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**PLACE MATTERS: THE ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES AS CHANGE AGENTS IN
CENTRAL APPALACHIA**

A dissertation submitted to
Marshall University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
in
Leadership Studies
by
Jasmyne R. Lewis
Approved by
Dr. Sissy Isaacs, Committee Chairperson
Dr. Ronald Childress
Dr. Monica Brooks

Marshall University
May 2024

Approval of Dissertation

We, the faculty supervising the work of **Jasmyne Lewis**, affirm that the dissertation, *Place Matters: The Role of Public Libraries as Change Agents in Central Appalachia*, meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the EdD program in Leadership Studies and the College of Education and Professional Development. The work also conforms to the requirements and formatting guidelines of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.

Sissy Isaacs

Sissy Isaacs (Mar 15, 2024 12:58 EDT)

Dr. Sissy Isaacs, Professor
College of Education and Professional Development
Marshall University

Committee Chairperson

3/15/24

Date

Ronald Childress

Ronald Childress (Mar 15, 2024 14:35 EDT)

Dr. Ron Childress, Professor
College of Education and Professional Development
Marshall University

Committee Member

3/15/24

Date

Monica Brooks, EdD

Dr. Monica Brooks, Dean
University Libraries
Marshall University

Committee Member

3/15/24

Date

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Dedication

To Aliya and Colin, the children who fill my heart with love and joy every single day.

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The path to finishing this doctoral degree has been fraught with challenges in all aspects of my world. Because of this, I would first like to thank my family for their support as I worked my way through this project, encouraging me right up to graduation. Mama, thank you for always supporting me, for not letting me give up, for stepping in with the kids when I was writing, and for holding me up when I could not hold myself up this last year and a half. Daddy, thank you for always being the voice of reason and my fiercest protector. To my babies, Aliya and Colin, thank you for understanding the long days and longer nights and for showering me with love despite the missed practices and events. Thank you for all the encouragement you have both given me along the way. I love you both so much.

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Abstract

The role of public libraries is changing in response to a multitude of influences and trends. The exponential growth of technology as the primary method of information access, funding challenges, changing demographics, and other mitigating factors have forced public libraries to become more than book repositories. Community library leaders and governing board members are faced with challenges such as decreased funding, community division regarding library services, and soaring costs for library materials and services, as they develop and adopt policies and practices to navigate this ever-changing environment.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to collect data from the public library directors, branch managers, and governing boards of directors across Eastern Kentucky, Southern West Virginia, and Southern Ohio, to describe the evolving role of the public library to understand how that role is changing in response to multiple threats and challenges, and to identify strategic guidelines and implications for library leaders and governing board members as they plan and develop the library of the future.

The role of the public library is very diverse in Central Appalachia because the community's needs vary widely based on population, education, economic opportunity, and social services available. However, the public library is most often filling the role of a community center in small Central Appalachian communities encouraging radical positive community change. Funding was found to be the primary challenge facing public libraries. Secondary challenges were found to be access to community education and awareness, technology, and availability of library resources. Administrative and leadership implications were found to be book challenges, political leadership, obtaining and retaining qualified staff and training, aging buildings and infrastructure, and community awareness.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Humans are inquisitive creatures with an innate need to know “why” from an early age. Toddlers insist on questioning every detail of life and this behavior continues into adulthood. Information seeking behavior helps people make sense of the world around them (Case & Given, 2016). Information seeking behavior is the act of looking for and finding information to answer a specific question by searching and using source information in digital or print formats to fulfill the need of learning for education or entertainment purposes (Case & Given, 2016). Typically, this learning behavior, whether purposeful or incidental, brings together all information related activities that will help an individual make sense of an issue or solve a problem.

In response to this human need and yearning for information, libraries were established and have existed throughout history. According to Campbell and Pryce’s (2013) research, some of the most famous ancient libraries include The Library of Ashurbanipal, The Library of Alexandria, and The Imperial Library of Constantinople, all of which housed archival documents, religious incantations, scholarly texts, and works of literature. These libraries, however, were closed collections, accessible only to male scholars and aristocracy, excluding the majority of citizens (Campbell & Pryce, 2013).

Libraries continued to be exclusive institutions until the mid-18th century, according to continued research by Campbell and Pryce (2013). Circulating libraries then became popular with booksellers and publishers in an effort to profit from the popularity of novels. The first public library in America was established by Benjamin Franklin in 1781. This circulating library was a subscription-based service that provided books to patrons paying a weekly, monthly, or yearly price for the service (Campbell & Pryce, 2013). These circulating libraries increased

demand for information, especially among those that could not afford to purchase books, by allowing patrons to use and return the materials, paving the way for the modern public library.

Historical library research by Campbell and Pryce (2013), shows the first free modern public library was established in Peterborough, New Hampshire in 1833. The Peterborough Town Libraries was the first library in the world to be funded by a municipality with the explicit purpose of providing information to all classes in the community. In an effort to further education in America, philanthropists and businessmen, such as Andrew Carnegie and Henry Tate, provided funds to establish a large number of public libraries. Carnegie built 1,689 public libraries in the U.S. between 1883 and 1929 (Campbell & Pryce, 2013).

Public libraries continued to be established in communities, providing access to books and periodicals, often with financial support from government municipalities (Campbell & Pryce, 2013). In the mid-20th century, however, a second industrial revolution based on information technology swept around the world. The Information Age brought new technology, increasing individual access to information through computers, the internet, satellite television, and smartphones (Aabø, 2005). Innovations continued with the information explosion, introducing the world to Amazon, social media, WebMD, online databases, Audible, Kindle, and Apple, among others.

Libraries have continued to expand service options, adding digital eBook and audiobook collections, expanding library programming beyond story times, and pivoting service models to continue providing services to the public during the Covid-19 pandemic. Public libraries seek to be more than a book warehouse; their goal is to remain relevant to the community by being people spaces. Erik Klinenberg (2018) calls libraries “palaces for the people” in his book by the same name. Klinenberg describes libraries as crucial, vital infrastructure where “life-saving

connections” are formed. In his view, libraries are necessary to create a healthy physical social infrastructure, fighting inequality and social polarization. Klinenberg, along with public libraries and their supporters, believe the institution is not only relevant but necessary for the success of human society.

Public libraries offer a variety of services to communities even when funding is limited. These library services go far beyond loaning books, often including educational opportunities, childcare, tool loans, and social service programs, but these services are dependent on community need and budget (Klinenberg, 2018). Despite these community needs and budget challenges, Klinenberg feels the role of the public library has and will continue to expand. With that thought in mind, we must consider what the future role of the library will be.

Public libraries have provided communities with access to information to satisfy their information seeking needs for hundreds of years. In this era of digital information, public libraries are experiencing a decrease in physical visits and library usage by library patrons each year despite changes to library collections, services, and programming according to the Institute for Museum and Library Services Public Libraries Survey. Stakeholders are being forced to reconsider the relevance of the public library in the digital age when faced with these declining usage statistics.

Central Appalachian libraries are struggling; this much is blatantly obvious with a cursory glance through the statistical reports from the Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives and West Virginia Library Commission. Libraries across both states have minimal staffing, limited budgets, and limited growth in collections and programming. Kentucky’s 2021 fiscal budget eliminated funding for public libraries statewide. At the state level, West Virginia

has reorganized the Library Commission, installing library services under the direction of the Department of Arts, Culture, and History.

Curiously, however, little research exists regarding the libraries of Central Appalachia and how the community would manage in the absence of these library services. In this austere environment, what happens if the public library ceases to exist in the Central Appalachian community? Are these rural Central Appalachian library systems able to provide “the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests,” as required by Article I of The American Library Association Code of Ethics? Without this information, Appalachian libraries will continue to struggle with the changing role of the library, fighting to be deemed relevant, and possibly ceasing to exist.

The digital age has changed the way we seek information (Aabø, 2005). This change in information seeking behavior has necessarily affected public libraries, leading some to question if public libraries are still relevant. Public libraries are experiencing a decline in physical library visits, leaving library leadership and funding agencies struggling with what libraries can do to reverse this downward trend, and secure both their relevance and ability to serve communities in the digital age.

The leadership role of the library director has become more challenging as libraries have become more complex institutions tasked with becoming change agents in their communities. Librarians are stereotyped as harsh old women wearing glasses that read all day and demand complete silence. Today’s library leaders are dynamic and well-educated people working to create quality institutions within local communities by developing quality policies, procedures, collections of materials, and programming while attending to other tasks such as resource

management, fiscal responsibility, staff management, maintenance, property management, and encouraging radical positive community changes.

Public libraries in Central Appalachia are faced with even more difficulties than those emerging from a digital world. The loss of major employers has left an already poverty-stricken areas facing further financial hardship as people leave the area to find work. Those economic losses also reduce tax dollars flowing into the local economy, thus further reducing the money available to support libraries. This combination of decreasing populations, dwindling budgets, rising costs of library materials, and increasing demand for personal access to information is taking a toll on public libraries, threatening their ability to serve their communities now and in the future. Learning how small, rural, public libraries in Central Appalachia are utilizing leadership roles and responding to these threats is critical to preserving their existence.

Problem Statement

The role of public libraries continues to evolve in response to a multitude of influences and trends. The exponential growth of technology as the primary method of information access, funding challenges, changing demographics, and a host of other mitigating factors have forced public libraries to become more than an archive or book repository. Nowhere has the impact of these trends and influences been greater than on the small public libraries in Central Appalachia. Community library leaders and governing board members are faced with a host of seemingly insurmountable challenges, such as decreased funding, division of the community regarding library services, and soaring costs for library materials and services, as they develop and adopt policies and practices to navigate this ever-changing environment. There is little research available to guide library leaders and governing board members in this endeavor. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to describe the evolving role of the public library in Central Appalachia,

understand how that role is changing in response to multiple threats and challenges, and identify strategic guidelines and implications for library leaders and governing board members as they plan and develop the library of the future.

Research Questions

The following specific research questions have been developed to guide the implementation of this study:

1. What is the role of the public library in Central Appalachian communities and how has that role changed over time?
2. What are the major challenges facing public libraries in Central Appalachia as libraries transition into a digital world?
3. What are the administrative and leadership implications for library directors and governing boards as library's transition into a digital world?

Significance of the Problem

The findings of this study add to our knowledge regarding how public libraries continue to function despite ongoing reductions in funding. Previous research on the subject has focused primarily on public libraries as a collective, often neglecting the rural public library for those in more urban areas. This study examines the role of rural public libraries, specifically those in Central Appalachia, to determine how the roles are changing and how the libraries remain relevant amid decreasing populations, dwindling budgets, rising costs of library materials, and increasing personal access to information. This information can assist other small public libraries existing in similar austere environments to design functional public library service models for their own institutions, thus improving public library leadership and services across Appalachia.

Delimitations

This study focuses on the role of the public library, how that role is changing over time, and the leadership and operational techniques of public libraries in Central Appalachia. This study is also limited to the Central Appalachian geographical area centering around the Huntington (WV) -Ashland (KY)-Ironton (OH) metropolitan area, including Boyd, Carter, Greenup, and Lawrence Counties in Kentucky; Lawrence County, Ohio; and Cabell, Putnam, and Wayne Counties in West Virginia, for a total of 30 public library branches. Participation in this study is limited to the library directors, branch managers, and board of directors for each of those specific 30 public library branches.

Summary

The need for public library services goes far beyond loaning books and other items in Central Appalachia. Community needs often include educational support and opportunities, childcare, and social service programs. The public library has stepped in to provide these services, but these services, along with other traditional library services, are dependent on financial support for the institution. Public libraries are more than just books. In many cases, public libraries are the community's safety net and lifeline to resources.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, the literature review begins with an overview of public libraries and narrows down the idea to rural public libraries in question for this study. The next sections address the issues of organizational change, the role of leadership in change, and strategic planning as related to the public library. The third section reviews the public library standards and guidelines used to govern public libraries. The last section in the literature review focuses on major challenges for public libraries including intellectual freedom within the community, social services provided to the underserved and vulnerable populations, the role of technology, funding and financial support, and lack of diversity.

Public Libraries

Public libraries are frequent topics of research; however, the public libraries of Central Appalachia are often overlooked. Researchers tend to focus on public libraries in urban areas as opposed to the small, rural public libraries that are more frequently found in this area. Literature regarding the public libraries of Central Appalachia is sparse, almost nonexistent. Some public library research that has been conducted is applicable to these institutions. That research shows that the role of the public library is changing around the world; however, it seems the role of the public library has always been in a state of change historically.

The public libraries of Central Appalachia started with print books only. The WPA Pack Horse Library Project was the original bookmobile. These women, employed through the Works Progress Administration under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, circulated books throughout Eastern Kentucky on horseback from 1936 to 1943 with support from Berea College and later, the Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives (Boyd, 2007). This program brought new reading material into the mountains while employing women of the area and urging

locals to trust the government. This program encouraged literacy in an area where large portions of the population could not read, had not completed grade school, and lived in a relatively isolated area. Boyd goes on to recount the increase in literacy rates in Eastern Kentucky during this time and the success of the pack horse libraries. The program ended as communities began to build local public libraries.

As the institutions continued to adapt and change throughout the late 20th century, public libraries began to focus on programming. Offering library programs increased reasons for more people to come into the library and to encouraged literacy in children and adults (Chase, 2016). Chase goes on to explain that public library programming continues to expand, reaching into adult programming, educational classes, and unique programming designed specifically for the community. Ultimately, libraries became a place for learning and friendship. The free books were an additional bonus to many, while others did not partake in this offer.

