



Lighting the Seventh Fire: The Potential of Library Services for Native Peoples / Lorie Roy

Libraries within indigenous communities have a legacy of service, linked through tradition and protocol and extending over time past, present and future. This paper provides a general description of some current library services and initiatives, presents some challenges to future connections, and identifies some opportunities that may ensure not only the survival of library services but also their continued development. We can examine these actions from a number of perspectives including geographically, by type of library, by type of service. This focus is largely based on tribal librarianship within the borders of the United States.

Let us start with a look at some international influence on tribal library development.

1. International efforts

While some tribal librarians and tribal communities may have had longstanding connections with indigenous communities outside the United States, for many tribal librarians the first steps to developing an international perspective on librarianship can be traced to the 1997 American Library Association annual conference in San Francisco. It was at this event that five members of Te Ropu Whakahaui (Maori in Libraries and Information Management) arrived at the bi-annual business meeting of the American Indian Library Association (AILA), inviting AILA members in the planning of the first international indigenous librarians forum. The resulting Forum took place in November 1999 at Waipapa Marae on the Campus of the University of Auckland on the North Island of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Since then, the Forum has been held every two years. With the fifth Forum approaching in June 2007, indigenous librarians are considering the history, purpose, and structure of these events. Never intended to be a conference, the Forum concept was initially chosen as a means to deliberate, consider issues of shared interest, and develop statements that might impact the future not only of tribal librarianship but also of indigenous knowledge organization and access.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has paid increasing attention to indigenous knowledge. IFLA has issued a "Statement on Indigenous Traditional Knowledge" and has recently organized discussion groups, programs and a new "Presidential Committee on Indigenous Matters." A few tribal librarians attend WIPCE, the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education, held every third year. The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) is hosting the next WIPCE that will take place in Melbourne, Australia from 7 to 11 December 2008. Furthermore, the Sister Libraries program sponsored through the American Library Association offers opportunities for tribal libraries to collaborate with libraries in other parts of the world.

2. National

In the last U.S. Census (2000), 1.5 percent of the population (4.3 million) self-reported that they were American Indian or Alaska Native. The tribes with the largest memberships are, in ranked order, the Cherokee, Navajo, Sioux, Chippewa, Choctaw, Pueblo, Apache, Lumbee, Iroquois, and Creek. Note that these groupings reflect federal naming traditions rather than Indian community naming. The Sioux are better recognized by their language groups, the Lakota, Dakota, or Nakota. Chippewa may prefer Ojibwe or Anishinabe. The Pueblo is the collective phrase for many distinct communities such as the Pueblos of Laguna, Santa Clara, and Santo Domingo. And the Iroquois is the name of a confederacy of five tribes, Cayuga, Mohawk, Onandaga, Oneida, and Seneca. The Native population is a young one: a third are younger than 18 years of age and there are fewer (5.6 percent) elders 65 and older, when

compared with the total U.S. population where 25.6 percent are under 18 and 12.4 percent are 65 or older. The median age of the U.S. population is 35.4 years; the median age of the Native population is 28.5 years. When compared with the U.S. population, fewer Native people are married (45 percent as compared to 52.5 percent with more households headed by women (20.7 percent as compared to 11.8 percent) and with a larger average household size (3.06 people per household compared with 2.59 for the general population). In Navajo and Pueblo communities, a larger percentage speak languages in addition to English at home (43.6 percent and 42.9 percent, respectively) compared with the U.S. general population where only 9.8 percent speak at least two languages well at home.

While fewer American Indians have four-year college degrees (11.5 percent as compared with 24.4 percent of the general population), they slightly exceed the rest of the population in terms of high school graduation (29.2 percent compared with 28.6 percent) and having completed either some college coursework or a two year associate's degree (30.2 percent compared with 27.4 percent).

Fewer Native men (65.6 percent compared to 70.7 percent) are in the labor force. Fewer Native workers are in management, professional and related fields (24.3 percent compared with 33.6 percent) and more (20.6 percent compared with 14.9 percent) are in service fields. The average income for all U.S. workers is \$37,057 and \$28,919 for Native workers. Twice as many Native people (25.7 percent compared to 12.4 percent) live in poverty. Over half, 64.1 percent, of Native peoples live away from Indian country in off-reservation lands in rural or urban areas.

This general picture provides the framework for within which tribal libraries operate. The remainder of this paper largely addresses library services for the 36 percent of Native peoples that live in homeland areas.

Within the United States, the structure of tribal librarianship has been framed locally. National efforts include the establishment and continuation of the American Indian Library Association, the work of units of the American Library Association and federal funding for tribal libraries through the U. S. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

AILA meets twice a year at the ALA Midwinter Meeting and Annual Conference and hosts an active electronic list to maintain communication between meetings. Its appointed officers include a President, President-Elect, Secretary, Treasurer, and Past-President; it is guided by an Executive Board and has a set of continuing and ad hoc committees. AILA publishes a print-only quarterly newsletter of approximately eight pages, organizes annual programs at ALA annual, works on collaborations with the other four ethnic library associations affiliated with ALA, responds to requests from ALA, AILA members, other librarians, and the public at large. AILA sponsors the Honoring Our Elders Award, a Distinguished Service Award, a Library School Scholarship, and a new Native American Youth Services Literature Award.

