



BOOSTING AND EVALUATING COLLABORATIVE INNOVATIONS IN LIBRARIES:

managerial guidelines and policy implications.

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Libraries are a cornerstone of vibrant democracies,

as highlighted in the Libraries for a Sustainable Future Manifesto 2024.¹ They are well-placed to play an important role in tackling key societal challenges.

The EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026 aims to strengthen the multiple roles of libraries as gateways to and transmitters of cultural works, skills, and European values.²

To fulfill these vital roles, libraries need to be creative, adaptable, and responsive to change. This requires ongoing innovation and a commitment to evolving community needs, as emphasized in the Council of Europe recommendation on library legislation and policy in Europe.³

Although the relevance of collaboration for innovation is widely accepted by academics and practitioners within the world of libraries, community engagement approaches are still novel in the library sector.⁴ To foster participation and co-creation in libraries a number of challenges need to be addressed: understanding the skills, resources and environments needed, and ensuring library staff are trained to encourage speaking, listening and empathy to prioritize equity and diversity.⁵ But also overcoming the traditional view on the role of libraries, recruiting stakeholders for collaboration, and effective communication with internal and external stakeholders, are challenges experienced by the library practitioners at the LIBER Winter 2024 LibrarIN workshop.⁶

¹ Manifesto Libraries for a Sustainable Future: <https://eblida.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Manifesto-Libraries-for-a-sustainable-future.pdf>

² Council Resolution on the EU work plan for culture 2023-2026 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022G1207\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022G1207(01))

³ Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on library legislation and policy in Europe <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680aaced6>.

⁴ Filipa Barros, Ilona Kish, Luca Moltmann and Susana Silvestre, "Rough Guide to Citizen Engagement in Public Libraries," Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2023, ISBN 978-92-76-60599-7, doi:10.2760/957683, JRC132175.

⁵ Rolf Hapel, "Equity, diversity and inclusion in public libraries: A literature review," Public Library Quarterly, 40(4), 347-363, 2021.

Anni Ojajärvi, Marianne Tenhula and Jukka Vahti, "How to make libraries forums of democracy? Methods for libraries to promote democracy," Sitra, Helsinki, 2022, ISBN 978-952-347-309-6.

⁶ Revolutionising Research Library Services With Collaboration, Social Engagement, And Living Labs – LibrarIN At The LIBER Winter Event:

<https://librarin.eu/revolutionising-research-library-services-with-collaboration-social-engagement-and-living-labs-librarin-at-the-liber-winter-event/>

To effectively implement collaborative innovation, libraries need practical tools to assess their current practices and measure their progress.⁷ There are very few frameworks that evaluate and monitor innovation in the field of innovation in libraries, and none in the field of collaborative innovation.⁸

This LibrarIN policy brief builds upon the foundation established in the first LibrarIN policy brief, *Reimagine Libraries: Sparking Collaboration for Innovation to Tackle Libraries' 21st Century Challenges*.⁹

While the first brief emphasized the vital role of collaboration and identified four key policy areas for advancing co-creation within the library ecosystem, this brief focuses on the practical application at the individual library level. Management-focused guidelines are offered to help libraries improve, monitor and evaluate their innovative activities and **adapt to evolving societal needs**.

This brief identifies critical organizational elements that drive library innovation, and a set of variables linked to these elements. The actionable recommendations look at enhancing collaborative innovation across these variables. Finally, the policy implications discussed here map directly to the key policy areas identified in the first LibrarIN Policy Brief, offering concrete strategies for libraries to become dynamic hubs of community engagement and collaborative experimentation. The brief was improved with inputs and comments from library practitioners at LIBER Winter 2024 event, library policy experts and the LibrarIN Stakeholder panel.¹⁰

⁷ Jeremy Atkinson, "Collaboration by Academic Libraries: What are the Benefits, What are the Constraints, and What do You Need to do to be Successful?" *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, 25(1), 1–7, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2019.1575016>

⁸ Minna Saunila, "Performance measurement approach for innovation capability in SMEs", *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, Vol. 65 No. 2, pp. 162-176, 2016.

⁹ Ernesto Solano, Luis Rubalcaba, Elena Silvestrini and Marieke Willems, "Reimagining Libraries: Insights From The LibrarIN Policy Brief On Sparking Collaboration & Innovation For 21st Century Challenges," 2024, available at: <https://librarin.eu/reimagining-libraries-insights-from-the-librarin-policy-brief-on-sparking-collaboration-innovation-for-21st-century-challenges/>

¹⁰ LibrarIN Stakeholder Panel: <https://librarin.eu/who-we-are/stakeholders/>



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/Key Insights Unveiled from the LibrarIN Literature Review

This chapter looks at how innovation in libraries is conceptualised, the drivers and determinants that shape it, as well as the frameworks used to evaluate its impact. Literature review forms the basis of this chapter, set out to understand how libraries adapt to a rapidly evolving landscape. The background comes from the conceptual and theoretical work done by the LibrarIN project proving a multiagent framework for service innovation in libraries and the innovation trajectories related to libraries as providers of public services.¹¹

1.1 How is innovation understood in libraries?

Understanding innovation in libraries requires examining how the term is applied and in what contexts it creates value for users and institutions alike ¹². Key areas in which libraries typically innovate are technology, service, culture, vagueness, character, use, program, facility, resource, and partnership. Library innovation can be categorised into four types, thus illustrating that the library’s purpose goes far beyond being a mere repository of information.¹³

TABLE 1. Classification of innovations in public libraries

Type	Description
Program innovations	a new initiative designed and implemented for catering to the needs of a specific patron population
Process innovations	a novel combination of actions, routines, or procedures for serving patrons. Process innovations are implemented mainly for creating effectiveness (i.e. doing right things) and efficiency
Partnership innovations	a novel integration of resources such as people and information, which are contributed or shared by organisations or units within a single organisation
Technological innovations	a new initiative or procedure driven by or centred on the features and capabilities of a specific or a combination of technologies