We should not assume that libraries and library programming are solely focused on children. Library programming is diverse and geared toward a multitude of age levels, interests, and groups (Herring, 2014). Libraries have adapted programming to reach the entire community, making the library a place where everyone can learn. The public library is important to all populations in the community, despite socioeconomic status. Many libraries offer exercise classes to help seniors maintain their physical health while continuing to be social (Lentsra, Oguz, D'Arpa, & Wilson, 2022). Other institutions are working to combat the opioid crisis by working with community partners, hosting naloxone training session for community members and staff, and providing resources for getting addiction help (Lowenstein, Feuerstein-Simon, Sheri, Dupuis, Kinsey, Luna Marti, & Cannuscio, 2021). This same study indicated that of the 44 libraries in 26 states studied, 14% of public libraries surveyed had experienced an onsite

overdose and 7% of those libraries stocked naloxone. Public libraries are in a unique position to provide unique social services to the community without being intrusive.

Bishop, Mehra, and Partee (2016) note that the rural public library is important to business development because librarians use their skills in information accession and dissemination to become social science researchers. In the Tennessee case study, these same researchers are working with the library to develop tools focused on small business development. Some of their plans include the development of a user/use-based model to represent the information context of small businesses; gap analysis of needs and expectations of multiple stakeholder groups; collaborative action research strategies between small businesses and rural public libraries toward economic development; and the process and development of a blueprint design of the public library small business toolkit (Bishop et al., 2016). The success of this research could further change the role of the public library in the local community.

Organizational Change

Organizational change is simply altering a major component of the business or organization that has a major impact on the entity (Kras, Rudes, & Taxman, 2017). This change could relate to organizational culture, technology, infrastructure, strategy, ecology, or economics within the organization (Kras et al., 2017). Failure to implement organizational change leaves businesses and organizations stagnant and irrelevant to the world around them. Organizational change is applied to public libraries in similar fashion to businesses. These libraries are faced with rapidly changing technology, strategy, and economics and often find it difficult to keep up because of the limited financial resources available. Yet, the culture of the public library remains important to the successful integration into the community. The public requires a library that is hospitable, usable, and focused on good customer service.

Organizational change frequently fails because employees are not committed to changing (Olafsen, Nilsen, Smedsrud, & Kamaric, 2021). Successful change begins with positive attitudes in regards to the changes being made. If the organization cannot gather employee support for the organizational change intended, failure is eminent (Olafsen et al., 2021). Change is difficult in the public library because of the stereotypes associated with the institution and the people employed by the institution. Oftentimes, library staff have been employed with the organization for many years and do not wish to change their methods for conducting business. The reluctance of staff to support change in the organization hobbles the ability of the library to meet public needs, particularly related to technology.

Role of Leadership in Organizational Change

Leaders of an organization are change agents that can manage the organizational change processes. These changes provide organizations compelling reason to evaluate the role of technology, customer service, expectations, and needs in the business model to remain relevant. Preparing for the future and long-term success is an important part of organizational change and the success of businesses. Seventy percent of organizational change fails to acquire their objectives because of poor leadership styles within the organization (Khan, Khan, & Fatima, 2016). The process of change demands highly skilled leadership and the ability to address issues in a skilled manner from leadership (Boga & Ensari, 2009). This process is no different for public libraries. Change must occur to remain relevant and often this change is difficult for those involved with the organization.

It is important to view the leadership styles and behaviors that effectively influence the leadership of the public library. Innovation and creativity are an important part of successful library leadership, along with leadership requirements for the 21st century (Sendze, 2019).

Leadership occupies significant importance in contemporary organizations, including libraries (Nwaigwe, 2015). As a result, previous researchers have found that various leadership styles are prevalent among library administrators (Germano, 2011; Jusic, 2016). These leadership styles include democratic and transformational leadership (Segun-Adeniran, 2015), laissez-faire leadership (Nwaigwe, 2015), transactional leadership (Germano, 2011), distributed leadership (Goulding & Walton, 2014), participative and collaborative leadership (O'Connor, 2014), managerial leadership (Allner, 2008; Wong, 2017), and entrepreneurial leadership styles (Jusic, 2016). Depending on library environment (academic, public, school, and special libraries), some library administrators put their leadership styles into action to make pivotal decisions that define the success or failure of their organization.

Although no specific leadership style or type of organizational change is recommended specifically for rural public libraries, there are some leadership traits, skills, and abilities that can help to create a better organizational environment in the public library, but they may vary in some degree from organization to organization. Jason Martin notes that every library is different in his book, *Library Leadership Your Way* (2019). Martin goes on to state that effective leadership is important to a successful library but that the success can come in different forms of organizational leadership including Theory X, Y, and Z, contingency theory, situational leadership, leader-member exchange, transformational leadership, authentic leadership, or servant leadership.

The role of the librarian has often been one of neutrality, but more recently librarians have been assuming roles of radical positive change agents working for positive social change (Mathiasson and Jochumsen, 2021). The public library is viewed as a neutral space, providing equal access to information and ideas from all points of view. However, the idea of positive

neutrality encourages librarians to encourage positive change for the betterment of the community. Post-neutrality states that librarians maintaining a professional stance of impartiality undermines their ability to advocate for social justice and that neutrality diminishes the importance of librarianship by reducing librarians to technicians (Wenzler, 2019). Mathiasson and Jochumsen state that librarians not be technicians, but that they should be proactive change agents and the drivers of change in communities (2021).

Strategic Planning

Public libraries are a unique institution. They are not businesses; yet they are expected to act as such. Public libraries rely on government funding and tax bases for operational expenses and typically operate by spending more money than they are earning. Scarcity of financial resources in the public library reinforces the necessity for strategic planning in both the long and short term. The strategic plan provides a framework for decision making that helps to determine the desirability of competing needs and how important decisions will be made to meet those needs (Mackenzie, 1997).

The strategic plan should include the mission statement of the public library, the direction of the organization for the future, and a commitment to future library services (Brown, 1992). This plan should also address how the public library will address the needs of the underserved community groups that the library serves (Mackenzie, 1997). The strategic plan should include the people that will be involved such as staff, management, and volunteers, those that the plan will affect including library patrons and other users, those who will monitor the implementation such as the library board of trustees, state and local government bodies, and those who contribute to the plan's development such as community members, funding organizations, government officials, and library officials (Fuller, 2021).

Rural public libraries often do not have strategic plans because these plans are cost prohibitive and the process can be daunting according to Kim Horton, writer of *Library Journal's* article "Helping Small and Rural Public Libraries Frame the Future" (2021). This process is necessary to develop a sustainable library system despite the cost and effort that is required to complete the plan. A good plan helps to address this lack of funding by directing resources and funding to better benefit the library and its patrons (Horton, 2021). Library Strategies is a consulting group devised of the Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library and Montana State Library that works with small public libraries across North Dakota, South Dakota, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Arizona to provide customized strategic planning services by training key library representatives in the planning process. Funding for this two-year project has been provided by the Institute for Museum and Library Services. This group assists small public libraries in developing strategic plans specific to their institution with little to no cost to the library.

Public Library Standards and Guidelines

Customer service is a term not frequently associated with public libraries; yet, public libraries are service organizations designed to meet the needs of their customers, the library patrons (Zabel & Pellack, 2012). Providing quality customer service is an important part of quality standards in the public library, even though this may take time away from other tasks deemed important by library staff such as cataloging materials, archiving information, or shelving books.

The American Library Association no longer supplies regulatory public library standards and guidelines in favor of locally produced standards and guidelines that are more appropriate for local conditions and needs. The International Federation of Library Associations and

Institutions, also known as IFLA, continues to maintain internationally reviewed library standards and guidelines. Kentucky, Ohio, and West Virginia have established public library standards and guidelines at the state level, but these documents leave room for local library board input. Public library standards and guidelines specific to the locality help to maintain quality library services that are tailored to the needs of the community (Zabel & Pellack, 2012).

The Public Library Association, a division of the American Library Association, published the Public Library Services for Strong Communities Report in 2022. The study surveyed public libraries nationally to determine the types of programs and services being offered by the institution, how they partner with other organizations, and the state of the library facility. The information also provided data for decision making and library advocacy based on the role of the public library and services and resources provided by the public library. The study found that 68% of public libraries offer election services, 99% of public libraries have summer reading programs, and 78% of libraries offer career services (Public Library Services for Strong Communities Report, 2022). Additionally, 17.5% of libraries offer some type of mobile services such as a bookmobile (Public Library Services for Strong Communities Report, 2022).

The Rural Library Network, created as a joint effort between Partners for Education at Berea College, in Berea, Kentucky, and Save the Children, is working to bring rural libraries together in a consortium style group. This effort allows libraries to support one another “rather than setting them up as competitors, which would reinforce a scarcity mindset” states Mark Swartz (2021). Small public libraries do more in the community by sharing resources, transforming the lives of those in the small communities.

Role of Technology

Access to technology has become one of the most important features of the public library. This statement holds true in both rural areas as well as more urban libraries. Patrons can gain access to computers and the internet free of charge at these institutions, giving them access to information, job postings, educational opportunities, and social connections. Access to free public internet is one of the most used services in public libraries (Bertot, McClure, & Jaeger, 2008). This service is especially important in rural areas where internet connections are frequently unreliable or do not meet upload or download speed requirements for many online tasks.

Rural areas rely on public libraries. These institutions provide access to increasingly more digital services and resources necessary for growing communities. Small and rural communities across the United States lack access to these resources, increasing the growing disparities and impacting residents' quality of life (Bertot et al., 2008). Rural communities are faced with limited opportunities because of the isolation. Rural communities in Appalachia are limited by these issues as well as the mountainous terrain that creates geographic isolation as well as technological isolation. Increasing access to technology in rural communities helps to increase access to educational opportunities, health information, and employment options by reducing geographic isolation (Bertot et al., 2008).

Funding and Financial Support

Public libraries are funded in different ways depending on their location and library district. Some public libraries receive funds from a local library tax while others only receive funding from local agencies, such as the fiscal court or city council; state agencies, such as the department of libraries or library commission; or federal agencies such as the Institute of

Museum and Library Services, otherwise known as IMLS, and the Library Services and Technology Act, otherwise known as LSTA (American Library Association, 2022). Other financial support stems from grants, trusts, fees, or donations to the library. Yet, public libraries are struggling financially (Common Public Library Funding Myths, 2022).

Rural public libraries have more financial struggles than larger, more urban library systems. Smaller populations, lower property tax values, and fewer dollars from state and federal agencies contribute to this problem. Some rural public libraries are not supported by a local library tax, leaving their operational budgets at the mercy of local, state, and federal monies, yet public library usage and expenditures continue to rise (Public Library Revenue, Expenditures, and Funding Sources, 2022). The local cost share began increasing in 2002, and by 2018 local funds represented 86% of all library revenues, up from 78% in 1995 (Public Library Revenue, Expenditures, and Funding Sources, 2022). Over 1995–2018, the share of funding garnered from state government decreased from 12% to less than 7% (Public Library Revenue, Expenditures, and Funding Sources, 2022). The share received from “other” sources—the federal government, donations, fees, and grants—shrank also, from approximately 10% to 7%. (Public Library Revenue, Expenditures, and Funding Sources, 2022) During this same time-period, the federal government was the source of a very small proportion, 1% or less, of library revenues (Public Library Revenue, Expenditures, and Funding Sources, 2022). It is also important to note that public library expenditures vary widely from state to state, county to county, and library to library. In 2020, the District of Columbia spent approximately \$85 per capita while Mississippi spent approximately \$18 per capita (Public Library Revenue, Expenditures, and Funding Sources, 2022). Ohio was the third largest spender per capita at approximately \$68, Kentucky ranked 32nd spending approximately \$39 per capita, and West Virginia ranked 48th spending

approximately \$21 per capita, denoting a wide variety of library spending across the Central Appalachian area.

Lack of Diversity

People from Central Appalachia are often stereotyped as white, protestant, hillbillies by individuals from the outside looking in; however, Central Appalachia reflects more diversity than the stereotype reflects. Early in the 16th century, Appalachia was home to Native Americans, particularly the Cherokee tribe, later becoming the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation, when most of the tribe was forced out on the Trail of Tears in the early 1800's (Simon, 2014). Appalachia continued to undergo change as the Cherokee were being forced out of the area, leading to an increase in African slaves living in the mountains. This population increased, reflecting 10-15% of the population in the area (Simon, 2014). Other European immigrants also moved into the Appalachian Mountains as coal began to be a prized resource in the area. Between 1820 and 1920, more than 60,000 Italians, Hungarians, Austrians, Russians, Poles, and other immigrant workers had settled in the Appalachian coalfields, making up as much as 40% of the workforce (Simon, 2014).

In the 1920's, coal was no longer as profitable as it had been, and the United States was on the brink of the Great Depression. These changes lead to a mass exodus from Appalachia as people moved north into more urban areas seeking employment in industrial cities such as Cincinnati, Columbus, and Cleveland, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Simon, 2014). By 1990, Appalachia consisted of only nine percent minorities, most being of African American decent (Simon, 2014). That significant decline in the minority population was not meant to last. By 2010, minorities accounted for more than 16% of the region's population, a significant increase when compared with the 1990 statistics. The Latino population in

Appalachia exploded, growing by 240%, making it the fastest growing minority in the area (Simon, 2014). Despite the influx of people, however, the minority rates in Appalachia remain well below the national average in the United States.

The lack of diversity in Appalachia is no secret. It is also no secret that librarianship lacks diversity. The American Library Association states that 87.1% of librarians identify as Caucasian and 81% identify as female (2022). Library patrons are becoming more diverse, even in Appalachia, but the library staff is not representative of the patron base. The librarians of Central Appalachia are no different. Most are white females and serve a predominantly white patron base based on 2020 United States Census population results; however, areas of Central Appalachia are seeing an increase in diversity as more people from varied backgrounds find their way into the area (United States Census Bureau, 2020). It is justified to believe that this diversification in population will also lead to a diversification in library staffing.

Intellectual Freedom for Communities

Increasing awareness of intellectual freedom and information literacy is one of the primary roles of the public library. This ability to recognize when information is needed and how to locate, evaluate, and effectively use the needed information is a skill often taught through library programming for both children and adults (American Library Association, 2017). The American Library Association (2017) further encourages libraries to incorporate these topics and techniques to enrich the library experience and educational value for patrons and the community.

