

# Growing Young Minds

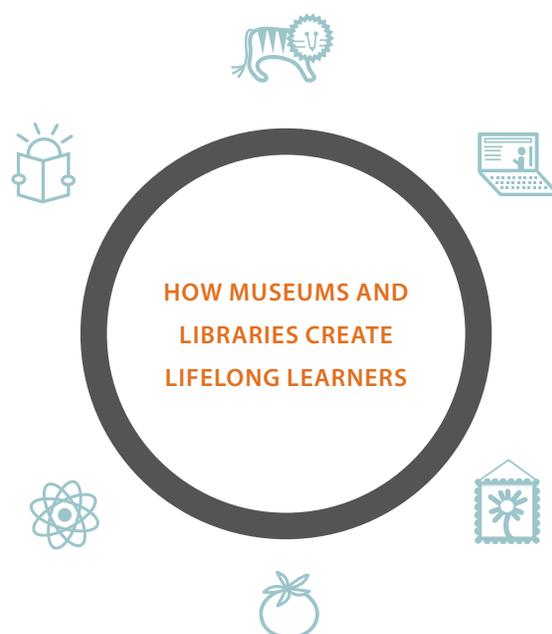


## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: CALL TO ACTION

*Growing Young Minds: How Museums and Libraries Create Lifelong Learners* calls upon policy makers and practitioners to fully use the capacity of libraries and museums to close knowledge and opportunity gaps and give all children a strong start in learning. Libraries and museums can play a significant role in early learning for all children. As our nation commits to early learning as a national priority essential to our economic and civic future, it is time to become more intentional about engaging these vital community resources. Libraries and museums reach millions of parents and children each year. They are trusted, welcoming places where children make discoveries, deepen common interests, expand words and knowledge, and connect their natural curiosity to the wider world. Neuroscientists tell us that the type of learning that occurs in these institutions—self-directed, experiential, content-rich—promotes executive function skills that can shape a child’s success in school and life. These experiences and interactions build brains and fuel a love of learning.



Parents know this and flock to museums and libraries not only to support their child’s learning but also to bolster their important role as their child’s first teacher. The Pew Research Center’s recent report, *Parents’ and Children’s Special Relationship with Reading and Libraries*, documents that an overwhelming percentage of parents of young children, especially those with annual incomes under \$50,000, believe that libraries are “very important” for their children, and are eager for more and varied family library services.<sup>1</sup>





We have to work to ensure that more children and parents, especially those at low socioeconomic levels, can tap into the learning resources of libraries and museums. According to a recent Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) analysis, only 36 percent of children with the lowest socioeconomic status visited libraries in their kindergarten year, compared to 66 percent of children in the highest; for museums, these figures are 43 percent versus 65 percent.<sup>2</sup> Recent research points out that the disparity of access to learning resources between children of affluence and those in poverty has created a knowledge gap with serious implications for students' economic prosperity and social mobility.<sup>3</sup>

These data underscore the urgency of this report. Libraries—public and school—and museums of all types—art, history, and children's museums; science centers; nature centers and gardens; aquaria; and zoos—form an extensive, diverse system of informal learning that is equipped to deliver early learning resources to young children and families, especially those most in need. Yet, in too many communities, museums and libraries are not “at the table” helping to craft the policies and practices that link children and their families to early learning resources.

It is critical to act now to incorporate, and leverage, the well-established informal learning system of museums and libraries as an essential component of our nation's early learning network. It is a wise use of limited fiscal and human resources that will help our nation develop the potential of every child and result in a stronger economy, a more effective workforce, and a nation of learners. With an increased focus on their capacity, these institutions can be more essential early learning partners at the community, state, and national levels.

IMLS supports many of the programs and case studies highlighted in *Growing Young Minds*. This federal agency has a long history of identifying and funding innovative approaches that put young learners at the center and help social, civic, cultural, and educational organizations work in partnership in communities and at the state and national levels.

With this report, IMLS is deepening and expanding its commitment to the youngest and most at-risk children in the United States to assure that libraries and museums reach underserved children and provide opportunities that can make a difference and last a lifetime.

As We Work Together  
to Meet Our Nation's  
Early Learning Challenges,  
Museums and Libraries Are:

➔ Community anchors that provide safe and accessible civic spaces promoting lifelong learning, cultural enrichment, and civic engagement, especially for underserved and vulnerable families and their children.



➔ Connectors that bridge the generations and bring children, their parents, and their families together in fun and nonthreatening settings that build mutual knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy.



➔ Innovative learning specialists that create exhibits, outreach programs, and environments that invite hands-on experiential learning.



➔ Stewards of rich cultural, scientific, environmental, and historical heritages, which offer robust collections of resources appealing to all disciplines and levels of learners.



➔ Digital hubs that provide guidance for navigating new technologies and identify trusted online resources to help close the digital divide for all children, their parents, and caregivers.

# 10 WAYS

## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES SUPPORT EARLY LEARNING EFFORTS

There are 10 key ways in which museums and libraries are currently supporting communities' efforts to develop a strong start for young children's learning.

1

**Increasing high-quality early learning experiences** Libraries and museums play a particularly critical role for parents and providers caring for children in home-based programs. For many poor and vulnerable children, they function as community "touch points," creating engaging pathways into knowledge- and skill-building.

2

**Engaging and supporting families as their child's first teachers** As trusted community anchors, museums and libraries are natural and safe places where families can learn together and access useful resources. Parents, grandparents, and caregivers can borrow books, backpacks, and other materials for home use; learn how to actively engage in age-appropriate interactions with their children; and locate high-quality child and health care providers and other local services.