The American Library Association also has several committees active in library services for Native people. These include the Library Services to American Indians SubCommittee of the Office for Literacy and Outreach Services, established in the 1970s. More recently, ALA established the Council Committee on Rural, Native and Tribal Libraries of All Kinds.

IMLS provides several categories of funding designated for tribal libraries or museums. In addition, tribal libraries can submit grant proposals under other grant programs. Each tribe can apply for a one-year Native American Library Services Basic Grant. These non-competitive grants are awarded to tribes that develop a three-year library plan and submit an annual evaluation. The grant amounts are equally divided among the successful applicants. In 2006, fifty five \$5,000 Basic Grants were awarded and one hundred sixty-nine \$6,000 Basic Grants with Educational/Assessment Options were awarded.

The \$5,000 grants support general library services such as the collections, materials and supplies, and small equipment purchases. Librarians can apply the \$1,000 Education/Assessment Option to fund continuing education events such as conferences or to fund the work of a consultant.

In addition to these noncompetitive Basic Grants, IMLS funds a tribal libraries competitive grant program called the Enhancement Grants. Tribes submit proposals for projects funded

for up to \$150,000 over two years. About a dozen grants are awarded in any given year; successful applicants propose model or innovative projects and partnerships.

The Native Hawaiian Library Services Grant program, separate from the Basic and Enhancement grants, is open to non-profits that provide services for Native Hawaiians. ALU LIKE, Inc. of Honolulu, Hawaii has received this grant of from \$340,000 to \$496,000 each year since 1998. IMLS grants recipients are selected through a blind review process. Reviewers are selected through an application process and are financially compensated for their services.

In addition to these targeted grant programs, tribal librarians may apply for funding through the other IMLS programs including the Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum Services Program, the Laura Bush 21st Century Library Program, and National Leadership Grants.

The first conference for all members of the five ethnic library associations affiliated with ALA will take place from 11 to 15 October 2006 in Dallas, Texas. The theme of the Joint Conference of Librarians of Color is "Gathering at the Waters: Embracing Our Spirits, Telling Our Stories." Events on indigenous librarianship will include programs on "Creating a Diverse Infrastructure for Native American Studies," "Honoring Generations: Developing the Next Generation of Native Librarians," and "Feathers, Headdresses, and Tomahawks: The Portrayal of Native Americans in Literature For Children."

Some of these national efforts are long-standing, others are recent and emerging. While welcome and necessary, these efforts are hampered by geographic distance, politics, and low—yet stable—involvement. Staff turnover in local settings can lead to fewer grant submissions or an inability to spend out funds and submit the required annual evaluations. There is no national office for tribal library development and little coordination across types of libraries. Tribal school libraries, for example, are not eligible for IMLS funding and their presence in national Indian education programs, initiatives, and gatherings is often minimal. Some feel that the most needy and remote locations that might benefit most from federal support are least likely to receive it.

3. State

Within the United States, state governments greatly impact local developments. The emergence of the state library systems stemmed from the first federal legislation affecting libraries starting with the Library Services Act of the mid 1950s. State libraries often are strong influences on library development. This is largely due to their process of distributing federal funding; acceptance of federal support is predicated upon the state library writing strategic state-wide plans.

Several states, most notably New Mexico, have an established support system for tribal library development. The New Mexico State Library has the nation's only statewide Tribal Libraries Program (TLP) staffed by two Native consultants. TLP provides annual grants to tribal public libraries, an annual Tribal Libraries Leadership Institute, onsite technology support, training, and consulting support. These cutting edge levels of state-wide support for tribal libraries result from unique local situations and the directed energies of influential individuals. New Mexico's support of tribal libraries can be tied directly to the influence of one state Senator, Senator Leonard Tsosie, whose sister is a prominent librarian at the University of New Mexico. Arizona's state librarian is an indigenous woman and tribal library initiatives are developed through state grants and the inclusion of tribal libraries in collaborative projects.

Tribal library concerns are also evident in several state library associations or Chapters of the American Library Association, including the New Mexico Library Association and Alaska Library Association. The Native American Libraries Special Interest Group (NALSIG) of the New Mexico Library Association hosts meetings nearly every month, often on site at tribal libraries. The Arizona State Library addresses tribal library concerns through its Services to Diverse Populations Special Interest Group. The Alaska Library Association has an Alaska Native Issues Round Table. The California Library Association has a Native Libraries Round Table. Unlike other national ethnic library associations such as the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, Chinese American Library Association, and REFORMA: The

Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking, the American Indian Library Association does not have state or regional chapters.

4. Regional

Tribal traditional homelands sometimes extend over the borders formalized by the non-tribal governments. Tribal library efforts therefore may follow boundaries that cross state government lines. These efforts may be innovative and collaborative and usually are sustained by alternative funding sources. One such initiative was the Native American Access to Technology Program (NAATP) sponsored through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Focusing on tribal libraries and community centers in the Four Corners area—New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Utah—NAATP brought hardware, software, and technology training.