Rumblings of libraries becoming obsolete began with the inception of internet access in the home. Flamm (2006) discusses the need for public libraries for internet access because of the limitations to speed, quality, and access in homes. Flamm goes on to state that it is more cost effective for public libraries to provide quality access to the internet, even upgrading their

services, as opposed to providing a subsidy program to individual internet subscribers. Flamm found that library internet users increased their use of the library over time as opposed to seeking other options for internet access. The use of the public library as a public internet access point further supports the idea of yet another change in the role of the public library.

Pew Research Center began tracking adult internet usage in 2000 according to their research. In 2000, 52% of American adults reported using the internet; yet, by 2021, 93% of American adults reported using the internet (Pew Research Center, 2021). This same study reports that “some demographic groups – such as young adults, college graduates, and those from high-income households – internet usage is near ubiquitous. Even so, adoption gaps remain based on factors such as age, income, and education,” (Pew Research Center, 2021). The use of high-speed broadband internet service in the home has also seen dramatic increase since Pew Research Center began collecting data. The biggest growth occurred between 2000 and 2010, with growth continuing but at a much lower rate (Pew Research Center, 2021).

Mark Norman has noted the changing role of the public library and makes a statement in his 2012 article regarding the future of public libraries. He states that, “Public libraries will survive and thrive by recognizing their changing role. With the digital world of content, the role is shifting to that of content aggregators, access managers, and educators in digital literacy,” (Norman, 2012). Public libraries have been changing roles since their inception, the digital age brings another role and more change. This is not a foreign concept to public libraries or librarians. Norman’s research is focused on public libraries in Sydney, Australia, yet it is relevant to libraries in Central Appalachia. Libraries in Central Appalachia are changing their roles in the community based upon the needs of the community. This is not a new concept.

Libraries in Central Appalachia began on the backs of horses and have evolved into community centers supporting education and opportunity.

Public libraries are facing other challenges beyond personal internet access. The cost of library materials is rising according to the American Library Association Prices of U.S. and Foreign Published Materials. Furthermore, the subscription cost to access digital content providers, such as Overdrive, LIBBY, and Hoopla, as well as access to digital databases, such as JSTOR, ProQuest, and EBSCO, are skyrocketing (Norman, 2012). Access to information comes at a cost to either the individual or the public library. Yet, if libraries do not spend the funds to maintain access to this information, they risk losing their relevance to the community.

The political landscape also has a significant effect on the role of the public library. Raising support for funding is a necessary task for public library proponents. Frequently, this task is impeded or facilitated by the political atmosphere in the community, the state, and the nation (Barnes Parker, 2016). Furthermore, the politics of the area often determine the scope of other public library issues, especially intellectual freedom (Albright & Brown, 2020). When library books are challenged by community members, the library must conduct a review of the book following the processes and procedures outlined in the library's operations manual to determine if the book should be removed from the library collection (Kimmel & Hartsfield, 2019). Yet, as each of these researchers have stated in their respective publications, politics on all levels have significant influence on the number and type of books challenged and on the outcome of those challenge proceedings. If the public library is viewed as a political entity because of funding issues, public funding disputes, or book challenges, patrons with opposing political views may avoid using the library's resources, viewing the institution as biased.

The role of the public library is constantly changing; the question of relevance has become more prominent as people began to have easy access to information via the internet. Research based planning for public libraries is necessary to increase relevance in the digital age (Matthews, 2016). This book notes that librarians need to develop a logical plan that will produce long range results including goals, policies, collections, and budgets to achieve a relevant library that meets the community needs and adapt to the changes public libraries face. The Institute for Museum and Library Services has also helped to implement better long-term planning by requiring outcome-based evaluation data for institutions to be eligible for substantial grant monies offered by the agency that often makes up a substantial portion of the public library's operational budget (Institute of Museum and Library Services, n.d.). Public libraries run the risk of becoming outdated or obsolete because planning for the future is frequently neglected for planning in the moment (Gross, Mediavilla, & Walter, 2016). Long term planning becomes more necessary as funding becomes more volatile. Librarians are not trained to be long term financial planners, accountants, property managers, or marketing specialists; yet, in most small, rural public libraries, that is required. The librarian must fill all of those roles with little to no training, simply learning these tasks through trial and error. This leaves the library in a precarious situation that must be addressed to remain relevant for the future of the community.

Social Service

Change agent is not a term often associated with public libraries; yet these institutions are frequently becoming the source of change in more communities. The public library is providing the community with resources previously only found through social service organizations in larger communities and more urban areas, branding libraries as safe and trusted spaces according to Noah Lenstra, PhD, in his book, *Healthy Living at the Library* (2020). Lenstra goes on to

describe library programming that is supporting community needs such as gardening initiatives, summer feeding, and food bank projects. Lenstra continues by noting the importance of linking library transactions to health promotions as a way to build connections and healthier communities.

Installing social workers in libraries give communities another way to access resources and information needed for individuals and families. Librarians are working with social workers to address issues of self-care, resilience, boundaries, mental illness, addiction, homelessness, and other issues of situational crisis. In “Libraries and Social Workers: Perfect Partners” (Lambert, 2020), Rachel D. Williams, PhD, states, “I think the social work world is gaining interest in this area because the public library is a crucial and core space for all people, particularly those who may have nowhere else to go or who do not feel welcome in other spaces.” This public library safe space allows individuals and families to get the assistance needed without stigma and negative repercussions that are be found when seeking assistance in other locations.

Public libraries have expanded their services to include a variety of social service options, including but not limited to housing assistance, employment and training services, legal support, educational training and services, warming and/or cooling centers, socialization, health education, and exercise (Lambert, 2020). Public libraries are continuing to expand their services as the community needs increase and more resources are required to meet the needs.

In Central Appalachia, communities have been faced with a substance abuse epidemic, leading to a multitude of drug overdoses in public places. The public library has not been spared from this tragic occurrence. In the 2021 study, “Public Libraries as Partners in Confronting the Overdose Crisis: A Qualitative Analysis”, 44 librarians from 26 states were interviewed regarding the effects of opioid crisis on their libraries and patrons. Participants from 14 % of the

libraries reported a drug overdose in the library that resulted in death (Lowenstein, Feuerstein-Simon, Sheni, Dupuis, Kinsey, Marti & Cannuscio, 2021). This unfortunate statistic forces the public library to prepare for a potential overdose in the facility by stocking naloxone and providing voluntary training for use of the lifesaving drug. One librarian goes even further to describe what the library is doing to try and curb this crisis, “Kids don’t have anything else to do. That’s part of the reason we’re doing so many programs now,” as libraries ramp up programming to provide alternatives to drugs in the community (Lowenstein et al., 2021).

COVID-19, Quarantine, and Pandemic Restrictions

In early 2020, COVID-19 forced public libraries to pivot services provided to communities as quarantine and other pandemic restrictions were implemented by state and local governments to try and halt the spread of the deadly virus. In-person library services were shut down across the United States, severely limiting access to information and library services to communities (Gilpin, 2021). Library staffers worked diligently to provide new and creative ways to serve library patrons including curbside book pickup, increasing collections of digital books and videos, and providing access to library databases from home. Many librarians also began providing research appointments to patrons via video conference, chat, and email. Libraries reported large increases in the use of these digital services, some increased as much as 50% (The Hunt Institute, 2021).

COVID-19 also highlighted the digital divide that continues to affect communities in Central Appalachia. Libraries were shuttered because of this virus, along with public school systems, forcing students to complete their classes in online formats. This presented a challenge when it was discovered one third of the rural population lacked internet access, 4 out of 10

homes did not have a computer, and 3 out of 10 homes did not have a smart device (The Hunt Institute, 2021).

Following the return to in-person services, public libraries are seeing gradual increases in foot traffic as community patrons need assistance applying for unemployment benefits, searching for new jobs, and gaining access to other necessary resources for recovery (Gilpin, 2021).

COVID-19 restrictions reinforced the need for public libraries in all communities, but the need is even greater in rural areas such as Central Appalachia. Moving forward, libraries will continue to provide social infrastructure to communities by granting free access to services otherwise unavailable and continuing to fight the digital divide.

American Library Association Center for the Future of Libraries

According to the American Library Association website (2022), the Center for the Future of Libraries works to “identify emerging trends relevant to libraries and the communities they serve, promote future and innovation techniques to help librarians and library professionals shape their future, and build connections with experts and innovative thinkers to help libraries address emerging issues.” This group focuses on exploring library trends that could benefit the future of the profession. Currently, this group has developed a four-book series that looks at technology, resilience of the institution, block chain technology, and approaching problem solving through design thinking.

ALA Center for the Future of Libraries classifies library trends into seven categories, society, technology, education, environment, politics & government, economics, and demographics, and calls this the STEEPED method (American Library Association, 2022). The STEEPED method is a deviation from the better-known trend classification model, DEGEST. DEGEST is an acronym for demography, economy, government, environment, society, and

technology. The major difference between STEEPED and DEGEST is the addition of education as an independent category. This method of classification is used to improve the understanding of major trends, understand how different trends affect one another, and to better understand how those trends are affecting a central issue or institution on a larger scale.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

The research design and rationale for the design are provided in this chapter. The participants section follows with a detailed description of how study participants will be selected. The chapter concludes with a description of the instrumentation, the data collection process, data analysis and procedures, and study limitations.

Research Design

The qualitative collective case study is an in-depth analysis as described by McMillian (2016). This qualitative collective case study focused on public library leadership in Central Appalachia discussing the communities, individuals, organizations, culture, and settings of public libraries in this austere environment. The collective case study format provided the researcher with the best understanding of public library leadership in Central Appalachia. The researcher was able to synthesize the data collected from public libraries across the region to highlight the similar findings, as well as differences, between each organization. The data was then used to draw generalized conclusions regarding Central Appalachian public library leadership (McMillian, 2016).

Population and Sample

Kentucky, Ohio, and West Virginia meet at the juncture of the Ohio and Big Sandy Rivers. This area of the Central Appalachia centers around the Huntington (WV) -Ashland (KY)-Ironton (OH) metropolitan area and includes Boyd, Carter, Greenup, and Lawrence Counties in Kentucky; Lawrence County, Ohio; and Cabell, Putnam, and Wayne Counties in West Virginia. This eight-county area is home to an equal number of library districts with a total of 30 public library branches serving a population of 337,173 people according to the 2020 Census.

Study participants included library directors and branch managers (N=30) from each of the Central Appalachian public libraries included in the eight-county Central Appalachian Region defined for this study. Some library directors also act as branch managers, while other library directors are in a separate position from the branch manager. All 30 library directors and branch managers were invited to participate in the study.

A convenience sample of governing board of directors from each library municipality was invited to participate in the study. Each public library municipality operates under the guidance of a Library Board of Directors or Trustees. Snowball sampling was used by asking library directors and branch managers to refer a library board member to participate in the study.

Instrumentation

Library directors, branch managers, and governing board of directors were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview guided by a researcher-developed interview protocol, the *Central Appalachian Library Leadership Interview Protocol*. This interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions, allowing the participants to share their own public library experiences, as well as their perceptions about the public library's future and community presence.

Interview questions were developed based on the study's research questions and the American Library Association's Center for the Future of Libraries Rising Trends in Libraries (2022). ALA Center for the Future of Libraries classifies library trends into seven categories, society, technology, education, environment, politics and government, economics, and demographics, and calls this the STEEPED method (American Library Association, 2022). Each interview question was designed to fit into one of these categories and measure the public library's current trend status and potential to address future trends.

The *Central Appalachian Library Leadership Interview Protocol* (Appendix B) utilized the Interview Protocol Refinement Framework (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). This planning method began by establishing consent for the interview, creating rapport between the researcher and participant, and using open ended questions that are aligned with research questions. This protocol allowed the respondent to provide demographic information, address each of the three research questions, and to provide any additional information the respondent felt was necessary. The protocol was based on a semi-structured interview format with the opportunity for consent to the interview provided. The interview lasted approximately 90 minutes on average. Questions were designed to elicit information regarding the community, library, library staff, and library patrons; as well as to determine how the library fits into the Summary of Public Library Criteria for Branch Type (Appendix D). This summary described basic parameters a public library should meet based upon population served, space occupied, hours of operation, staffing and staff qualifications, and physical collection size.

A pilot study was conducted to validate the *Central Appalachian Library Leadership Interview Protocol* (Appendix B). The researcher interviewed two individuals using the Public Library Interview Protocol to complete validation. This process helped determine the validity of the research instrument and determined modifications that needed to be made to the research methods.

Data Collection

The library directors, branch managers, and governing board of directors were invited via email to participate in the semi-structured interview. Non respondents were contacted by telephone. Once the pool of participants had been established, interview times were determined for the dates of December 2022 through February 2024. Interviews occurred via Microsoft

Teams video conferencing software. The researcher asked for consent to record and transcribe interviews. Transcription occurred after the interviews were completed. The researcher also took descriptive field notes during the interview to supplement the recording.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The interview data was coded based upon standard coding response processes. Data analysis will begin by identifying code categories based on the natural themes from the data (Gordon, 1992). Once these categories were identified, they were more broadly classified into similar ideologies. Members of the doctoral committee were asked to review the coding and categorization data to verify the reliability of the coding and categorization process completed by the researcher.

Member checking was used to ensure validation of the findings. Member checking was utilized during the interview by building rapport with the participant to obtain honest and open responses, as well as by restating, paraphrasing, and summarizing information to the participant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher further used member checking to validate the study by sharing the findings with the participants giving them the opportunity to analyze and comment on the results. Data triangulation provided additional validation as library directors, branch managers, and library board of directors participated in the study, along with statistical information derived from state and federal agencies related to each public library.

