



**Positioning Librarians as Media Literacy Advocates and Providers in California Libraries**

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## **Abstract**

Libraries have an important role as information stewards and are uniquely positioned to educate teens in how to find credible information in an age where information, credible or not, is easily found online. We believe the ability to effectively use resources to find, evaluate, and communicate information, is a critical skill. Studies show teens are especially vulnerable to untrustworthy sources of information. We want to create a framework for libraries to get teens and young adults to see the library as a safe and reliable place to find accurate information, regardless of their access to technology and social media, aka the digital divide. The impacts of social media percolate through society as fake news, conspiracy theories and the like move beyond the internet and into the mainstream. For teens who live in online social media environments, this education is particularly important so they can distinguish the facts amidst a prolific amount of fiction. We believe these skills will help teens build confidence in their ability to find information and make up their own minds.

## **Introduction**

With the current abundance of information available to teens, it is especially important for them to be able to distinguish information that is reliable and credible from information that is not. Teens, despite how much time they spend on the internet and on various media platforms, have a shocking inability to tell the difference between information that is true and information that is biased, warped, or completely false. It is crucial that these teens be equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to be able to make these impactful distinctions. Teens are so immersed in social media and online life and they carry what they know into adulthood. It is important to make sure that teens can be responsible consumers and creators of online content so that they can be safe, informed, and productive when using media. By teaching teens these lessons, we will be creating a future generation of media literate adults. Librarians are in a unique position to be able to offer teens, regardless of circumstances, resources and training that can help them gain these skills. Libraries are a trusted source for a community and should be a place to gain critical life skills, including media literacy. Librarians have a responsibility to their patrons to not only provide them with reliable information, but to provide them with the skills and the confidence to analyze information and make their own decisions.

## **Definitions**

The recent elections and the role social media played in spreading information sparked new discussions on the importance of information literacy. Since 1974, the phrase information literacy has focused on the techniques and skills used to construct information solutions to answer questions and solve problems (Schroth, 2020). Since then, the definition of information literacy has been expanded to include the need to recognize when information is needed, the ability to locate, evaluate, and effectively use the information (Georges, 2004). The ability to

identify, search and evaluate information is still at the core of information literacy, but the internet and social media platforms and the speed and ease at which the information is spread and shared has added an ethical component.

While information literacy has always been a staple of research in relation to quality information and reliable resources, the internet and social media have made it difficult to distinguish between facts and opinions in a sea of information that is accessible 24 hours a day. It is not possible to filter results on Facebook and Instagram for “peer reviewed” or “academic resources,” yet it is this type of tool or skill individuals need to pick the information they are going to believe and share.

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.”

Digital citizenship encompasses more than educational research, news and current events by addressing how users find and share information. Social media has created avenues for local social movements to create an impact nationally and internationally. As tweets, images, messages, and videos spread information instantly and unchecked, the consequences can be positive and negative. The potential impact of even a single user in the digital domain highlights the importance of learning and teaching effective digital behavior and ethics. (Issitt, 2018). Digital citizenship can be defined as the norms and rules of behavior for persons using digital technology in commerce, political activism, and social communication. A person's digital citizenship begins when they engage with the digital domain, for instance, by beginning to use a

smartphone or e-mail. However, digital citizenship exists on a spectrum based on an individual's level of digital literacy. This can be defined as their familiarity with the skills and behaviors commonly used to communicate and conduct commerce with digital tools (Issitt, 2018).

As we attempt to position libraries as providers of information literacy in the new media age, it is important to define exactly what these terms mean and how the meanings differ depending on who is using them. Educational theorist Marc Prensky suggested that the modern human population can be divided into two groups - digital natives and digital immigrants (Issitt, 2018). Digital natives were raised in the era of digital technology, while digital immigrants were born before the digital age or have limited access to technology (Issitt, 2018). As devices and access to digital technology have become more accessible and prevalent in our lives, educators and social scientists believe that teaching children and adults to use digital technology safely and ethically is among the most important goals facing modern society (Issitt, 2018).

