



OCLC Global Council · August 2023

Redefining the library experience

Findings from the 2023 OCLC Global Council Survey



Libraries are continually evolving how they engage with users to make the most impact within their communities. Recently, this has included a renewed emphasis on proactively shaping experiences around library spaces, programming, collections, and staff development.

In ten years, how would you like your library to be described?

“I would like to have our library continue to be a ‘jewel’ in our community; a community center that is open to all.”

Public library respondent, US

“We expect the ‘destination of our library’ trend to continue, where the focus is more about spaces and personal connections ... than materials.”

Public library respondent, Greece

“Culturally safe, inclusive in collections and services; tightly integrated in the curriculum and research endeavor.”

Academic library respondent, Australia

In 2023, the OCLC Global Council voted to concentrate its area of focus on the important topic of “redefining the library experience.” This is a concept that builds on the findings from OCLC Research initiatives such as the New Model Library and its framework.

Conducted in partnership with OCLC Research, the 2023 survey explored themes such as community engagement, collaboration, and innovative programs that meet library users’ continually evolving needs and expectations. The results of that survey provide insight into

ways that library leaders and workers expect changing library experiences to create more meaningful engagement and positive impacts.

How are you including thoughts about the library experience in your future planning? Compare your ideas with those of your peers from around the world as you consider how to drive change over the next decade.

Global Council areas of focus concentrate efforts around a topic of interest to libraries around the world. This important work spans not only geographic regions, but all types of libraries—while providing opportunities for professionals at all levels of their careers to participate and add their voices and ideas to the conversation. Previous topics included: Libraries and Open Ecosystems, Sustainable Development Goals, Discovery and Fulfillment, and Open Access, Open Content.

Major library experience findings

While the survey garnered data across a wide variety of questions, a few findings stand out as particularly notable with regard to the subject of changing library experiences:

- Libraries will increasingly play the role of “space providers”
- Demand for open access in academic libraries will intensify
- Resource sharing through consortia will increase
- Partnerships with non-profit and government agencies will increase for public libraries
- Academic librarians expect increased partnerships with consortia and other libraries
- Library workers may see more flexible working options and access to mental health care
- Additional need for data analytics is expected

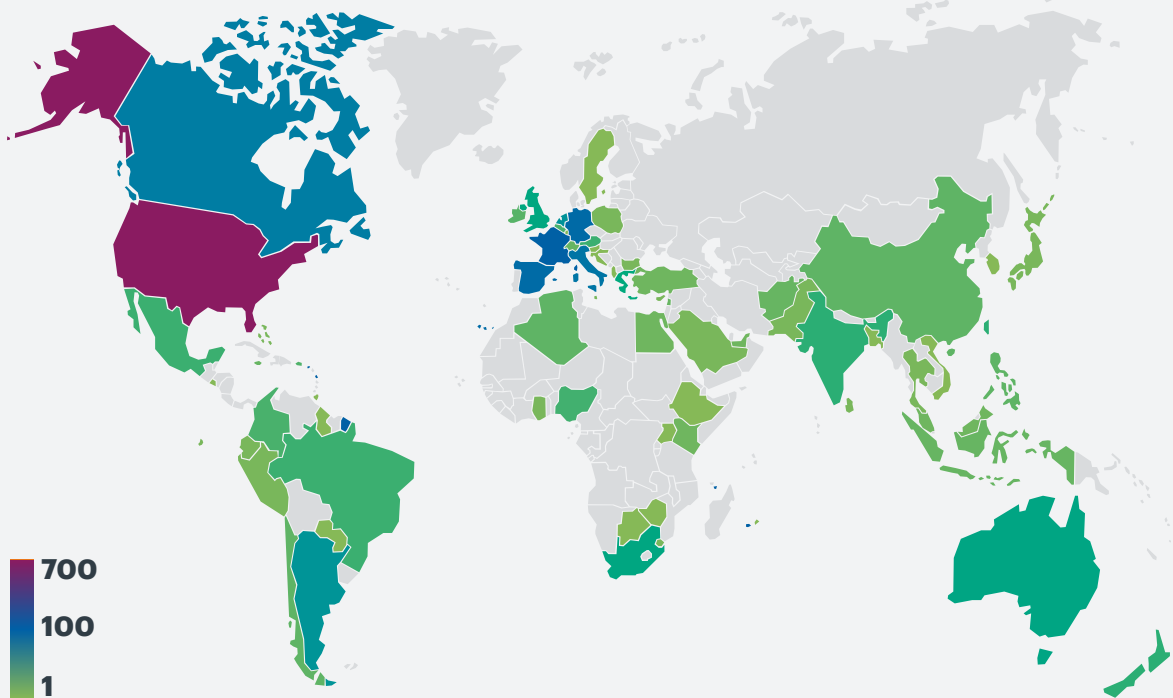
We’ll see how those findings relate to three specific topics within the library experience:

- What resources and services libraries offer their users
- How libraries engage with their communities and collaborate with each other and outside partners
- The experience of library workers themselves

Survey responses

1,627 respondents

77 countries/territories



Top 5 countries/territories

716 US

129 France

110 Germany

108 Spain

92 Italy

Library offerings

How will experiences related to library resources and services change in the next ten years?