¹¹ Paul Windrum, Luis Rubalcaba, Lars Fuglsang, Ernesto Solano, Faïz Gallouj and Benoît Desmarchelier, "D2.2 Conceptual framework and model of participatory management and sustainable growth v2." LibrarIN -101061516 — HORIZON-CL2-2021-HERITAGE-01-02, 2024, <https://librarin.eu/download/21788/?tmstv=1736856875>

¹² Victoria L. Rubin, Patrick T. Gavin and Ahmad M. Kamal, "Innovation in Public and Academic North American Libraries: Examining White Literature and Website Applications / L'innovation dans les bibliothèques publiques et académiques en Amérique du Nord: examen de la littérature blanche (livres et périodiques) et des applications pour sites web," Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science 35(4),397-422, 2011, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/ils.2011.0031>

¹³ Devendra Dilip Potnis, D. D., Joseph Winberry, Bonnie Finn and Courtney Hunt, "What is innovative to public libraries in the United States? A perspective of library administrators for classifying innovations," Journal of Librarianship and Information Science, 52(3), 792-805,2019, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000619871991>

To further broaden the understanding of innovation in libraries, the following three core roles that libraries play in fostering and supporting innovation can be identified: ¹⁴

1 Library as a provider of innovative projects and services.

Libraries must provide projects and services implementing new and improved activities. In some cases, the library is the only provider of the service, fully responsible for the character of the event or activity.

2 Library as an enabler of innovative projects and services.

Sometimes, the library only serves as a third space for other organizers or parties. Plenty of activities are organized directly by individuals or groups within the community, and the library only provides the time and space.

3 Library as a catalyst of social innovations

In some cases, libraries are places for active collaboration between themselves and other stakeholders.

This category included events and activities organized both by the library and its users.

More importantly, **innovation in libraries is strongly associated with the change in how their role is perceived**. When the library is no longer seen as a mere place for data collection and information, but as a space for collaboration and co-creation, then the library actually becomes this innovative hub offering all kinds of new services. This perception of the library's role was also mentioned as one of the challenges standing in the way of collaborative innovation, by the library practitioners at LIBER Winter 2024 Workshop.

¹⁴ Ladislava Zbiejczuk Suchá, Eliška Bartošová, Roman Novotný, Jiřina Bělehradová Svitáková, Tomáš Štefek, Eva Víchová, "Stimulators and Barriers towards Social Innovations in Public Libraries: Qualitative Research Study", *Library & Information Science Research*, 43(1), 101068, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2020.101068>

The LibrarIN project proposes a conceptual model that frames library innovation within a multi-agent model, and is built on the following three key concepts:

A Innovation in libraries does not occur in isolation but **through collaboration with different stakeholders.**

B Kelvin Lancaster's consumer demand theory is **used to assess users' perception of innovation in library services.**¹⁵

C **Value co-creation takes a dynamic approach,** where direct and indirect interactions among actors facilitate the continuous evolution of services in response to social and technological transformations.

This LibrarIN model goes beyond the introduction of new services and also looks at the refinement and adaptation of existing ones, driven by collaboration, organizational realignment, and the integration of diverse resources. The LibrarIN conceptual model offers a strong foundation for studying innovation trajectories in libraries, stressing the role of user engagement and strategic cooperation across different stakeholders in shaping the future of library services.

The LibrarIN model, understands innovation in libraries as a dynamic process that involves the integration and evolution of services, competencies and technologies to generate value for users and the community. From a service perspective, libraries have moved from being simple repositories of information to becoming architectural or assembled services, where central and peripheral services are combined to offer new ways of accessing and using information.

This model emphasizes the importance of value co-creation, in which librarians, users and other stakeholders collaborate to design and improve services. In addition, the conceptual framework highlights three logics of innovation in libraries: **horizontal**, which introduces or eliminates services; **vertical**, which improves material, informational or methodological components; and **diagonal**, which combines both strategies.¹⁶

¹⁵ Kelvin Lancaster, "A New Approach to Consumer Theory," *Journal of Political Economy*, 1966, vol. 74, issue 2, 132, DOI: 10.1086/259131

¹⁶ Benoît Desmarchelier, Faridah Djellal and Faïz Gallouj, "Innovation in libraries: A service-oriented perspective," *Research Policy*, 54(1), 105110, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2024.105110>.

1.2 Drivers and determinants of innovation in libraries

The LibrarIN literature review shows several drivers and determinants that influence **innovation within libraries**, categorised across various levels or organisational frameworks, each bringing a unique focus to the factors that promote innovation in library settings.

This framework of drivers and determinants shows that innovation in libraries is a multi-faceted endeavour shaped by both organisational strategy and a supportive culture for experimentation and user engagement.

A Drivers of Innovation in Libraries

Stimulators of innovation in libraries can be categorized across four distinct levels: structural, local, organizational, and personal, as further detailed in Table 2

TABLE 2. Innovation drivers in libraries

Level	Description
Structural level	Platforms for drawing inspiration (Platforms for sharing good practices between libraries, international cooperation, intersectional inspiration)
Local level	A novel combination of actions, routines, or procedures for serving patrons. Process innovations are implemented mainly for creating effectiveness (i.e. doing right things) and efficiency
Organisational level	a novel integration of resources such as people and information, which are contributed or shared by organisations or units within a single organisation
Personal level	A new initiative or procedure driven by or centred on the features and capabilities of a specific or a combination of technologies

Source: Suchá et al (2021)

B Determinants of Innovation in Libraries

With the development of digital technologies, various disruptive innovations have emerged that are gradually replacing libraries in the information-seeking process.¹⁷ To remain relevant, libraries must actively engage in service innovation. Parting from the Christensen's (1997).¹⁸

¹⁷ She-Tinn Yeh, Zhiping Walter, "Determinants of Service Innovation in Academic Libraries through the Lens of Disruptive Innovation," COLLEGE & RESEARCH LIBRARIES, 77 (6) pg. 795-804, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5860/crl.77.6.795>.

¹⁸ Clayton Christensen, "The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail," Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1997

Resources-Processes-Values (RPV) framework, three **determinants can be identified for innovation in libraries: namely the tangible and intangible resources an organization possesses, the processes that employees use to transform resources into products and services of greater worth, and the values by which the organization and employees set priorities**, together determine whether an organisation will succeed or fail to respond to disruptive innovations. This framework offers propositions for fostering innovation within libraries, as detailed in box 1.