### **Background**

With the abundance of information that is available to people of all ages, it is especially important to be able to identify which information is credible and which is not. Teens and young adults, especially, are bombarded with shared posts of untrustworthy information and it is up to them to decipher if it is to be believed. Jamshid Beheshti found, in his 2012 study, that 60 percent of 13-17 year olds have a social media profile and 62 percent of teens use the internet to find news and information. Despite how much time and attention teens give to the internet and social media, they are relatively unable to distinguish credible information from false information. Many children do not know where to start when attempting to weed out information from unreliable sources or information with a motive that sways their information. "Children encounter problems in selecting appropriate search terms, move too quickly through the web

pages while spending little time reading the materials, and have difficulty judging the relevance of the retrieved pages” (Beheshti, 2012). These difficulties continue to occur as children move into middle school and high school.

Media literacy “is essential in this current environment when you have so many people who absolutely reject credible sources of information and believe anything they see on the internet” (Simonton, 2017). Stanford conducted a study in 2016 where students were asked to evaluate two Facebook posts announcing Donald Trump's candidacy for president. One was from the verified Fox News account and the other was from an account that looked like Fox News. Only a quarter of the students recognized and explained the significance of the blue checkmark, which indicated that one of the accounts was verified while the other was not. Over 30 percent of students argued that the fake account was more trustworthy because of some key graphic elements that it included. Clearly, based on this study, teens have a difficult time identifying the indicators that mark websites, articles, and online information as credible or not. “To identify fake news stories, it is crucial that individuals are equipped with the skills and competencies to sustain and update their access to rapidly changing information systems” (Jones-Jang, Mortensen & Liu, 2021). Media literacy and digital life skills are always changing and evolving. It is important that teens are taught often and frequently the skills needed to identify false information.

Understanding media literacy is beneficial to teens and will help them to become media and digitally literate adults. By teaching teens that not all information on the internet is good information and showing them how to tell which is which, they can be confident that they are not being deceived. “Fake stories lurk in every corner of the internet, equipping digital users with the skillset needed to discern facts from falsehoods is gaining relevance” (Jones-Jang, Mortensen, &

Liu, 2021). Teens do not want to be tricked when it comes to the information they are receiving. A big part of teaching media literacy is showing teens that they are not as capable of identifying fake news as they think they are. Once teens discover that they are being lied to, they will be more inclined to fix the problem and learn more about what they can do to avoid being deceived. Learning media literacy helps kids to think critically, become smart consumers of products and information, create media responsibly, and understand an author's goal. Beheshti defines being information and media literate as having the ability to inquire, think critically and gain knowledge, being able to draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply knowledge to new situations and create new knowledge, being able to share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of our democratic society, and choosing to pursue personal and aesthetic growth (2012). All of these things can be accomplished when a teen is information and media literate.

Media and information literate teens become media and information literate adults. Studies have shown that “information literacy instruction led to a significant increase in readiness for self-directed learning and readiness to overcome deterrents,” like disorganized and rapidly changing digital sources (Seifi et. al 2020, p. 259). People can more effectively use and communicate information when they are able to critically analyze and evaluate information resources for biases and context. Media literate individuals are not only more likely to be able to identify fake news, but are also better able to navigate and locate credible, reliable information resources (Jones-Jang et. al 2021, p. 382). Essentially, teaching information and media literacy has a wide range of positive effects which empowers people to learn and evaluate data to make more informed decisions in their own lives. This skillset is more than just an academic tool;



media literacy can positively and meaningfully influence a person's civic engagement, career, and personal life.

### **Current State of Teen Media Literacy Education and Resources in California In California Public Libraries**

In order to determine the availability of media literacy resources and educational materials offered by public libraries, we started by examining a sampling of the websites of the 186 public library systems in the state of California. Virtually all of the websites we visited offered links and pages to research focused resources, such as databases. However, of the 50 sampled, only 4 contained any mention of media literacy. These mentions included a list of fact-checking websites, a zoom news literacy event, and an "Information Savvy Challenge". An examination of a sampling of the social media pages of California libraries also showed little, if any, mention of media literacy, especially in regards to teens.