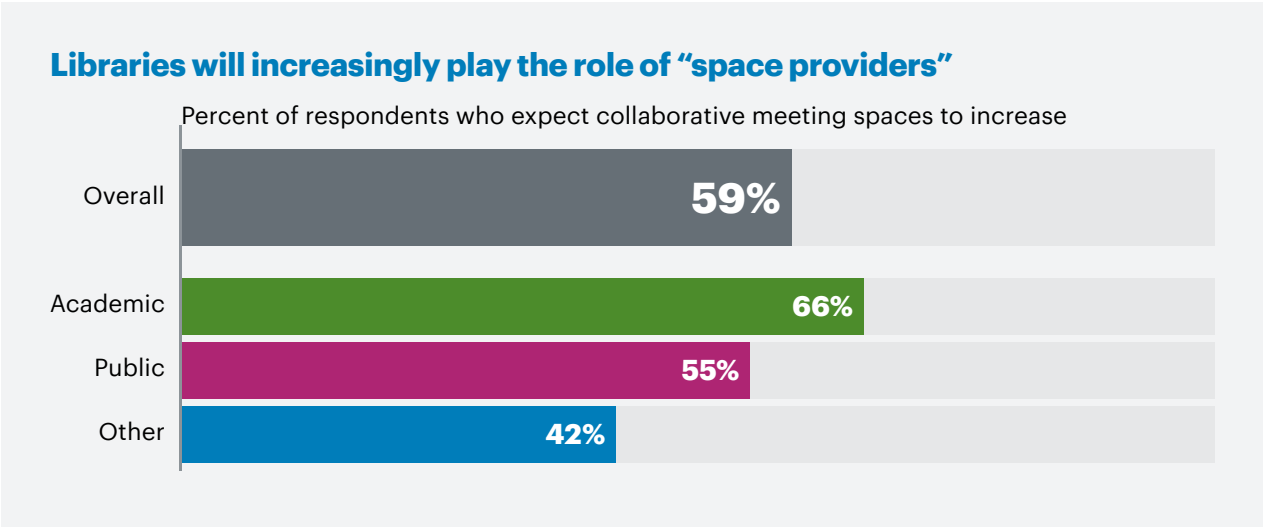
Libraries will increasingly play the role of “space providers”

Respondents were asked, “How do you anticipate the space in your library designed for meetings or collaborative work for users might change in the next 5–10 years?” Fifty-nine percent anticipate this type of physical space will increase, 23% feel it will remain the same, and just 3% feel it will decrease.

“Less print and more collaborative spaces—they also do not need to be high tech—they need to be flexible adaptable spaces where users can use their own tech, discuss, plan, etc.”

Academic library respondent, Australia

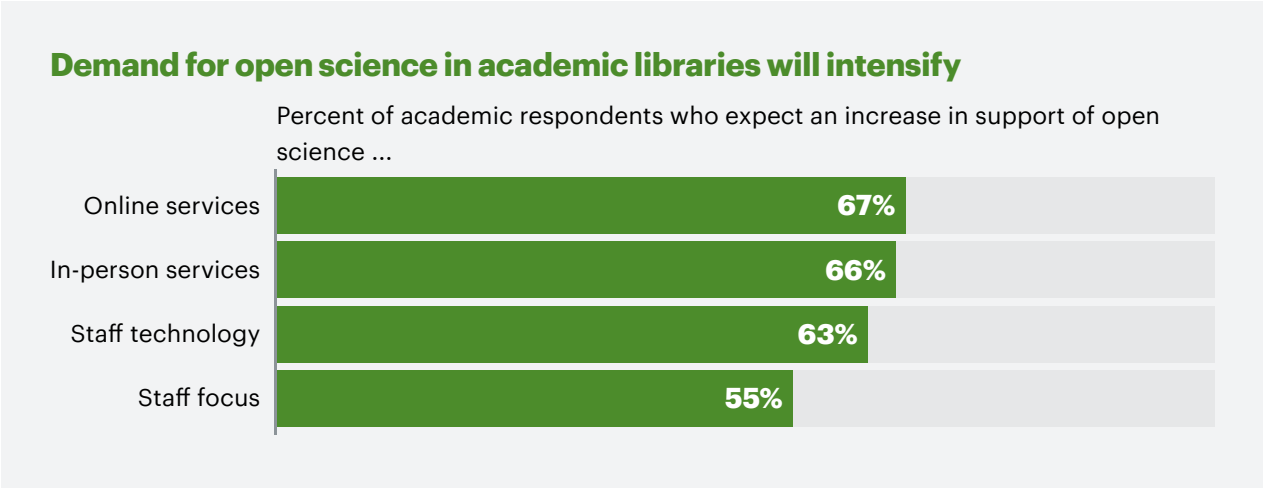
Academic library respondents (66%) are significantly more likely to anticipate this increase compared to public library respondents (55%) and other library type respondents (42%).