Box 1.

Determinants behind innovation in libraries according to Yeh and Walter (2016)

1

Determinants related to resources

Availability: Innovation requires dedicated personnel and financial resources. Libraries often need to identify "slack" resources (created through automation, underutilized services, etc.) and redeploy them to support innovation initiatives.

Propositions:

1. Dedicating personnel and financial resources for innovation is positively related to service innovation.
2. User participation is positively related to service innovation.
3. Building partnerships with other libraries is positively related to service innovation.
4. Building partnerships with vendor and commercial communities is positively related to service innovation.

2

Determinants related to processes

Autonomy: Innovation thrives in environments where teams have the autonomy to experiment and make decisions, especially when dealing with rapid external changes and novel innovations. This autonomy allows for efficient resource allocation and agile responses to the evolving environment.

Propositions:

5. Autonomy granted to the innovation team is positively related to service innovation.
6. Tying performance evaluations and rewards to innovation outcomes is positively related to service innovation.

3

Determinants related to values

Leadership and Culture: A pro-innovation leadership style and an organizational culture that supports innovation are crucial. Library leadership plays a key role in setting the strategic direction and shaping the organizational culture to foster innovation.

Propositions:

7. A pro-innovation leadership is positively related to service innovation.
8. An innovation-supportive culture is positively related to service innovation.

1.3

Evaluating innovation in libraries

The importance of evaluating library innovation is well-documented in the literature, underscoring the challenges and complexities inherent in measuring innovation performance. Variations across studies make a unified framework difficult, emphasising the need for multidimensional and adaptable evaluation. Systems should be process-centred, collaborative, agile, and capable of linking metrics to both past performance and future outcomes.¹⁹ This resonates with the broader consensus that **innovation assessment must extend beyond technological considerations to include diverse and composite measures**, providing a holistic understanding of innovation. Multidimensional evaluation, integrates varied factors influencing innovation performance, allowing organisations to comprehensively assess their progress.²⁰

Performance measurement should be aligned with stakeholder goals while maintaining focus on continuous improvement and the identification of inefficiencies.²¹ **Both technological and non-technological elements should be incorporated into innovation evaluation frameworks**, ensuring all relevant variables are considered such as company-specific, contextual, and innovation dimensions.²²

In the context of libraries, it is crucial to define how innovation is conceptualised and the activities or services linked to it. **Following established principles of innovation evaluation, libraries must adopt multidimensional approaches that are process-oriented, collaborative, and metric-driven.** Building on this foundation, the proposed dimensions of library innovation encompass the following six key areas:

1 Digital transformation. Digital transformation is understood not only as the increase of digitally accessible resources or digital services, but also as the community's gained independence when autonomously accessing digital library services. It is a multifaceted process with far-reaching implications across technological, economic, and social spheres. While its pace varies across sectors, it presents a unique challenge for libraries, impacting both their operational methods and user engagement.²³

¹⁹ Vikas Dewangan and Manish Godse, "Towards a holistic enterprise innovation performance measurement system," *Technovation*, 34(9), 536-545, 2014.

²⁰ Linda Ponta, Gloria Puliga, Rafaella Manzini, "A measure of innovation performance: the Innovation Patent Index," *Management Decision*, 59(13), 73-98, 2021.

²¹ John Hagedoorn and Myriam Cloudt, "Measuring innovative performance: Is there an advantage in using multiple indicators?" *Research Policy*, 32(8), 1365-1379, 2021, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0048-7333\(02\)00137-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0048-7333(02)00137-3).

²² Marisa Dziallas and Knut Blind, "Innovation indicators throughout the innovation process: An extensive literature analysis," *Technovation*, 80, 3-29, 2019.

²³ Andreas Marquet, "A maturity model for measuring digital transformation of archives and libraries," *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries*, [S.I.], v. 10, n. 3, p. 269-282, oct, 2021, ISSN 2241-1925, Available at: <http://www.qqml.net/index.php/qqml/article/view/715>.

This is further intensified by the complexities of long-term preservation for digitized and born-digital materials, which are relatively new to the archival context and require innovative approaches to ensure their continued accessibility.

2 Co-creation spaces: Libraries can serve as calm and safer spaces for co-creation, becoming vital hubs for open innovation within their communities. They offer valuable market research resources for entrepreneurs and businesses, particularly those seeking to expand internationally. Libraries leverage social networking platforms to engage with users and provide market insights to the business community. Furthermore, spaces like living labs, makerspaces, co-working areas, learning spaces, and innovation hubs contribute significantly to a library's ability to foster innovation.

3 Personalized programs and services: Libraries should offer tailored programs and services that meet the specific needs of their communities. This includes offering a variety of workshops, book clubs, and cultural events, as well as providing personalized assistance with information searches. It's important to remember that innovation can take many forms. Smaller libraries can be just as innovative as larger ones by focusing on services that have a meaningful impact on their communities.

4 Collaborations and partnerships: To drive innovation, libraries must actively collaborate. This means building partnerships with users, other libraries, local governments, public and community organizations and businesses to develop new services, improve existing offerings, and create engaging programs. This collaborative approach should be embedded in the library's digital tools and resources.

5 Digital literacy: Libraries play a crucial role in digital literacy, providing access to resources and technologies that many people do not have in their homes. In addition to being spaces where users can learn to use digital tools, libraries offer educational programs that promote essential skills, such as effective online information searching, digital security, and software management. Likewise, digital literacy is related to media literacy and critical thinking, essential when facing societal challenges.

6 Management: Effective management enables organizations to systematically navigate the inherent risks of innovation, whether through leadership, resource allocation, or creating environments where collaboration and creativity thrive. From inspiring visionary thinking to managing processes like research and development, prototyping, and commercialization, management serves as the bridge between abstract ideas and tangible, impactful innovations. Therefore, understanding the interplay between management and innovation is essential for libraries.