Our research did reveal a handful of media literacy initiatives previously undertaken in several California public libraries. The San Diego Public Library was one of five libraries that participated in the ALA's Media Literacy@Your Library Program in 2017/2018. The program was targeted toward adults and consisted of events featuring panel discussions on representation in the news and the challenges of underrepresented groups working in media. Currently, there is no mention of this program or media literacy on the San Diego Public Library's website. The Pacific Library Partnership, which consists of 4 library systems (42 total libraries) in Northern California, created a robust and comprehensive news literacy toolkit in 2018/2019. The toolkit was not specifically aimed at teens, but did offer a robust variety of resources and lessons in news literacy. A scan of the websites of the libraries in the Pacific Library Partnership found no evidence of or links to this toolkit.

The ALA is currently offering a program called Media Literacy Education in Libraries for Adult Audiences. This program provides resources, instruction and webinars aimed at helping library employees to incorporate media literacy into their interactions with adult patrons. The Practitioner's Guide "contains information, program ideas and conversation starters on topics like misinformation and disinformation; architecture of the internet; civics; media landscape and economics; and media creation and engagement" (Sostman, 2020). The 30-page guide also explores ways to "meet patrons where they are by integrating media literacy into reference interactions and existing programs" (2020). The ALA webpage for this program does provide a handful of resources aimed at teens and children, but the focus of the program is clearly adults. It is readily apparent from our research that California libraries and the ALA are making efforts to address media literacy. However, these efforts have been sporadic and short-lived, and are not targeted toward teens.

### **In California Schools**

In California, as well as the vast majority of other states, the approach to media literacy education to date has been inconsistent at best. Currently, there is no federal requirement for media literacy education in schools, nor is there any requirement in the state of California. In 2017, Senator Bill Dodd (D-Napa) introduced SB 830, which would have required that media literacy education be incorporated into school curriculum. Due to lack of funding, the revised bill that was eventually passed in 2018 only requires that the California Department of Education provide a list of resources and instructional materials on media literacy on its website.

Nationally, only 14 states have passed legislation addressing the need for media literacy education in schools. However, much of this legislation is lacking concrete curriculum requirements. For example, "New Mexico advises middle and high schools offer a media literacy

elective” and the state of Colorado “created an advisory council for media literacy within the Department of Education”. Not even half of the United States consider media literacy important enough to even mention it in their plans for education.

Media literacy skills, in California and elsewhere, have typically been incorporated into the curriculum of other subjects, rather than being taught as a stand alone unit. For example, the state’s content standard for English Language Arts references media literacy; specifically, in grades 9-12, students are required to evaluate the credibility and accuracy of information presented by various media sources. Additionally, The California Model School Library Standards, adopted by the SBE in 2011, incorporates “information literacy” skills, in which students “learn to access, evaluate, use, and integrate information and ideas found in print, media, and digital resources.” The curriculum includes standards that require students to assess the credibility, authority, and accuracy of resources and consider the need for additional information.

### **Existing Media Literacy Curriculum**

There are currently dozens of organizations and higher education institutions that offer media literacy resources and curricula. Many of these programs include resources for educators, students and parents. For example, Common Sense Media provides a comprehensive digital citizenship curriculum with free lesson plans for K-12 on subjects such as privacy & security, digital footprint, cyberbullying, as well as news & media literacy. The Stanford History Education Group offers a program called COR: Civic Online Reasoning. This program provides resources and lessons to educators which are more focused on media and news literacy. All of the COR lessons seek to help students answer the following questions when evaluating news and media: 1. Who’s behind the information? 2. What’s the evidence? 3. What do other sources say?

## **Equity**

Issues of equity arise alongside media literacy concerns. Even those who are impacted by the digital divide, the gap between those who have access to computers and the internet and those who do not, are still in need of media literacy education. The digital divide is the inequality of access to digital technology and platforms that can be based on socio-economic disparities, or issues involving gender and race that affect connectivity and access to technology and media platforms; “research provides sufficient evidence of a digital divide based on gender, ethnicity, and SES” (Ritzhaupt, Liu, Dawson & Barron, 2013). In spite of the seeming ubiquity of mobile devices, “a small percent of the population struggles financially with obtaining and maintaining these devices” (Huffman, Shaw & Loyless, 2019). Fake news and misinformation spreads throughout society whether it's in the form of a social media post or by word of mouth from one student to another at school. In this way, those that do not have access to technology at home can still be affected in the same way as those that do by misinformation. Those affected by the digital divide also need media literacy education so that they can make up their own minds with respect to the information they hear, even second or third hand.

