

## **The Importance of a Director in Charge of the Academic Library**

April 2020/revised June 2023

*Re-endorsed by the CARLI Governance Board at its June 16, 2023, meeting.*

### **The Statement**

CARLI Governing Member Libraries are led by an administrator, dean, or director whose duties are focused on the planning, administration, and management of the library. Directors should be qualified to run a library, either by education or by experience, and must be prepared to participate fully in the consortium. They bring their knowledge and experience of library services, technologies, history, and philosophy to bear on both the achievement of local goals and their roles as a critical point of contact between the work of their institutions and the consortial work of CARLI. The library director plays an important role in communicating effectively the evolving role of their library, and acts as both an influencer and advocate for its community of learners, while also providing advocacy for higher education throughout the State of Illinois.

The [CARLI Bylaws](#) define a library's director as, "the person who is operationally responsible for the staff, services, and budget of the library. Titles of eligible individuals include, but are not limited to Director, Dean, Chair, or Head Librarian."

Directors are expected to be familiar with the CARLI Membership Agreement, and, if applicable, the CARLI I-Share Participant Institution Agreement.

Responsibilities of directors are reviewed on the CARLI [website](#):

"CARLI directors' responsibilities include:

- Signing the CARLI Membership Agreement, and, if applicable, the CARLI I-Share Participant Institution Agreement, within the organizational framework of approving contractual agreements of the institution. Once signed, these agreements remain in effect until terminated.
- Ensuring library compliance with the terms and conditions of the CARLI Membership Agreement, and, if applicable, the CARLI I-Share Participant Institution Agreement.
- Designating an I-Share Liaison (for participating libraries.) Detailed information about the role of the liaison is available from the I-Share Liaison's Guide.
- Providing timely notification of any intention to terminate agreement(s), as outlined therein.
- Serving as the institution's voting representative for CARLI Governance Board elections and Bylaws revisions.
- Keeping all contact/liaison names and information up to date with CARLI.
- Ensuring all CARLI communications are distributed to staff and campus/governing authority officials, as appropriate.
- Serving on the CARLI Governance Board, if elected or appointed."



## **Background**

### **Why a Statement Is Necessary**

The impetus for this statement is that CARLI, its Governance Board, and members, seek to act as a resource for organizations contemplating a staffing decision to eliminate or delay filling the library director position. The statement is intended to articulate why having a dedicated, library-focused director is a crucial choice, not just for continuity of service, but also for leveraging interlibrary cooperation and ensuring that the campus investment in the library is optimized by a representative who can advocate for innovation, diversity, equity, and service excellence.

### **Explanation of the Issue**

At its December 6, 2019, meeting, the CARLI Board of Directors discussed a situation that some member organizations are experiencing; in some instances, the library director position is not filled when the incumbent retires or resigns. The college or university simply “assigns” the library to a campus administrator such as a vice president or assistant provost, who has many other responsibilities, and is not comparable to that of a library director. Sometimes a mid-level library staff member is named as “in charge” without title or compensation increase. These assignments erode the effectiveness of the library in many ways, but also dramatically diminish the ability of the consortium to interact in a productive way with the library. The entire consortium is weakened when services, resources, and programs that could be extended to faculty, staff, and students, are not developed, offered, or promoted.

As a result of the December 2019 discussion, the board recommended drafting a statement outlining the consortium’s shared philosophy that a qualified library director should be in place at all member institutions. Three CARLI Board of Directors members and the CARLI Senior Director agreed to work on this statement, constituting the Importance of CARLI Member Director Ad Hoc Task Force.

### **Pervasiveness of the Situation**

In preparing this statement, the task force documented, at a minimum, seven institutions where a director, formerly in charge of a CARLI Governing Member Library, was replaced by another campus administrator with a full portfolio, or a library staff member without review and adjustment of title or compensation. The situation has been most pervasive in community colleges and small private college libraries in the last few years. Although not corroborated with campus administrators, the task force members posit that the rescission of library director positions is almost certainly correlated with campus budgets.

## **The Rationale behind Having a Dedicated Library Director**

The duties of ensuring synthesis and connectivity between the library and the campus, providing advocacy for resources and learning support, and aligning faculty and student needs with library services and programs, cannot be successfully tacked on to other campus administrators’ portfolios. The library director’s duties are not only critical to the campus, they constitute a singular, identifiable, fulltime leadership position, demonstrated by CARLI Governing Member Library directors statewide.



## **Ensuring synthesis between the library and the campus**

The library and library director play many external critical roles on campus, including collaborating with teaching faculty and other campus units in shaping the curriculum. The library is integral to ensuring that the teaching and learning outcomes are aligned with the organization's goals. Library services, materials, and programs reinforce classroom content. In an age when immediate access is expected, the library and its resources are available supporting needs and providing guidance in real time.

## **Providing advocacy for and access to resources and learning support**

Current technologies make access to many library services and resources transparent to library users; but they are always the result of extensive curation, organization, and negotiation by CARLI library directors and their staffs. Some of this work is internal to each member library, but much is the result of cooperation and collaboration among all CARLI's Governing Members.

## **Aligning faculty and student needs with library services and programs**

CARLI member libraries strive to ensure capacity in terms of collections, services, and support. The ability to offer a broad spectrum of services, resources, and programs comes from an embedded culture of resource sharing and support. CARLI provides services at scale; success is only possible when every member contributes to a foundation of cooperation. All CARLI members benefit from each other and depend on distributed collections of specialties, including large research libraries at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign or Chicago, Northwestern University, and the University of Chicago. Most of CARLI's 128 members are small and medium-sized libraries that depend heavily on the consortium to fulfill users' needs. Partnerships among these diverse institutions require the dedicated, focused attention of a library director committed to working toward shared goals and addressing new and emerging needs and technologies for research, such as supporting scholarly communication, digital publishing, and open educational resource initiatives. Finally, the library director is uniquely qualified to identify critical library-focused DEIA initiatives (decolonizing the catalog, for example, is a huge and necessary endeavor and currently under discussion), aligning them with institutional goals, and advocating for diverse, equitable, and accessible collections, technologies, instruction, programming, and services in support of teaching and learning.