Each of these dimensions is supported by specific variables designed to guide libraries in evaluating their innovation capacity and identifying areas for improvement. By adopting this framework, libraries can develop actionable strategies to enhance innovation and collaboration. These principles and dimensions provide a comprehensive foundation for libraries to design, implement, and assess projects that drive meaningful progress in their services and operations. The evaluation framework is presented in the table below.

TABLE 3. LibrarIN monitoring and evaluation framework for collaborative innovation in libraries

Dimension of library innovation	Variables to evaluate & monitor
<p>1. Digital transformations: Implementation of digital library management systems, artificial intelligence, advanced search tools, and online services to improve accessibility to information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Library Management System • Advanced search tools • Online services to improve the accessibility of information
<p>2. Co-creation spaces: Design versatile spaces that encourage interaction and collaboration, such as group study rooms, coworking areas, and comfortable reading areas, living makerspaces labs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group study rooms • Collaboration and co-creation areas • Comfortable reading areas • Living labs and makerspaces • Identify online co-creation spaces on platforms managed by libraries
<p>3. Personalised programs and services: Offers services tailored to the needs and context of the community, such as workshops, book clubs, cultural events, and personalised advice in the search for information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing analysis of community needs • The services it provides are differentiating from other public libraries
<p>4. Collaborations and partnerships: Establishing partnerships with local organisations, educational institutions, and businesses to enrich the library's offerings and reach new audiences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic alliances • Collaborative processes • Agreements - Negotiation- Consensus • Open Innovation
<p>5. Digital literacy: Provides training programs to improve users' technological skills and digital literacy, allowing them to make the most of the library's digital resources.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovative training programs • User training coverage
<p>6. Management: Administration of resources and financial management.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding • Achievement of objectives • Indicator management • Human Talent Management • Commercial and marketing strategy • Business model that includes Circular Economy



2 /Promoting effective collaboration and innovation in libraries: managerial guidelines

LibrarIN offers managerial guidelines to encourage effective collaboration in libraries. These guidelines, based on extensive research, are presented as a step-by-step guide (see figure 1). This LibrarIN guide emphasizes collaboration throughout the entire innovation process: from planning and design to implementation and evaluation. It also recognizes the importance of engaging a broad range of stakeholders, including end-users, other libraries, and organizations in the public, private, and non-governmental sectors. To help libraries assess their progress, this guide includes an evaluation section with tools to measure innovation, collaboration, and identify areas for improvement.

The figure below offers a framework that describes the different phases that libraries should consider following to promote this type of activities, then describes the fundamental activities that libraries may follow in each phase.

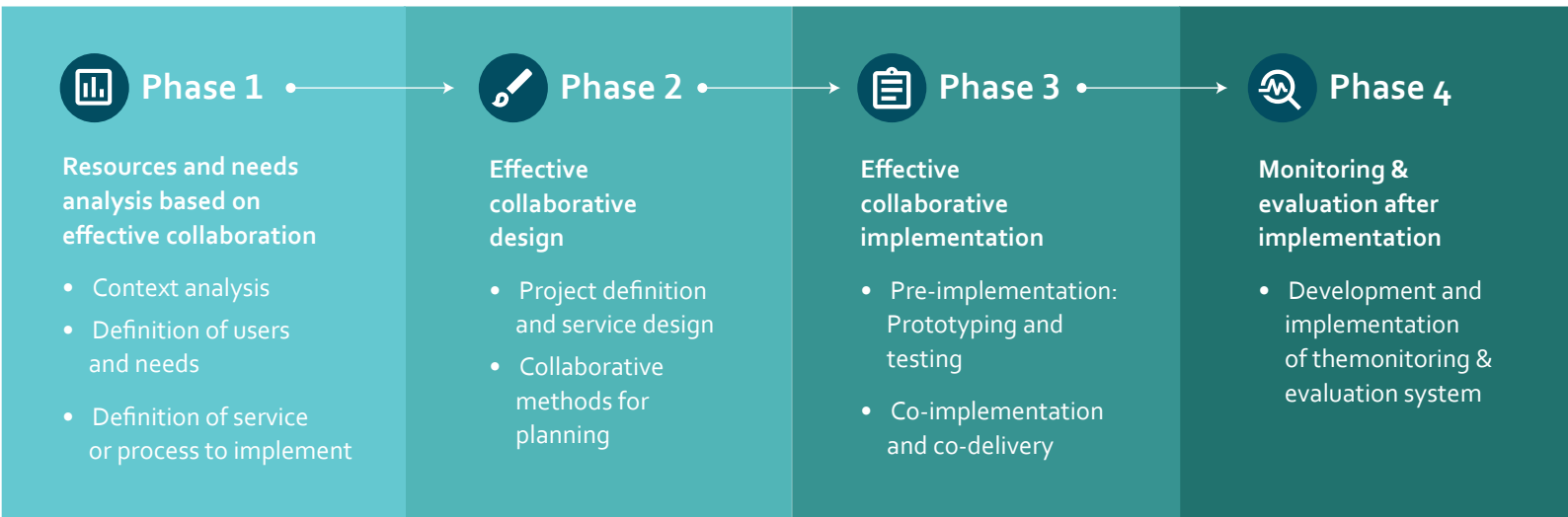
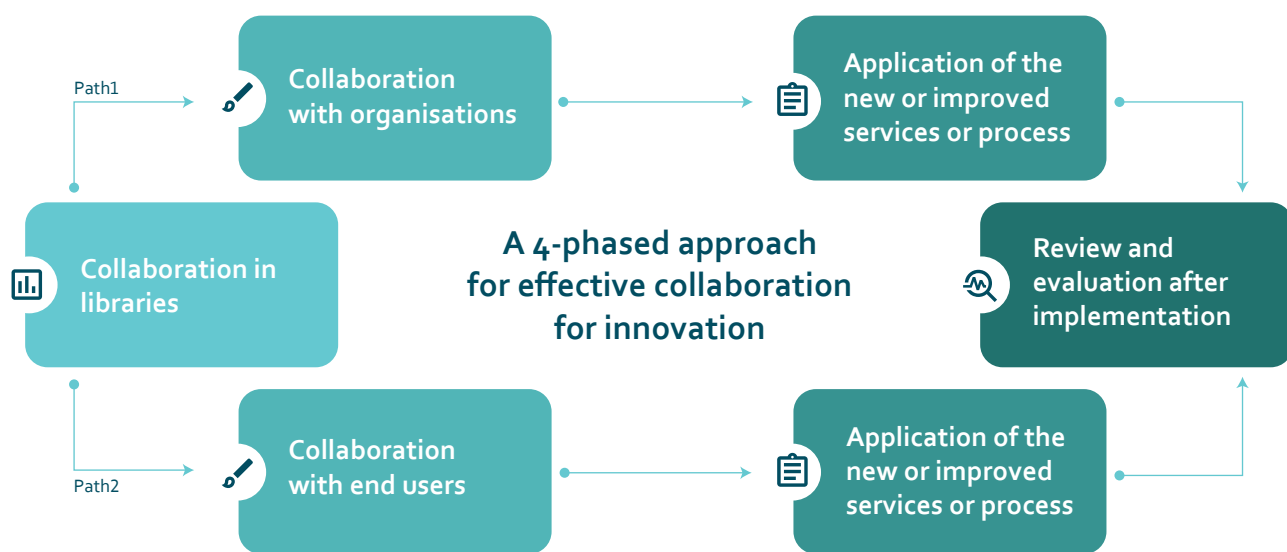


