10:00:00 DISCLAIMER
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10:00:08 JENN WHITE
This is 1A. I'm Jenn White in Washington. Like many institutions, public libraries have had to adapt to the pandemic's challenges. So far they've mostly kept up. At times they've even gone above and beyond. And at others they've been staples to those who use them.

10:00:26 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER
We love our public library. We have books checked out regularly all over our house. We use them in our home schools studies. We use them just in our general daily life. The public library is really a gift and the short time they were closed during the pandemic was awful really because it's just a resource we use regularly.
10:00:46  **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER**
I have been using the public library every week for our local chess club. We meet up there and we play with some of the local people and it's just a great time to still be able to use the facility.

10:00:56  **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER**
The Winston Salem Foresight County Public Library system has been excellent. When they shutdown briefly for three or four months, they still allowed people to check out books online and they had a place for them to pick them up at each public library. The library's been great. They're done a tremendous job.

10:01:17  **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER**
I have used my library system constantly during the pandemic and could not possibly be more grateful. The library has been what's kept me going.

10:01:27  **JENN WHITE**
Rosanne, Andrew, Steve, Elizabeth, thanks for those messages. The nature and role of public libraries was shifting long before the pandemic began. EBooks have made online materials easily accessible, but at a major cost to libraries. Growing challenges in the digital space and new demands placed on public libraries during COVID have complicated the question of what their role will be in the future. Here with us to talk about it is Melanie Huggins. She's the President of the Public Library Association, that's the division of the American Library Association focused on public libraries. Melanie, great to have you.

10:02:00  **MELANIE HUDDINS**
Thanks for the invitation.

10:02:02  **JENN WHITE**
Also with us is John Bracken. He's the Executive Director of the Digital Public Library of America. That's a project aimed at providing public access to digital materials online. John, welcome.

10:02:13  **JOHN BRACKEN**
Thank you for talking libraries today.

10:02:15  **JENN WHITE**
And Brewster Kahle. He's the Co-founder of Open Library and The Internet Archive. That's a digital library. Brewster, welcome to 1A.

10:02:23  **BREWSTER KAHLE**
Thank you.
So, Melanie, the pandemic has forced a lot of institutions to pivot. How have public libraries adapted during the pandemic?

So many of us really did have to reimagine and extend what many people think of as conventional services during the pandemic. And we fast-tracked some really innovative programs as well. So as you heard in the callers love letters to libraries at the beginning of this show, we still checked out books. We still made as much as our resources available as possible. But we had to fast-track some things like circulating hotspots and laptops to really hope with that homework gap that remote school created. And some of us got incredibly involved in the recovery efforts of our communities going so far as to redeploy library staff to community's recovery efforts, manning phone banks, assisting with small business loans and emergency rental assistance. So like everyone else librarians and library workers were tested during the pandemic. And I believe we're risen to the challenge because we were prepared.

And explain a little bit about that preparation because it seems like public libraries were able to adapt to the needs presented by COVID. I don't want to say easily, but you adapted pretty quickly.

Right. And I think the reason that is is because public libraries are in every neighborhood and every community. And sometimes we see the needs and disparities before anyone else does. We are in the business of creating resilient communities and so we are so empathetic and smart about that work that when we see needs, when we see a community in crisis, we can, to use an overused word lately, pivot pretty quickly and really deliver on the essential and critical social infrastructure that people expect their public library to these days.

Well, Alicia writes, "I work at a public library. During our early lockdown period, we worked from home, increased our online programming checkout limits. We did away with late fees years ago and electronic library offerings. When staff came back, we offered curbside pickup and increased our hotspot inventory to service online schooling needs. John, what role has the digital space played in making sure materials remain accessible during the pandemic?"
JOHN BRACKEN

Yeah. Well, I think it's been -- the pandemic has really brought home for libraries something that a lot of us have been thinking, which is how essential it is for libraries to own their digital face. That in a moment of the shutdown we had, I think so many of our partners realized that their digital strategy needed to be core to what they're doing as organizations. And in fact, you know, given the reflections we were having as a country over the last year, also ensuring that the diversity and inclusion strategies of libraries also needed to match their digital focus. So this notion of digital justice is a thing that is much -- libraries are so much presence on both in terms of accessing material. But also in advocating for and making the case as Melanie touched on for increased access to broadband. I'm sitting in Chicago where one-fifth of the students in Chicago don't have access at home to broadband. And the libraries have played a huge role in advocating for that and in ensuring that in addition to the access that we have access to the material and knowledge and books that we need to have to live as an informed and engaged society.