Limitations

The limitations of this research were primarily a result of the qualitative research design. The qualitative study required the researcher to be present during data collection, possibly limiting the participants' ability or willingness to share or describe their personal experiences with concerns of anonymity and confidentiality (Cornish & Skovdal, 2015). Recollection bias or

the desire of participants to provide socially desirable answers is also of concern because of the structured interview setting causing feelings of scrutiny regarding personal choices. Findings from this research may lack generalizability and the ability to draw casual conclusions because of the small sample size (Bell & Waters, 2014). The quality of the research may be influenced by the researcher's personal biases and subjectivity.

Chapter 4: Findings

Chapter four provides the findings generated from this study. The presentation of findings is organized by the data collection, characteristics of the respondents and their library facilities, and each of the three research questions. The final section provides a chapter summary.

Data Collection

Twenty-one library professionals were interviewed for this study. Library directors, branch managers, and governing board of directors from eight counties across three states were identified for interviews and contacted via email, including the letter of intent, study abstract, informed consent, IRB approval, and a copy of the interview protocol (See Appendices A, B, & C). Study participants included library directors and branch managers from Central Appalachian public libraries included in the eight-county Central Appalachian Region defined for this study. Additionally, library professionals from Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives and West Virginia Library Commission were contacted via email and interviewed for the study, along with one member from a library board of trustees.

Library directors, branch managers, and governing board of directors who did not respond to the initial email request for interviews were contacted by phone to schedule an interview. Doing so resulted in seven additional interviews.

Snowball sampling methods were incorporated to obtain further information from library professionals in Central Appalachia. This method resulted in an additional interview with one library board of trustee member, three interviews with staff members from the Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives, one interview with staff from the West Virginia Library Commission, and one library director outside of the original eight county area. This brought the

total number of interviews completed to 21. The interviews were conducted between April 2023 and February 2024. Interviews ranged from 35 to 90 minutes to complete.

Interviews were conducted through the videoconferencing platform Microsoft Teams. Permission to record the interviews was granted by all 21 participants. Field notes were taken during all interviews. Transcription of all interviews was completed using Microsoft Teams. Follow-up emails were sent to the 21 library professionals interviewed identifying emergent ideas, themes, and trends. Responses from 12 library professionals confirmed these themes to be representative of public library leadership in Central Appalachian public libraries.

Characteristics of Respondents

Five of the 21 (23%) participants identified as male and 16 (76%) as female. Participants ranged from 31 to 71 years of age. Fourteen (66%) of participants had obtained a Master's Degree in Library Science from an American Library Association accredited program; however, all participants had obtained a Bachelor's Degree in various fields of study. Job titles varied among participants including Library Director, Branch Manager, State Librarian, and Trustee. Forty-two percent of participants interviewed identify as Library Directors (n=9) and 19% of participants interviewed identify as Branch Managers (n=4). Two interviewees are State Librarians (0.09%), one from West Virginia and one from Kentucky. Three participants (14%) additional interviewees are employed by the Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives.

Initially, interviews were requested via email sent to each library director and branch manager in the designated study area. Only five of the original 30 individuals responded. Follow-up phone calls were conducted to secure more interviews from potential participants. Two additional interviews were obtained from the Kentucky Department of Libraries and

Archives. Library districts in the study area were represented in addition to two state agencies and one additional library district.

Years of experience varied widely across the interview participants. One library director in Carter County, Kentucky was new to the field having only recently graduated from the University of Kentucky while the most senior state librarian had amassed 47 years of library experience. Most respondents (57%) had served more than 20 years in public libraries. 38% (n=8) of respondents have served more than 10 years, and one respondent (0.04%) had served less than 5 years in public libraries.

Major Findings

This section provides a detailed summary of participant interview responses. This section is organized around the three research questions. Respondent interview findings were reviewed and sorted. Once sorted, overall themes were identified. Participant quotes were used to support the emerging themes.

Role of Public Libraries in Central Appalachia

Research Question One sought to identify the role of public libraries in Central Appalachian communities and how that role has changed over time. Participants were asked to consider the current role of the library in the community and how the role has changed. Participants were also asked to consider programming and collections held in their libraries, as well as any resources their libraries could use to be more successful. Overall responses were centered around community centers, information centers, and social services.

Public libraries in Central Appalachia provide their communities with a variety of library programming, collections of materials, and services according to interview data. Many of these institutions are small, retrofitted buildings, seeking to serve the needs of the community on

shoestring budgets to better the lives of the patrons and the community. A West Virginia participant stated, “Our role is providing for the public. You know the ones that don’t have internet access, they come, we provide. That is how it works.” These small, rural, public libraries housed in Central Appalachia are using their position as information centers to provide their communities access to other resources. They alleviate the stress found in many communities that stems from many circumstances beyond the control of the patron such as terrain, business closures, and lack of opportunity.

One library director stated:

I think the role of the public library depends on the community. I think every community is completely different and I think it is up to every library to figure out how to support that community. We were all about books and that was beautiful, and books are still our number one business, but libraries are so much more now. We are community spaces and places. We must meet the community where they are to meet their needs, and it is going to be different in every community.

It is difficult to qualify the role of the public library in Central Appalachia because the roles vary across libraries. These roles are different in a library district, across counties, and across states. Each public library has a different role because the community they serve is different from the neighboring community. Thus, clearly defining the role of the public library in Central Appalachia is difficult because these institutions are serving their communities based upon community need, not based upon any formal public library structure.

Public Libraries in Central Appalachia are meeting needs. They are providing meeting spaces, housing outside agencies, providing diverse learning opportunities throughout small communities, and making large impacts on the lives of those living in those small places. When

asked what the role of the rural public library is in Central Appalachia, one participant sums it up best by saying, “In one word, public libraries in Central Appalachia are essential.”

Community Centers

The role of the public library in Central Appalachia is diverse because it is based upon community needs. The public library has always been the information center of the community; however, in many Central Appalachian communities, the public library is also transitioning into the community center and a source for social services. One participant stated, “I think that libraries provide an extremely valuable service to the community in helping give access to information and providing services that improve their quality of life.” This participant went on to state, “We just do what needs to be done, and I think that is the way the libraries have always been, whether it is providing books and materials, services, or simply the personal aspect of assistance. I believe that is something that libraries have always done and will continue to do.” Another participant stated, “We had to become more of a community hub as opposed to just a book warehouse.”

Rural public libraries in Appalachia are taking on the role of the community center as they move away from being book warehouses. They are hosting events such as plays and recitals, providing opportunities for exercise by offering different levels programming, expanding learning by offering science, technology, engineering, arts, and music (STEAM) activities for all ages, providing meeting space for the community. They are always willing to adapt to the needs of the community supporting their institution. Public libraries truly belong to the people of the community because they work to meet the needs of the community on the most granular level.

Information Centers

Although the role of the public library is changing in Central Appalachia, the need for traditional library and information services still exists. “Story time is a huge draw in our library,” stated one library director, “but most of our foot traffic comes from people that need to use our computers, internet, copier, and fax machines. These are services they don’t have at home.” Another participant stated, “Books are still our number one circulating item in the collection. People still read and they want print books.” When questioned further, each participant verified that digital materials are available in every library district studied.

Even with the addition of digital books in all eight library districts studied, print materials are still popular items, but public libraries in Central Appalachia are also getting creative with the items available for check out by library patrons. When asked about the most unique aspect of the library district, one library director mentioned, “the ability for patrons to check out the community.” When asked for details about how this works, the director continued, “this collection allows patrons to check out experiences from the library. Things like museum passes, a tour of the fire department, a ghost hunting pack, equipment to use in the park.” The library director states that the program is very effective and that it encourages the community to experience everything that the area has to offer.

Rural public libraries in Central Appalachia are flexible and willing to adapt to the needs of the community. The unique library collections and programming that are found in Central Appalachian public libraries encompasses the wide variety of interests found in these communities. These library collections and programs were highlighted in each interview as key to bringing patrons into the library. In some cases, new technology is not well received by the

community because of the cost to the patron to access the material on their own. One such example is the transition from DVDs to streaming services. One library director stated:

We have an enormous DVD collection. I have never seen a DVD collection larger in my life, and all three locations have it, so we have spent a ton of money on DVDs. It is still very popular and will remain popular in Eastern Kentucky long after it is not popular in other places because streaming services cost money.

For patrons to stream movies at home, they must pay for the streaming platform, but they must also have access to a stable, high speed internet connection. Unfortunately, this connection is not available to many patrons because of cost, but for others, the rural setting and rugged terrain make it impossible to connect to the internet. Patrons are forced to rely on the public library for access to entertainment but also for internet connectivity.

Social Services

One of the most compelling changes to the role of the public library is the addition of social workers to the library staff. This change in the role of the library was needed for patrons to gain access to needed services such as housing or medical assistance, parenting classes, or workforce development. By placing the social worker in the library, the stigma is removed, and the social workers become approachable, no longer a threat to the family unit. The patron can connect with the needed services and the need can be met. One West Virginia library director stated:

We are really proud that we have had social workers in the Cabell County Public Library since the 1970's. The social workers on staff help people find food, clothing, shelter, water. Not just the individuals who are homeless and living on the streets, but people laid off from work or whose job shut down. They come in and need help meeting their

electric bill. We also work with domestic violence shelters, the transient authority, all of these agencies across the state, even across the country. It is a beautiful thing.

These same rural public libraries in Central Appalachia that are helping patrons connect with services in the community are also helping patrons connect with food and household supplies that they need. One public library in Eastern Kentucky is providing patrons with a care closet in each restroom facility. The small cart is filled with personal hygiene items such as soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrushes; diapers and wipes; socks, lotion, lip balm, and feminine hygiene products. “People take what they need and leave the rest. We haven’t had any problems with theft, if that is even what you call it. If they need it that bad, they can have it all,” stated the library director. This director noted that the care closet is included in the programming budget but donations are frequent and always accepted to help supplement the program.

Food insecurity is a problem in Appalachia as the cost of groceries keeps rising and the area is already poverty stricken. Another Eastern Kentucky public library is trying to help patrons offset some of the costs by providing free produce to patrons. This food is donated by other local organizations, knowing the library reaches the most people in the community on a regular basis. The library director stated:

We often have a table full of potatoes, cabbage, or carrots in our front lobby. We just put a sign out that says free. The food is always gone by the end of the day. The need in the community is vast and we do all we can to help.

Other public libraries in Central Appalachia are combating food insecurity through the implementation of seed libraries. The public library provides seed packets to patrons to grow at their home. Some libraries ask that patrons save seeds to return to the library to share with others while others replenish seed packets as their budget permits. One library in Eastern Kentucky

obtained free seeds by reaching out to a supplier because purchasing seeds was not feasible for their budget. This proved to be a successful program according to the library director, driving up the number of library card applications by 110% over the previous month.

Major Challenges Facing Public Libraries in Central Appalachia

As the role of the rural public library has changed, it is necessary to understand what challenges are facing these institutions. Technology has become an increasingly important part of library services to the public and the public library is focused on providing access to the community. However, this does not come without problems. Research Question Two was directed at determining what major challenges are facing rural public libraries in Central Appalachia by asking the library professionals in this study what they are experiencing.

“Keeping up with change and helping the community adapt to those changes,” was the answer provided by one library branch manager in Eastern Kentucky when asked about the challenges facing the public library in Central Appalachia. Another library director in West Virginia stated, “Money is the biggest challenge we face. Our library is small and we don’t have a large tax base so funding is very limited for us.” Yet another library director in Ohio stated:

Connectivity and funding are the two things that are major challenges for libraries in this corridor. We do not have the tax base to fund the sort of initiatives necessary to robustly and fully-fund libraries in this area and allow them access to all of the benefits and technology that are available.

However, staffing was also frequently mentioned by the library professionals interviewed. “We pay less than McDonald’s per hour and that makes it difficult to retain our staff,” stated one library director. This director went on to state, “finding qualified staff to work for the pay we provide is often difficult.”

Although funding was the issue most frequently discussed by the library professionals interviewed (n=21), access to stable internet connections for the community was the second most frequent challenge mentioned by the group (n=19). Internet connectivity for the community was not mentioned by staff of two public libraries in the study. These libraries were two of the most urban libraries in the study area. The mountainous terrain and sparse populations create a barrier for internet service providers to establish connections in these rural mountain communities. It is difficult to lay cable in such rugged areas and cellular service connections are often blocked by the terrain as well. Satellite connections are the most reliable way to connect but the expense is often a barrier in areas that are frequently impoverished due to a lack of jobs. Many of the other challenges brought up by the study group stem from either a lack of funding or stable internet connections, including community awareness of library services, the lack of current technology, and access to digital resources.

Funding and Taxation

Public library funding was overwhelmingly the biggest issue put forth by the library professionals in this study with 100% of participants (n=21) stating that public library funding is the biggest challenge their library system faces. Although seven out of eight library systems (87.5%) are funded through a library tax or levy, one library system currently does not have any funding outside of the limited city and county support.

The Carter County Public Library is a prime example of a Central Appalachian public library in a funding crisis. This two-branch public library system is in Eastern Kentucky and currently operates on \$77,000 per year according to the library director and board member interviewed. “The City of Olive Hill provides about \$27,000 per year, the City of Grayson provides \$25,000 per year, and the Carter County Fiscal Court provides \$25,000 per year, for a

total of \$77,000,” stated the board member. This board member goes on to state, “there is not a library tax in Carter County. We are one of the few systems left in Kentucky without tax support.”

The Carter County Public Library cannot supply the same library services found in the neighboring counties with a library tax. Carter County is surrounded by Boyd, Elliott, Greenup, Lawrence, Lewis, and Rowan Counties. Each of these counties, except for Elliott County, fund their public library by utilizing some form of a library tax. Carter County’s public library cannot provide adequate services to their library patrons because of inadequate funding. Additionally, Carter County has found it increasingly difficult to find qualified library staff to work in the two branches of the system because the positions pay only \$20,000 per year with no benefits, creating a high turnover rate. “It is difficult to have any continuity of services when staff turnover is so high. We have had three library directors in the last 18 months because of the pay scale,” stated the library board member. The Carter County Public Library director interviewed for this study had recently resigned to take a higher paying circulation position in a neighboring county.