FIGURE 1: managerial recommendations for effective collaboration in libraries. Based on: Arnstein 1969 Atkinson 2019; Parson 2016; Pots et al 2021; Lavoie 2022

2.1 Step-by-step guide for libraries boosting effective collaboration for innovation

In this section, LibrarIN provides a step-by-step guide for innovators in libraries to initiate effective collaboration for library innovation. The guidelines are presented in the shape of a checklist, facilitating its use.



Phase 1

Resources and needs analysis based on effective collaboration

Analysis of the library innovation ecosystem

- ☑ **Context analysis.** Libraries should start with a context analysis covering different aspects of the library innovation ecosystem: i) organisational agents playing a role in the library organizations, current or potential, individual organizations or networks of organizations, and, ii) beneficiaries, users and communities around the library. Analysis may refer to socioeconomic characteristics of individuals, organizations, networks and communities, potential for collaboration with the library, and allocation of existing or future services to potential collaborative engagement.
- ☑ **Library resources.** The own library's resources have to be analysed to assess the availability to undertake collaborative innovation projects. This refers to four key elements: location of the library (urban or rural, downtown or suburb etc.), the possibilities offered by the library building, the available and potential human resources to be engaged, and the level of funding and possible sources of financing for projects (but it is important to note that while some collaborative activities may require additional funding, many successful innovation and co-creation activities in European libraries have been implemented without it).
- ☑ **Compare the library catalogue of activities and services offered.** with a) the new identified needs and services that address innovation gaps b) the innovative services offered by other libraries.

Definition of user needs through collaborative activities

- ☑ **Engage with users through collaborative activities such as focus groups, workshops, and open sessions to understand their needs, challenges and demands.** These activities can facilitate communication between library management and users, with user representatives serving as a crucial link
- ☑ **Identify the library users and stakeholders.** These can vary depending on whether your library is a public, academic or national library, the type of users you want to serve will determine the strategy to follow when planning collaborative activities.
- ☑ **Establish the optimal collaborative strategy to address the specified needs and requirements.** This could involve exploring potential partnerships or associations with other organizations, or investigating collaborative methodologies, including co-design and co-implementation techniques.

Identification of new or improved services or processes

- ✓ **Define the type of service that addresses user needs together with end-users and stakeholders.** Libraries can offer a broad range of services, clarity about the service to be developed will assist in establishing partnerships and selecting representatives of specific user groups.
- ✓ **Identify good collaborative innovation examples in libraries at a national and international level.** these can guide your strategic planning and decision-making.
- ✓ **Propose your collaborative innovation project.** The library management, in collaboration with library user representatives, should make a sound proposal for the collaborative project, taking into account its financing, type, collaborative practices objectives, time frame and the role of the library users.



Phase 2

Effective collaborative design

Collaborative methods for planning:

- ✓ **Pinpoint and onboard the key decision-makers within the library.** While active user involvement is crucial for successful collaborative endeavors, library management is ultimately responsible for spearheading and overseeing such projects.
- ✓ **Pinpoint and onboard the staff within the library.** While user and key decision makers are crucial the involvement and motivation of library staff is also crucial.
- ✓ **Engage representatives of user communities:** To guarantee an effective collaboration you need to carefully choose user representatives. If collaboration is being carried out with organisations not directly representing users, you will still need to contact user representatives and include them in the project in this phase. Be mindful of identifying different segments of the user population, including users that are usually marginalised or overlooked.
- ✓ **Set-up the collaborative digital tools to be used in the design of the library innovation.** As argued in the LibrarIN policy brief Reimagine Libraries: Sparking Collaboration for Innovation to Tackle Libraries' 21st Century Challenges, information technologies and digital transformation play a determining role in collaboration and innovation in libraries.

Project definition and service design

- ✓ Define the objectives, goals, limitations and expected impact of the collaborative innovation project. The collaboration should be planned and written in a proposal that establishes its practical implications, considering the time and resources that its implementation will imply.
- ✓ Gain approval for your collaborative innovation proposal. Complete and submit your collaboration for library innovation project proposal after establishing the necessary groundwork.
- ✓ Design and frame your new service. This is the real design exercise that is established in this key phase of the innovation cycle.