JENN WHITE

Now, Brewster, you're the Co-founder of Open Library and The Internet Archive, which currently holds around 33 million books and texts. Talk about what these two platforms are and how they fit into the larger library ecosystem.

BREWSTER KAHLE

The idea of archive.org and openlibrary.org is they're free libraries on the internet. And they have webpages, the way back machine music and the like. But the real focus I think for today is the books. We've been digitizing books in coordination with a large number of libraries, about 1,000 library books have been digitized and made part of this global collection including things that are modern books from the Boston Public Library and about 80 other libraries. And we digitize these and lend them through a system called controlled digital lending.

JENN WHITE

Now, John, most library visitors aren't thinking about the difference between what it takes for libraries to purchase hardcopy books versus licensing the rights to an eBook. Explain the model around eBooks and some of the complications that come with it.
JOHN BRACKEN
Yeah. I mean the concern and really frankly what gave rise to the creation of the digital public library of America was that the amazing potential that these technologies digital gives us to increase our access to knowledge and information. That's there's a risk that if we don't tee-up those technologies in line with the values and ethics that we want to have to increase access instead of having more access to knowledge and information we will have less. And that's really the worry that we have. And so one of the things we've tried to take on is ensuring that libraries can control and curate their own digital collections. We've been partnering with a set of libraries across the country to build out a project that we call The Palace Project, which is now a new app where people can access -- libraries can curate and access titles directly from publishers and really live up to the library values that are important that Melanie was touching on. And ensure that that carries over into a digital context.

JENN WHITE
Now, Brewster, you've run into issues with some of the big publishing houses over licensing and copyright issues, Hachette Book Group, Penguin Random House, Wiley and Sons and HarperCollins filed a lawsuit against The Internet Archive last June citing mass copyright infringement. And we should note we reached out to all four publishers for comment. Two responded, Wiley and Hachette directing us to the lawsuit complaint that is publically available online. And we'll tweet out a link to that complaint at 1A. But, Brewster, what exactly are these publishing houses accusing The Internet Archive of doing?

BREWSTER KAHLE
They're accusing The Internet Archive of lending books. So what traditionally libraries do is we buy books. We preserve books and then we lend them out. In this digital era especially during the pandemic the way to lend these thing is digitally. And so what The Internet Archive for 10 years working with 80 different libraries has been digitizing and lending and using the same control that the publishers use for their in print works. So if it's good enough for Harry Potter, it's probably good enough for Dusty Musty's. And it's been going on for 10 years. But then when the pandemic started and there as more light and more need for these, the publishers decided to sue The Internet Archive.

JENN WHITE
And how are you responding to that lawsuit?
BREWSTER KAHLE
Oh, it's painful. It costs millions of dollars. These companies are billion dollar organizations. And it's distracting. But we know what we're here for. We're here to bring the breadth of information that has been published over centuries to a broad public. And this controlled approach towards going in digitizing and lending, controlled digital ending has been working. So they're just going to try to shut it down and they're demanding that we destroy 1.4 million digitized books. So it's ridiculous. It's outrageous sort of what's been going on.

JENN WHITE
Melanie, how much of an impact did the pandemic have on eBook usership?

MELANIE HUGGINS
Yeah. The pandemic really did for most libraries I believe, it increased the use and interest in eBooks. They certain rose sharply during a time were people maybe had a little bit more difficult time getting their print materials. But I have to say it hasn't come anywhere near outpacing the circulation of print books. The Pew Research Center data tells us that only seven percent of all readers read eBooks exclusively. Most people -- 30 percent of all readers read some kind of combination of print and digital. And almost 30 percent read printed books exclusively. So while we are so grateful to John and to Brewster for staying on top of these issues that do impact us what we're seeing right now is that print is still the preferred. We are spending most of our budget on print materials. I know a lot of your listeners will be happy to hear that.

