



MEDIA LITERACY IN THE LIBRARY

A guide for library practitioners

November 2020

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Imagine that you are working at the reference desk when a patron comes to you with a question. They cite a “fact” that has been widely debunked, mentioning an article from a publication that you know to be untrustworthy. What can you, as a library worker, do to educate and inform them?

As information providers and hubs for lifelong learning, libraries have always been resources for helping communities develop media literacy skills. Now, in the midst of a global pandemic, and in an age when we increasingly rely on digital media for information and communication, these critical thinking skills are more important than ever.

The American Library Association (ALA), working with talented thought leaders across the library and media literacy sectors, has created *Media Literacy in the Library: A Guide for Library Practitioners* to help library workers prepare for day-to-day interactions like the imagined reference desk one above. In this guide, we offer resources and ideas to plan programs and activities to teach media literacy skills to adults and also to integrate these skills into programming you already offer at your library.

This guide has been created for out-of-school adult audiences, who library workers will generally meet in a public library context. However, many of the approaches and best practices explored are equally appropriate for a classroom or other library setting. Our group of advisors comprised practitioners and thought leaders from academic, school, public and special libraries as well as allied fields including media literacy, elementary and higher education, journalism, and services to the aging. This guide has been authored by members of this cross-sector group who are themselves library workers, educators, and media literacy experts.



■ WHAT IS MEDIA LITERACY?

The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) [defines](#) media literacy as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create and act using all forms of communication. In its simplest terms, media literacy builds upon the foundation of traditional literacy and offers new forms of reading and writing. Media literacy empowers people to be critical thinkers and makers, effective communicators and active citizens.”

Media literacy encompasses learning about multiple genres of media, including journalism, entertainment (films, music, television), persuasive (advertising, promotion), and propaganda. In this guide, we focus primarily on news literacy, although it must be acknowledged that there is tremendous overlap between these areas.

We posit that a media-literate adult should be able to access, share and create media across multiple formats and platforms while utilizing critical thinking skills to evaluate the purpose and potential impact of the material.

MEETING PATRONS WHERE THEY ARE



KRISTEN CALVERT, Dallas Public Library

People who need media literacy skills may not be eager to sign up for a program or class on the subject; in fact, they may not know their skills are lacking at all. Creating a program dedicated to media literacy is great, but you can find ways to introduce media literacy concepts into interactions you already have with your patrons. The reference desk and existing programs are two areas where you can get started right away.

MEDIA LITERACY and the REFERENCE INTERACTION

Reference interactions offer a very informal—and public—teaching setting, so you will want to keep your interaction brief and focus on one media literacy skill you want to get across.

Topics like current events, politics, and social media provide good openings. When a patron starts talking about politics or another subject that can intensify quickly, media literacy is an excellent way to deflect. Instead of answering questions about politics or religion, ask questions like, “Where do you go for news?” and “Where did you find/hear that information?” Be prepared to direct participants away from in-depth discussions about ideology.

Here are a few examples of how you might respond to patron questions and comments.

“How could anyone possibly vote for (insert politician name, ballot initiative, bill, etc.)?”

- “I’ve been hearing a lot of discussion about that topic. It seems like there are a lot of perspectives out there. Would you like me to help you find some information about it?”
- “I can tell you feel very passionately about this! Have you found specific resources or outlets that have helped shape your opinions?”
- “That’s a good question. What do you think might be motivating voters on the other side? Have you explored this resource (e.g., [All Sides](#), [Pro/Con](#), [Opposing Viewpoints](#), [CQ Researcher](#)) that lays out various perspectives on the issue?”

“I keep hearing talk about defunding the police, but our police are already working with social workers! Look at this article I saw posted on Instagram.”

- “Let’s take a look at the Instagram post and try to find the source of that information. Knowing the source may help us determine whether the article is biased or even downright false.”

“I’m looking for information about spiders. My friend Ira posted on Facebook that there’s a spider that lives in your toilet and will bite you as soon as you sit down.”

- “There are lots of different kinds of spiders out there; I’m not sure about any that live in your toilet. I can show you a couple websites where we can look up the validity of content that regularly circulates the internet, and maybe we can look up more about spiders that might pop up in someone’s household.”

“My child is spending a lot of time on their iPad. I’m concerned that the websites and videos they are looking at are harmful and don’t match with the values I want them to grow up with.”

- “That’s a valid concern. With anyone in the world able to easily create and upload content to the internet, it’s important for you and your child to understand where the content they are watching is coming from. Let’s look at how you can learn and teach your child how to evaluate what they are looking at online.”

“I just don’t trust mainstream media anymore. That’s the real fake news!”

- “If you don’t feel comfortable with the world’s largest media outlets, where do you get your news? Why do you feel this source is reliable over others? Let me show you a few tools you can use to determine whether the media outlet you’re looking at has the intent of informing you, rather than persuading or entertaining.”

Be ready to address whether the patron thinks their information source is reliable and how they determined reliability. To do so, you will want to have resources at the ready that explain key concepts of media literacy and why they are important. Here are a few that we recommend:

- [Media Literacy: 5 Core Concepts and 5 Key Questions for Deconstruction](#) from the [Center for Media Literacy](#)
- [The National Association for Media Literacy Education](#) (NAMLE)
- [Today’s News: Real or Fake?](#) from [Action 4 Media Lit Education](#)