Despite proof that thriving public libraries raise property values, Carter County public officials refuse to implement a library tax. One library board member stated:

Some folks are going to say that libraries are old fashioned and outdated because they think you can find anything and everything you want on the internet. Others say, “why do we need a public library when we have a university library in town?” Well, because that is a different type of library, it doesn’t support the public. It is paid for by students and should be used by students.

Political figures in Carter County are not in favor of implementing a new tax, frequently stating that “now is not the time.” These same figures did not grow up with access to a public library, thus they do not see the benefit of the public library according to interviews. “If you have never had something, you don’t miss it, you don’t realize it’s value,” states one board member.

Even the public libraries with the largest budgets are still struggling with funding issues. Cabell County Public Library in West Virginia is currently facing the biggest potential budget cut in the area that could cripple library services in the county. Cabell County Public Library currently operates on a \$4-million-dollar budget. About half of this funding is provided through the Cabell County Board of Education by an excess tax levy that supports the public library system, as well as Parks and Recreation. Yet in 2023, the Cabell County Board of Education announced that they would be reducing funding provided to the Cabell County Public Library through this levy from approximately \$1.5 million to approximately \$197,000. This would leave Cabell County Public Library, the second biggest library district in West Virginia, to operate on less than half of their previous budget.

Cabell County Public Library has filed a lawsuit, in conjunction with Parks and Recreation, to restore funding to the library. However, if this lawsuit is not successful, the future of public library service in Cabell County will be drastically changed. One branch manager in Cabell County stated, “We will have to close if we don’t win this lawsuit. I will lose my job and my community will lose their library.” Another library employee in the Cabell County Public Library stated, “I am worried and scared. It is not an exaggeration. I am scared for education. We must support libraries because they are essential.”

The community is in support of the funding for Cabell County Public Library. Library supporters continue to flood the library with messages of support and hope for the future. They

have rallied at the local school board meetings and staged letter writing campaigns expressing their anger toward the Cabell County School Board for slashing library funding. “Our patrons love our library. They use our library and want to continue using the library. They are furious that this is even an issue,” stated one library branch manager. “Last year, we ran the numbers, not counting everything, but just the buildings and the people. It costs \$1.7 million for seven branches. That’s just the bare bones of it,” stated the library director.

Other public libraries have also expressed concerns regarding funding. Wayne County Public Library in West Virginia stated that although many of their administrative tasks are handled by Cabell County as part of the regional library network, they are still struggling to maintain library services in the three small branches. The library director stated, “It is hard to keep up with technology and to buy new books on our budget. We are a small system with a small budget.” Boyd County Public Library in Kentucky stated that their one wish was for stable funding to support complete library services and to pay staff competitive wages. Greenup County Public Library in Kentucky also stated stable funding would change the way library services are provided to the patrons of their district.

Briggs Lawrence County Public Library in Ohio has some of the most secure funding sources of the libraries interviewed, despite not being a taxing library district. Their funding is provided by the State of Ohio Public Library Fund, but also through a trust provided by the Caleb Briggs Library Trust Fund. Yet, this public library district is also concerned about funding. The public library director states:

Healthcare costs for the library are enormous. It costs the library \$75,000 for one person to sit at their desk. That is not the amount of money the person takes home but what it

costs the library for that person to be on staff. A large portion of that is the cost of healthcare for the library employee.

Community Education and Awareness

Community awareness was another issue brought to light by the library professionals interviewed. 57% (n=12) of the interviewees stated that bringing community awareness to the library was an issue. Many people do not know that the public library is available in these rural Appalachian communities. One Eastern Kentucky library director states:

We are often an afterthought for many people in the community. Some of them just aren't aware that we are here. You hear people come in and it is almost like a brag when they say things like this is the first time I have been in the library and I'm 70 years old.

Instead of the public library being the first place community members look for an answer, they are often the last in some Central Appalachian communities according to one library professional. The library directors in this area are hoping to change this by increasing marketing and outreach activities performed by the public library in the community. Additionally, public libraries are adding a wider variety of programming events to offer more options for the community to increase foot traffic for the institution.

Small budgets present a large problem for rural public libraries with a need for marketing campaigns. Some larger public libraries are looking to hire local agencies to handle these tasks, while others continue to do their best with in-house staff. One Eastern Kentucky library director states:

The advertising and media we have here are lacking. Getting the word out about what we have to offer is missing. I have hired a local advertising agency to promote the library, to

get that information out, get people to recognize us, to become visible. Those are resources we have been missing.

Many public libraries in Central Appalachia rely on social media for much of their advertising because it is free. Cabell County Public Library offered Facebook training for their branch managers and staff members. Branch managers were able to set up a Facebook page for their library branch and learn the basics of using the platform for public library marketing. One branch manager stated, “we use Facebook to advertise all our programs after we learned how to use it. It’s free and people see it.”

Technology

Other rural public libraries are relying on paper flyers passed out at local schools and grocery stores to get their information out to their community because the digital infrastructure is not strong enough to rely on social media marketing or website traffic. One West Virginia library director stated:

My {library} Wi-Fi extends 300 feet into our parking lot. The community can get internet at home if they live on one of two major highways or one block to each side of the major highway in town. Access to internet is a real problem in our community.

This problem is not unique to the mountains of West Virginia. Similar problems are found in the Appalachian foothills of Eastern Kentucky as well. One Kentucky library director stated:

We have 50 T-Mobile hotspots in our collection. We always have a waiting list. The need is twofold. It comes from a lack of internet service availability in many parts of our county but also because of the price for internet service. It is impossible to function without some type of connectivity in today’s world. You have to have access.

In this digital world, access is needed for the community. Public libraries are the primary location for free public internet access for all purposes. One library director in Eastern Kentucky stated:

We have people in our parking lot all hours of the day using our Wi-Fi. They come here to use our connection for lots of reasons. Sometimes it's because they do not have access at home, others need a faster connection, sometimes people are traveling or out of town, others need to use our computers. Sometimes people have a device, like an iPhone, but do not have service and have to connect to the Wi-Fi for the device to work. There are lots of reasons people need our connection and we are here for them all.

Rural public libraries are serving communities by connecting them to the world through internet and devices. Each of the eight library districts in this study area provided computers for public use and free Wi-Fi connections. Some of the smaller libraries such as Carter County Public Library in Kentucky provide only desktop computers, other larger systems such as Boyd County Public Library in Kentucky offer laptops for checkout from a kiosk. Putnam County Public Library in West Virginia establishes mobile computer labs in the community with their outreach programs. Other public libraries in the study have different devices to use while in the library, such as iPads, tablets, Kindles, or devices especially for children. However, 71% of the library professionals (n=15) questioned stated that keeping technology up to date was a problem due to the cost.

These same library professionals noted it is difficult to keep staff training up to date with the rapid changes in technology, especially when many staff members are not technologically inclined due to age or skills. One West Virginia library director stated:

My staff is part time and all over the age of 60. They took the job to make ends meet during their retirement years and because they like books. They were not anticipating the amount of knowledge they would need related to technology.

Another library director in Kentucky stated:

Technology changes so fast that we cannot keep up. Our budget is small. We cannot afford to purchase new computers and all the software licenses needed. We encourage people to use free software that is available to them, like Google Docs. It is a bit of a learning curve sometimes because it is not what they are used to, but most people are willing to try it, especially when we tell them they can use it on their own devices for free too.

Technology in the library is not just limited to internet and computers for public use. The technology for staff-use also needs to be considered. Technology cost must also encompass providing staff computers, databases, digital materials, and the integrated library system (ILS) that maintains the library's collection and patron information. These all come with a price.

"Cabell County Public Library is part of the Western Region of libraries. We provide administrative support to our branches in Cabell County, but also to Wayne, Lincoln, Mingo, Putnam, and Mason Counties in West Virginia," according to the library director. The director went on to state:

For some counties, we only provide assistance by processing payroll or offer HR support. For others we catalog materials, provide collection support by sharing resources, and other tasks that help out that specific location. We also maintain SirsiDynix, the ILS system we all use, as well as support the digital book collection known as West Virginia READS.

Cabell County Public Library provides these services to the small public libraries in the Western Region, allowing them to focus on other tasks such as programming, reference questions, and building patron rapport.

It is also important to discuss the explosion of digital materials in relation to library services. Due to the expense of maintaining large digital collections, Kentucky, Ohio, and West Virginia have adopted the consortium method for digital materials. Kentucky Libraries Unbound, The Ohio Digital Library, WV-READS, and WVDELI are all shared digital collections maintained by one source and shared by libraries across each respective state. Libraries are paying for use based upon their community population numbers, making the digital platforms known as LIBBY and OverDrive, more affordable for even the smallest libraries in the state. However, West Virginia's state librarian pointed out that the cost for digital materials is still substantial, going on to state:

Digital materials are often viewed as a cheaper alternative to print because they will last forever. This is not the case. Digital materials are often the same price or more expensive than their print counterparts to purchase. Digital books also come with circulation limits that allow us to check out a book a specific number of times. Think about it like a paperback book. They wear out and fall apart after they have been checked out several times. Digital books don't wear out; publishers just limit the number of times we can circulate them before we must repurchase the same material.

Kentucky has also implemented a similar system to share access to otherwise expensive library databases through Kentucky Virtual Library. This allows libraries and patrons to access databases, interlibrary loan services, and courier services for one price paid by the library based upon population. This shared cost makes the databases accessible for all participating libraries.

Additionally, Kentucky Virtual Library is available to all libraries in the state, not just public libraries.

All interviewees (100%) stated their public library is providing some form of technology training for the library patrons or staff. These classes range from specific software training programs such as Microsoft Word, Adobe Photoshop, or Google Docs, to more device specific programs such as iPhone Boot Camp or How to Train Your Laptop. One library branch manager in Kentucky stated:

Our device classes are always well attended and often have a waiting list when registration fills up. We offer computer basics such as email, Facebook, and online shopping, but we also give our patrons tips about how to stay safe online by not giving out personal information and verifying their information.

Another branch manager in West Virginia stated, “Our device classes are always full and our desk staff answers a ton of questions about technology every day. Our patron surveys show that technology advice is one of our most valuable assets.”

Technology is a vital part of the public library because of the number of patrons relying on the institution for access. Each community is different, and the public library must work to meet the community’s technology needs by providing access, devices, training, or information. Regardless of the funding level at which the public library is operating, providing free and open public access to Wi-Fi and computers remains an important part of the public library’s role in the community.

Availability of Library Resources

With the explosion of digital media, print resources, such as magazines and newspapers have begun to go bankrupt. Additionally, the cost of other informational materials, including

books, has increased in the last five years. The price increase and decrease in production have limited the number of materials public libraries can access with their limited budgets. This problem is exacerbated in Central Appalachia because of the limited access to technology and internet connections.

Areas without access to reliable internet service are at a significant disadvantage because they must wait on access to print media for news. This often means that days could pass before information sources arrive from larger areas. Meanwhile, misinformation spreads through word of mouth. One library director in West Virginia states:

One thing I find our staff doing frequently is correcting misinformation that our patrons garner from sources that are not reputable, from each other, or from satire when they do not quite understand what satire is. The library is stopping misinformation in our community where we can.

Another library director in Kentucky states:

The lack of up-to-date print resources is a real problem. Our patrons enjoy their Better Homes and Gardens, but they also want to know what is going on locally. Many of our patrons are upset they cannot easily access obituaries or local news except in an online format.

As the digital era continues to expand, more print media outlets are shifting to digital formatting. The problem stems from patrons expecting free, unfettered access to local news and information, but are then obstructed by paywalls. These patrons are used to getting information in print formats for free and expect the same information in digital format for free, yet this is not the reality of the situation. One branch manager in West Virginia stated:

Library patrons that have been avid newspaper readers for years are crushed when they discover their local newspaper no longer exists. We point them to online services, only to find what they need is behind a paywall. As libraries, we cannot purchase every subscription our patrons want and we often have upset patrons because of this.

Administrative and Leadership Implications

Like every organization, rural public libraries face administrative and leadership implications that create barriers to service. Some of these implications are specific to public libraries in all geographic areas, while others are more specific to Central Appalachian public libraries.

Book Challenges

Currently, one of the biggest issues facing public libraries on the national level is collection oversight from government institutions and book challenges. Although these issues have not directly affected the public libraries in the study area, the threat remains on the mind of every library professional interviewed.

Public libraries as close as Scioto County in Ohio and Bourbon and Clark Counties in Kentucky have been faced with book ban challenges orchestrated by community members. However, the immediate study area has not faced any public backlash because of collection materials or programming. “Banning books has not been an issue in our library system. It has gotten really close to us but we have not had an issue yet,” states one Kentucky library director. Another Ohio library director states, “I am on constant alert for issues related to book bans. I worry that we will have problems like our neighbors, but we have not yet.” A West Virginia library director stated, “Book bans worry me but not to the extent of the funding issues facing our libraries. We have bigger concerns right now than the book bans in this area.”

One library director in Ohio stated, “Appalachian people tend to stay in their own holler and mind their own business. They don’t care what their neighbor is doing, as long as it doesn’t affect them.” When asked about this statement, another library director in Kentucky stated, “I totally disagree with that. I think the people around here live to know what their neighbor is doing, but we live in a secluded area that outside influence has a difficult time penetrating.” Although these two directors do not explicitly agree about the tendencies of those living in Central Appalachia, their thoughts are similar regarding the area. Central Appalachia is an insulated area and often the outside world has little or no effect on the thoughts of the area. People are generally accepting and nice to one another. One Eastern Kentucky library director stated, “I am not from here. Kentucky is my seventh state. The people are just so nice and proud of their home.”