JENN WHITE
We're talking about the future of public libraries with Melanie Huggins. She is the President of the Public Library Association. Also with us is John Bracken. He is the Executive Director of the Digital Public Library of America. And Brewster Kahle. He is the Co-founder of Open Library and The Internet Archive. We're also hearing from you. Richard tweets, "My wife Linda and I were pioneers in computer automation in libraries in Connecticut in the early 80s. I have worked in IT for over 40 years and use the public library more than ever." I'm Jenn White. This is 1A from WAMU and NPR.
I'm Jenn White. This is 1A. We're discussing the future of public libraries with Melanie Huggins. She's the President of the Public Library Association. Also with us is John Bracken. He is the Executive Director of the Digital Public Library of America. And Brewster Kahle. He's the Co-founder of Open Library and The Internet Archive. We're also hearing from you. Christine tweets, "One way that I have coped with the pandemic is to read. I read eBooks for free through my local library. What a wonderful resource during the financially uncertain time for my family." Now, John, you've described your role at the Digital Public Library of America as a liaison between public libraries and publishers. Tells us more about what that work involves and how you negotiate books priorities.

Well, we work with libraries. We help serve libraries and help make sure that the values in the histories that libraries have built up as play space to trusted institutions that specialize in curating knowledge and information that those practices that we love and value so much carry over into a digital age. And one way we're manifesting that is we listen to librarians and we listen to libraries and they say they want better pricing and access to eBooks and audiobooks, which I think are a very important part of this. They want diverse content, more representative of American society and of their users. And they want the ability to do what librarians do, which is to curate and uplift and point and help us find the knowledge and information we need or maybe that we don't even know we need. And so as we're really trying to put ourselves in a position to help libraries maximize their value and impact in a digital context.

And the way we've been doing that is taking those values and desires that we hear from our library partners and bring that to publishers and making arrangements. So for instance we just recently brokered deals with Audible and Amazon publishing to ensure that titles that they had that lived behind commercial, digital pay walls now will be starting next year, starting in the next few weeks be accessible to library users through the app I mentioned, the Palace Project.

And what are publishers saying their concerns are when it comes to licensing and price agreements with libraries?
JOHN BRACKEN
Yeah, that's a really good question. I think big picture we all realize that we are living in a crisis as a country right now. That the crisis that we're all seeing that have come to the forest specially over the year that millions of families have dealt with in terms of the real life impact that false information that misinformation they've had. We know more than ever as a society both as librarians as publishers as authors how vital it is to ensure that all Americans have access to quality information. And for my money there's not a better sector or not a better professionally trained set of workers than librarians to help us solve that problem.

JENN WHITE
Brewster, my understanding is that publishers suing Open Library and The Internet Archive, part of their argument is that those organizations aren't really libraries. How do you respond to that?

BREWSTER KAHLE
Well, I think it's just part of their general assault on libraries because there's been continuous lawsuits against libraries actually by these publishers for decades, but different libraries. The Internet Archive buys or gets donated books, preserves them, makes them available for free public access, but in a controlled way if it's not public domain. Public domain then publically available to bring that breadth that isn't available through eBooks. So all the eBook licensing you might want to do still isn't going to bring you the millions of books that are out of print that are the wealth of our libraries. Also people are using books in different ways. We're going and linking these books to Wikipedia footnotes. So making the citations blue. So these are used by, well, Wikipedia contributors. But also people doing their homework.