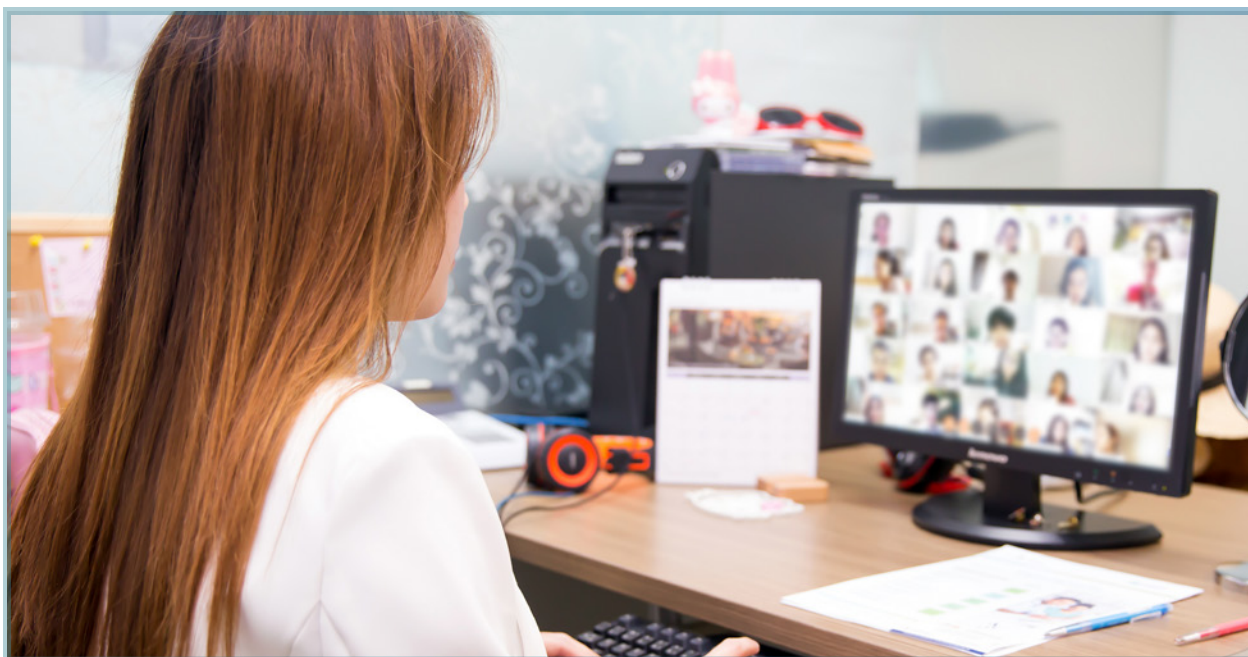
PRO TIP

When engaging with a piece of media online, always ask yourself, “What is my purpose for seeking this out? Did this meet that purpose or another one?”

CONVERSATION STARTERS



- Did you know that most misinformation and disinformation have some roots in truth?
- Have you heard about deep fakes and shallow fakes?
- Here are the library’s top five sources for learning about fake news.
- Where do you get your news? Here are the library’s recommendations for credible news sources.
- Fake news isn’t only found online. It can be found in movies and other media too. Would you like to see an example?
- Did you know that fake news has been around for hundreds of years?



MEDIA LITERACY AND YOUR EXISTING PROGRAMS

Like the reference desk, your library's existing programs—in-person and virtual—offer plenty of individual interactions that can be enhanced by media literacy concepts. Programs also pose an opportunity for you to plan ahead and integrate the concepts into your lesson plans or talking points. Here are a few examples:

- **Book clubs:** Relate book themes to current events. Discuss how the media portrays those events and why. Foster a discussion by asking questions about media literacy principles that directly relate to the topic at hand.
- **Screenings and discussions:** After showing a movie or hosting a program where patrons discuss books, TV shows, video games, or YouTubers, ask questions about some of the Key Topics discussed in this guide.
- **Technology classes:** Discuss trusted sources of information and best practices on where to find quality information. This is especially important when talking about social media.
- **Makerspace programs:** If you provide makerspace training on equipment where media is created, discuss the responsibility of the creator when creating media, including how to recognize bias, information curation, and creating responsibly.
- **Community celebrations:** Ask local journalists or media representatives to be a part of large community-wide events. Panel discussions and virtual or in-person meet-and-greets are great options here.
- **Passive programs/displays:** When creating material displays to advertise and/or provide additional resources during a program, include materials that discuss media literacy in the context of the program.

MEDIA LITERACY FOR STAFF AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Before library workers can effectively teach media literacy skills to patrons, they need to have a solid grasp of the concepts. Here are some tips for teaching media literacy to library staff and community partners.

- Make sure staff and partners know what media literacy is and why it's important.
- Have free resources available for staff and partners to help broaden their understanding.
- With community partners, relate media literacy to the organization's area of interest. For example, if you are working with a genealogy group, explore how genealogy is discussed through advertising, in the news, and on social media.
- With staff, discuss the difference between media literacy and information literacy and why this differentiation is important. Library staff tend to focus primarily on information literacy, which is traditionally geared toward research skills. Though information literacy is similar to media literacy in many ways, being able to educate customers to make informed judgments as they are taking in media, rather than when they are intentionally researching, is important in today's world.



DEFINING TERMS

Information literacy is:

- the ability to realize when information is needed
- the ability to locate, analyze and use effectively the needed information
- knowing how to find the information needed for any task or decision at hand
- the ability to think critically about varying types of information and analyze whether it is the right information for the intended purpose

Media literacy is:

- the ability to access, analyze, create and act using all forms of communication
- the ability to access, share and create media across multiple formats and platforms while utilizing critical thinking skills to evaluate the purpose and potential impact of the material
- understanding how various groups are represented in the media, including whose stories are highlighted and whose are marginalized
- understanding media ownership structures and its impact on what we see

News literacy is:

- one part of media literacy
- the ability to judge the reliability and credibility of news reports



PRO TIP

Don't expect mastery of media literacy. Given the constant evolution of the information landscape, your learning will be ongoing.

KEY TOPICS IN MEDIA LITERACY



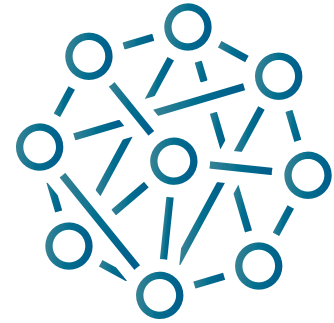
In the pages that follow, we will explore five broad and important topics in media literacy today. For each of these sections, we will explore *Big Ideas* that you, your library staff, and your patrons should know; *Program Starters* that can be implemented in-person or virtually; *Learn More* resources for you and your patrons to dive deeper or explore the topics from different angles; and *Pro Tips* from experts experienced in media literacy education for adults.

Why these topics? Working with a team of 30 thought leaders from the library and media literacy sectors, we sought topical areas that would help the average American news consumer bring a new awareness and critical lens to the complex realities we now face, including COVID-19, humans' increasing dependence on social media, and political polarization.