Respondents were asked to describe the most significant ways physical space will change and 388 provided a comment. Nearly a third (32%) of these respondents say their library’s physical space will have *collaborative, technology-enabled space or rooms for meetings, classes, collaboration, creation, etc.*

Demand for open science in academic libraries will intensify

Open science remains a focus for the near future in academic libraries. Two out of three respondents from academic libraries expect online and in-person services as well as staff focus and use of technology that support open science and/or research to increase.



“With the data guidelines for open science, we anticipate more infrastructure needs there and [potential] integration with the research office and outreach to departments.”

Academic library respondent, US

Library engagement and collaboration

While much of the work done by libraries on behalf of their institutions and communities is local, the ways in which that work is accomplished often rely on collaborative arrangements and cooperation between libraries and other organizations.

Resource sharing through consortia will increase

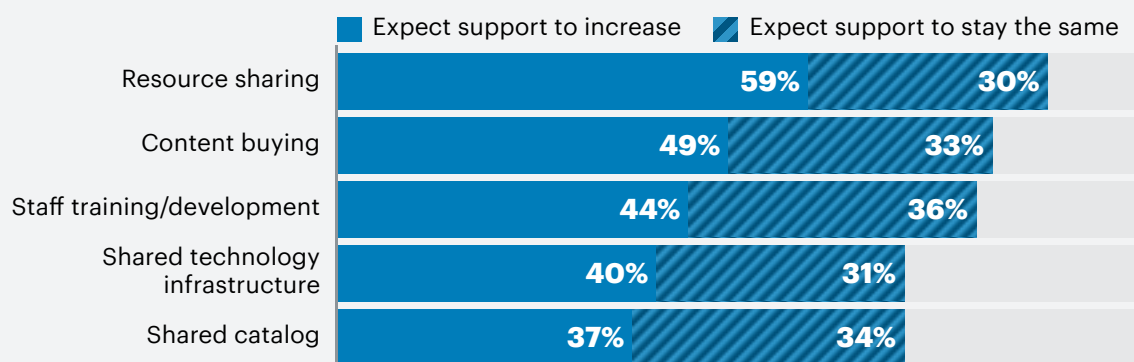
Respondents were presented with five services that libraries typically receive from consortia (or cooperatives/buying clubs) and were asked how they anticipate these services would change in the next 5–10 years.

“We are part of a library consortium with a shared catalog and shared physical resources. We also collaborate in many ways through this consortium in trainings, sharing of knowledge, and so forth.”

US government library respondent

Most respondents expect cooperative resource sharing, content buying, and staff training/development resources to either increase or remain the same.

Resource sharing through consortia will increase



More than half of respondents, regardless of library type, expect resource sharing to increase (public: 54%, academic: 61%, other library types: 62%).

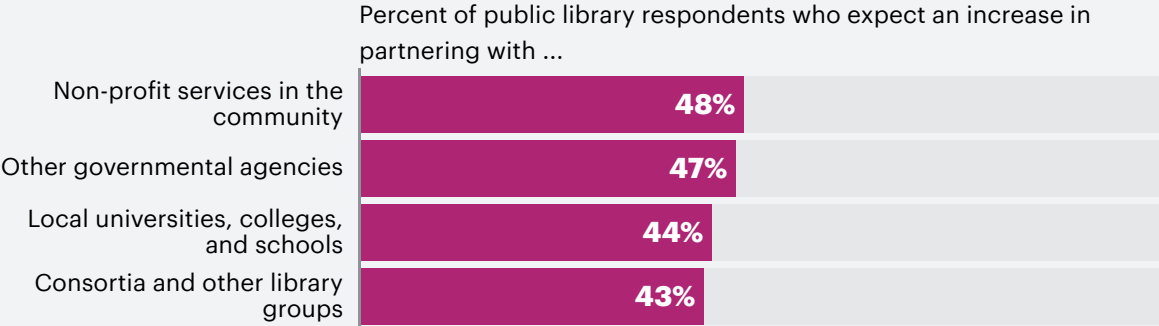
Partnerships with non-profit and government agencies will increase for public libraries

Public library respondents were presented with five types of organizations that libraries may collaborate or partner with to address the needs of their user communities and were asked how they anticipate these collaborations/partnerships would change in the next 5–10 years. Nearly half reported that they expect four out of five of those collaborative relationships to increase.