BREWSTER KAHLE (CONTINUED)
And they go in, they read maybe 30 seconds of a book to a minute. That's the typical use. They read a couple of pages, do a fact check. Maybe get a quotation for their school report and they're back out of it again. That's how people use libraries. People use bookstores to go and buy a book. Maybe go and have it beside your bed. Read it. Keep it on your bookshelf. But that's not how a lot of the books that are used that have been digitized out of universities public libraries in this enormous project that has been going on now for 20 years. So we need the breadth. Also we need access that's sort of under user's control. So it's access from a library so there's privacy issues that libraries hold very acutely. But these aren't available actually just brokered from publishers often a lot of that reading data whose reading exactly what goes back upstream.
10:17:09 BREWSTER KAHLE (CONTINUED)
We don't think that there should be a license required to read a book. That they should be able to say, "You can read a book, but you cannot." And as John just mentioned and Amazon has blocked all libraries from reading a large number of their books completely where libraries used to just buy the books and make them available. Some extension of licensing has put an enormous amount of power in the part of the publishers. And I'm glad that there's the Digital Public Library of America trying to broker some of these issues. But I think we need to go and have the breadth of libraries survive into this digital. And that's what the thousand libraries we're working with are doing.

10:17:57 JENN WHITE
We should mention we reached out to Amazon publishing to invite them to participate in this conversation and declined to participate or to provide a statement. Melanie -- we should also mention that Amazon is a supporter of NPR, but we cover them like any other company. Melanie, how have you experienced this tension in the digital space -- in the eBook space where libraries are concerned?

10:18:23 MELANIE HUGGINS
They are definitely funding considerations. One thing that I know that Brewster and John are well poised to talk about is the price that libraries pay for eBooks. It makes no sense to the libraries. It makes no sense to the consumer that a print copy of the same book we can get for $20 and the eBook copy might be $200. Libraries want publishers to make money. We want authors to make money. But we need to find a fair and equitable way to keep a broad and balanced collection available to our consumers. So we're making tough decisions every day. Libraries were on a pretty good trajectory before the pandemic in terms of funding with many people gaining modest increase in their budget each year. That has really been a mix bad right now and it depends on the source of funding for your library. For example, if you're a library that relies heavily on property taxes, you may be doing just fine right now.

10:19:25 MELANIE HUGGINS (CONTINUED)
Granted that we don't see another housing collapse. But if you rely on tourism or sales tax you could be really tightening your budget and making tough decisions. Books are a small portion of most libraries budgets. Most of what we spend money on is like any non-profit or organization is the people. And that's where I think we've had the most impact during the pandemic.
Well, that leads to this tweet we got. This person says, "I've heard from numerous librarians around the country that since the pandemic's start they've started seeking emotional support as they struggle with the rise of their social services tasks. Who knew that librarians are now social workers?" And as you say Melanie, you're doing more than just lending books. What are some of the other services public libraries offer that people may not think about?

Wow. That's so insightful that comment. And I just want to step back and say I can't think of many professions that are more aligned with librarianship than social workers. The definition of social work is that -- and social services are that you exist to help strengthen families, individuals and communities. And that is definitely the businesses that libraries are in. We are not in the book business. We are in the health and wellness business, economic development, education of our communities. And I agree 100 percent it is not what a lot of people who got into libraries years ago signed up for. We have got to take good care of our library workers and frontline staff. We've got to give them the tools and resources and support to do this very difficult, emotional labor. The thing that I love about this library-social work connection --

And some libraries do have social workers in them including the library that I run Richland Library in Columbia, South Carolina. And we will never not have them again. That's how critical they have become to the library's role in a community. A really good example of that is remember when vaccines first became available to 65 and older? The only way to get a vaccine was to sign up for an appointment on a federal website that required you to have an email address. So digital equity is not just about education and homework support. It's about survival. And librarians are dealing with some really tough issues on the frontlines. I don't think a lot of people realize that.

Well, we got this voicemail from someone in Maryland.
Hi. This is Kris Frederick, the community school coordinator for the Baltimore Design School in Baltimore, Maryland. We relied on the Enoch-Pratt Free Library System during the shutdown and now as we've reopened. They offered virtual programming for our students from all ages that included book clubs, workshop. They would put together kits that kids can come by the library pick up from a central location and take home to do the virtual workshop with the material.