There are exceptions to every norm; but overall, most Central Appalachians within the study area do not seem to mind what others are reading or what lines the shelves of the public library despite the divisive political climate of the country. Although there has been some legislation in each state that would affect public libraries, none has been successful at this time. One Eastern Kentucky library director stated, “I have something in my library to offend everyone. That’s what makes it a good library” This seems to be the consensus for all. However, another Eastern Kentucky library director stated, “I whole heartedly believe censorship will be our biggest issue in the next five years. It is on our doorstep. I am afraid of what is coming.”

Political Leadership and Implications

The political implications facing public libraries in Central Appalachia span the political arena and encompass issues from taxing authority and Board of Trustee appointments to state level funding and organizational structure. Unfortunately, the Central Appalachian public

libraries are not immune to the effects of politics. Although four public library districts have successful working relationships with their public officials, four others are having significant issues related to those individuals currently in office.

In Kentucky, House Bill 167 was passed into law in 2023 making it easier for County Judge Executives to appoint library board members of their choosing, placing the library board in danger of becoming a political entity. In Boyd County, Kentucky, the County Judge Executive utilized this law to appoint a person of his choosing to the library board, despite being provided two viable candidates through the previously established application process provided by Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives.

The Boyd County Public Library Director stated:

The Judge Executive did not want to talk to us and try to get to know those people we invited to open interviews or to talk about what he'd like to see in a candidate. He said, 'No, I don't like those. We're going to appoint this person here.' And because the law changed at the beginning of the year, he was able to do that. Fortunately, I think this guy is a library supporter. I think he sees the value.

Although no other public library in the Eastern Kentucky portion of the study has faced this issue, it continues to loom in their minds. Another library director in Eastern Kentucky is also concerned about this new power appointed to County Judge Executives.

We had a great relationship with our previous Judge Executive, he is our Board President now. However, every tax funded library is only four short years away from someone trying to fix a problem that does not exist. The right decision would have been to make our boards elected like school boards instead of giving total control to one elected individual.

The appointment of library board of trustee members in Kentucky continues to be a point of contention from county to county. Some counties have adopted the new process established in SB 167 (2023). While others continue to use the application method previously established. This method has not been challenged by any public library in the court system at this time.

In 2018, Kentucky's then Governor Matt Bevin eliminated state funding to public libraries across the Commonwealth. Six years later, public library funding has yet to be restored. At least four library systems received at least 90% of their funding from the state. Carter County Public Library in Kentucky is one of the four library systems. "Public library funding is essential," stated a library trustee from Carter County "We do not have a library tax in Carter County and our funding is so limited that any amount from the state makes a big difference in what we are able to do for our community."

According to Kentucky's Department of Libraries and Archives, public library funding could make a comeback in the 2024 State Budget, much to the delight of public libraries. "We do not really need the state funding here," states one Kentucky library director with funding from a library tax, "but counties like Elliott and Carter are desperate for the money. We need to support all our libraries by returning library funding to the budget."

As mentioned previously, Carter County Public Library is not a taxing library district. Library funding is provided by the two cities, Grayson and Olive Hill, as well as the Carter County Fiscal Court. This library district is operating two branches at \$77,000 per year. Carter County's Fiscal Court is adamant that a library tax is not the way to support the library; yet they are not willing to provide a proportional amount of support for the public library. The library director stated:

Our patrons want a library like those around us in Boyd, Greenup, or Rowan Counties. I try to explain to them that those libraries are supported by tax dollars. Our patrons do not want to pay a tax because our library is not as nice as those in the taxing districts, but those libraries are nice because they have the tax dollars to support them. It is a catch-22 for us.

Funding issues because of politics is not just an issue in Kentucky public libraries. West Virginia is experiencing a similar issue. Cabell County Public Library is currently suing the Cabell County Board of Education to restore excess levy funding in the amount of approximately \$2 million dollars as previously discussed. Other West Virginia libraries discussed the distribution of monies granted to the state from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Currently, this money is allocated to West Virginia libraries on a per capita level, giving large libraries a bigger share of the money. One West Virginia library director stated that this money should be allocated in a different fashion, giving smaller libraries with bigger needs a bigger share of the money. This would allow the small libraries to better meet the needs of their communities that are not being met because of small tax bases.

West Virginia and Kentucky have both been faced with large cuts to the state library organizations. Both states have hired new organizational heads in the last year and faced reorganization due to reduced funding. The West Virginia Library Commission is currently understaffed, with only 14 employees. Kentucky is in a similar position as the Regional Librarians are currently fostering other counties to cover for unfilled positions. Additionally, several other key positions within the organization remained unfilled while the search for a new State Librarian was underway.

Qualified Staff and Training

Public Libraries in Central Appalachia are often hard pressed to find qualified staff to fill their positions. Of the library professionals interviewed, 66% (n=14) have obtained a Master's Degree in Library Science. However, 76% (n=16) of interviewees stated that they had difficulty finding staff qualified to fill positions in their public library. Of the library directors interviewed, 77% (n=7) stated that they prefer good customer service experience to a library-related degree. "I can teach someone everything they need to know about libraries, but I cannot teach good customer service," stated one Kentucky library director. Another library director in West Virginia stated, "I have nine part-time staff but that only equates to about 3.5 full time employees to run three branches. It is hard."

Low pay is part of the problem in these rural Central Appalachian public libraries. Many pay their staff minimum wage, while others are unable to offer benefits. "It is really hard to get good people when McDonald's pays better," states one Kentucky library director. It is also difficult to justify the cost of a graduate degree when the average pay for a library director in Central Appalachia is under \$50,000 per year.

Kentucky also requires many library staff to obtain a professional certificate based upon their education level. To maintain this credential, the library employee must meet the renewal criteria, including additional library related classes, continuing education hours, and training. This often becomes a barrier to obtaining qualified staff because the library does not pay well enough to support staff in obtaining these educational requirements, nor can the library support the pay for the requirements from the institution's budget.

Aging Buildings and Infrastructure

The public libraries in Central Appalachia are housed in a wide variety of buildings, many of which were never intended to be public libraries. All eight library districts reported that at least one building in their library system need repair. However, it is difficult to maintain aging buildings on the limited public library budgets found in Central Appalachia.

Cabell County Public Library in West Virginia recently built the newest building in the study area. The Barboursville Branch is the greenest library in West Virginia according to the library director. The new building is equipped with solar panels for power and geothermal heating units. However, the library director also states that the main library in downtown Huntington, WV needs a new roof, while other branch locations also have maintenance needs that must be addressed soon.

Carter County Public Library was recently awarded a \$50,000 grant from T-Mobile to replace the roof of the Grayson branch and to update some technology in the building. Once the roofing company began the project, they found an additional \$5,000 worth of damage that was not visible. Soon after, more damage was found including floor rot and wall damage. Unfortunately, the cost to repair this damage is beyond the library budget and the current Board of Trustees is seeking funding sources to repair the problems.

Boyd County Public Library opened their new Midland branch in 2021. This new library facility uses garage doors to create flexible space that can be opened or closed to meet the needs of the community. However, the library director states that the main branch located near Central Park, is a bit of a “Frankenstein building,” meaning that various renovations over the years have not created a cohesive space. The director noted that a new building would be wonderful, but it probably would not happen anytime in the next six to eight years.

Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives effectively run a construction grant program for libraries in Kentucky. According to the past construction grant coordinator, the program provides libraries with funding for building projects and the loan is then forgiven over time. It was also noted that this line of funding has remained constant in the state budget, despite changes in government leaders. This grant program has provided funding to build libraries across the state, many of which are also in Eastern Kentucky.

West Virginia also has a grant program dedicated to funding special library projects based on need. According to the state librarian, \$1,000,000 was allocated to fund building improvements this year. The funding provided by this project allowed one West Virginia county to purchase a new building to replace a prefabricated library with a litany of structural issues. The library also gained adjacent off-street parking and was able to sell the previous location for a substantial amount of money.

Community Awareness

Central Appalachian public libraries are facing a great number of challenges but ensuring that the community is aware of their existence is a battle noted by the smaller, underfunded libraries in the study sample. The well-funded libraries of Boyd, Greenup, and Lawrence Counties in Kentucky, Lawrence County in Ohio, and Cabell and Putnam Counties in West Virginia are better known and have better usage by their communities. However, it is the small or underfunded library systems that struggle to gain community awareness such as Wayne County in West Virginia and Carter County in Kentucky.

Carter County Public Library was established in 2008 by a small number of local residents. The 16-year-old institution has not taken root in the community because the

community has not embraced the library according to the board member interviewed. One board member stated:

We are focused on providing as much programming to children as we can. We want to raise a generation of library users so that they will continue to support the library as adults and bring their children. We have to establish a library culture in our community. That has never been done before in Carter County.

Carter County Public Library faces a litany of issues because of inadequate library funding. The lack of community awareness is yet another issue facing the library. Many members of the community are unaware the library exists and other members of the community are aware of the library's existence but are not convinced of the relevance. The library director stated:

It is the job of the Carter County Public Library and its board of trustees to meet the community needs where they are and establish the role of the library in their community. Once the community role has been established, community awareness will increase, and ultimately the community will understand the importance of a well-funded public library within the community.

Community awareness is inherently important in the continued relevance, existence, and evolution of the public library. The community must be aware of the resources offered by the library, they must be willing to support the library; and they must encourage change that is needed to meet the community's needs.

Change Agents

Central Appalachian libraries are creating radical positive change in communities through programs and services offered by the institution. Of library professionals interviewed, 100%

(n=21) stated that making the community a better place was the role of the public library. These same interviewees stated that it is the duty of the library director to initiate these changes and determine the needs of the community. One library director stated:

We are initiating change in the community. We want our community to be better because of the programs and services we offer at the library. When we are planning our programs, these are things we think about. What can we do to make our town the best it can be? What programs will help people live their best life? Sometimes that is as simple as a seed library so people can grow their own food or other times it is offering lessons for canning, crochet, or sewing. This spring we have free tax preparation coming to the library because that is expensive. People worry about making mistakes.

Another library director stated:

Our library is a change agent because we are actively working to better the health in our community. We are offering free classes for healthy cooking and food preparation, exercise classes multiple times a week for the whole family, offering options to help families unplug from their devices to explore the community and nature.

Although the library professionals interviewed noted the importance of library neutrality and providing information from all viewpoints, the interviewees were quick to note the importance of making the world a better place through library offerings. One library director stated, “The goal of the library is literacy, learning, free and equal access to information and services, and to enlighten everyone the community, regardless of their stance. We are here to serve everyone equally.” Another branch manager stated, “The library is Switzerland. We are neutral but we also have something to offend everyone in our collection and on our calendar.”

Public libraries in Central Appalachia are working to change the community but they are struggling to change the organizational structure of the institution. Eighty-five percent (n=18) of the library professionals interviewed have been employed with their institution for more than 20 years. One library director stated:

Librarians are able to remain in their positions for large amounts of time because it is not a physically demanding job. This sometimes creates problems because we do not get new people with new ideas. In the worst cases, library starts to feel stagnate.

The role of leadership in Central Appalachia's public libraries is important. Although the library director makes many of the decisions regarding the direction of the library, the Board of Trustees also act as a steering committee and retains the right to dismiss the library director, if needed. When asked about the role of leadership in the public library one director stated:

The stereotype of the old librarian with a bun started because librarians, directors, and staff stay in our positions too long. We become jaded. The role of the director should be all about change, not maintaining the status quo. This is true of our board of trustees too. It is often the same people rotating on and off of the board. They care about the library; but, change is hard and sometimes they do not want to push for the change that is needed to move the library forward. They would rather just maintain what we have rather than worry about something new.

The ability of the public library to adapt and change is important to maintain relevance to the community. If the library is not willing to adapt and change based on community need, the institution will become stagnate and deemed antiquated.

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed narrative of the participant responses to the interview protocol questions after a description of the data collection methods and the participant characteristics. Study participants were asked various questions about the role of public libraries in their Central Appalachian communities, major challenges facing public libraries in Central Appalachia, and the administrative and leadership implications facing public libraries in Central Appalachia. Participants were able to identify and discuss key issues facing their local public library while comparing those issues with other small public libraries, as well as large urban libraries. Participants were then able to identify and discuss the administrative and leadership concerns facing the public library in their community. The results of each interview question were organized according to common themes that developed from the analysis of participant responses. The major themes included: funding and taxation, community awareness, technology, availability of resources, book challenges, political leadership, staffing, aging buildings and infrastructures, and change agents. Participants were able to identify and discuss the role of the public library in the local community. The role of the public library varied widely based on community needs. The challenges were practical in nature and rooted in funding issues.

Findings identified the lack of funding as the most problematic challenge facing public libraries in Central Appalachia. The lack of funding was often the cause of the other challenges facing the public library. The lack of stable and secure funding for public libraries in Central Appalachia is negatively affecting the institution's ability to provide information and resources to meet community needs. Additionally, this lack of funding is creating more challenges for the public library. Without funding, it is difficult for the institution to initiate change in the

community; purchase new books and technology; to hire and train staff; to provide adequate maintenance for aging buildings, and to advertise the resources available.

The role of the public library was most frequently identified as the community center. Interviewees indicated that the public library is meeting the needs of the community beyond education, information, and entertainment. The public library is assisting people in the community by connecting them with services and resources, but also by providing food, shelter, and other essentials. Public libraries are meeting community needs by understanding what the community is lacking and providing the resources to meet those needs. Each public library expressed different needs that they are meeting in their community because each community is different in resources available. Because the community needs vary widely based on population, education, economic opportunity, and social services available, it was established through discussions with the library professionals interviewed that the role of the public library is very diverse in Central Appalachia.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This study sought to identify and define the role of the public library in Central Appalachia, understand how that role is changing in response to multiple threats and challenges, and identify strategic guidelines and implications for library leaders and governing board members. This chapter provides the purpose of the study, the problem statement, research questions, a summary of the methods, and a summary of the findings. The study conclusions, a discussion of their implications, and recommendations for additional research are also included.

