



# FUTURE PROOFING PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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How to remain relevant  
through the digital age  
and beyond.



collectionHQ  
data. insight. solutions.

espo  
evidence-based selection planning

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# Consumers these days can do almost anything with a click of a mouse or a tap on a screen.

Goods can be bought and delivered within hours, new products can be easily browsed, and online advertising seems to magically target its ideal audience to connect customers with items matching their needs and wants.

This easy and instant access to goods and information is changing consumer expectations and could threaten our more established institutions, notably libraries. With budget constraints and limited resources, libraries can't be expected to invest millions in research and development, experiment with unproven gadgets, or compete with the tech giants driving these changes. Libraries have to apply the assets that make them unique - their role at the heart of the community and knowledge of patrons - to not only keep up with technological advances, but to promote reading and literacy among all ages to reduce societal divides for generations to come.

However, we can't ignore the many challenges facing public libraries in their bid to achieve this mission. Challenges include:

- *Librarianship as a multi-faceted profession with fewer available resources than before.*
- *Meeting patron demand and challenging library stereotypes.*
- *Measuring community outcomes and results.*

This whitepaper will review the methods and concepts applied by librarians in their quest to remain relevant in today's digital world.

## collectionHQ and ESP

Two of the key tools this whitepaper will refer to are collectionHQ and Evidence-based Selection Planning (ESP). collectionHQ is used by over 600 public libraries globally to gather insight into collections to support more efficient, more patron driven collection development. ESP applies machine learning methods, similar to Amazon and Netflix, to provide selectors with recommendations about the current and pre-published titles that will resonate with their community, how many to buy, and where to distribute. This information is based on several data points including reviews and evidence from collectionHQ.



## Research Methodology

This whitepaper considers research from a sample of 22 U.S. public libraries where ESP is used to select at least 25% of new material for the collection. Results have been observed over a 12 month period and exclude Non-Book items. The research also refers to collectionHQ and ESP case studies.

# 1 PART

**LIBRARIANS WEAR  
MULTIPLE HATS**






## Case Study

Shrinking budgets have left many public libraries with less resources and fewer staff, stretching the tasks of remaining librarians even further. On top of this trend, “changing demographics” and patron demands have placed a requirement on librarians to adopt a new set of skills and knowledge (American Library Association, 2017). Librarians today are educators, innovators and companions, providing a service to some of the most vulnerable members of our society.

So where do they find the time to curate their collections?

Self-service and online systems have helped librarians to deal with dwindling resources by enabling patrons to check out, place holds and return items independently; but human beings are still required to maintain these services and offer help to patrons (Public Libraries News, n.d.).