5. By type of library

Tribal libraries find community, collaboration and affirm Native cultures at gatherings organized by type of library.

The first tribal college, Navajo Community College (now, Dine College) was founded in 1972. As of June 2006, thirty-four tribal colleges are now members of AIHEC, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. AIHEC does not have a separate section for tribal college librarians or strong presence at its conference by tribal librarians.

Instead, tribal college librarians have been meeting annually for over a decade at the Tribal College Librarians Professional Development Institute. This event was founded and continues under the auspices of librarians at Montana State University in Bozeman and meetings are held in Montana or in Washington, D.C.

The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) is the largest conference for Indian educators in schools providing kindergarten through high school education. Tribal school librarians do not have a strong presence at NIEA conferences nor do they have their own organization or conference.

6. By interest area or patron group

Those involved in tribal archives may attend meetings of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) and becoming active in SAA, particularly through its Diversity Committee and the Native American Archives Roundtable. Librarians working on the Navajo reservation or serving Navajo patrons are now starting to organize and hold separate meetings. The National Network of Libraries of Medicine also host regular gatherings to focus of needs and concerns of Native patrons.

Other programs provide services for Native patrons across geographic areas.

In September 2001, delegates at the Second International Indigenous Librarians Forum in Jokkmokk, Sweden drafted five goals, two of which addressed concerns for young people. These were:

1. We as indigenous librarians seek to form alliances with other international indigenous bodies committed to nurturing indigenous youth.
2. We as indigenous librarians affirm our commitment to utilise our collective skills, values and expertise in both cultural and professional spheres to strengthen indigenous youth.

Tribal libraries might support Native youth through helping them acquire strong literacy and communication skills in ways that also support cultural identity. In 1998, Dr. Loriene Roy, Professor in the School of Information at the University of Texas at Austin, started a national reading program with her graduate students with a pilot test at the Laguna Elementary School in New Mexico. This program came to be known as "If I Can Read, I Can Do Anything," and now helps support library initiatives at twenty-five sites in ten states. Participating schools receive donations of new books, reading incentives for students, membership cards, assistance in program development, and consulting advice. If I Can Read hopes to expand to more libraries, assist in local Native language recovery efforts, and explore other ways to support leisure reading.

7. Interdisciplinary and Inter-Institutional Efforts

The annual Sequoyah Research Center Symposium held on the campus of the University of Arkansas-Little Rock (UALR). This small gathering provides an opportunity for Native academics, students, writers, and community members to update each other on their efforts and support the UALR on its efforts in developing its American Native Press Archives.

National conferences on tribal museums, libraries, and archives have been held in 2002 and 2005. Funded through the IMLS, these events afforded tribal information specialists with opportunities to network, share information, and take the first steps in starting collaborations. The first national conference focused on including tribal community members. Membership efforts for the second conference provided opportunities for students and new graduates to highlight their work and hosted a poster session event for librarians receiving IMLS tribal libraries Enhancement Grants. A third national conference will take place in Oklahoma in late October 2007.

Summary

Tribal libraries face a number of challenges, often including low financial support, limited resources, and geographic isolation. Libraries and librarians are often left out of grant-funded efforts, although their skills are needed at the community level. With all of these opportunities, tribal librarians are not always invited to the table, especially where critical, time-sensitive grant-funded initiatives are concerned. Tribal librarians have to be ever vigilant that their services are recognized so that they are included in programs that involve language recovery, cultural mapping, use of information technology, and cultural heritage programs.

The Anishinabe people are dreamers and predictors. Among their dreams and predictors are the Prophecies of the Seven Fires. Hundreds of years ago the people moved east until they lived on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. Over time, seven prophets arose, predicting that the Anishinabe would return, through a sequence of seven moves, to the west and stop when they found food growing on water near an island shaped like a turtle. Each move would guarantee the survival of the people; if they chose not to move, then they would not live. The first prophet told them to follow the sign of a cowrie shell, the grand megis. This was the Prophecy of the First Hearth Fire. Their second move or fire was prompted by the prediction that a young boy would help them recover their traditional lifeways; they continued to follow the rivers during their third move toward the land where food grew on water. The fourth prophet predicted the arrival of Europeans as people whose faces of death would be mistaken as the faces of brotherhood. The fifth fire was the prediction of the loss of traditional religious expression. The sixth prophet told of a time of great sadness and even greater loss of culture, including language erosion, disruption of traditional family life, economic strife, and health challenges. Today, the Anishinabe are emerging from the sixth fire. The seventh prophet predicted that a new people would emerge in the seventh fire. This new people, or Osh-ki-bi-ma-di-zeeg, have the potential to recover lost elements of the culture, if they make the right decisions. This right road of life would ignite a final fire of peace and brother/sisterhood. If they take the wrong road, then the result could be degradation of the natural resources and death to all peoples.

I predict that the tribal librarian's role in this impending age of the seventh fire is a critical one. It may be up to us to help ensure that our communities have the information to choose the right path. The library can provide the social space for tribal members lead the lighting of the eighth fire.

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