Project indicators and counterfactuals

- ✓ Indicators and metrics. The project design phase should include a definition of the metrics that will allow following and monitor the innovation and projects
- ✓ Counterfactuals. when needed and possible, the establishment of ex-ante evaluations and control groups is required



Phase 3

Effective collaborative implementation

Pre-implementation: Prototyping and testing

- ☑ **Prototype and test innovations with collaborative methodologies.** Use methodologies like prototyping, randomised controlled trials, and pre-implementation testing to test and refine innovations throughout the project lifecycle and ensure effective collaboration
- ☑ **Validate and collect feedback.** Testing the prototype with users or key stakeholders is essential to gain feedback and identify areas for improvement, along with any unforeseen errors or limitations. This validation process ensures alignment with actual needs and expectations before progressing to a more advanced or final version.
- ☑ **Marketing of new services or processes.** Effectively promoting new library services or processes is essential for user adoption and engagement. Libraries should develop a comprehensive co-marketing strategy that includes clear communication and implication with stakeholders to the dissemination of the value and benefits of the innovation. Utilize multiple channels such as social media, library newsletters, in-person events, and community outreach to reach diverse audiences.
- ☑ **Identify areas for staff improvement and implement its training:** Assess the skills and knowledge gaps among library staff that may impact the successful adoption of the innovation. Conduct training needs assessments and develop tailored programs to equip staff with the necessary competencies. This may include workshops, hands-on training sessions, or access to online learning resources.

Co-Implementation and co-delivery

- ☑ **Implement and deliver your project following the previous steps and consider changes from the prototyping exercise.** It refers to the application of the service or process after the last inputs received.
- ☑ **Co-implementation can be achieved through both implicit and explicit user interaction.** Implicit co-implementation occurs naturally as a result of service delivery, while explicit co-implementation relies on voluntary ad hoc user interventions.²⁴



Phase 4

Monitoring & Evaluation after implementation

- ☑ **Consider collaborating with or employing external organizations to contribute their expertise to the design and implementation of the evaluation process.** For instance, an external expert could be engaged to offer impartial advice as needed.
- ☑ **Develop a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system for the library.** Where possible, align the M&E system with existing metrics used by national or international organizations or associations. The metrics developed by the LibrarIN project should also be considered a valuable resource.
- ☑ **Improve the metrics and indicators established in the co-design process.** These are essential for effective evaluation and monitoring, enabling the tracking of collaboration progress and identification of areas for improvement. It is crucial to determine the optimal timing for introducing or refining specific indicators.
- ☑ **Perform the M&E system and deliver the results as needed.**

²⁴ Osborne, Stephen P., Madeline Powell, Tie Cui, Kirsty Strokosch. "Value Creation in the Public Service Ecosystem: An Integrative Framework," Public Admin Rev, 82: 634-645, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13474>.



3.

/Policy implications



The guidelines for collaborative innovation in libraries carry significant policy implications. While the broader ecosystem-oriented strategies outlined in the LibrarIN policy brief 1 remain vital, a sharper focus on the specific needs of individual libraries ensuring their position as cornerstones of European democracies, allows for a more tailored approach. This refined perspective emphasises three fundamental interdependent areas requiring policy support:

- 1 **Promotion of library service management models and related tools.**
- 2 **Development of service knowledge, organisational capacities, and staff training.**
- 3 **Advancing European shared values through libraries.**

3.1 *Policy Recommendations*

LibrarIN recommends policymakers on national and European level to:

- 1 **Empower Libraries as Hubs of Collaborative Innovation**

Support libraries in becoming centres of innovation by providing funding and resources to develop new service models in different areas such as health, social issues, culture and art, entrepreneurship, welfare among others. Equip library leaders with the tools and skills to design and implement services that promote social innovation and community collaboration. Prioritise initiatives that leverage cutting-edge technologies like AI and digitalization to address societal needs. Establish systems for ongoing monitoring and evaluation to ensure the success and scalability of these innovations.
- 2 **Invest in Skills to Drive Library Transformation**

Champion continuous learning for librarians and library staff to ensure they are equipped for modern challenges. Focus on developing digital literacy, co-creation skills, project management skills and social innovation expertise. Extend training opportunities to engaged community members, fostering stronger partnerships and ensuring effective collaboration in library-led initiatives. Empower libraries to adapt and thrive in an era of rapid change while enhancing their capacity to serve diverse populations. Library staff should be trained on a co-creative approach of the library services to improve effective collaboration and transform libraries in Europe.
- 3 **Position Libraries as Champions of European Values**

Recognize European libraries as ideal spaces to address issues such as social inclusion, vulnerable communities, democracy, digital responsibility, environment and climate change, culture, ethics and other European values. The new generation of libraries aim to be meeting places for people in the community to address societal needs. Such a meeting place must be open to everyone and should facilitate dialogue between people of different cultures, beliefs and places of origin, so that libraries can be a space for the promotion of European shared values.

In line with the mandate of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Group of Member States' experts on "Building bridges: strengthen the multiple roles of libraries as gateways to and transmitters of cultural works, skills and European values".²⁵

3.2 A Policy Menu for Collaborative Innovation in Libraries

Building on the areas outlined above, Table 4 provides a comprehensive policy menu combining innovation ecosystem-level strategies with targeted managerial recommendations for individual libraries

Policy dimensions for library ecosystems (brief 1)	Guidelines oriented at individual libraries (brief 2)		
	Library service management models, technology and M&E	Service knowledge, capacity building and skills and training	Shared European democratic, social inclusion and ethical values
New or improved services in specific services areas (education, reading, community services, etc)	A	B	C
Thematic policies related to technology, living labs and social networks	D	E	F
Cross-cutting co-creation policy areas Collaborative frames & strategies, participatory tools, organizational support benchmarking)	G	H	I
Specific R&D and innovation policies for libraries	J	K	L

When collaborative innovation strategies for libraries are aligned with their unique position as inclusive spaces for societal transformation, policymakers can create true ecosystems that drive social innovation for libraries and promote European values. The LibrarIN recommendations provide a clear roadmap for action to ensure the role of libraries as centres of knowledge, community, and innovation. A few examples on how to use the LibrarIN policy menu:

A digital literacy program

for librarians in generic terms (not oriented to a particular service):

D E

An artificial intelligence services-related innovation program

under a matching grant scheme:

D J possibly others

Funding a new living lab

oriented to social inclusion and community services:

A D and likely in G B

An EU contact point in the library:

would be placed under box

I although C F L could also be engaged.