Problem Statement

The role of public libraries continues to evolve in response to a multitude of influences and trends. The exponential growth of technology as the primary method of information access, the impact of COVID-19, funding challenges, changing demographics, and a host of other mitigating factors have forced public libraries to become more than book repositories. Nowhere has the impact of these trends and influences been greater than on the small public libraries in Central Appalachia. Community library leaders and governing board members are faced with a host of seemingly insurmountable challenges, including decreased funding, division of the community regarding library services, and soaring costs for library materials and services, as they develop and adopt policies and practices to navigate this ever-changing environment. Concurrently, there is little research available to guide library leaders and governing board members in this endeavor. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to describe the evolving role of the public library in Central Appalachia, understand how that role is changing in response to multiple threats and challenges, and identify strategic guidelines and implications for library leaders and governing board members as they plan and develop the library of the future.

Research Questions

Based on the Section 4 Standards and themes, the specific research questions developed to guide this study include:

1. What is the role of the public library in Central Appalachian communities and how has that role changed over time?
2. What are the major challenges facing public libraries in Central Appalachia as they transition into a digital world?
3. What are the administrative and leadership implications for library directors and governing boards as library's transition into a digital world?

Summary of Methods

This qualitative collective case study format was chosen because of the focus on public library leadership in Central Appalachia. The study discusses the communities, individuals, organizations, culture, and settings of public libraries in this austere environment. The collective case study format provides the researcher with the best understanding of public library leadership in Central Appalachia. Public library directors, branch managers, and library professionals from the eight public library systems in the Central Appalachian area, locally known as the Tri-State Area, were asked to participate. These counties included Boyd, Carter, Greenup, and Lawrence Counties in Kentucky, Lawrence County in Ohio, and Cabell, Putnam, and Wayne Counties in West Virginia. Convenience and snowball sampling methods were utilized for recruitment. A total of 21 participants were interviewed for this study, with at least one subject from each of the eight public library systems included in the study. Semi-structured interviews occurring between April 2023 and February 2024 were used to gather data. Upon completion of all participant interviews, thematic analysis was used to categorize responses. Interview recordings,

transcriptions, and notes were reviewed to identify overarching themes and perceptions regarding the role of public libraries in Central Appalachia.

Summary of Findings

Review of the participant interviews helped to identify the overarching themes related to the role of the public library in Central Appalachia, how that role has changed over time, and major challenges facing public libraries in Central Appalachia as the world becomes digital. Additionally, these interviews revealed information related to the administrative and leadership implications for library directors and governing bodies in this digital world.

The analysis of interview data found that the rural public libraries in Central Appalachia are generally focused on meeting the needs of the community. However, community needs vary greatly from library to library. These public libraries are working to meet communities where they are in digital transitions, technology, and internet connectivity to better the world around them and to help patrons at every level.

The role of the public library was most frequently identified as the community center, followed by an information center, and a location for social services. Interviewees indicated the public library is meeting the needs of the community beyond education, information, and entertainment. However, literacy, education, and information are still the primary focus of the public library. The role of the public library in Central Appalachia is diverse because the needs of each community are different. Public libraries are change agents filling gaps in the communities, ensuring that patron needs are met. In some areas, these gaps are as simple as providing meeting spaces or access to internet, while in other areas the public library is providing access to food for families in need. The public library has outgrown the role of a book repository

and grown into the role of social equalizer by helping patrons meet their basic needs as well as their need for information.

The public library is acting as a change agent by assisting people in the community. The library is connecting people with services and resources, but also providing food, shelter, and other essential needs. Public libraries are meeting community needs by understanding what the community is lacking and providing the resources to meet those needs. Each public library expressed different needs that they are meeting in their community because each community is different in the resources available. It was established through discussions with the library professionals interviewed that the role of the public library is diverse in Central Appalachia because the community needs vary widely based on population, education, economic opportunity, and social services available.

These same interviews pointed out that public library funding is a concern for every library in every system in Central Appalachia. This worry was exhibited despite the financial security of taxing districts and levies. Public library funding was found to be the most frequently mentioned concern (n=21) from all library professionals interviewed. Study participants indicated that adequate funding would solve most of the issues facing the rural public library in Central Appalachia. However, other challenges facing public libraries in Central Appalachia were identified as technology, community education and awareness, and the availability of library resources. The administrative and leadership implications most frequently mentioned were book challenges, political leadership, qualified staff and training, aging buildings and infrastructure, community awareness, and change agents.

Conclusions

Findings from this study were sufficient to support the following conclusions:

What is the role of the public library in Central Appalachian communities and how has that role changed over time?

The public library in Central Appalachia is filling the role of community center, information center, and social service provider. The role of the public library has changed over time as the institution has transitioned from focusing on books and book storage and toward a model focused on providing community enhancement. The public library is still providing books and information resources. However, the public library is also providing resources to meet other community needs such as food insecurity, clothing needs, utility assistance, and connecting library patrons to other community services. The role of the public library in Central Appalachia differs in every community as library personnel work to determine the needs of their community and provide the resources to meet those needs. Factors determining the scope and depth of those needs include the availability of technology, population, education, economic opportunities, and social services available.

What are the major challenges facing public libraries in Central Appalachia as they transition into a digital world?

The major challenges facing public libraries in Central Appalachia are funding and taxation, community education and awareness, access to technology, and the availability of resources. Funding and taxation constituted the biggest challenges as adequate funding would facilitate resolution of the other major challenges listed. Underfunded public libraries are unable to meet patron needs, provide adequate technology and resources, or perform outreach or advertisement to provide community awareness of the services available. The major challenges

in Central Appalachia are similar to the challenges faced by public libraries in larger, more urban areas. However, these challenges are often exacerbated by the lack of public funding in small communities, especially those counties without a library tax or without other available funding sources.

What are the administrative and leadership implications for library directors and governing boards as libraries transition into a digital world?

The major administrative and leadership implications for library directors and governing boards are book challenges, political leadership, qualified staff and training, aging buildings and infrastructure, and community awareness. Administrative and leadership implications in Central Appalachia are generally similar to those found in public libraries in other geographic regions.

Book challenges do occur but are not as prevalent in Central Appalachia as other parts of the United States due to the secluded nature of the communities. Some challenges were noted in the area, but most have remained in the larger, more densely populated areas outside of the Tri-State Area. Directors and governing board members do feel that more book challenges are forthcoming because of the unstable political climate in the United States.

Developing effective relationships with political leadership is a significant issue for public libraries in Central Appalachia. Statutory changes sometimes complicate the nature of these relationships. Some political leaders in Central Appalachia do not understand the importance or relevance of the public library to the community.

Hiring and retaining qualified staff in Central Appalachian public libraries is a continuing challenge. Libraries are not able to provide adequate compensation due to inadequate funding resulting in qualified individuals often move to larger urban districts for better pay or leaving the library field altogether.

Public libraries in Central Appalachia struggle to maintain facilities and update infrastructure due to the lack of funding. Libraries are often located in retrofitted spaces with problems such as a leaking roof or limited accessibility. Budget constraints often force them to choose between adequate building maintenance and other budget line items, leaving little money to hire professionals to address systems that staff are not trained to manage.

The lack of community awareness of public library functions and services in Central Appalachia continues to be a major challenge. The community cannot support or utilize a public library that they do not know exists.

Public libraries in Central Appalachia are acting as change agents in their communities. The library is making the community a better place by implementing change in the daily lives of patrons by providing goods, services, and programs that are unavailable anywhere else in the community. However, libraries are struggling to change the administrative organization of the institution because the library directors and Boards of Trustees often do not encourage change.

Discussion and Implications

Public libraries in Central Appalachia exist in an austere environment. Public library funding was terminated at the state level in Kentucky under Governor Matt Bevin in 2018. Tax levies that support public libraries are the subject of an ongoing court case in West Virginia, while some public libraries have no tax levy to rely on for funding. Some political figures and community members claim that Google is a replacement for the public library while access to internet service in communities is limited by the very mountains that define the area. Yet, despite these challenges, these woefully underfunded institutions are reaching out into the small communities to discover what services and resources will make a difference to their library users. Place matters to these institutions. These rural public libraries exist in small towns with

big hearts for community needs. It was noted in multiple interviews that helping one another is “just the Appalachian way of life”.

This study found that the challenges and implications for public libraries in other areas outlined in the literature review were an accurate reflection of those found in Central Appalachia. Literature found that all public libraries are struggling to maintain adequate funding, technology, and resources for their communities. Literature also states that public libraries are facing implications related to book challenges, political leadership, attracting qualified staff, maintaining physical spaces, and promoting community awareness.

The role of the public library has been one of education, literacy, and information since the inception of the institution. The public library began filling a void by providing new classes of library materials, resources, and services to the community that were not previously available. Giving the community access to information, education, and services became the primary role of the public library. This organizational change took the public library from being solely an information center to being a community center. Organizational change is simply altering a major component of the business or organization that has a major impact on the entity as a whole (Kras et al., 2007). By implementing change in the organization and becoming the community center, the public library has remained relevant in the community, supporting the community, and meeting the community needs.

In this Central Appalachian based study, library professionals could not clearly define a general role of the public library because the role is so different from community to community. Eric Klinenberg’s theory that the public library is the center of the community is proven in Central Appalachia (2018). Every public library in Central Appalachia has become a community center that works to meet community needs. These libraries are agents of change in their

community. They are helping people live a better life by giving away food, connecting individuals with social services, teaching job skills, and offering space for people to engage with one another, and yet still provide the vital resources of the printed and digital book.

The public libraries in Central Appalachia are adapting and changing based on the community's needs. Library programming is dynamic in nature. Herring (2014) stated that library programming is diverse and geared toward a multitude of age levels, interests, and groups. Central Appalachian public libraries are offering library programs to every age group. This study found public library programming varies from library to library because the community need varies. Yet the library is focused on meeting those needs. The best example found was the abundance of exercise classes found in Central Appalachian libraries. Many libraries offer exercise classes to help seniors maintain their physical health (Lenstra et al, 2022). However, Central Appalachian libraries are providing exercise classes to help all patrons maintain their physical health in an area that is fraught with heart disease and diabetes. These classes are free, removing the financial barrier for those unable to afford gym memberships or other classes that charge a participation fee.

Public libraries were implementing digital services such as internet access, digital books, and databases prior to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic did however force some libraries to become more digital to continue serving their community. Public libraries implemented creative ways to host library events virtually or in a drive-thru format. Books were delivered curbside and people used the digital services more frequently (The Hunt Institute, 2021). The pandemic forced library patrons to use digital services because other services were unavailable, but the services were already in place prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in Central Appalachian libraries.

Rural communities rely on the public library for access to technology, but the technology found in these Central Appalachian public libraries is often dated. Yet, access to free public internet is one of the most popular services in the public library (Bertot, et al., 2008). This access remains important to the community because it is a necessary service for access to information, job postings, educational opportunities, and social connections. Without the library, many people living in Central Appalachia would not have access due to availability or cost. Additionally, the public library is providing more access to resources, not just internet, decreasing the disparity caused by poverty and location (Bertot et al., 2008).

The establishment of organizations such as The Rural Library Network and the Association for Rural and Small Libraries is helping small libraries find likeminded organizations across the country. The resource sharing discussed by Swartz (2021) that would help to bring libraries together as a supportive group is occurring across West Virginia. Cabell County Public Library hosts shared resources and services for 10 counties, helping those small public libraries to allocate limited funding and manpower to other tasks and programs. The small library can focus on helping patrons and communities. The idea of sharing resources and information to better equip all public libraries would be an excellent method to employ in an area where a larger library with stable funding could help support smaller local public libraries by absorbing tasks such as payroll, human resource tasks, cataloging, book processing, and database management.

There is great potential to learn from each of these small rural libraries and utilize that knowledge to build the library of the future. This study can be utilized by library professionals and local government leaders to determine what the role of the public library is in their community, to determine community needs. This study can also be utilized to determine what

challenges and implications face the institution and surrounding institutions including the budgetary issues facing rural public libraries. This would allow library professionals to garner new ideas from neighboring communities that may have similar needs, challenges, and implications.

Despite the consensus that public library funding is the primary issue facing Central Appalachian public libraries, further investigation is needed to determine the appropriate level of funding required to provide adequate library services to communities of different sizes. Public libraries are funded in different ways depending on their location and library district. Federal agencies are earmarking some money for public libraries through IMLS and LSTA (American Library Association, 2022). However, it is not being distributed in an effective fashion for small public libraries. Per capita funding seems fair on the surface, but it is not sufficient for small public libraries. This method does not consider the needs of the community or the existence of other funding streams such as tax levies or flat rate funds provided by city or county governments. Public library funding should include a survey of all funding streams and how those streams could be implemented into different community structures to produce the most gains for all libraries involved.

Public libraries in Central Appalachia must continue to meet the community where they are and provide the services needed in that community. The public libraries that are struggling to remain operational, like those in Carter County, Kentucky, must become relevant to the community through strategic planning and organizational change. These public libraries must continue to search for the community needs and fill them, to the best of their ability, despite their miniscule funding. Meeting the community needs will increase community awareness of the public library and build reliance on the public library and trust in the institution.

Public libraries cannot overlook the importance of strategic planning and organizational change. Strategic planning provides a framework for decision making and helps to determine the desirability of competing needs, and how important decisions will be made to meet those needs (MacKenzie, 1997). Many small public libraries are not using this tool to guide their decision making. In fact, many of these institutions do not have strategic plans. Some feel that those documents are not useful. The time spent developing these documents will help the public library progress with organizational changes and addressing secondary issues, such as high turnover rates, hiring and retaining qualified staff, future building integrity and maintenance, and compensation rates.

