

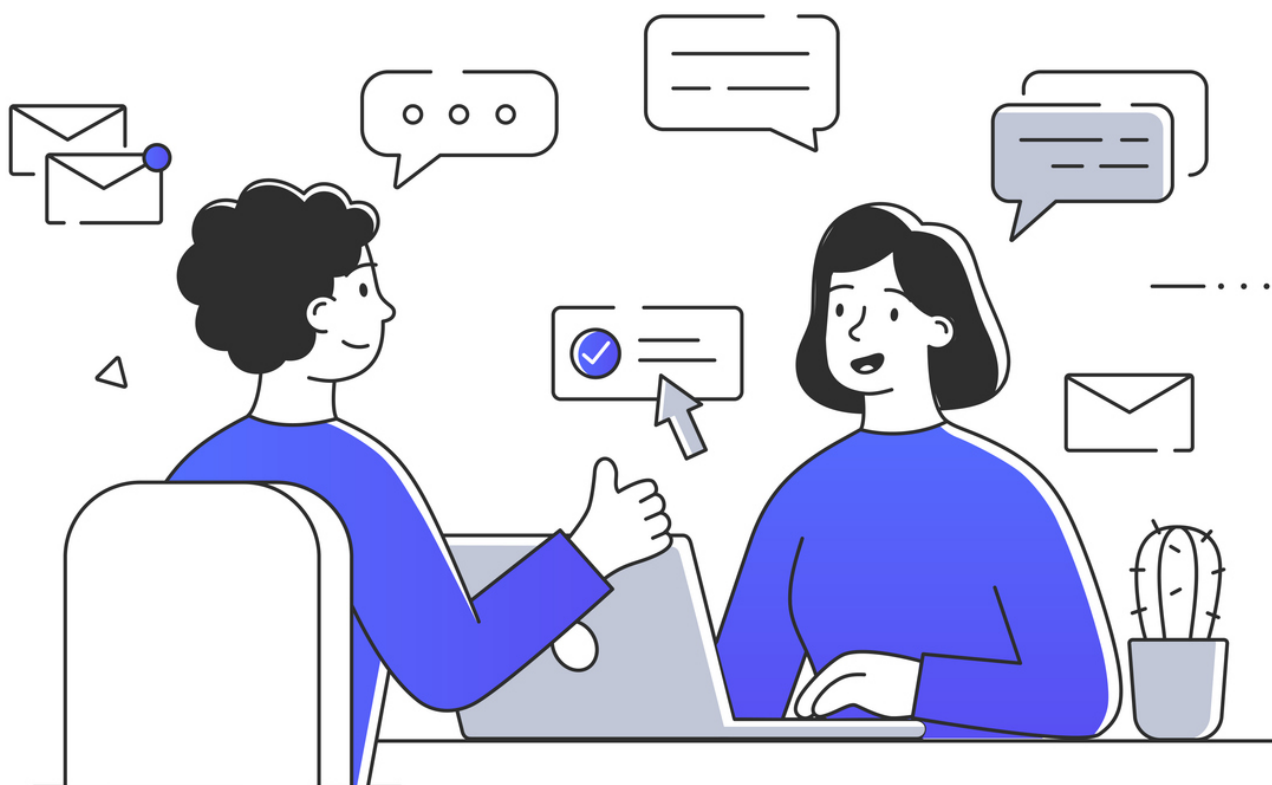
Guest Post — Senior Librarians as Publisher Change Agents: What's the Business Case? (Part 1)

By GWEN EVANS | MAR 25, 2026

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Editor's note: Today's post is by Gwen Evans, an independent consultant with over 20 years of experience in academic library strategy, scholarly communication, and cross-sector collaboration across research infrastructure stakeholders.

Publishers and other library-facing vendors have always hired librarians into various subject-matter expert roles. As relationships between libraries and publishers have grown more fraught and deals between library customers and publishers have become more complex, there is a recent trend for more publishers to appoint senior-level librarians to senior-level library relations roles. I held one of these roles myself, as the VP of Global Library Relations for Elsevier. What do both publishers and librarians hope for from these appointments?



In preparation for these interviews, I asked several North American library leaders what they thought about these senior-level roles. It's a small sample, but in my experience, as both a librarian and a publisher representative, they reflect widely-held librarian sentiment about these types of positions. The librarians I spoke to preferred to remain anonymous so they could speak freely.

The Publisher-Librarians:

- **Emily McElroy (EM)**, Vice President of Academic Relations at Taylor & Francis, previously Associate Dean for Research and Health Sciences at the University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries, and previously Dean at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Emily joined Taylor and Francis in April 2024.
- **Robert Hilliker (RH)**, Director of Library Relations (North America) at Springer Nature, previously Associate Provost for Libraries, Rowan University. Rob joined Springer Nature in March 2025.

Why did your organization create this role?

