

## 1. How is literacy fundamental to democracy? In what ways can the library actively support a culture of reading and inquiry?

Literacy is fundamental to democracy because it is the first step toward accessing information in all its forms, including social media. Developing literacy skills enables individuals to find reliable information; we cannot solely rely on mainstream media and large publishing groups.

We must train people not only to search for topics that interest them but also to think critically about fake news and misinformation. This critical thinking is essential for forming informed opinions. Extension programs, such as those focused on the arts, are important as they allow users to express themselves. These engaging programs can attract individuals who may not be initially interested in democratic issues, encouraging broader participation.

Libraries should establish clear acquisition policies. There is an ongoing debate about whether some form of censorship is necessary or if libraries should provide access to all points of view.

## 2. Apathy is a drag on the democratic process. How can the library encourage citizen engagement and voter participation?

There are diverse forms of voter participation. In some countries, registration is required; in others, voting is mandatory, and in some places, you can vote on Election Day simply by presenting identification—it is as easy as that. Additionally, in certain countries, political parties can set up in libraries to explain their programs, while in others, this is not permitted.

However, inviting people to vote can be controversial in some countries, as different groups may view it as a threat or an invitation to support opposing candidates.

We believe that practicing democracy within the library is the best way to engage with democratic processes and make them interesting. We can encourage users to vote on library-related issues, such as remodeling projects or the acquisition of new materials. However, we must also consider who we will involve in these decisions and how we will manage expectations versus the actual outcomes.

Furthermore, libraries should foster discussions on various topics related to democracy, starting with those that are less controversial.

We also need to work with our teams in two key ways:

- They must be trained as facilitators.
- Some team members may feel apathetic; we need to advocate for their feelings to engage them effectively. A useful reference point is the "IFLA Manifesto." There is a consensus within our group that while we have trained our staff on many technical issues, we have not focused enough on social ones.

## 3. Democracy can falter when there is a lack of trust in society.

Democracy is under threat, and we all agree that libraries must take action. People trust libraries, but we have been perceived often as less engaging compared to schools. We need to create attractive activities and make thoughtful choices, working collaboratively and using persuasive approaches.

Collaborating with PEN International clubs and promoting banned books can be both impactful and accessible. For instance, in Malmö, there is The Dawit Isaak Library, a library dedicated to freedom of expression.

#### 4. What ideas for library services or programs have you heard at this conference that you intend to implement in your library?

One of the most inspiring ideas we have come across is the “Civil Society” program at the Toronto Public Library. In addition, we recognize the importance of training our staff in group facilitation techniques and fostering effective discussions.

#### 5. With what local institutions or agencies might the library partner in support of democracy?

- IFLA
- UNESCO
- Library associations
- International and national PEN clubs
- Schools, colleges and universities