- 1. ARCHITECTURE OF THE INTERNET** reveals how the digital environment functions and its impact on users. This includes how differentiated, personalized media experiences and algorithms influence our access to content, lead to polarization and groupthink, and commodify personal information; and how media business models (e.g., free content, paywalls) affect users' understanding and interpretation of information. Understanding the internet's architecture is the first step toward informed decision-making about operating within the digital space.
- 2. CIVICS** relates to citizenship and the actions—and inactions—of people in our democracy. To be well-informed and active citizens, U.S. adults need to understand how media affects our understanding of, and participation in, our political system.
- 3. MEDIA LANDSCAPE AND ECONOMICS** refers to the historical, current, and potential future landscape of traditional and social media, and specifically the businesses that run them. To understand how the media affects us as individuals, we must understand the U.S. media landscape and the motivations of the individuals and entities that built it and profit from it.
- 4. MISINFORMATION** is the creation and spreading of false or inaccurate information without malicious intent. **DISINFORMATION** is the creation and spreading of false information with the intent to deceive. Combined, mis/disinformation can have an alarming impact on public opinion, our trust of the media, and our understanding of democracy. Understanding what misinformation and disinformation are, how they differ, and how to identify them, helps adults be more savvy news users/consumers.
- 5. MEDIA CREATION AND ENGAGEMENT** includes developing and disseminating media through digital or print methods, including everything from zines to podcasts. Possessing the skills to create and share media enables people to speak up about their beliefs and offers an avenue for empowerment. At the same time, the democratization of media creation and the ability of the layperson to inexpensively create high-quality materials can lead to more “noise” in the media space and a greater distrust of information. Empowering adults to responsibly create media could open pathways to career advancement, hobbies, and civic involvement.

ARCHITECTURE OF THE INTERNET

NATASHA CASEY, Blackburn College



According to the [Pew Research Center](#), “roughly eight-in-ten U.S. adults go online at least daily.” However, many are unfamiliar with the basic ways the internet works, including why certain content ends up in our search engine results. This is compounded by the fact that most online companies are less than forthcoming about how they work.

Although you make individual decisions and choices when you go online, such as which websites to visit and which apps to use, there is also a largely invisible system at work that tailors and personalizes online content based on where on the internet you’ve been before and what various sites and platforms think you might like. This invisible system is sometimes referred to as the “architecture of the internet,” and it includes such concepts as cookies and algorithms.

There is a largely invisible system at work that tailors and personalizes online content.

There are positive and negative consequences to this architecture. If you purchase an item on Amazon, the website will suggest similar items you might like. Many consumers find this convenient, and retailers do it to boost sales. But this same process is to blame for filter bubbles and echo chambers—that is, online spaces where we encounter information and perspectives we already agree with. This often leads to confirmation bias, the tendency to seek and validate information that aligns with our existing beliefs, and in turn, overwhelmingly discount disconfirming evidence, even if it is based in observable truths.

BIG IDEAS

COOKIES: A piece of data stored on a person’s computer by a website to enable the site to “remember” useful information, such as previous browsing history on the site or sign-in information.

ALGORITHMS: A set of instructions to be followed, usually applied in computer code, to carry out a task. Algorithms drive content *amplification*, whether that’s the next video on YouTube, ad on Facebook, or product on Amazon. Also, the algorithms serve a very specific economic purpose: to keep you using the app or website in order to serve more ads.

FILTER BUBBLES: Intellectual isolation that results from information served primarily through search engines that filter results based on personalized data, creating a “bubble” that isolates the user from information that may not align with their existing viewpoints.

CONFIRMATION BIAS: The tendency to prioritize information that confirms or aligns with one’s previous viewpoint and discount the opinions that do not.

PROGRAM STARTERS

Cookies 101

Screen the YouTube video “[Website Cookies Explained | The Guardian Animations](#)” created by The Guardian, one of the UK’s most prominent independent daily news outlets. Then lead a discussion with patrons about how their activities are tracked online.

Filter Bubbles, Explained

Screen the TED Talk “[Beware Online ‘Filter Bubbles.’](#)” Then lead a discussion about what you see when you go online. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the personalization of search engines and websites? Are the upsides worth the loss of privacy? Have patrons do a topic search (using different search engines, such as DuckDuckGo and Google) and compare the results; note that they must not be connected to the same Wi-Fi server for this to work. In what ways are the results different? The same? Discuss the fact that most people don’t move past the first two pages of search results and the role economics plays with “sponsored” results on the first page.

RESOURCES

- [“This Is What Filter Bubbles Actually Look Like”](#)
- [“Have Scientists Found a Way to Pop the Filter Bubble?”](#)

Who Is Tracking Your Behavior?

For a virtual program, ask patrons to visit [Your Ad Choices](#) to run a diagnostic on their computer or phone to learn which marketing companies are tracking your online behavior. Ask them to read the section “Understand Your Choices” and decide what to do. Next, ask them to look up one of those marketing companies to find out more about them. Ask: what did you learn? Do you care if you are tracked by Google and other media companies? Why or why not? Do you understand the privacy implications of being tracked online?

RESOURCES

- [“How to Find Out What Google Knows about You and Limit the Data It Collects”](#)
- [“There’s a Wildly Popular Conspiracy Theory that Facebook Listens to Your Private Phone Calls, and No Matter What the Tech Giant Says, People Just Aren’t Convinced It’s Not True”](#)

Privacy and the Business of Data

Screen the film “[Terms and Conditions May Apply.](#)” Use the discussion and activity guide on the [Resources page](#) to organize your program.

RESOURCES

- [“What Tech Giants Really Do with Your Data”](#)
- [“‘Data Is a Fingerprint’: Why You Aren’t as Anonymous as You Think Online”](#)



TV, Smart Technology, and Privacy

For a virtual program, ask patrons to go to the privacy settings on their smart television, if they have one, and turn off the microphone access and advertising tracker. What else is listed in the privacy settings? Ask: What did you learn? What did you change? If they don't have a smart television but watch television via an app such as Netflix, Hulu, or Amazon Prime, visit the privacy settings. Ask the same questions: What did you learn? What did you change?

RESOURCES

- [“Do You ‘Choose’ To Have Your Privacy Invaded by Using Tech?”](#)
- [“Can’t Seem to Stop Those Ads Following You Around? Why Not Become ‘Metaliterate’?”](#)

Is Your Browser Protecting You?

Learners who wish to check how well their browser add-ons are protecting them can visit [Panopticklick](#). If the learner is insufficiently protected, they can then install the Electronic Frontier Foundation's [Privacy Badger](#) on that browser. If you don't want patrons downloading an add-on on their devices, you could demonstrate the activity instead.