RH: Springer Nature recognized that libraries were undergoing significant changes due to the rise of open access and new publishing models. They wanted someone with deep experience inside libraries to help navigate that transition and strengthen relationships with library leaders with a focus on North America. The traditional engagement is with collection and e-resources folks, and that remains important, but scholarly communication and other roles are increasingly involved in publishing.

Springer Nature wanted a role exclusively advocating for librarians within the company — someone who could represent library interests and perspectives beyond the strong relationships our customer engagement and other teams already have with librarians. An important part of my role is to tell them things folks may not want to hear. I had a conversation with a VP, and he said, “Look, I want to be clear about this: we talked about it in the interview process, but we mean it. There are things you’re going to tell us that we won’t like hearing, but we need to hear.”

EM: Taylor & Francis recognized the need for someone with extensive library experience who also worked closely with campus leadership, whether a chancellor, provost, or vice president of research. They wanted to establish stronger communication channels and create partnerships that would foster mutual understanding. I’m the VP of Academic Relations, not just libraries. The program has been successful, so we expanded with a team member in India, reporting to me in our Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa region, and I’m currently recruiting for the APAC region.

During my interview, I specifically addressed my ability to provide candid feedback and challenge existing approaches. I never would have taken the position if I didn’t feel I could respectfully disagree with things. Alex Robinson, the Chief Commercial Officer, confirmed that this critical perspective was precisely what they sought — someone who would speak up and encourage improvements.

The Translation Problem: The Library Leader Perspective

Every library leader highlighted a fundamental translation problem between publishers and librarians. Publishers consistently misunderstand library organizational structures, personas, budget realities, and decision-making processes. The gap between publishers’ pricing expectations and libraries’ financial realities is a critical concern. Pricing models need to account for vastly different institutional contexts, from major research libraries to small colleges where “\$300 savings is a great day.” Librarians think publishers don’t grasp the severity of current library budget constraints, with one library leader noting, “I don’t know a single university that’s doing well right now.”

What is the one thing that you wish publishers would really get about libraries?

EM: My biggest focus is helping internally rather than externally, mainly because we have lots of smart people who can handle external work. What I do, especially given everything happening in the U.S. this past year, is set the context for the library budget and explain how it depends on many factors affecting universities. I think one primary concern for libraries is not just a reduced budget for collections, but also for staff, and that’s affecting how libraries approach collections. And no, you can’t just go out there and ask for more money! Every dean in their university is asking for money. People are exhausted. I think it’s more important than ever to work together. As a librarian at our advisory board meeting said, “We are not in this together right now.” That needs to change.

RH: In North America, it's really rough for librarians right now. Mostly, I've seen a great deal of sympathy internally. At the Springer Nature North American Library Advisory Meeting, the overwhelming message was that there are many points pinching libraries right now on every side, and it's really, really painful. It's been productive for me to engage with our Government Affairs team and get a sense of what's happening at the policy level, where we're engaging with other stakeholders, and how we can find a place for libraries in the FAIR proposal, for example. It's been positive to engage in those ways, and I like being part of a team with a policy role.

I think I'm making progress in fostering an internal understanding that the library functions best and is most successful when it's connected with the senior leadership of its own organization, and that we at Springer can play a role in helping the library secure that seat at the table. I know institutions where it takes a crisis to bring those folks together, and if publishers can help librarians bridge that gap, then I think that's a win for everybody.

How do you ensure your organization understands library economics and workflows?

EM: While I spent a significant part of my career working in collections, I also supervised research services, systems, cataloging, and special collections. A publisher's work with libraries is not limited to acquisitions or collections; it affects all areas of a library, which is not always evident to publishers. Understanding the role of subject liaisons or librarians who concentrate on research data, publishing, or research impact is essential. Just like faculty on campus don't always understand everything libraries do, the same is true for publishers. I provide an honest view of what library leaders and librarians think and how something could help or hurt.

RH: When there's a question of, well, what are the librarians in North America going to think, I'm an important point of contact. I'm part of those early conversations alongside colleagues who bring perspectives I don't have. There is a sense of collaboration when certain decisions are being finalized.

For example, metadata often takes a back seat to things that seem to have a more pressing "front of house" impact. But metadata is a fundamental infrastructure that undergirds a bunch of that impact. One of the things I'm trying to shepherd along is enhancing the quality of our metadata consistency — like better tracking ORCIDs of authors, having more authoritative KBART data, and ensuring metadata is handled consistently across systems.

Part 2 of this conversation is coming soon — watch this space!

Gwen Evans

Gwen Evans, MA, MSLIS, is an independent consultant specializing in academic library strategy, scholarly communication, and cross-sector collaboration. With over 20 years of experience bridging libraries, publishers, and research infrastructure stakeholders, she delivers user-centered solutions informed by her background in cultural anthropology. Previously, she served as Vice President of Global Library Relations at Elsevier, Executive Director of the library consortium OhioLINK, and Associate Professor and Coordinator of Library Information and Emerging Technologies at Bowling Green State University. She is currently a board member of the Friends of the National Library of Medicine.



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