“Mostly we work with community groups ... as well as public schools, daycare, health centre, etc. I hope this will continue to increase.”

Public library respondent, Canada

Partnerships with non-profit and government agencies will increase for public libraries



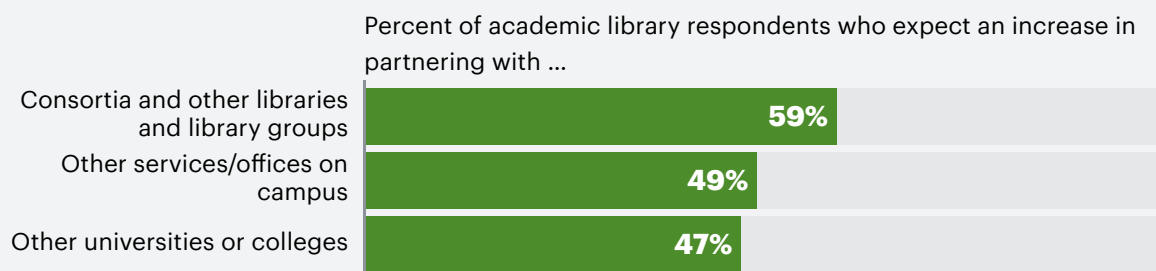
Only 28% of public library respondents felt that partnerships with for-profit services and businesses in the community were likely to increase.

Academic librarians expect increased partnerships with consortia and other libraries

Academic library respondents were more likely to report expected increases in collaborations/partnerships with consortia and other libraries and library groups.

“We partner with our state consortia and will need to continue to rely on this. Partnering within our institution is where we’re trying to make an impact, but we will need to work harder to make our impact more meaningful for the whole institution.”
Academic library respondent, US

Academic librarians expect increased partnerships with consortia and other libraries



Only 19% of academic library respondents felt partnerships with nonprofit services in the community would increase, and only 9% indicated partnerships with for-profit services and businesses would increase.

Library as a workplace

Disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic created challenges for library workers that continue to reverberate. How technology is used by library workers has changed and will continue to do so. In addition, the need for flexible work options and access to mental health remain important topics for consideration.

Library workers may see more flexible working options and access to mental health care

Forty-four percent (44%) of total respondents expect flexible working options to increase over the next 5–10 years. And while only 26% believe that access to mental health care will increase, another 30% believe it will at least remain the same.

“[We] Anticipate that there might be more remote work and flexible work options in 5–10 years to promote work/life balance.”
Academic library respondent, US

“...relaxation workshops, training in mental health care. All this already exists but will certainly be increased in the years to come.”

Special library respondent, France

Additional need for data analytics is expected

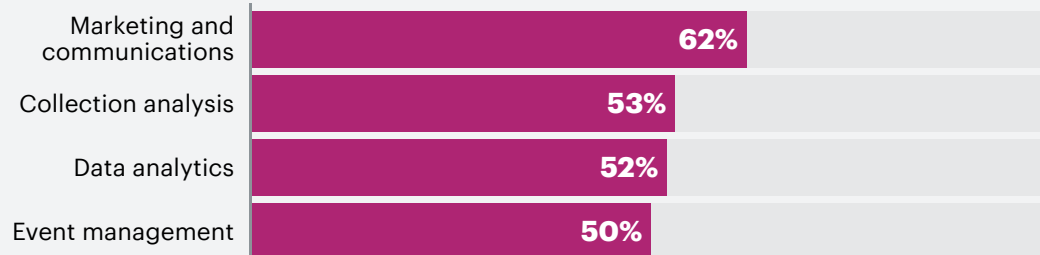
Both academic and public library respondents expect the use of data analytics and collection analysis technology by staff will increase. Academic respondents also see an increase in data management and curation technologies, while public respondents expect an increase in technologies for marketing/communications and event management.

Additional need for data analytics is expected

Percent of academic library respondents who expect an increase in the use of technology for ...



Percent of public library respondents who expect an increase in the use of technology for ...



“...We have been looking at using increased technology to manage programs, projects and events.”