RESOURCES

- [Electronic Frontier Foundation](#)
- [DuckDuckGo](#)
- [“Surveillance Self-Defense”](#)



PRO TIP When hosting programs in person, test programs and websites with library Wi-Fi and computers before the start of class to make sure they work with your internet and IT capabilities.

LEARN MORE

- [“Online Privacy: How Did We Get Here?”](#)
- [“Understanding Social Media Privacy”](#)

CIVICS

LAURA SAUNDERS, Simmons University School of Library and Information Science



Civics encompasses a person's rights and responsibilities within society. To exercise their rights, such as voting and the freedom of speech and assembly, and to fully participate in the democratic process, individuals need to know what those rights are and understand the legal, ethical, and moral systems in which they function. They also need access to reliable and trustworthy information on which to base their decisions.

Where does civic information come from? *Media, especially news media*, is one important source, as journalists investigate and report on the actions, debates, and decisions of government officials and agencies. *Government documents* are primary sources and offer insight into agencies and elected officials. In a democratic society where freedoms like speech, press, and assembly are meant in part as a check on government, the free exchange of ideas and engagement in open and *civil debate* can also come under the umbrella of civics.

Libraries have an important role to play in the civic life of their patrons. We provide access to government and media information and assist our patrons in analyzing and evaluating that information. By providing such access, we are guided by the [core values of librarianship](#), access, service and intellectual freedom.

Beyond providing physical or virtual access to information sources and technologies, libraries can enable and facilitate the conversations through which members of the community exchange ideas and debate important questions. Public libraries are often considered [limited public forums](#), or [spaces](#) “held in trust for the use of the public and, time out of mind, have been used for purposes of assembly, communicating thoughts between citizens, and discussing public questions.” They offer space for civic conversation, but we enhance that physical or virtual space through our collections, resources, and programming, which allow our communities to access, create, and share information and engage with each other.

Libraries have an important role to play in the civic life of their patrons.

The library's role in civic life is shaped by additional factors:

- **Accountability:** Most public libraries exist within municipal organizational and funding structures, meaning that within the scope of their mission and professional values, they are accountable to their local community, including the government and taxpayers.
- **Trust:** Trust in the U.S. institutions that the public has historically relied on for reliable information, including government and the media, is eroding. An exception is the library, which continues to maintain [high levels of public trust](#). With that trust comes responsibility to respect our communities and uphold our libraries' missions and values.

BIG IDEAS

SAFE SPACES: Intellectual freedom and free speech are important values in libraries and other public forums. Libraries are currently contending with how we can uphold our commitment to intellectual freedom and free speech, which may include speech that is hateful and divisive, while also acting in socially responsible ways and ensuring our spaces are safe for all.

NEWS DESERTS: In many communities, local news outlets have been drastically cut or have disappeared altogether, leaving residents without a source for community news, including civic information such as local initiatives and ballot questions. This lack of community information has been linked to declining trust in news and government. In some communities, the library has tried to fill this gap by becoming news producers themselves.

CIVILITY: Civic discourse is not always civil. Increasing partisanship and cognitive bias, or the tendency to believe things that fit our existing worldview and reject those that do not, can make communication fraught. As libraries take on greater roles as community centers and offer more programming related to civics and the media, we will have to create policies and foster environments that promote civility.

MARKETPLACE OF IDEAS: One of the arguments in favor of free speech and public forums is that when all ideas are shared and considered, the “best” ideas will rise to the top. However, this argument rests on the idea that the sharing can happen equitably. In reality, some voices are louder or get more “air space,” while others are systematically shut out of conversations. For the marketplace of ideas to function, inequities must be made visible and people with diverse perspectives and voices must be included in the conversation.



PRO TIP Use the mantra “bring solutions, not problems” to guide media literacy discussions. Encourage people to move past listing the issues and challenges to brainstorming action steps.

PROGRAM STARTERS

Citizen Journalism

Host a series of workshops to explain how news is created and walk patrons through the process of identifying, researching, writing, fact-checking, and editing stories about the community. Where feasible, libraries may partner with local news outlets.

Civic Conversations

Building on a model like [Living Room Conversations](#), the [National Conversation Project](#), and [The People’s Supper](#), convene and facilitate civil conversations on topics important at the local, state, or national levels. These could be dialogues between invited guests, like local journalists and politicians, or open conversations among patrons. Setting rules for engagement and guidelines for dialogue and debate will be important to ensuring a civil process.



Civic Literacy, or How a Bill Becomes a Law

For folks to exercise their rights, they need to understand how government works, what their rights are, and what role they play. Introduce patrons to the workings of local, state, and/or federal government through a series of workshops about participatory processes like voting and petitions. Programs could be supported by research guides and displays with resources for further information, like information on registering to vote.

Get Out the Vote

Libraries' work to encourage voter participation is crucial. Work with local high schools, community colleges, and other community centers to help patrons register to vote, check their registration status, and provide information on voting requirements in their state. The program could be enhanced with information guides to current ballot initiatives, information on locations and hours of polling stations, and so on.

The Right to Know, or Filing a FOIA Request

In a democracy, the government is accountable to its people. To hold elected officials accountable, community members need access to records and other information related to the functions of government. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and various federal and state level "Sunshine Laws" ensure the right to access such information. Hold a workshop to walk patrons through the process of filing a FOIA request or explore existing requests and the kinds of documents that FOIAs have helped make public.

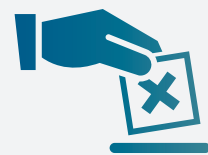


LEARN MORE

- [New Hampshire Public Radio’s “Civics 101” Podcast](#): Each installment of this NPR podcast covers an aspect of government, such as the electoral college or a review of the three branches.
- [Muckrock](#): A nonprofit, collaborative news site, Muckrock facilitates the filing of FOIA requests and engages in investigative reporting. Its website keeps a running tally of requests filed and fulfilled, and shares information on requests.
- [TEDEd Talks: Civics](#): A series of TED talks on civics topics like impeachment and the Supreme Court, as well as examinations of specific people and events, geared toward a younger audience.
- [Living Room Conversations](#): A resource for convening and facilitating civic conversations. Offers conversation starters and detailed guides, including tips for setting norms, on an array of topics from “Culture and Society” and “The American Dream” to “Justice,” “Politics and Government,” and “Media and Entertainment.”
- [Libraries Transforming Communities](#): An initiative of the American Library Association. ALA and the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD) have compiled a collection of resources to help libraries with their community engagement efforts, including materials from Conversation Café, Essential Partners, Everyday Democracy, Future Search, Turning Outward, National Issues Forum, and World Café, and self-paced online facilitation training.