We also got this tweet from Brent who says, "When my son was young I loved the free resources at the public library, play groups, readings and of course, the books. Ereaders have their place. But kids need something tactile." Now, John, access to online library materials also had implications for teachers and classrooms and students. How have you seen the interaction between public libraries and remote schooling play out during the pandemic?

Yeah. I mean as Melanie was saying one of the lessons from the pandemic for all of should be how vital libraries are to our nation's health, our health, our career development, our economic health, our physical health and our [unintelligible]. And if we're not going to invest in libraries including the digital components we really put ourselves at risk. I think the K12 and we saw so many -- a lot of the digital partners on a lot of the public libraries I worked with over the heart of the lockdown they pivoted to work on food distribution and health care and really being first providers and first responders to their communities. There's seven times as many libraries in this country as there are McDonald's. And I think we -- as Melanie is touching on they deal with such limited resources that both in terms of the services that we need to provide in a K12 environment as more and more schools move away from providing services to libraries.

The urgency of our role and our role in this national civic dialogue as it takes place online as we realize that we can't just seed the civic dialogue online to places like Facebook and commercial social platforms that we have a role as civil society in taking on those conversations that libraries are really the heart of that.
We're talking to John Bracken. He's the Executive Director of the Digital Public Library of America. Brewster Kahle, he's the Co-founder of Open Library and The Internet Archive. And Melanie Huggins, she's the President of the Public Library Association. I'm Jenn White. You're listening to 1A. We also want to hear from you. How have you been using your public library during COVID? How is your community's libraries fared overall during the pandemic? And what do you feel like the function of public libraries should be? You can comment on our Facebook, tweet us @1A or send us an email at 1A@wamu.org. Here's a voicemail we got from Arizona.

Hi. My name is Aleah and I work remotely. And my public library has been wonderful in supplying hotspots for locals who may have like internet instability, which I've experienced. So I absolutely think public libraries should still be funded. But you know they adapted extremely well.

Melanie, what role are libraries playing now in closing that digital divide?

Wow. It's an ongoing challenge. So digital equity is front and center for us well before the pandemic. But just again, you know, like so many other disparities that became so apparent during the pandemic especially with remote schooling and people working from home. So digital equity is really -- it's about access. You know, do they have access to high speed broadband and the technology they need. Do they know what to do with it? Will they adopt it and is it affordable? And I think there's a role for public libraries to play in every single one of those categories of digital equity. We're really excited about having a digital equity act in the making at the federal level, which would help with some infrastructure for funding digital equity projects and programs in public libraries throughout the country. But like you heard John talking about many of us started circulating hotspots making sure that we were strengthening our broadband.
Leaving it on 24-7 so that people could access Wi-Fi from outside of our building. We're even designing our buildings with that in mind now. So it definitely something that librarians are painfully aware of and I think going back to the equity piece and the examples that I gave about vaccinations is libraries are also champions of the marginalized. And when you see our most vulnerable populations having to interact with high speed broadband to obtain healthcare, to get rental assistance, to if your library or community has been through a natural disaster to access FEMA. Who else is on the frontlines and making sure that that is available as needed when it's needed at those critical moments in people's lives?

Now, Brewster, in your recent Time Magazine article you said there was a possibility that libraries wouldn't be around in 25 years if we don't quote "handle the next phase of the Internet wow." Explain what you mean.

The libraries I think as physical locations that will be community centers will be around for as long as we believe in that approach. It's the library collections that library collections are now in this digital era. In the physical era we bought books and we owned them. Now the publishers are saying, "You can't own digital things. You're licensed. You can have them for a few reads or maybe a fair year. Then we're going to turn off your eBooks." That that approach of licensing rather than owning in the digital sphere can make it so that we don't actually have library collections. So there might be library buildings, but librarians just might become, well, customer service departments for publishers' database products. That's not what a library is. A library goes and collects things that are important to their community, holds on to them permanently, cannot be taken away from a publisher again at the end day and then uses them in new and different ways.