We hope to improve the equity of media literacy education by meeting teens (14-19) where they are and providing a toolkit of educational resources for schools and libraries to enhance student learning. By providing these resources to teens at a public institution, in this case the library, we will be reaching those teens in our audience range who have graduated or otherwise stopped attending school and those that may not have access to technology at home.

## **Connecting California Libraries and Media Literacy**

Libraries continue to be a trusted source for finding credible and reliable information. Historically, libraries have provided services that offer credible information and encourage

lifelong learning. Promoting information and media literacy is a natural extension of these services. Library professionals have a duty to their patrons to not only provide them with accurate information, but to provide them with the skills and the confidence to analyze information and make their own decisions.

Right now there are no distinct guidelines for California public libraries regarding information or media literacy. Programs and resources regarding media literacy specifically are created library-to-library and are often addressed extremely minimally. Information literacy is typically taught at a higher level of education, largely in an academic setting. But why should this be the case? As noted by the American Library Association, “libraries help ensure people can access the information they need- regardless of age, education, ethnicity, income, physical limitations or geographic barriers” (American Library Association, 2021). Every person deserves to become information and media literate, and in fact should be, regardless of level of education. These crucial literacy skills should be taught to everyone, not just those who can afford a higher education. Public libraries are unique in that they provide resources for all members of the community, regardless of age. We argue that the people who are most in need of media literacy skills are teenagers, aged 14-19. This group is at an age where they are not only able to retain the skills they are taught, but are also at a key point in their life where they can continue to build upon those skills. Teaching media literacy to teens will help them prepare for the future, no matter what that may look like.

Although library professionals are not necessarily trained educators, libraries should be another resource where teens are able to see the real-world implications of what they are learning in the classroom. Libraries can help bridge the education gaps that currently exist by instructing patrons and providing resources on the topics of information and media literacy. As discussed

previously, there are currently no specific guidelines for California educators regarding information literacy. Libraries have a unique opportunity to provide additional resources to educators and students who really need them. For example, the authors of the Stanford report on media literacy that was conducted in 2017 pointed out “the importance of redeveloping guidelines for users of all ages to learn how to assess credibility on the internet” (Spector, 2017). These guidelines could be created for all California public libraries in order to create a uniform understanding and informal curriculum for young patrons that want to learn more about media literacy and become more adept digital citizens.

Information literacy, and specifically media literacy, is so essential in this day and age. It has become clear recently, particularly in the last few election cycles, that the spread of false information is vast and wide, especially with the ubiquity of the Internet and digital media. Library professionals should be helping their communities to become critical viewers of the media, in order to ensure that patrons have a clear understanding of the information they obtain and to help them develop into responsible users of media.

### **Challenge Statement**

It is very clear that right now, libraries have a unique opportunity to address the media literacy gap. While it is important that everyone is information literate, teenagers aged 14-19 will benefit the most from this education as they are soon to be voters and they can take these skills and apply them to their adult lives. Research has shown that teens are lacking these essential media literacy skills. The Stanford History Education Group conducted several studies on teens and media literacy, and in a study done by the Stanford Graduate School of Education in 2016, researchers found that more than 80% of middle school students could not tell a native ad (with the words “Sponsored content”) from a news story (Donald, 2016). In another study by the

Stanford History Education Group in 2019, 96% of high school students surveyed failed to consider that ties to the fossil fuel industry might affect the credibility of a website about climate change (Spector, 2017). Even though teens lack media literacy skills, their thoughts and opinions are very much shaped by social media and fake news. According to a Pew Study in 2020, 71% 18-29 get news digitally, with 42% getting their news from social media (Shearer & Mitchell, 2021). Even worse, this age group has not fully developed the critical thinking skills they need to evaluate news sources. Studies from the Centers for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance found that teenagers, when making decisions, don't evaluate potential harm, but rather put a higher priority on society, or peer, approval (Sparks, 2021). All of these factors have influenced the following challenge statement: Position the library as an expert and trusted provider of credible information resources (specifically, media literacy) for teens ages 14-19.