²⁵ Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Group of Member States' experts on Building bridges: strengthen the multiple roles of libraries as gateways to and transmitters of cultural works, skills and European values: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14250-2023-INIT/en/pdf>.



Annex 1:

Examples and recommendations from the LibrarIN community

Following feedback from the LibrarIN community, we asked a few library professionals and collaboration experts in the field of libraries for their examples and recommendations, these examples serve as an illustration to the guidelines and policy recommendations provided in the previous section.

Collaboration for innovation examples from Finland, the Netherlands and Portugal.

Library practitioners from the LibrarIN stakeholder panel and the project's wider network contributed to this chapter, providing examples of effective collaboration for innovation.

- ① Oodi Helsinki Central Library | Finland
- ② Oeiras Municipal Library Network | Portugal
- ③ Digital Humanities | Netherlands





Image: Vadim Morozov at Unplash

1 *New trends in library management: the case of self-management in the Oodi library in Helsinki*

By Robert Seitovirta, Unit Media Culture,
Oodi Helsinki Central Library

The Central Library Oodi in Helsinki thrives on a management culture called Community self-management. The idea originated in 2017-18, when several workshops were held with the staff of Oodi to determine the working methods and culture for the new central library. In short, the most valued aspect was psychological safety at work and the foundation for this was laid by applying community self-management. Zero-hierarchy and community self-management at the workplace are essential for pursuing functioning citizen involvement and partnerships.

In Oodi we believe that everybody has the right to wellbeing at work. Our aim is to produce and uphold a working environment where people really thrive and want to come to. Since the opening of Oodi in 2018 several workshops have been held to determine common values and working methods as well as to improve the concept of community self-management. It is important to notice that this is an on-going process. Everyone is responsible for upholding a commonly determined work-culture.

If the aim is to involve surrounding communities, community self-management can be seen as a prerequisite. Only when the working environment guarantees and fosters a working culture that includes community self-management, a real involvement of the public is possible. Beyond this, noticeable benefits of community self-management include creating a safe work environment for everybody and allowing a boost of self-confidence for staff members, because they get to make the decisions. This all leads to more democratic decision-making and inclusion.



2 The Oeiras Municipal Library Network: the tension between tradition and innovation in the adoption of new management methods.

**By Filipe Leal,
Oeiras Municipality**

Oeiras (near Lisbon) is one of the most developed Portuguese cities, managing to maintain a virtuous balance between economic growth, social cohesion and environmental quality. It is characterized by strong business dynamics (linked to technology and innovation). It has the most qualified population and the highest standard of living in the country. Despite this, the Municipality of Oeiras is a strongly hierarchical organization, with a charismatic Mayor, with a bureaucratic culture, and little overture to citizen participation.

The Oeiras Municipal Library Network (BMO) is made up of three libraries (Algés, Carnaxide, Oeiras). The BMO focus on the communities they serve, seeking citizen involvement, are proactive and innovative. Over the years, they have been pioneers in adopting new management methods. In 2019, they advanced with the application of design thinking to redesign the spaces of the Algés Municipal Library. The seven work sessions took place between January and March, involving a diverse group of people (political decision-makers, library managers and technicians, managers and technicians from other municipal services, inclusion. also library users). This process was driven by an external entity, with experience in using design thinking in public services.

Some lessons learned. The practical application of the methodology came to demonstrate its high potential as an innovation tool in libraries. The process reinforced a feeling of teamwork among participants and an awareness of the change process. Reinforcing the dynamics of interaction with users made it possible to identify unknown perceptions and expectations. The result obtained from the process was applied to the redesign of the spaces of the Algés Municipal Library. However, as a final note, we emphasize that this was a unique experience that did not continue, the BMO quickly returned to more traditional and safer approaches.



3 *Living Lab Digital Humanities at the Utrecht University*

By Arja Firet, Digital Humanities Workspace,
Utrecht University

During the last decades, the Utrecht University Library (founded in 1584) turned into a modern research library. Beyond her traditional library activities, the UUL simultaneously acts as a 'data company' enabling millions of downloads from knowledge bases and data repositories. Since the digitisation of primary sources, Digital Humanities (DH) has become an increasingly relevant topic for our library, as large digital collections offer novel ways of conducting research for humanities scholars. Digital literacy is essential nowadays: it offers the possibility of answering new research questions using digital sources and computational techniques, but it is also crucial for being able to value research in one's discipline and to reflect critically on the effects of digitisation in a society increasingly shaped by data and algorithms. The rise of Digital Humanities clearly made our library realise that new activities, different expertise, and another relationship with our research community was required. Hosting the international DH2019 conference in Utrecht marked a turning point: it came to us that more formal structures and collaboration in this field could help us to improve research and education support in this digital age. In 2020, the faculty officially launched the 'Centre for Digital Humanities' and the library decided to create a 'Digital Humanities Team'. What started as a simple collaboration between library and faculty on DH support, gradually blossomed into a close and equal partnership and to a mutual co-creation process of new services and support. First, we created in 2020 a physical location in the library where researchers could meet, collaborate, or exchange DH knowledge. This Living Lab Digital Humanities (later: DH Workspace) had a flexible setup and advanced technical equipment.

Here, researchers, teachers and students of the faculty, and DH support staff from both the CDH and UUL, can meet each other for workshops, lectures, seminars, hybrid events and the free weekly DH Walk-in hours. Soon after, we decided also to launch a website with all our combined DH services and support. This further collaboration between our parties made it easier for UU scientists and students to find all DH services in one place and request DH support without having to navigate through multiple UU websites. From September 2024, the DH Team and the CDH also managed to include 'digital literacy' as an intended learning outcome in all bachelor programmes of Humanities students. This, to enrich their digital competencies and to foster their ability to an ethical and critical approach to Digital Humanities. In determining the location for the Living Lab DH, the library was an obvious choice. First for practical reasons: the library is always open to the public, the DH and other library professionals are almost always present to give advice and support, and the collections of the library form the basis for all research. With that, the value of the UU library lies in the specific knowledge she offers to the larger UU community in the field, having a large expertise in for example Open Science, FAIR (meta)data, digitisation, or education of (digital) information literacy skills. Finally, the Living Lab DH not only strengthens the library as an, already, central and neutral meeting place for sharing knowledge that is open to a broad academic community, but it also reinforces the connection and collaboration with the other parties of the faculty that support Digital Humanities.