Who would have thought that we would use our newspapers, our town newspapers way after the fact for genealogy. That wasn't why they were originally published. That wasn't what the publisher was out there for. And those publishers go away. So we need libraries to be long term custodians of knowledge. And the licensing structures that are so pervasive now don't have this ability.
JENN WHITE

We're talking to Brewster Kahle. He's the Co-founder of Open Library and The Internet Archive. Also with us John Bracken. He's the Executive Director of the Digital Public Library of America. And Melanie Huggins, she's the President of the Public Library Association. We're discussing the future of public libraries after the pandemic. And you can join the conversation, tweet us @1A. I'm Jenn White. More from you and our guests in a moment.

JENN WHITE (CONTINUED)

Now let's get back to our conversation about the future of public libraries after the pandemic with Melanie Huggins. She's the President of the Public Library Association. Also with us is John Bracken. He is the Executive Director of the Digital Public Library of America. And Brewster Kahle, Co-founder of Open Library and The Internet Archive. We're also hearing from you about your local libraries. Well, there was a comment here, but it has now disappeared and it was a wonderful comment about someone's local library. I'll try to get that back up so we can read it. We did have this question from Vernon who says, "Our libraries charge more for eBooks because they can be distributed to multiple people at the same time." John?

JOHN BRACKEN

I think the short answer is yes. I think the broader answer is we're finding as we work to deliver what libraries want to the publishers we're developing new models for making those eBooks accessible. So for instance making eBooks available for 10 lends at a time instead of one at a time. And so I think there's lots of room between what we're talking about in terms of what the current status quo. There's lots of room for experimentation and creativity to ensure that the models and the values that Melanie is articulating carry over into a digital context. And that's the heart of what we've built our Place Project around is ensuring guaranteeing access and making it something that's immediate. So that those 20 percent of kids in Chicago who don't have access to broadband at home are able to be able to get titles that they wouldn't be able to get otherwise.
We got this email from Julie who says, "Rhode Island plans on introducing legislation this year to require publishers to provide electronic book licenses to libraries and schools at the same time they offer them to the public and on reasonable terms instead of charging libraries three to six times more than the consumer. The library patrol enjoys eBooks for free, but the cost for libraries to provide them is breaking their budgets." Now, John, you're currently working with members of Congress to come to an agreement on eBook pricing and licensing. Describe the work that's happening there.

I think broadly nationally through the efforts of Melanie and her colleagues and associations like the American Library Association and others, there's really been an up swell of advocacy and activism pointing out the problem that you just articulated. And as part of that there's been a Congressional inquiry that's emerged over the last few months that is spotlighting this crisis. I think we need to remember these are taxpayer dollars that libraries are using to buy and purchase access to this digital material. And we need to make sure that they're available, that access is broad and equitable.

Brewster, do you think legislation is the answer to this issue or would you like to see something different?

Yes. I do. I think that we should make sure to control digital lending that we have digital ownership going forward, that we don't just have eBook brokers going forward are the way to go. And really commend Wyden and Representative Eshoo for going and investigating the eBook distributors to go and try to understand what's going on here and why is it so constrained. And why is are libraries being singled out to be discriminated against in the publishing sphere. That bill that you just mentioned about in Rhode Island that's being contested tooth and nail by the publishers. They do not want to have any constraints on how they're pricing and selection, who gets what. We used to solve that by buying books. And if you want to circulate 10 books that's pretty clear cut. You buy 10 of them. But in the beginning of the pandemic we got panicked calls from teachers.
They had the classroom readers. They bought them. But they were sent home on a Friday and they couldn't get back in on a Monday. So how are they going to make access to those? And is that going to be allowed going forward? So yes, these eBooks licenses are sometimes tens of dollars per year per student, which would be available for a year, and then the Diary of Anne Frank. Year after year and bought for only a couple of dollars. So there is a shift of power going on. And we libraries are sometimes caught in the middle, but we also have a $12 billion a year budget collectively a libraries in the United States to go and act in such a way that it's inequitable. Yes, we want people to get paid. But we want libraries to exist as they have existed for hundreds of years.