Standards and guidelines for public libraries have been relinquished to the state level, but many of these standards are difficult to enforce because of the budgetary issues facing small public libraries in Central Appalachia. Developing a set of public library standards and guidelines specific to the Central Appalachian area would help smaller libraries maintain quality library services tailored specifically to the rural area (Zabel & Pellack, 2012). Holding small public libraries with very limited budgets to the same standards as large public libraries without funding problems creates additional barriers to success for the smaller institutions. Give these small libraries their own research-based standards that can be met in a feasible manner. The result in a better option than a general standard or guideline on a state or national level.

Based on the overall themes that emerged through the interview process, the challenges and implications facing public libraries in Central Appalachia were exposed and verified that these challenges and implications are similar across the region. These same interviews determined that the purpose of the public library is the same in each community, to meet

community needs. However, the public library's role in this purpose within each community is different.

Public libraries are agents of social change. This holds true in Central Appalachia. Public libraries are working to expand their services but also to connect patrons with services outside of the library. Community needs change and the public library is meeting those needs whether it is story time, drug rehabilitation referrals, education, or exercise (Flaherty & Miller, 2016). The addition of social workers in the public library is a natural progression in the change of the organization. Libraries are safe spaces for people who have nowhere else to go (Lambert, 2020). This allows people to get the help they need in a place that is already welcoming to everyone. The community patron often has a trusting relationship with the public library in Central Appalachia. Living in a small community fosters relationships that extend into all areas of life, offering trust where none would exist otherwise. Public libraries in Central Appalachia are excelling at helping people find what they need to survive, meeting community needs, and creating a better quality of life (Mathiasson & Jochumsen, 2021).

Administration must encourage public libraries to be agents of change. The role of the public library in Appalachia is to meet the needs of the community. Public libraries cannot meet the needs of the community if they are not changing and adapting. The organization must embrace new ideas and adopt the post-neutrality ideology needed to allow for "more complex and nuanced understandings of neutrality and library professional identity" as stated by Mathiasson & Jochumsen (2021). Librarians are change agents and base their change on the ideas of what is good. Librarians should continue to be drivers of change in their communities, promoting understanding (Lankes, 2020). Lankes goes on to state that "to be a librarian is not to

be neutral, or passive, or waiting for a question. It is to be a radical positive change agent within your community (2013).

The relationship between the community and the public library should continue to remain fluid to meet community needs based on the data found in the literature review and interviews. Librarians must continue as change agents, supporting positive community change. Trends in public library service in Central Appalachia should move the library further toward a community center model, emphasizing the needs of each individual community in the evolution of the institution. Public libraries are indeed creating stronger communities in Central Appalachia.

Suggestions for Future Research

Although there is a wealth of research regarding public libraries, no research existed regarding the public libraries in the Central Appalachian region known as the Tri-State area. This study gathered information regarding eight public library systems in a very specific area of Central Appalachia. This study only looked at the perspective of the library professionals associated with the public library in question. This same research could be repeated at institutions across Central Appalachia or in other rural areas. Future research should also be geared toward acquiring the perspectives of other individuals involved with the public library in these rural communities. Research should be conducted to gain the perspective of the library patron and political figures to determine how they view the role of the public library, as well as what they view as the challenges and implications facing the institution. The challenge of public library funding appears to play a significant role in the success of public libraries. It would be beneficial to research how public library funding can be supported in rural areas and how those benefits can offset other problems in the communities.

Summary

In conclusion, the overall results of this study conclude that the role of the rural public library in Central Appalachia has evolved from a book warehouse into the community center model. The role of the public library has changed and will continue to change based upon the specific community within which the public library is present. Every public library is different, yet the role remains the same, to serve the community by meeting the needs of the people that live there.

The challenges and implications facing public libraries in Central Appalachia are like those found in other areas of the United States. However, funding proves to be the primary challenge that drives the other problems, including community education and awareness, a lack of technology, and availability of resources. The implications facing public libraries are also like those found in other areas of the United States. Political leadership, hiring qualified staff, aging buildings, and community awareness continue to be issues in Central Appalachian public libraries as well as others around the country. However, Central Appalachia is seeing fewer book challenges than other areas of the United States based on interviews and literature.

The information obtained from this study provides insight about how public libraries adapt to their communities based on the needs of the area. Also insightful is the importance of adequately funding public libraries in rural communities to minimize the intuitional challenges and implications while benefiting members of the community. Library professionals in Central Appalachia and other rural communities can be made aware of the challenges and implications outlined in this study to advocate for adequate funding and to continue the evolution of their specific public library to meet the needs of their community. Library boards and other governing bodies should also be made aware of their role as change agents in Central Appalachia including

the role the public library plays in the community and how addressing the challenges and implications could improve the library, as well as the community.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval



Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board
One John Marshall Drive
Huntington, WV 25755

FWA 00002704

IRB1 #00002205

IRB2 #00003206

May 1, 2023

Thelma Isaacs, EdS, EdD, MA, MS, BA
College of Education and Professional Development

RE: IRBNet ID# 2049445-1

At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Isaacs:

Protocol Title: [2049445-1] Place Matters: Public Library Leadership in Central Appalachia

Site Location: MU

Submission Type: New Project APPROVED

Review Type: Exempt Review

In accordance with 45CFR46.104(d)(2), the above study was granted Exempted approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Designee. No further submission (or closure) is required for an Exempt study **unless** there is an amendment to the study. All amendments must be submitted and approved by the IRB Chair/Designee.

This study is for student Jasmyne R. Lewis.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Lindsey Taylor at (304) 696-6322 or l.taylor@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Bruce F. Day'.

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director, Office of Research Integrity

Appendix B

Central Appalachian Library Leadership Interview Protocol

Name:

Title:

Date:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. As a reminder, this research is being conducted through the Marshall University College of Education and Professional Development to explore the future role of public libraries and leadership in Central Appalachia. This interview will be recorded for the sole use of the co-investigator's analysis. The information you provide will be integrated with that of other interviewees and confidentiality will always be maintained. Participation is completely voluntary. You may elect to stop participation at any time.

Did you read the consent for and study abstract? Do you have any questions about the purpose of the study? Are you willing to continue with the interview?

[Discuss answers]

Your experience as a library professional in Central Appalachia is very important to this study. I anticipate this interview will take approximately 90 minutes. Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions about anything we have discussed so far?

[Discuss questions]

If you think of any questions as we are talking or at any point in this study, please feel free to ask them. I am more than happy to provide answers for you.

Demographics:

1. Tell me about the community you live in.
2. Tell me about public library you work in.
 - a. Facility size?
 - b. Number of patrons?
 - c. Number of items in the collection?
 - d. Number of seats?
 - e. Number of computers?
3. Tell me about your role in the public library.
4. How long have you been in this role?
5. Have you worked in other libraries?
 - a. If so, where?
 - b. Is the role of the public library different in Central Appalachia than other areas of the country?

Research Question 1: What is the role of the public library in Central Appalachian communities and how has that role changed over time?

1. What does your library offer in terms of programming, collections, etc.?
2. What is the most unique thing about your library?
3. What is the current role of the public library in the community?
4. How has this role changed over time?
5. Is the role of the public library continuing to change?
6. What would your patrons or community members say about your library?

Research Question 2: What are the major challenges facing public libraries in Central Appalachia as they transition into a digital world?

1. What do you think are major challenges facing public libraries today?
2. Are there challenges specific to libraries in Central Appalachia that do not exist in more urban areas?
3. How has the transition to a digital world changed the role of the public library in Central Appalachia?
4. What resources does your library need to be a successful public library?

Research Question 3: What are the administrative and leadership implications for library directors and governing boards as library's transition into a digital world?

1. How many people staff this branch?
 - a. Qualifications of staff members?
2. Who are the primary stakeholders in your public library?
3. Have these stakeholders changed over time?
4. How do you think these stakeholders will change in the future?
5. What are the contributions of these stakeholders to the public library?
6. How is your public library funded?
7. Is this funding adequate for your population and library goals?
 - a. Community Size?
8. Does your library have a leadership plan or other guidance document in place such as a strategic plan?
 - a. May I see a copy?
9. What are some of the goals you have for your public library in the future?

10. What are the obstacles to these goals?
11. Have changes in library leadership had an effect on your public library?
12. Have changes in community leadership had an effect on your public library?
13. Are there other administrative or leadership issues that have had an effect on your public library?
14. If you could change anything about your public library, what would it be and why?

Other Information:

1. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your public library?
2. Can you suggest another library professional or library board of director's member that would be interested in participating in this study?
3. May I follow up with you if I have other questions while reviewing this information?

Thank you for your time today. If you have any questions or additional comments, please let me know.

Appendix C

Consent to Participate in Research

Dear [Participant],

My name is Jasmyne Lewis, Executive Director at Rowan County Public Library and 2014 graduate from the University of Kentucky with a Master of Science in Library Science. Currently, I am a doctoral candidate at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia, seeking the degree of Doctor of Education in Leadership Studies. As a part of that program, I am conducting my dissertation research study investigating the future of public libraries and leadership in Central Appalachia. I am contacting you to participate in this study. A study abstract is attached.

More specifically, I am requesting your participation in a semi-structured interview regarding your experiences in the public library. This interview will focus on the topics of understanding how the role of the public library is changing in response to multiple threats and challenges and identify strategic guidelines and implications for library leaders as they plan and develop the library of the future. For convenience, the interview will be conducted via Microsoft Teams videoconferencing and should require approximately 90 minutes of your time. Interviews will be recorded. Recordings will be destroyed following completion of interview transcription. Transcripts will be assigned a number. The code list of names will be retained on a password protected computer file by the co-principle investigator. The success of this study is dependent on the willingness of library professionals such as yourself to share their experiences and insights.

There are no known risks involved with participating in this study. Your willingness to be interviewed will imply both your consent and that you are at least 18 years of age. Participation is completely voluntary and there are no penalties or loss of benefits if you choose not to participate. You may also choose not to answer any questions included in the interview protocol. The information you supply is confidential, and no individual will be identified by name or identifying information.

If you have questions about this study, you may contact Dr. Sissy Issacs (Principal Investigator) at 304-696-2890 or issacs9@marshall.edu. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity at 304-696-4303.

Please reply to this email to indicate your willingness to participate in this study. I will then respond with suggested times for scheduling the interview.

Thank you for your consideration of participation in this study. My expectation is that this study will provide information regarding the public libraries of Central Appalachia and their ability to be resilient and successful despite the austere environment. A summary of study findings will be shared with all participants.

Jasmyne Lewis, Co-Investigator

Appendix D

Summary of Public Library Criteria for Branch Type

	Small	Medium	Large	Urban
Population Served	Up to 5,000	5,000-10,000	10,000-35,000	35,000+
Net Library Space in square feet	Less than 5,000	5,000-10,000	10,000-35,000	35,000+
Hours of operation per week	20-25	25-45	45-65	65+
Staffing	1-2.5	2.5-5	5-17.5	17.5
Qualifications of Branch Supervisor	Library competency, Post-secondary education, Library Technician	Professional Librarian or Library competency, Post-secondary education, Library Technician	Professional Librarian	Professional Librarian
Qualifications of Staff	Library competency, Post-secondary education, Library Technician	2 additional professional librarians	2 additional professional librarians	2 or more additional professional librarians
Number of items in physical collection	6,000-12,000	12,000-24,000	24,000-50,000	50,000+
Number of user seats, including computer seats	15-30	30-60	60-200	200+
Number of Public Access Computers	3-5	5-6	6-25	25+

Note. From “Guidelines for Rural/Urban Public Library Systems” by Administrators of Rural and Urban Public Libraries of Ontario, 2017, 3rd edition.

http://aruplo.weebly.com/uploads/2/8/3/7/2837807/aruplo_guidelines_3rd_edition.pdf

Appendix E

Jasmyne R. Lewis

Education

Doctor of Education in Leadership Studies (Ed.D) Marshall University

Masters of Science in Library Sciences (MSLS), University of Kentucky

Masters of Education in Special Education (M.Ed), Georgetown College

Bachelor of Arts, Government and Sociology Major (BA), Morehead State University

High School Diploma, Elliott County High School

Internship

Carter County Public Library, Grayson Branch

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Employment

Executive Director, Rowan County Public Library, 05/2023-current

Responsible for the management of a public library collection and for the provision of library services to patrons and community organizations. Duties include budget management, policy recommendation, departmental planning, and direction and administration of library activities. Drafts and recommends policy to the Library Board and plans for the implementation of public library goals and objectives.

Section Head: Science, Medicine, and Agriculture, US Arts, Science, and

Humanities Division, Acquisitions and Bibliographic Access Directorate, Library of Congress, 04/2021-05/2023

Supervised work up to the GS-13 level. Provided administrative and technical supervision necessary for accomplishing the work of the unit. Determined the human resources needed to

accomplish the work of the unit, and independently planned, scheduled, coordinated and carried out the unit's activities. Developed technical standards or protocols applicable to a library function. Participated in planning the work of a unit, including formulating goals and objectives and identifying improvements in methods and procedures.

Assistant Librarian and Adjunct Professor, Kentucky Christian University,

03/2020-04/2021

Provide effective and strong public service to faculty, students, and other researchers through reference and consultation services, bibliographic instruction and presentations. Perform work related to public services, technical services, systems, and archives.

10/2016- 03/2020 Digital Access Librarian, West Virginia Library Commission

Provide talking books, talking book players, large print, and Braille materials to West Virginia patrons with visual impairments, blindness, and physical disabilities as a regional library associated with the National Library Service.

Librarian, Kentucky Department of Corrections, 03/2015- 10/2016

Responsible for providing a full range of library access, information, and instruction services for inmates housed in the Kentucky prison system at Little Sandy Correctional Complex.

Director, Rocky J. Adkins Public Library, 03/2013-03/2015

Evaluated and administered library programs such as circulation, reference, reader's advisory services, children's services, community services, and public information. Directed the development and maintenance of a public library collection of books, periodicals, records, films, tapes and a variety of other library materials. Provided staff support to the Library Board of Directors.