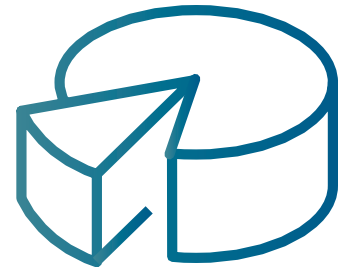
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ABOUT CIVICS

- What motivates us to vote or participate in politics in other ways?
- What kind of information do we need to make good decisions about (insert topic: voting in this election, supporting this ballot initiative, etc.)? Why is that kind of information important? How can we find that information?
- How do we talk to people who disagree with us in constructive ways? What do we do when we just cannot agree?
- Have you experienced the impacts of political polarization? How so? What steps can we take to address polarization? (Adapted from the [Living Room Conversations—Polarization](#))



MEDIA LANDSCAPE AND ECONOMICS

MICHAEL A. SPIKES, Northwestern University School of Education and Social Policy



Consider how the media industry has changed in recent decades. In 1983, 90 percent of all U.S.-based media was created and controlled by 50 companies. Mergers brought this number down to 25 in 1992, and further mergers have brought this down to just five today. Those five companies are AT&T, Comcast, Disney, Viacom, and Fox, who collectively own 90 percent of the professional media content currently being produced in the United States. This media consolidation has led to criticism of media outlets as being obligated to commercial and political centers of power rather than service to public interests and democratic process. Less competition has led to more content that is largely the same.

Meanwhile, the internet has brought us all more content than we know what to do with, created by professionals and amateurs alike. Therefore, it is now even more important for us as consumers to consider what kinds of media we consume and the thinking processes that we enact during that consumption. To start, we must think about what we are consuming. *Is it entertainment? Is it promotion? Is it advertising? Is it journalism?* We consume each of these types of media in different ways, and we have different ways of thinking about each.

For example, when watching a sitcom on TV, we rarely think that we should analyze the meanings of each joke that passes as part of the plot. We sit back and enjoy it. When watching an ad, on the other hand, we may ask ourselves: *Do I agree with the claims being made in this ad? Have I used this product before? Am I interested in it? What kind of previous experience have I had with this product?*

In these cases, we enact different ways of thinking, based on the type of content that we see. We should be more aware of these ways of thinking while consuming media content. Online, however, the markers that we use to detect the types of content that we are consuming aren't always so prominent.

One of the big words being used to characterize today's media ecosystem is "disintermediation." This describes a system of media creation and sharing that is largely characterized by direct contact between the creator and the consumer, without an intermediary that makes decisions about the quality or relevance of the media that is presented to the consumer. Quite simply, there is no "middle-man" or gatekeeper in this process.

An example is the online video-sharing platform YouTube. Users create video messages and upload them to the platform, and the videos are immediately available for other users to consume. According to the social media management platform [Hootsuite](#), 500 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute, and more than 2 billion people use it every month. YouTube is now the most popular social media platform on the internet, according to the [Pew Research Center](#).



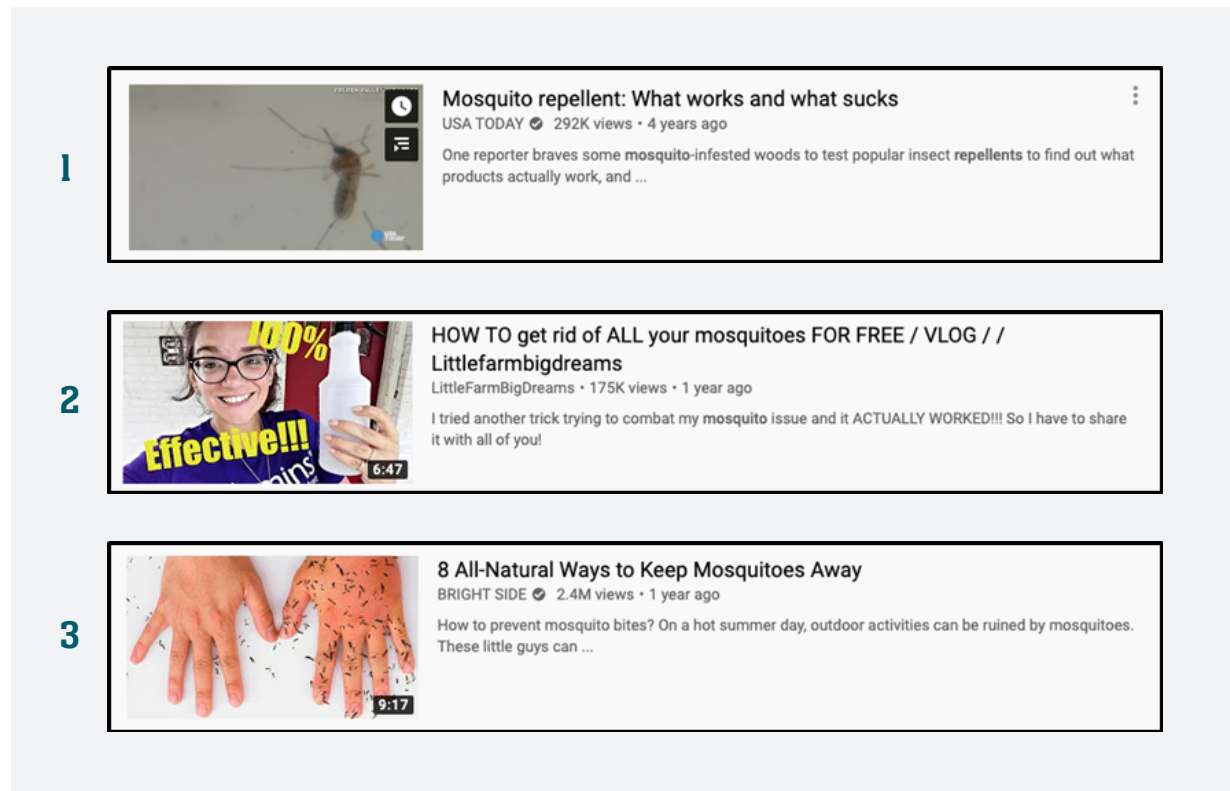
PRO TIP

Always keep in mind the intended purpose of the media you're consuming. Your reasons for consuming it, and the meanings you take from it, may or may not match that of its creators.