Well, Melanie, I want to pull on a thread here because one of the tensions I'm hearing is that people are not, you know, wholesale moving over to eBooks. So there's an argument to be made that we should just invest in more paper copies that people can check out. And then there's a concern about the direction education is moving in and whether kids to be able to access these eBooks and this issue of preservation. So you're trying to answer multiple questions at the same time. Am I hearing this correctly?

It is super complex. You have just described it correctly. I think that not every book is available in eBook format. So there are a lot of restrictions as to what we can get in what format. And not every eBook is available in print format. I think what public libraries do really well is pay attention to the needs of their communities. And I know many public libraries are taking a hyper local approach whether it is taking purchase recommendations and even format recommendations and if we can get it we will. Or looking to their own creative talent within their community and making sure to Brewster's point that we are collecting and owning some of the content that is created in our own communities. It is a very complex issue. I think it's one that we are not really going to know the ramifications of for some time in the future.

Well, I found the tweet I was looking for from Robin who says, "I believe that a strong library system is a key ingredient to a healthy equitable community. Our local Durham County library provides diverse content and media, tech services and amazing programming." If you want to shout out your local library, please feel free. Tweet us @1A. Melanie, explain a little bit more about the funding model for public libraries.
Yeah, there are different models across the country. And, again, some municipalities help fund their library primary through tourism or hospitality or sales tax. And those libraries are the ones that have suffered the most during the pandemic I believe because people weren't spending as much money. Those of us who rely more on property taxes or our special taxing districts have a little bit more assurance that we will have a solid budget for the years to come. But every day CEOs of public libraries are making tough decisions about how to spend their budgets. Whether who to hire, how to fill positions, what kinds of positions, what are those qualities that we need in the people that work for us. So I would say I don't want to say that libraries at large are in crisis in terms of funding.

But it is always a balancing act. And the eBook situation is a piece of that overall puzzle.

Well, I also wonder whether libraries in rural or less populated areas face unique challenges.

They absolutely do. They face unique challenges in funding. And I think primarily what we see is they face digital equity challenges. As we know there are adults and children in rural areas are less likely than those of us who live in urban or suburban communities to have broadband that runs to their home. Again, what we've seen during the pandemic and what we knew before is that you can't apply social services without internet access. You can't communicate with your child's teacher. You can't participate in democracy sometimes without access to broadband. So definitely rural communities have unique situations. But I do -- I have to say I see some of the most innovative and creative solutions coming out of our rural communities as well as it relates to providing meaning and impact in their communities.
Here's an email we got from Anna who says, "I had the awesome experience of being a social work intern at Catawba County Library last year during the height of the pandemic. It changed my perspective on what librarians do and cemented my belief at the important partnership social workers and librarians have to offer." And Reston Library tweets, "Libraries are and can continue to be essential community resources for objective, organized access to facts. Sometime many internet users mistakenly think they'll get from a search engine like Google." Melanie, what is the training and education for librarians look like today and how has that evolved in the last couple of decades?

Well, full disclosure it has been quite a while since I went to library schools so I cannot tell you exactly what that training looks like today. I will tell you that it takes such a mix of skills and talent and ability to work in a library. Most of the people that work in libraries don't have a master's in librarian information science. And we are looking to attract people who are community organizers, people who have project management skills, people who are deeply empathetic and connected to communities, people who aren't afraid of ambiguity because as this whole show has told you is that libraries are in a state sometimes of ambiguity. So we need people that are very diverse in their skill sets. Counselors, social workers, obviously are key to that puzzle. But we do still value that library degree because I also want to remind people that during a pandemic we also had a presidential election.

We also had a census to complete and librarians were on the frontlines of making sure that people had factual, accurate relevant timely information to make good decisions for themselves and their families.

We're talking about the future of public libraries with Melanie Huggins. She's the President of the Public Library Association. Also with us is John Bracken, the Executive Director of the Digital Public Library of America. And Brewster Kahle. He is the Co-founder of Open Library and The Internet Archive. I'm Jenn White. You're listening to 1A.