### **Recommendations**

We have created a tiered approach to our recommendations. Each recommendation is encompassed within one of three tiers. The tiers are separated by the amount of resources, including funding and staff time, that need to be put in as well as the amount of effort that would be required to accomplish them. In the first tier, which consists of the tasks that are simplest to accomplish, we have placed the media literacy toolkit, media literacy training opportunities for staff, and partnering with local high schools. The second tier consists of a media literacy state library position. The third tier, which is the most ambitious tier, suggests partnering with content providers and social media or technology companies.

#### **Media Literacy Toolkit**

There already exists a wide variety of media and information literacy resources for librarians. We recommend that these resources be pushed out to California public libraries in

order to provide library staff and patrons with reliable sources and a variety of methods to get accurate and trusted information about media literacy and the credibility of news stories and other online content. These resources include games and quizzes, tools that librarians can use to become more adept at media literacy and pushing it out to their patrons, websites that can be provided to patrons that they can use to find the credibility of a source and learn more about media literacy, tips for marketing as well as marketing content that can be shared by public libraries throughout the state.

### *Quizzes*

Quizzes will be an important way for librarians to assess the pre-existing skills of their young patrons. Quizzes are also a good tool for showing youth how little or how much they know about media literacy. They may believe that they know more than they actually do. By creating and distributing a fun and engaging quiz that also teaches important media literacy skills, librarians will be able to find out what further steps need to be taken in order to teach media literacy skills, patrons will be able to discover their own skill level when it comes to media literacy, and patrons will be able to learn more about media literacy in a stimulating and judgment free way. We recommend creating several quizzes which would include topics such as: altered photos, spam emails, social media posts, the author's agenda, biases, what signs point to a credible source, fake news, and facts vs. opinions. The quizzes should begin with a quick pre-survey to assess how the patron feels about their media literacy skills before getting started and end with a quick question about how their skills may have improved or how their results compared to their expectations. Each question should provide instant feedback after an answer is submitted. Teens will need to know if they got the question right, and if not, why they were wrong. In order to most successfully reach the teens, the quizzes need to be engaging. They



should be interactive and they should be formatted as multiple choice tests. They need to include graphics and moving elements in order to make it feel like less of a lesson and more of a game.

■ Examples

- <https://www.brainpop.com/english/studyandreadingskills/medialiteracy/quiz/>
- <https://forms.gle/QoyrHFfGUoz863CE8>
- <https://www.buzzfeed.com/tag/fake-news-quiz>
- <https://www.cbc.ca/kidscbc2/the-feed/fact-or-fake-can-you-tell-the-difference-online>

■ Quizzes should include

- Can you tell the difference between photos that have been altered and those that have not
  - Can you tell if an email is from a reliable source or spam
  - Can you tell if a Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter post is legitimate
  - Would you share this post? Why?
  - What is the author's goal with this post/image?
  - How are these advertisements biased?
  - Why does this source seem credible?
  - Is this article "fake news"?
  - Facts vs opinions
- Quizzes should ask participants before beginning how confident they are in order to gauge how much they are able to learn and show kids that they are not as media/information literate as they thought they were

- Quizzes should explain why the answers given are correct or incorrect
- Quizzes should be engaging, multiple choice or interactive, and include pictures and media examples
- Free resources for making your own quiz
  - Quiz-maker.com
  - Google forms

### ***Media Literacy Websites***

There are many websites that have very helpful information in regards to media literacy. These websites can be used by librarians in order to gain a better understanding of media literacy and how to implement media literacy education in the library. The websites include topics such as: fake news, news literacy, what media literacy is, and the importance of media literacy. The websites include guidance for librarians about how to set up media literacy programming in their library branch and how to advocate for the need for media literacy education in and outside of schools. Also included is information about the ALA Media Literacy Cohort who work to train librarians to serve the needs of their communities. Many of the websites also include educational curriculum and lessons that librarians can use in their libraries to teach media literacy or to provide as a resource to patrons for patrons to learn at home. Librarians would benefit further with a website created by the California Library Association that provides credible information on how to implement media and information literacy education at the library as well as providing resources that can be shared with patrons such as graphics and websites. This could be a collaborative website that all California librarians can contribute to. Every California library should be implementing some sort of media literacy training for their patrons. By making the

process collaborative, the burden and responsibilities of the task will not be overwhelming to each individual library.