In our opinion, three important factors made the collaboration between the library and the faculty a success. First of all, both parties had a clear common interest. Providing DH support meets a real need, and we realised that by joining forces we would be able to improve it drastically. Thanks to our collaboration we now have blended expertise from a transdisciplinary team, complementing one and another. The DH support team consists of both academic researchers, research software developers, IT specialists, data specialists, statisticians as library staff. And if necessary, we can fall back on a national network of DH specialists. Finally, the creation of a hybrid Living Lab DH in the UU library has significantly contributed to the success. What started as a practical, physical space, now has become a place for community building that encourages connection, collaboration and experimentation. It gradually has become a DH knowledge hub that cultivates co-creation and co-innovation.

Expert recommendations on boosting collaboration for innovation in libraries

Expert insights on engagement and innovation from **Susana Silvestre of Boost your Thinking** and **João Guerreiro, librarian, trainer and cultural manager**, are detailed below.



Susana Silvestre

Boost your Thinking



João Guerreiro

Librarian, trainer and cultural manager

Tips for Library Managers to boost Community Engagement

Creating inclusive spaces:

Public libraries play a unique role in fostering environments where all citizens feel safe, respected and valued. To achieve this, managers must prioritize accessibility in both the physical and temporal dimensions. For example, planning activities that promote dialogue, interaction, and the exchange of experiences among citizens, after normal working hours or on weekends, ensures broader participation, especially for working individuals or parents.

Community mapping:

A successful participatory process begins with identifying community leaders or representatives from local associations, schools, local businesses, religious institutions, community groups and informal networks (e.g. street art youth). So it is necessary to schedule meetings to listen to their needs, aspirations, dreams and ideas for language, cultural preferences, ideas, dreams, creating opportunities for partnership. This not only strengthens engagement, but also positions libraries as hubs of local connectivity.

Effective communication strategies:

the proximity of libraries to their communities makes them ideal channels for promoting participatory initiatives. Managers should take advantage of cultural, sporting and social events in the community to reach out to diverse audiences, including underrepresented groups. Partnering with neighborhood associations, schools, and other community organizations increases reach and credibility.

Incorporation of training activities:

To enrich and expand the scope of co-creation, innovation and citizen engagement, libraries should consider organizing training activities throughout the participatory process. They can address specific skills or knowledge gaps identified during the project, empowering teams and participants to contribute more effectively. For example, as seen in the Lisbon Public Library Network's citizen lab, participants without carpentry skills were trained by a retired community carpenter. Such initiatives not only support the project objectives, but also promote individual and collective learning.

Incorporate reflection and learning:

reflection must be integrated into all stages of participatory processes to ensure continuous improvement, so it is necessary to ask for feedback from participants, through questionnaires, interviews or testimonies, which will allow, on the one hand, to have objective evidence of the work carried out in partnership, on the other hand, to assess the level of involvement of participation.

Transparency.

It is essential to communicate clearly with citizens; to share with the community which projects can and cannot be developed. Participation is a process, and the library also needs time to learn how to become a library of participation. Similarly, it is important to recognize that libraries—depending on their type, administrative dependency, or the scope of their work—may have “barrier values” (Guerreiro, 2017), i.e. limits they cannot or should not exceed.

Tips for Library Managers to Accelerate Innovation

Selecting appropriate methodologies:

Library managers must be equipped to identify and implement participatory dynamics that align with the unique characteristics of their community. Methods such as Design Thinking, World Cafes, Citizen Labs and Lego Serious Play promote dialogue, problem solving and co-creation in collaborative Environments.

Leveraging local expertise:

Innovation often thrives at the intersection of knowledge and practice. Managers should identify and involve local experts—whether formal (shop owners (pharmacies, gyms), association presidents, parish council presidents) or informal (Roma elders, street artists)—to co-create solutions that are both practical and contextually relevant.

Balancing tradition with innovation:

Libraries should act as laboratories for experimentation, combining traditional services with co-creation and prototyping approaches. For example, integrating citizen science or prototyping initiatives into library programs allows for testing new ideas, products, and services while maintaining core library functions.

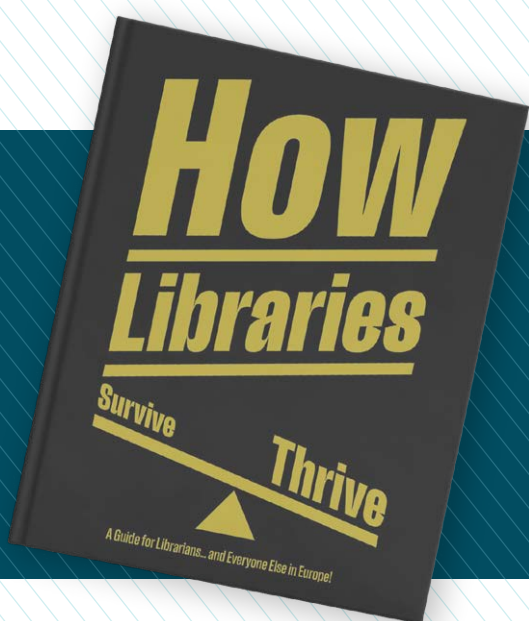
Promote lifelong learning:

Libraries should aim to incorporate learning opportunities into innovative projects. This approach not only improves project outcomes but also empowers participants with new skills and knowledge.

Consider the needs of the community.

Focus on useful projects rather than large-scale ones. The usefulness of a project can be identified through direct contact with the public, either through a simple conversation or by using participation methods. Additionally, it is worth considering that libraries are spaces for socialization where Heinz Edmunds' concept of the third interest can emerge: an interest unknown to the user that is discovered through exposure to a new reality or circumstance.

Recommended reading material



- How Libraries Survive Thrive (published September 2024)
- Espacio compartido: modelo de relación biblioteca-comunidad basado en la participación ciudadana y en la teoría de los stakeholders

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