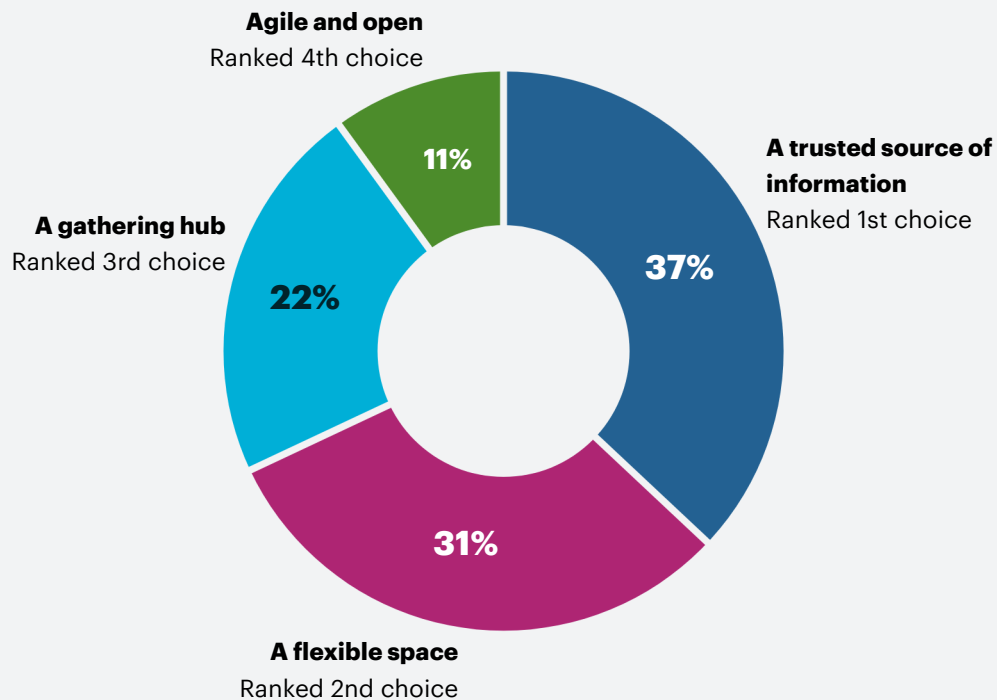
Public library respondent, US

Library visions for the future

In closing, we asked respondents: How would you like your library to be described ten years from today? The following options were provided, and respondents were asked to rank their choices. They replied:

Librarians see the future library as a trusted source of information and a flexible space

Percent of respondents who selected their preference for each description



“A trusted partner in teaching, learning and research.”

Academic library respondent, Australia

“The go-to place in the community to connect and learn, whether in-person or online.”

Public library respondent, Canada

How would you answer that question? What experiences—for your users, your staff, and your partners at other libraries and organizations—will change?

We’ve seen dramatic changes over the past decades in how libraries provide resources and services. Many of those have been further accelerated by the recent global pandemic. But every library is different. Whether you see yourself reflected in these results—or are experiencing a very different set of changes—your vision can help shape the future of library experiences for your library and our profession as a whole.

Methodology

OCLC Research and Global Council conducted an online survey of libraries throughout the world from 9 January – 31 March 2023. This was the first year the survey was translated into multiple languages: Dutch, English, German, International French, International Spanish, and Italian. An invitation to participate in the survey was shared with the library community on 9 January 2023 via email, at member events, and online through the OCLC Community Center and social media channels. A total of 1,627 respondents from 77 countries/territories completed or partially completed the survey: 898 (55%) from 18 countries in the Americas, 641 (39%) from 43 countries/territories in EMEA (Europe, Middle East, and Africa), and 88 (6%) from 16 countries/territories in Asia Pacific. Just over half (52%) of respondents are from academic (or education) libraries (college/university/higher education/research [46%]; community college [3%]; school [K-12] [2%] and other education [.4%]). Nearly a third (30%) are from public libraries and 18% are from other library types, such as government and special libraries.

To learn more about OCLC Global Council and the area of focus work, visit oclc.org/global-council/area-of-focus

OCLC would like to thank the 1,627 library professionals who completed the survey. Also special thanks to the OCLC Global Council, and in particular, the members of the 2021–2023 Global Council Program Committee: Reinhard Altenhöner (chair), May Chan, Sasekea Harris, Jennifer Maguire-Wright, Gaye Rowley, Jan Simane, Anna Wolodoko, and OCLC staff on the Membership, Research and Market Research teams: Helene Blowers, Joanne Cantrell, Lynn Silipigni Connaway, Peggy Gallagher, Lesley A. Langa, and Christina Rodrigues.

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