- Recommended media literacy sites/curriculum
  - <https://libguides.tru.ca/fakenews/home>
  - <http://www.ala.org/tools/programming/media-literacy-your-library>
  - <https://www.plpinfo.org/toolkit-content/>
  - <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/ml/>
  - <https://programminglibrarian.org/articles/media-literacy-your-library-learning-and-prototyping-report>
  - <https://www.infodocket.com/2020/12/10/media-literacy-in-the-library-a-guide-for-library-practitioners-new-free-publication-from-ala/>
  - <https://medialiteracynow.org/resources-for-teachers/>
  - <https://www.skanlibrary.org/explore/community-resources/media-literacy-toolkit/>
  - <https://cor.stanford.edu/>
  - A CLA created website

### ***Resources for Patrons***

There also exist many resources that librarians can offer to their communities. Many of these are websites or pre-existing flyers and infographics. These resources can be provided to patrons in the library, on the library's website, or through social media or email communications. Some of the resources that already exist and can be helpful in sorting out true information from false include unbiased news sites, fact checking systems, lessons on digital citizenship, media literacy, and information literacy, video playlists to help navigate digital information, using

technology and social media in a safe and responsible way, and games and quizzes that make learning these important concepts fun. If librarians do not have the time or resources to provide a comprehensive training program for teens age 14-19, they should at least be able to provide reliable and accurate sources for patrons to learn the concepts of information and media literacy on their own at home or in the library.

- Recommended library tools
  - <https://www.allsides.com/unbiased-balanced-news>
  - <https://www.factcheck.org/>
  - <https://www.politifact.com/>
  - <https://www.snopes.com/>
  - <https://www.brainpop.com/technology/digitalcitizenship/medialiteracy/>
  - <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8dPuuaLjXtN07XYqqWSKpPrtNDiCHTzU>
  - <https://www.cybercivics.com/>
  - <https://ca.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/newsandmedialiteracy/>
  - <http://factitious.augamestudio.com/#/>
  - <https://www.newsguardtech.com/>

### ***Marketing***

A big part of providing the media literacy resources and training for patrons is to advertise that they are available. No one can use the library's resources if they do not know that they exist. That's why it will be important to advertise these library services. One way to reach the intended audience of 14-19 year olds would be to post flyers and infographics related to media literacy concepts regularly on social media pages. If the library is able to create a list of

resources or a media literacy guide on the websites, these sites could be included in regular library flyers, they can be mentioned in person at the library in patron interactions, and they can be promoted during special programs. Another way to reach 14-19 year olds where they are at would be to conduct school visits. Ideally, the school and public librarian will work together to promote media literacy to teens. This may include sharing resources and collaborating on programs. Librarians may also want to reach out to local homeschool groups. They can benefit from the library's resources, as well.

- Advertising/PR
  - Appear at local school board meetings to promote toolkit
  - Toolkit on library website
  - Presentations to high school english classes
  - Create shareable flyers and infographics that can be posted online (social media, library website) and in the library

### **Outreach to Local High Schools**

Our target audience of teens ages 14-19 can often be difficult to reach through the public library. The majority of teens are not making regular in-person visits to their local library. If they are utilizing library resources at all, they are likely doing it online, especially in light of the pandemic and the focus on digital resources and virtual learning. So besides online, where else can you reach teens? At school! Therefore, in order for our media literacy education efforts to have a greater impact on our teen target, we recommend that public libraries partner with their local high schools. This partnership could include:

1. Working with the school administration and/or librarian to ensure that all students have access to the library. This could manifest as the facilitation of library cards for all

students, or preferably, giving students access to the library and its digital resources through their school credentials.

2. Promoting the media literacy toolkit at schools through in-person visits, school announcements, teacher education, etc.
3. Creating a student advisory group to help promote media literacy and the use of the public library resources. Students could create social media posts, visit classes, put up posters around campus, or make announcements on the school TV News.

### **Staff Training**

As information professionals, librarians and library staff are among the most trusted voices for the public to help them sort fact from fiction. As such, it is critically important that the library staff be fully trained on media literacy and digital citizenship. Public and school librarians need to be aware of the misinformation disseminated across social media platforms and become experts on how to discern whether information is from a trusted and reputable source. It is recommended that librarians across all types of libraries use the resources provided by this toolkit to train themselves and other staff so that they can be well positioned to provide media literacy programs and resources to the public.

