will be an increase in the capacity (knowledge and attitudes) of national and regional coalitions/associations to advocate for public libraries at the EU level.

To support these goals, PL2020 has used the impact data in a wide range of advocacy materials and activities, including the following:

- (1) position paper to the EC consultation on a European area of skills and knowledge (Reading & Writing Foundation, 2014);
- (2) PL2020 facilitated MEP question to the EC about the role of public libraries by Vilija Blinkeviciute, Lithuanian MEP (European Parliament, 2014a);
- (3) advocating for libraries to be mentioned in the European Parliament report on new technologies and open education resources adopted by the Committee on Culture and Education (European Parliament, 2014b);
- (4) keynote speech given by Xavier Prats Monné, EC Director-General for Education and Culture, at the conference on “Cultural and Creative Crossovers” in Riga, Latvia (Public Libraries 2020) (n.d.);
- (5) keynote speeches given by Princess Laurentien at the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations annual assembly and International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions annual conference in 2014; and
- (6) “library tour” to gather personal stories from library users and MEPs, as qualitative evidence to reinforce quantitative impact data.

PL2020 has also created a number of advocacy tools using the evidence from the cross-European impact study. These tools include infographics to share impact data with MEPs and EC officials, letters and door hangers to welcome newly elected MEPs, and an animated video about how libraries change lives (Public Libraries 2020) (n.d.). PL2020 has found that the most compelling data for raising general awareness about public library impact is broad EU-wide data, and that tools such as infographics were most useful in advocacy when they included just a few essential data points.

4.2 Observations from using cross-European impact study findings in Public Libraries 2020

In addition to coordinating advocacy activities at the EU level, PL2020 manages a small library advocacy grants program to help libraries and library organizations across the EU plan and implement advocacy efforts to support local needs. PL2020 will grant approximately 15 advocacy project proposals throughout the life of the project, in waves so the lessons learned in the first grants can be applied in later grants.

In its first four grants, PL2020 observed a clear trend in that all grantees chose to structure their advocacy messages around the same three issue areas prioritized in the cross-European impact study: non-formal and informal learning, social inclusion, and digital inclusion. Moreover, some grantees have now performed their own research to produce evidence about the impact of their services in order to conduct advocacy activities, and clearly imitated the approach of the original impact study. PL2020 has observed that the evidence presented in the study has not just helped the public library community understand the power of using numbers in advocacy, but has also encouraged library leaders across Europe to align around the same messages when making the case for public library funding and policy support.

5. Conclusion

A defining characteristic of the GL approach to advocacy is that all grantees embrace the collection, analysis, and communication of impact data at every stage in the grant lifecycle, from the first pilot to the final report. While each grantee program has the flexibility to design community interventions that address their local needs, like education or digital inclusion, this commitment to using impact data is valuable for library advocacy in both the short term and the long term. In the short term, designing programs to have specific, measurable impact arms grantees with immediately relevant evidence of the value of the library's contributions, enabling grantees to advocate more effectively for new funds and supportive policies. In the long term, creating an environment in which library staff and leaders are confident users of impact data – and building the body of evidence about library impact year over year – increases the likelihood that libraries will continue to receive sustained support at the local, national, and international levels, long after a GL grant ends.

Note

1. Republic of the Philippines, Department of Science and Technology, Information and Communications Technology Office. The Philippine Digital Strategy: Transformation 2.0: Digitally Empowered Nation (<http://icto.dost.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/philippine-digital-strategy-2011-2015.pdf>).

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Corresponding author

Julia Cottrill can be contacted at: julia.cottrill@gmmb.com