3

**Supporting development of executive function and "deeper learning" skills through literacy and STEM-based experiences** Museums and libraries help lay the foundations for later learning and academic and career success, including basic literacy, reading, and STEM. They are adept "brain builders," offering learning environments that address the important social, emotional, and cognitive aspects of learning and foster persistence, self-direction, critical thinking, and problem solving.

4

**Creating seamless links across early learning and the early grades** Libraries and museums support a growing number of school-based efforts to build a coordinated set of learning experiences and effective transition practices that span the preschool years through the third grade. Many have developed curricula that scaffold increasingly advancing skills and knowledge, as well as partnerships that promote a smooth transition into kindergarten.

5

**Positioning children for meeting expectations of the Common Core State Standards** Museums and libraries are stewards of cultural, scientific, historical, and environmental heritage, offering rich collections of books and objects that span all disciplines and knowledge levels. They offer exhibits, environments, and programs that foster the interest-driven, project-based learning that is emphasized in the new K-12 Common Core State Standards for Literacy and Math and the Next Generation Science Standards.



*Libraries and museums are trusted, welcoming places where children connect their natural curiosity to the wider world.*

6

**Addressing the summer slide** Libraries and museums are important partners in efforts to help children sustain learning during the summer months. Museum visits increase during the summer, with many offering special programs that support continued content and skills learning. School and public libraries are community lynchpins in providing children with access to materials they need to maintain and advance their reading skills over the summer months.

7

**Linking new digital technologies to learning** With their free public access to the Internet, libraries are important community digital hubs, with expertise in promoting digital, media, and information literacy. Museums and school and public libraries are rich sources of accessible digital media, educational apps, videos, and audio- and e-books, with staff trained to help parents and youth select age-appropriate, content-based, curriculum-linked materials.

8

**Improving family health and nutrition** Museums and libraries help ensure that all families have access to needed health information and resources. Many offer developmental screenings and vaccination programs; advice and programs on nutrition, exercise, and gardening; and healthy activities for family members of all ages.

9

**Leveraging Community Partnerships** Libraries and museums are successfully forging strong collaborative relationships across multiple community sectors—including schools, public broadcasting, housing authorities, hospitals, family health centers, municipal governments, corporations, and universities—to map and address gaps in service provision and programs.

10

**Adding capacity to early learning networks** State library administrative agencies and, in many states, museum associations can help link libraries and museums with state-based policies and programs. They stand ready to participate actively as a growing number of states build shared seamless, outcomes-based systems of care, services, education, and family supports for young children.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Libraries and museums can improve early learning outcomes, increase school readiness, and help all children, especially those most at risk, read and succeed at grade three and beyond.

### **Everyone has a role to play.**

#### *Federal policy makers can:*

- Leverage grants that support museums and libraries as learning partners.
- Support research on the impact of informal learning.
- Invest in institutional capacity for museums and libraries.

#### *State policy makers can:*

- Recognize museums and libraries in early learning policy.
- Link museum and library services more intentionally to K–12 education.
- Incorporate museums and libraries into support for community-based initiatives.

#### *Communities can:*

- Support the roles of libraries and museums in providing quality programs and services for all children, especially those in family, friend, and neighbor care situations.

- Enhance the use of libraries and museums for vulnerable populations by addressing such resources as transportation and broadband access.
- Consider museums and libraries as community hubs where educators and parents come together to access and explore the effective use of content, collections, and technology.

#### *Schools and Early Learning Programs can:*

- Offer joint professional development to teachers, school librarians, and museum and public library staff to create a shared understanding of standards, curricula, best practice, and outcomes.
- Establish partnerships with local libraries and museums to provide programs and resources that support new expectations for building content knowledge, including school readiness and the P–K transition.
- Fully engage school librarians as important learning and literacy resources.

#### *Museums and libraries can:*

- Establish strong partnerships with a wide range of community organizations.
- Provide parental and family support and access to quality programs and services, especially for vulnerable populations.



- Create links to schools that support local education priorities and policies, including Common Core and other state standards.
- Incorporate recent research on the brain, executive function, and learning into exhibits and programs.
- Embed rigorous evaluation into program development and base programs on research and evidence.
- Develop grant initiatives to support innovative partnerships among libraries, museums, and other community organizations.
- Support an enhanced research agenda about the effectiveness of libraries and museums on the development of young children.

#### LEARN MORE

Read the full report, *Growing Young Minds: How Museums and Libraries Create Lifelong Learners*, at [www.imls.gov/earlylearning](http://www.imls.gov/earlylearning).

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Miller, C., Zickuhr, K., Rainie, L., & Purcell, K. (2013). *Parents' and Children's Special Relationship with Reading and Libraries*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

<sup>2</sup>Swan, D. W., & Manjarrez, C. A. (2013). *Children's Visitation to Libraries and Museums*. Research Brief series, no. 1 (IMLS-2013-RB-01). Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services.

<sup>3</sup>Neuman, S., & Celano, D. (2012). *Giving Our Children a Fighting Chance: Poverty, Literacy, and the Development of Information Capital*. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

#### *Parents, grandparents, and caregivers can:*

- Visit libraries and museums with their children and join with them in discovering programs and services that support effective and enjoyable child development and learning.
- Speak up to staff about the programs and services that they would like to see in their local library and museum.
- Find out whether their local library or museum has resources that can help with their child's transition to kindergarten, homework, or health and nutrition needs.

#### *Funders can:*

- Endorse public-private partnerships to advance the role of museums and libraries in early learning.

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## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SERVICES

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 123,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. Our mission is to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural and civic engagement. Our grant making, policy development, and research help libraries and museums deliver valuable services that make it possible for communities and individuals to thrive. To learn more, visit [www.ims.gov](http://www.ims.gov) and follow us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/USIMLS](http://www.facebook.com/USIMLS) and Twitter [US\\_IMLS](https://twitter.com/US_IMLS).



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