### **Media Literacy Position at the California State Library**

As previously noted, there are currently no state guidelines for public libraries in regards to media literacy programming and education. The California State Library is in a unique position to create new guidelines and provide resources to public libraries around the state regarding media literacy. One of our recommendations is that the California State Library create or assign a specific position that focuses entirely on media literacy. Although this position would

initially focus on the age group of teens ages 14-19, it would hopefully be able to expand that focus over time. This role has the potential to:

1. Create and maintain media literacy standards and guidelines at a state level.
2. Create and distribute media literacy resources for public libraries, including an online toolkit.
3. Provide media literacy grants that allow libraries to invest in toolkits, publicity, and staff training. There could also be grant opportunities that provide libraries with the necessary funding to create media literacy programs and conduct outreach for teens about this topic.
4. Create partnerships with other organizations that are currently addressing media literacy education, including the California Department of Education.

While the creation of a toolkit, outreach to local schools, and staff training are more achievable recommendations at a lower funding level, the creation of a state position might be more ambitious. However, a person working at the state level would be able to ensure that guidelines are implemented evenly across the state, rather than created library by library. In addition, part of the California State Library's mission statement is to empower people by "providing credible information services to all Californians," (California State Library, 2020). It is more advantageous to all California libraries to have someone creating standardized guidelines rather than continuing to create programs, workshops, and more individually.

### **Partnerships**

There are a number of resources available. We do not want to recreate their content. We want to compile the information and make it available for use. Organizations like Common Sense Education, the California Department of Education, About Face, and the National Association for Media Literacy Education, Media Education Lab, Action 4 Media Education,

and Media Literacy Now provide a wide range of resources including lesson plans, toolkits, student games including a Social Media TestDrive, resources for parents, administrators, social media workshops, parent guides and Cyber Citizenship Initiatives.

Consulting and partnering with these organizations will give the library an insight into what is working and which resources can be highlighted or replicated.

The Bay Area is home to many tech and social media companies, and partnering with these companies that are familiar with developing apps, games, and other interactive tools will help reach the target audience where they spend a large amount of their time.

### **Outcomes**

People trust the library as a place for lifelong learning. Library professionals should take advantage of this position to support educators as a solid resource. While librarians may not be trained educators themselves, libraries should be a resource for teens to see the real world implications of what they are learning in school. Libraries can help bridge the education gaps that currently exist by instructing patrons and providing resources on the topics of information and media literacy. We expect the following outcomes to occur as a result of the recommendations offered within this white paper:

- Teens aged 14-19 become more responsible and informed users of social media.
  - Teens develop the skills and confidence to know how and where to find credible information.
  - Teens have increased awareness of library resources available through familiar devices.
- Library staff are trained to provide media literacy programs/resources to the public.



- Standardized guidelines are created to allow libraries to more reliably teach patrons about media literacy.

### **Conclusion**

There is danger in doing nothing about the spread of false information. Educated adults and tech savvy teens do not have the skills or tools to determine what is misleading and why, and the individuals and groups responsible for creating and spreading lies, conspiracies, and hateful messages are not going away. In fact we should expect them to continue and develop new methods to confuse, dupe, and purposely sew misinformation. A comprehensive approach with traditional toolkits, innovative technology, and a dedicated professional to lead this important initiative is necessary to give this target audience a fighting chance as social media continues to be embedded in our lives.

As librarians, we help patrons one-on-one at the desk and on the library floor. We connect with smaller and larger groups through programming, and we are proud of our ability to connect our varied communities with much needed information and resources.

Libraries are perfectly positioned as respected sources of information with dedicated staff to be the organization to draw a line and take a stand against what is a significant attack on our attempts to support our 14-19 year olds as they seek out the information and develop the ideas necessary to become tomorrow's leaders.

The toolkits will support library staff by providing them with easy to use resources. The interactive games will provide our target audience with a familiar venue on devices they are comfortable using. The dedicated "social media specialist" will provide leadership and monitor the constantly changing landscape of social media and the spread of information. This initiative

will be a resource that can grow to support all ages in an effort to create a positive change through the concepts of social media literacy and digital citizenship. Thank you!

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