Platforms like YouTube have also become successful by blurring the lines between different types of content, making it difficult for users to tell the differences between content that is created by trustworthy sources and those with other intent.

Say it's summertime, and you're interested in hosting a backyard outdoor movie night. You want to find out what kind of mosquito repellent might be best to use in your backyard. You search YouTube and get these, among other, results:

Platforms like YouTube have also become successful by blurring the lines between different types of content.



These results come from three different sources, but there's very little information given to help you to decide which is the most reliable. There are view counts (292K, 175K, and 2.4M), but those are dependent on lots of factors. As you can see, a video that was posted by USA Today, a news media outlet, has only 292,000 views as compared to the outlet Bright Side with 2.4 million views, despite being on the platform for a much longer period of time (4 years vs. 1 year). In addition, while USA Today is a well-known brand, we know very little, if anything about Bright Side. (A cursory internet search shows that it is a social media operation run out of Cyprus that has been accused of spreading political disinformation.)

This is a low-stakes example, but it highlights a few challenges that users of these platforms generally do not consider due to the ease of use of platforms like YouTube. How do we help others think about these issues when interacting with information on disintermediated platforms?

BIG IDEAS

DISINTERMEDIATED: Many of the media messages that are shared on social media platforms are disintermediated, meaning that the message is spread from the producer to the consumer without an intermediary, or *gatekeeper*, such as an editor, who might determine its reliability or quality.

FRICTIONLESS: Social media platforms provide an increasingly frictionless experience to users, meaning that it is relatively easy to consume, share, or post media messages on them—often without much thought to their reliability or quality.

COMPUTER ALGORITHMS: Due to the sheer magnitude of messages that are shared on social media platforms, computer algorithms play a significant role in filtering the information that is presented to consumers. These are sets of instructions that determine how information is displayed on these sites. While algorithms can be tuned to highlight certain types of information, they largely do so to drive longer periods of engagement on the platforms that they support.

BLURRING THE LINES: Social media platforms have largely benefited through blurring the lines between different types of media messages that are shared on their platforms. The platforms largely present content in the same manner, leaving consumers with few cues to differentiate between media messages shared from sources with different intents for sharing it.

While algorithms can be tuned to highlight certain types of information, they largely do so to drive longer periods of engagement on the platforms that they support.

PROGRAM STARTERS

Searching and Using Information Online

Explore the idea of disintermediated media by searching for and displaying different types of media products that are posted on social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube. Highlight the differences between information that is intermediated (from larger media organizations, such as a news outlet) and individual users. (Note: Emphasize that differences between these media types exist on a scale; they are not all “good” or all “bad.”)

Creating and Sharing Media Messages Online

Lead patrons through the process of creating and sharing media content on a platform such as YouTube. Highlight the ease of use of these platforms and how it may lead to less thoughtful processing of messages both when consuming and creating.

Follow-the-Algorithm Activity

Engage patrons through a process of identifying what kinds of content are highlighted and suggested to them based on content that they have previously engaged with. Highlight the use of “likes/reactions” on Facebook or “likes/dislikes” on YouTube and the use of these “suggestions” to drive further engagement on these platforms.



f Facebook Wall Display

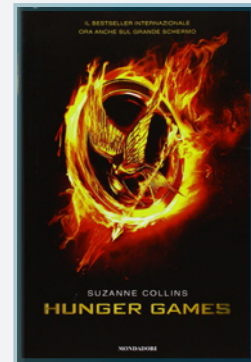
Build a real-world “wall” that shares personal information much like a Facebook wall. This activity can help illustrate the concepts of algorithms and blurred lines. Use [this Esurance ad](#) as inspiration; create the wall as a program and leave it up as a display.

LEARN MORE

- [The New Media Monopoly](#) by Ben H. Bagdikian
- [The Master Switch: The Rise and Fall of Information Empires](#) by Tim Wu
- [“The Six Companies that Own \(Almost\) All Media”](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ABOUT MEDIA LANDSCAPE: THE HUNGER GAMES

In her dystopian young adult novels, Suzanne Collins explores the power of media messages—especially television—and their constructed nature. As an example, the decision makers in the Capitol, including President Snow and the Gamemakers, construct violent clashes by the “tributes” in the televised hunger games to drive increased viewing of the games by citizens. In addition, the books highlight the use of the televised games to keep citizens dormant to the will of those in the Capitol. The author has cited reality TV shows and footage of the Iraq War as inspiration for the series.



- In what ways is media used within *The Hunger Games*?
- How might the games be different if they were broadcast through a different platform? How might social media affect them? What might those messages look like?
- What are some other ways that media might be used to influence the opinions of a large group of people, similar to that in *The Hunger Games*?

MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION

NICOLE A. COOKE, University of South Carolina School of Information Science



Since the 2016 U.S. presidential election, we have become increasingly familiar with the universe of fake news and its proliferation and persistence in print, visual, and social media. Specifically, the conversations have rightfully turned toward the main components of fake news: misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation. Researcher Claire Wardle and her think tank organization, First Draft, [define these terms](#) as follows:

- **Misinformation** is when false information is shared, but no harm is meant.
- **Disinformation** is when false information is knowingly shared to cause harm.
- **Malinformation** is when genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere.

Despite what we have learned about fake news and how to combat it, it is still a really difficult task because there is just so much of it and it is becoming increasingly sophisticated as technology continues to advance. Fake news, misinformation, and disinformation often have plausible roots in truth, are deliberately created and disseminated for profit, and can be shared and spread to others in the blink of an eye on social media.

However, despite these complications, libraries and information organizations are in prime positions to assist students and patrons with disputing misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation. This is where media and information literacy come into play, and who better to convey these skills than librarians and information workers?

BIG IDEAS

FILTER BUBBLES: In his book [The Filter Bubble](#), Eli Pariser defines the concept as “a state of intellectual isolation that allegedly can result from [personalized searches](#) when a website [algorithm](#) selectively guesses what information a user would like to see based on information about the user, such as location, past click-behavior and search history.” As mentioned on page 9 (in *Architecture of the Internet*), filter bubbles can prevent people from acknowledging or accepting information that does not confirm their existing beliefs.

