



Global Research Library 2020 (GRL 2020) is an initiative of the University of Washington Libraries and Microsoft Corporation to bring together global leaders from different sectors to shape a roadmap for research libraries for the decades ahead.

A 2020 VISION FOR GLOBAL RESEARCH LIBRARIES

The inaugural GRL2020 workshop held in Woodinville, Washington USA on September 30 through 2 October, 2007, drew experts from around the globe – including Europe, China, India, Japan, Canada, Australia and the United States.

Setting the scene for the discussion, Betsy Wilson, Dean of University Libraries, University of Washington, and Tony Hey, Corporate Vice President for Technical Computing at Microsoft, described the changing landscape for libraries thus:

“The rapid dissemination of findings, the creation of new tools and platforms for information manipulation, and open access to research data have rendered the traditional institution-based approaches to providing access to information inadequate. In order for research libraries to play a central role in this increasingly multi-institutional and cross-sector environment, we must find new approaches for how they operate and add value to research and discovery on a global basis.”

The 'framing discussions' at the outset of the workshop focused on a wide array of issues related to understanding and managing the output of global research. Many global problems - climate change, world-wide health threats, and international economic issues - require support for the research enterprise that transcends political boundaries, and demands new infrastructure and cooperative frameworks. Participants largely agreed on various core value propositions for the Global Research Library:

- Innovation and knowledge creation rely on sustained availability of information (information drives discovery).
- The creation of public value is central to the mission of GRLs.
- Selection, sharing, and sustainability are longstanding components of library missions, and remain so as library assets transition from paper to digital formats.
- Long-term curation of content is critical, and requires focused effort in the development of systems and standards to support them in the long digital future ahead.

It was widely acknowledged in the GRL2020 discussions that the global research library of the future will be an interoperable network of services, resources, and expertise designed to facilitate the process of research and the selecting, sharing, and sustaining of the outputs of research.

Participants agreed that overlapping infrastructures must be integrated and managed within policy frameworks by staff with appropriate skills now uncommon in the field. Infrastructure was broadly interpreted to include telecommunications, protocol standards, computing, electronic publishing, repositories, discovery and delivery services, and instructional services necessary to support rapidly changing skills that support these technologies. To the extent that common, interoperable components of such infrastructure can be agreed upon and shared, costs of various dimensions of the enterprise can be reduced and efficiencies increased.

The growing worldwide trend towards Open Access is an example of a kind of social interoperability that earned attention from the group. While acknowledging that this issue is dealt with more effectively by others, the importance of changes to the business models of scholarly publication and research is recognised as a key to improving the effectiveness of research and learning in the developing world.

The Web has reduced separation among communities, and research libraries need to exploit these trends by creating collaborative environments where public, private, and governmental agencies may find common purpose and mutual benefit. Microsoft Corporation's generous support of the University of Washington's leadership of this meeting is an example worthy of elaboration.

The GRL2020 group outlined critical impediments that must be addressed if the vision of the global research library of the future is to be realised:

- Funding for research and learning is fragmented and suffers from steep disparities globally
- Intellectual property and copyright constraints increase friction in the information supply chain
- Complexity of the stakeholder environment impairs interoperability and information flow
- Cross-sector tensions and proprietary perspectives dilute resources and leadership
- Infrastructure deficiencies, especially in developing countries, limit the scope and effectiveness of recognised solutions
- Economic and technological sustainability are problems at all levels
- Skills appropriate to the 21st century information world are scarce in a 20th century workforce

Disparate political, economic and cultural environments often confound collaboration so the GRL2020 participants focused on identifying areas where collective leadership could have the greatest impact. They agreed that an important first step would include an advocacy document to help create a unified, coherent voice in support of the global research library. This work is already underway among a group of participants in follow-up to the workshop.



“Research libraries have a central role to play in the radical transformation taking place in research, scholarship, science and discovery. By bringing together this remarkable group of people for several days of intense dialogue, we have generated new ideas, energy, and momentum in the essential work of shaping the future direction of libraries in what will necessarily be a global and cross-sector information environment.”
Betsy Wilson, Dean of University Libraries, University of Washington