We got this email from Adam who says, "I've heard people talk about a third industrial revolution in terms of remote working and changes in how our economy and the nation will function. I wonder if your guests have any thoughts on that in terms of how libraries will continue to operate." And, John, I'm going to come to your first on this one. Any thoughts?
10:41:11  JOHN BRACKEN
Yeah. I think that's a really good throughput back to this term that we've been throwing around without really talking through, which is digital equity, right? And I think when we talk about digital equity in library space we're talking about access to the internet. We're talking about support for diverse collections and content and authors that are truly representative of the American experience, which as a field we have not always lived up to. And to the point of the question, we're talking about how the software and tools and algorithms that we as libraries use to find and identify and curate information, how that is built. So at the Digital Public Library of America we're standing up a project, an Algorithmic Justice Project where we're seeking to work with ethically based technologist who are grounding racial equity in how they think about organizing information to ensure to Melanie's point that the workforce and the way we're designing information structures as a field are living up to our full values.

10:42:13  JENN WHITE
Melanie, anything to add?

10:42:15  MELANIE HUGGINS
Well, I think it's a really interesting question. I mean, we definitely have seen a change in what employers need, the way they think about teams, the way they work together. The physical space of libraries has been so critical in a time where sometimes you couldn't access the physical space. I think that future of libraries and the future is really wrapped up in the future of cities, towns and communities. And public libraries are a part of that critical infrastructure that attracts, retains and grows talent. So how we do that and how we partner with our economic development partners and our schools and our workforce development agencies is really going to be critical to whatever that revolution looks like.

10:42:59  JENN WHITE
Well, Chantal emails, "My family has always heavily relied on our public libraries. When we moved and couldn't afford internet every day after school we went to our local library so our children could do their homework. During the pandemic we felt the whole of not accessing our local library. Our libraries have become so much more than just books." We have just about a minute and a half here. So very briefly from each of you, I want to hear what you think the future of public libraries looks like. Brewster, I'll come to you first.
BREWSTER KAHLE
The opportunity of this digital revolution is universal access to all knowledge. That if you have curiosity that you want to scratch then you can go and turn to your library, the internet and be able to get to the lectures no matter where they are, books no matter how old they are. And even if you have a print disability that you can get access. That's the opportunity of the internet. And I think that's what I committed myself and our organization to try to help build.

JENN WHITE
John, what about you?

JOHN BRACKEN
This library love that we all feel and that your listeners are describing is so important and so visceral for all of us. And for us in building out the Palace Project we're trying to make sure that that love and those values carry over and aren't lost in the transition into digital space as we're sharing digital knowledge and learning in a digital environment as well as in the magical place that the libraries have represented for us.

JENN WHITE
And, Melanie, I'll give you the last word here. As a librarian, what does the future look like?

MELANIE HUGGINS
Well, I think we're just scratching the surface on how we work in concert with our cities, towns, communities and neighborhoods to make sure our families are resilient. That we can help solve some really big problems and really important to me and my colleagues around the country is creating some greater social cohesion. And I am super optimistic about libraries' ability to do that and the future of public libraries.
That's Melanie Huggins, the President of the Public Library Association. Also with us today John Bracken, the Executive Director of the Digital Public Library of America. And Brewster Kahle, Co-founder of Open Library and The Internet Archive. Brewster, John, Melanie thanks so much for speaking with us. And I just have to take a moment to shout out the Main Detroit Public Library on Woodward in Detroit. Spend many, many a weekend in that library and I miss it. It was such a good time. I'll have to head back there next time I'm home. Before we go we wanted to flag that voting is now open for our listener picks series. This is the week where you tell us what you want to hear. And we've been asking for your pitches all through November. Now we've taken some of the best ones and we're putting them to a vote. You can find the voting forum on our Twitter @1A or on our Facebook page. and you have until the end of the week to vote on your favorite and we're air your picks next months. Today's producer was Haili Blassingame. This program comes to you from WAMU part of American University in Washington distributed by NPR. I'm Jenn White. Thanks for listening and we'll talk again tomorrow. This is 1A.

B-ROLL: 10:46:06

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