INFODEMIC: As defined by [Merriam-Webster.com](#), an “Infodemic is a blend of ‘information’ and ‘epidemic’ that typically refers to a rapid and far-reaching spread of both accurate and inaccurate information about something, such as a disease. As facts, rumors, and fears mix and disperse, it becomes difficult to learn essential information about an issue. Infodemic was coined in 2003 and has seen renewed usage in the time of COVID-19.” Infodemics can be overwhelming to patrons and students, causing them to shut down and reject new, additional, or conflicting information.

MEDIA MANIPULATION: Alice Marwick and Rebecca Lewis, writing for Data & Society, define media manipulation as “the omission, altering, or falsifying of media to provide receivers with a false perception of that media.” Information consumers need to be vigilant and keep up to date on the influence of new technologies on the information they consume.

PROGRAM STARTERS

The “History” of Fake News

Look at historical newspapers, paying attention to headlines and the differences in coverage across various publications. Highlight terms like *propaganda* and *yellow journalism*. This program could be offered in person or online and could even be a passive program with a webpage or libguide.

Social Media and Tech Tools Used for Trickery

To spotlight visual literacy skills, provide examples of photos and videos that have appeared in print and online, some of which have been altered. Discuss tactics such as cropping, perspective, use of still photos vs. video, and photo manipulation and how they can change the meaning(s) of what we see. Deep fakes and shallow fakes are also part of the visual literacy and technology discussion. This program could also mention fake tweet and fake status generators that are used to impersonate celebrities and deceive people.



PRO TIP

The amount of information available on misinformation, disinformation, and fake news can be overwhelming. Give patrons an opportunity to digest the curated strategies and key points being provided to them by the library’s programs and staff. Misinformation, disinformation, and fake news lend themselves well to a *series* of programs, with each focusing on one problem or point—for example, one program on deep fakes and another on photograph altering.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ABOUT MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION



- What role does money play in the creation and dissemination of misinformation and disinformation?
- Who are the producers of misinformation and disinformation? And where is it coming from?
- Why don’t people vet information before they share it?
- How do I break free of my filter bubbles and echo chambers?
- What is the relationship between misinformation and disinformation and democracy?



Being a Savvy Information Consumer

Assemble top strategies and sources for identifying and combating misinformation, disinformation, and fake news. After these tips and tricks are presented, library staff can walk patrons through several pre-selected examples and then give patrons an opportunity to find their own examples.

Health Misinformation and Disinformation

Using COVID-19 as a starting point, compile a list of fake headlines, sources, and cures related to the pandemic. Then debunk them and provide alternative, credible information. This can build on previous programs by pointing out the roots in truth and the various fake elements / pieces of information.

LEARN MORE

- [*Fake News and Alternative Facts: Information Literacy in a Post-Truth Era*](#) by Nicole A. Cooke
- [*Hoaxed: Everything They Told You Is a Lie*](#), film directed by Scooter Downey and Jon Du Toit
- [*Post-Truth*](#) by Lee McIntyre
- [*After Truth: Disinformation and the Cost of Fake News*](#), film directed by Andrew Rossi
- [*Fake News: Understanding Media and Misinformation in the Digital Age*](#), edited Melissa Zimdars and Kembrew McLeod
- [*“Deconstructing the Nouns of Post-Truth Pedagogy”*](#)
- [*Checkology*](#) from the News Literacy Project

MEDIA CREATION AND ENGAGEMENT

KURTIS KELLY, Estes Valley Library

Does your library have a podcast? Is someone you know a blogger? Do you have staff or patrons who are “digital storytellers”?

Creating media content has become easier than ever, thanks to the wellspring of new platforms and free tools. While we can’t forget that major companies like Facebook and YouTube are profit-driven, we can help our patrons navigate these platforms and build their technical confidence while also offering opportunities to explore the “bigger picture”: how what we create affects the world around us.

Along the way, we also explore the emerging opportunities of libraries themselves as media creators, with staff and patrons collaborating to fill the voids created by the rapid disappearance of local news sources.

Today, many people feel left behind by traditional or legacy media. They don’t trust news outlets. They may feel “legacy media” ignores or overlooks them. They can discover a voice and important role through media creation (or “produsing,” the social media-age concept of both “producing” and “using” news), while also gaining awareness of—and empowerment through—their personal digital footprint.

Let’s join our patrons on the journey of creating, sharing, reacting to, and evaluating media content. That journey includes a new horizon filled with possibilities: the expanding territory of media creation and engagement.



Patrons can discover a voice and important role through media creation, while also gaining awareness of their personal digital footprint.

BIG IDEAS

WHAT MOTIVATES PEOPLE TO CREATE MEDIA CONTENT?

1. Self-expression and a sense of personal satisfaction.
2. The pursuit of business and career goals.
3. The pursuit of political or social change.

CREATING MEDIA is easier than ever, thanks to the dramatic rise in new platforms and free tools.

DON'T FORGET ETHICS. Being a media creator entails a significant amount of social responsibility, since the works we create may cause benefit or harm to those who encounter them.

PROGRAM STARTERS

Workshops in Podcasting, Blogging, Video Blogging, and Digital Storytelling

Topics may include how to utilize technology; successful interview techniques; journalistic checklists; and how to use storytelling to communicate information and ideas. Digital storytelling invites the use of video, photography, animation, and music to tell a story—one that may indeed be a news story!

Local Media Meet-and-Greets and Panel Discussions

Bring together representatives from traditional media (newspaper, radio, TV) and new media (social media and online platforms) to discuss their mission and challenges. Consider asking panelists to compare the approaches and methods they use in creating content. Consider asking audience attendees which sources they use, their level of trust, and which sources they identify with and why. Explore unique roles and areas of common ground.

Tracking Our Digital Footprints

This hands-on workshop invites people to consider the footprint they create. Invite participants to search their own names in Google. Possible areas of focus may include “think before you post”; how to create an online brand; and how to take control of your footprint.

Technology Open House

Does your library have a makerspace, a media lab, or a recording studio? Or do these exist elsewhere in the community or schools where you can lead a special program? Consider leading a workshop, woven into the core tenets of media literacy, and inviting participants to envision their roles as community journalists.

School Newspaper or Local Access Channel

Consider ways to collaborate with these organizations. How can the library partner or support student journalism? Is there a student who would cover the “library beat”? Would an instructor like a special library presentation on media literacy? Can the library platforms help expand the reach of student writers?



