RURAL AND SMALL PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Challenges and Opportunities

Edited by Brian Real

ADVANCES IN LIBRARIANSHIP

VOLUME 43

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Advances in Librarianship Volume 43

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RURAL AND SMALL PUBLIC LIBRARIES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

EDITED BY

BRIAN REAL

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EDITOR'S DEDICATION

I have learned basically everything I know about public libraries through two major parts of my life: my work as a Public Services Librarian with the Calvert Library, a rural public library system in southern Maryland, and my work as a research associate on the Digital Inclusion Survey at the Information Policy and Access Center (iPAC) at the University of Maryland's iSchool. This book is dedicated to my colleagues at both organizations—and especially Professor John Carlo Bertot of iPAC—as I would not have the knowledge or skills needed to oversee this volume without them.

I would also like to acknowledge my wife, Dr. Sarah Cantor, whose love and support has been essential in guiding me through writer's block and other crises, both major and minor.

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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION TO THE *ADVANCES IN LIBRARIANSHIP* SERIES

Through a combination of economic changes, political forces, and technological changes, libraries now find themselves in a position of meeting ever-increasing community needs and filling roles that otherwise would go unmet in key areas of economic and workforce development, health and wellness, education, civic engagement, and fostering and supporting open governments, among much else. Despite often decreasing financial support, the growing political pressures to reduce support for public goods such as libraries, and the voices claiming that Google has made libraries obsolete, libraries of all types—public, school, academic, and special—have never been more innovative, more community focused, and more in demand than they are now.

Libraries play significant roles in digital literacy and digital inclusion, online education, provision of social services, employment skills, and even emergency response. They are creating partnerships with local government agencies and nonprofits to address local needs. They adopt and innovate with new technologies and expand their services and materials through new channels provided by emerging technologies, from online reference to the curation and management of digital resources. At the same time, libraries serve as a primary support structure for social justice and human rights by fostering and promoting inclusion, access, and equity for individuals, for their communities, and for society as a whole.

The *Advances in Librarianship* book series offers a completely unique avenue through which these major issues can be discussed. By devoting each volume—often in the range of 100,000 words—to a single topic of librarianship, the series volumes devote a great amount of consideration to a single topic. By including contributors who are library professionals, administrators, researchers, and educators from many different places, the series volumes bring an unparalleled range of voices to these topics of librarianship. And by exploring these topics as broad issues with a wide range of societal impacts, these volumes not only inform those within the library profession, they inform community members, policymakers, educators, employers, health

information professionals, and others outside of libraries who are interested in the impacts of libraries.

The ability to address current and future issues from both practice and research perspectives at great depth makes this series uniquely positioned to disseminate new ideas in libraries and to advocate for their essential roles in communities. To ensure the most current and future utility, each volume includes contributions in three areas: (1) current best practices and innovative ideas, (2) future issues and ways in which they might be prepared for and addressed, and (3) the large-scale societal implications and the way in which the focus of the volume impacts libraries as a social institution.

This volume of *Advances in Librarianship* focuses on the importance of rural libraries and community archives to their communities. The majority of communities in the United States are rural, and they frequently have greatly reduced access to many services—from healthcare to broadband—available to urban and suburban communities. Many rural communities do have a library, and these libraries provide innumerable services and contributions to their communities. Yet, in the library and information science professional and academic discourse, rural libraries receive far less attention than seems appropriate given how numerous they are and how central they are to their communities. This volume is intended to help fill that gap, presenting a range of perspectives demonstrating the unique value and impact of rural libraries and community archives in their communities.

Ultimately, volumes in this series share innovative ideas and practices to improve overall library service and to help libraries better articulate their vital and myriad contributions to their communities. The range of library impacts can be seen in the recent volumes in the series, which have explored such important topics as library services to people with disabilities, libraries as institutions of human rights and social justice, and efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in the field. Forthcoming volumes will be devoted to socially innovative programs in libraries, library services for LBGTQ populations, the pedagogical roles of academic libraries, and new approaches to MLIS education. As fewer venues publish materials related to library practice, education, and research and many of the journals formerly devoted to library research have shifted their focus more to information issues, the *Advances in Librarianship* book series is an unwavering venue devoted to documenting, examining, exchanging, and advancing library practice, education, and research.

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