LEARN MORE

- [*Ghosting the News: Local Journalism and the Crisis of Democracy*](#) by Margaret Sullivan. Also check out PBS NewsHour's [interview with the author](#).
- [“Libraries Bringing Small Town News Back to Life”](#)
- [Follow Me](#), the first documentary about Instagram, and released on Instagram
- [Bad Education](#), an HBO film on the power of student journalism. It’s an excellent film for discussion but does deviate from actual events. Supplement the discussion with these three sources:
 - [“On Top of the News at Roslyn High”](#)
 - [“Bad Superintendent”](#) (provides the basis for the film)
 - [“What’s Fact and Fiction in Bad Education”](#) (explains the movie’s dramatic license)
- Alex Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Prodigy* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).
- Lynn Scofield Clark and Regina Marchi, *Young People and the Future of News* (New York/Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

THE LIBRARY AS A MEDIA CREATOR

What happens when the local newspaper disappears? Who covers the local town meetings? Who are the gate-watchers? In some communities, the library has found ways for its staff to fill the void left as newspapers cut staff or vanish altogether. Assuming responsibility for news coverage is no small task, but it can be highly rewarding. Begin by exploring these questions with your staff:

- What issues are you interested in? Do you think they’re getting enough coverage locally, nationally, internationally?
- What can we do to make ourselves more informed? How do we gather the stories that matter?
- Do you miss our local newspaper? If there is a local newspaper, how is it different from 25 years ago? What should be done?
- Who feels left out by the news? Who doesn’t feel represented?
- Did you know the library has equipment you can use for free? What equipment should we acquire to make it easier to tell important stories?



MEASURING OUTCOMES

AMBER CONGER, Lexington County Public Library



Evaluating learning outcomes for adults in a library’s informal, voluntary learning environment presents unique challenges.

While many library programs are presented in a structured context conducive to assessing knowledge gains, libraries offer other valuable learning opportunities that lack a built-in mechanism to assess outcomes. With the daunting statistics on adult media literacy in the United States, it may seem challenging to gauge the impact of your library’s efforts. In this section, we explore the basics and provide some resources to get started.

USING QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA TO MEASURE OUTCOMES

- **Quantitative data** can be counted or captured on a scale. These are numbers-based measures of success, such as the number of video views, program participants, webpage visits, or Facebook comments/shares. This data is often gathered using instruments such as surveys or counters.
- **Qualitative data** describes characteristics or qualities and is collected through methods such as observations, interviews, comment cards, or open-ended questionnaires. These are word-based measures, often presented in a narrative form.

Which type of data should you collect? It depends on the type of program you offer and the availability of the potential respondents. For example, if your library program is presented in a classroom-type setting, it may be most effective to offer a short survey that lists specific learning outcomes and ask the patron whether or not those outcomes were achieved. However, if you are offering a media literacy poster display at your library, the best evidence of learning outcomes may be gathered from conversations the patrons had with reference staff.

In most cases, libraries should consider using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to capture the outcomes of media literacy efforts.

SURVEYING

Many of the same measuring tools you use for other programs will align with your media literacy efforts. One way to ascertain the impact of a program or series is to do a pre-survey and post-survey. For one-time events or interactions, a simple follow-up survey can yield worthwhile results. Also

consider an online email survey with participants one or two weeks after the event, giving patrons time to reflect on what they've learned.

Additional ideas for conducting surveys:

- Set up a survey on a tablet for patrons to participate at will; no staff supervision necessary.
- Offer incentives for participation.
- Integrate an optional survey into the Wi-Fi login.
- Look to other fields, such as retail or K-12 education, to explore additional ideas for gaining feedback.

Quantitative survey questions are often closed-ended (yes/no) or request a numeric or scaled answer:



- How likely are you to seek out a variety of different information sources after attending this program? You can make the process simpler and more quantifiable by adding a scale, such as 0 to 10, with 0 being *not likely at all* and 10 meaning *extremely likely*.
- Are you more likely to check the source of a social media post you receive or one which you might share with others?
- Do you generally discuss news topics with others (friends, family, etc.)? Would you like the library to convene discussion opportunities?



Qualitative survey questions are often open-ended and seek to understand intentions:

- What are your general news sources (print, online, TV, etc.) and how do you allocate your time with each?
- How have you thought about ideas like “filter bubbles” and media bias before this program? Has your view changed? Or been reinforced?
- What resources or tools might you be interested in using at your library, whether it’s something existing now, or something you’d like to see in the future?

WHEN GATHERING NUMBERS OR CONDUCTING A SURVEY IS NOT PRACTICAL



An informal learning opportunity for adults could be compared to understanding the response to public art. Sometimes there is no accessible way to determine its impact; are there ancillary sources that could provide qualitative feedback? Think creatively!

- Have your efforts brought media literacy into community conversations in new ways? For example, does the program provoke any type of discussion, debate, or controversy in social media?
- Is there a demand for additional programs or services as a result of the initial efforts?
- What kinds of press coverage do the media literacy programs receive?
- Do other organizations use your program/service in marketing campaigns or educational programs?
- Have your efforts led to new community partnerships? (schools, local media, local non-traditional media creators)?
- Are there “community-based proxies” who could provide data? For example, could a partner organization share the extent of comments they received after utilizing or promoting the library’s efforts?
- What can staff tell you? For example, can they keep track of reference conversations?

LEARN MORE

- [Project Outcome](#): a free toolkit from the Public Library Association offering simple surveys and an easy-to-use process for measuring and analyzing outcomes
- [Evaluating Library Programming: A Practical Guide to Collecting and Analyzing Data to Improve or Evaluate Connected Learning Programs for Youth in Libraries](#)
- [Evaluation Resources](#), Institute of Museum and Library Services
- [Inspiring Learning: Detailed Framework](#)
- [Online Tools for Evaluating Programs and Services](#), Network of the National Library of Medicine
- [“The 4 Questions to Ask When You Debrief on a Project”](#)
- [“Did It Work? 5 Tools for Evaluating the Success of Your Project”](#)

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Media Literacy Education in Libraries for Adult Audiences is a project of the American Library Association (ALA) designed to support libraries in their efforts to improve the media literacy skills of adults in their communities. By tapping the expertise of a diverse group of thought leaders, the project has curated a suite of free media literacy resources that are available free of charge for libraries in order to help them reach adult learners. These resources include a [strategic report](#), practitioners' guide and a [series of six webinars](#).

This project was conducted by the ALA Public Programs Office in collaboration with Knology, a social science think tank. It was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services grant number LG-13-19-0089-19.



MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION IN LIBRARIES FOR ADULT AUDIENCES

A project of the American Library Association

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