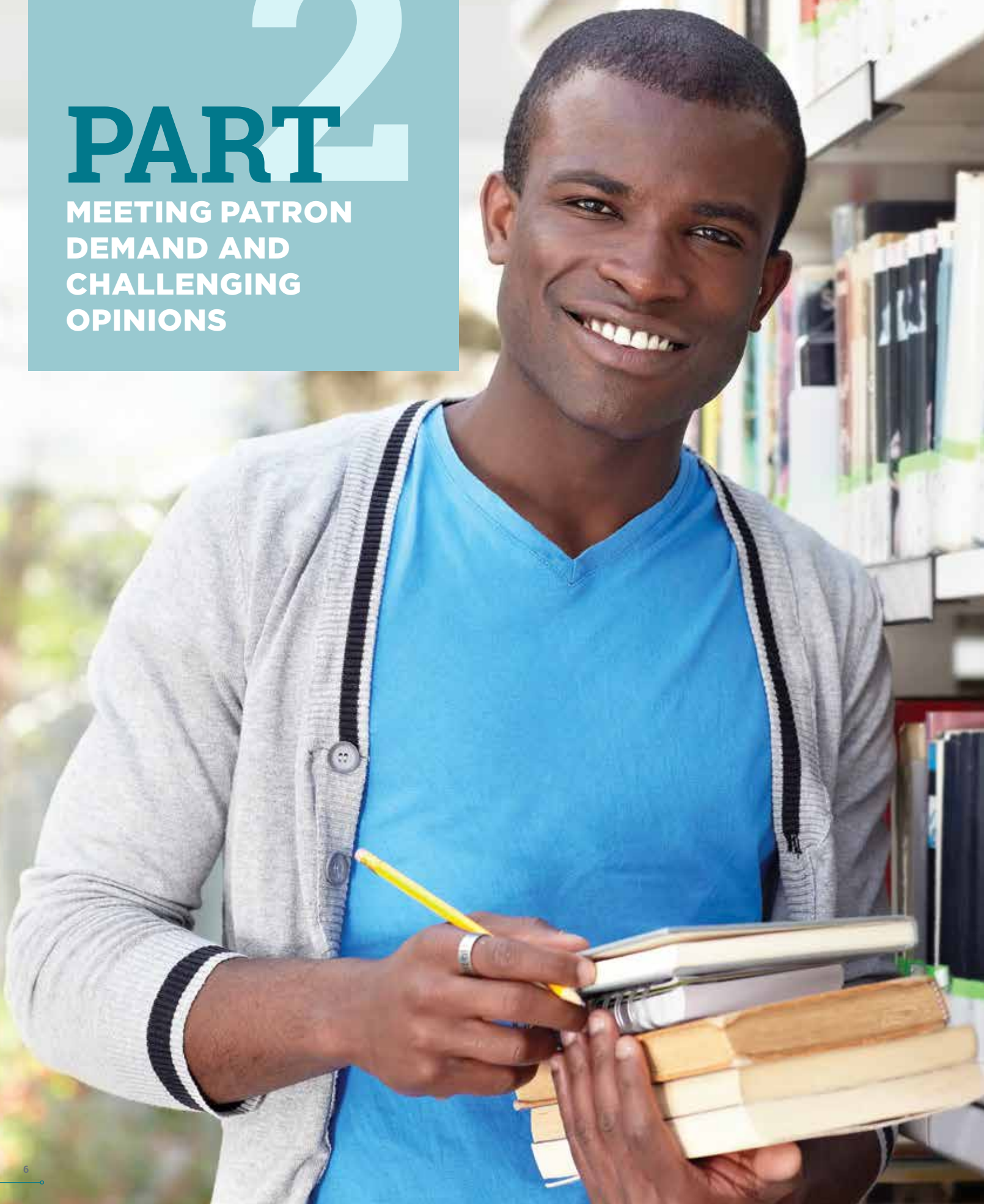
Another growing expectation is for librarians to be “data savvy” (Lauersen, 2016) with an ability to extract and analyze data to make informed decisions. Finding the right tools to support efficient and accurate use of data has become pertinent to successful librarianship. A tool that crunches the numbers to tell you what your patrons want to read, which items to remove from your collection and arranges your weekly to dos has been proven to support significant time savings.

A case study from the Phoenix Public Library, AZ, suggests that using Vendor Selection with Baker & Taylor and collectionHQ has reduced the time taken to carry out selection from 9 months to 3 months. Kathleen Sullivan, Collection Development Coordinator at the library, comments that the work carried out by vendor selectors “represents at least two librarian positions” therefore the activity frees up staff time to spend on other essential tasks.



# PART 2

MEETING PATRON  
DEMAND AND  
CHALLENGING  
OPINIONS



According to Pew Research in 2018, two-thirds of American adults today have access to the internet at home and 77% own a smartphone (Pew Research Center, 2018) leading to an increased demand for online services. This trend has given rise to retailers finding opportunities to improve the “shopping experience” (Fresh Business Thinking, 2017), merging in-store and online offerings to make the buying process unique and efficient. Consumers, as a result, have become accustomed to service providers making a conscious effort to exceed their expectations.

With this in mind, library management are finding ways to keep up with patron demand and challenge opinions that libraries have become “irrelevant” (Molloy, 2018) by offering services and events to attract new generations of readers. But how do they ensure that new patrons will return again and again? It’s about developing an appealing collection with a variety of titles that are relevant to the local community - and therein lies the problem.

On average, 16% of newly selected material on library shelves globally has been checked out by a patron less than twice. This metric can be referred to as Dead on Arrival or DOA. To address this issue, librarians must be prepared to apply more than just gut instinct when selecting new titles. Informed, data-driven decisions must be used to select the right titles in the right quantity based on local demand to avoid hundreds of dormant books creating an untidy and uninviting space to patrons.



## Efficiency

### **REDUCED DOA**

At the start of this study, the average DOA of Non-Fiction and Fiction material from the research sample was 18.43%. Regular use of predictive analytics to select current and pre-published titles with ESP has reduced the sample’s DOA in this material by 7.26%. Assuming an average book price of \$15 and based on the collective purchase of 1,659,554 Non-Fiction and Fiction titles over 1 year, we can calculate the monetary savings this reduction would generate for those libraries as \$82,145.

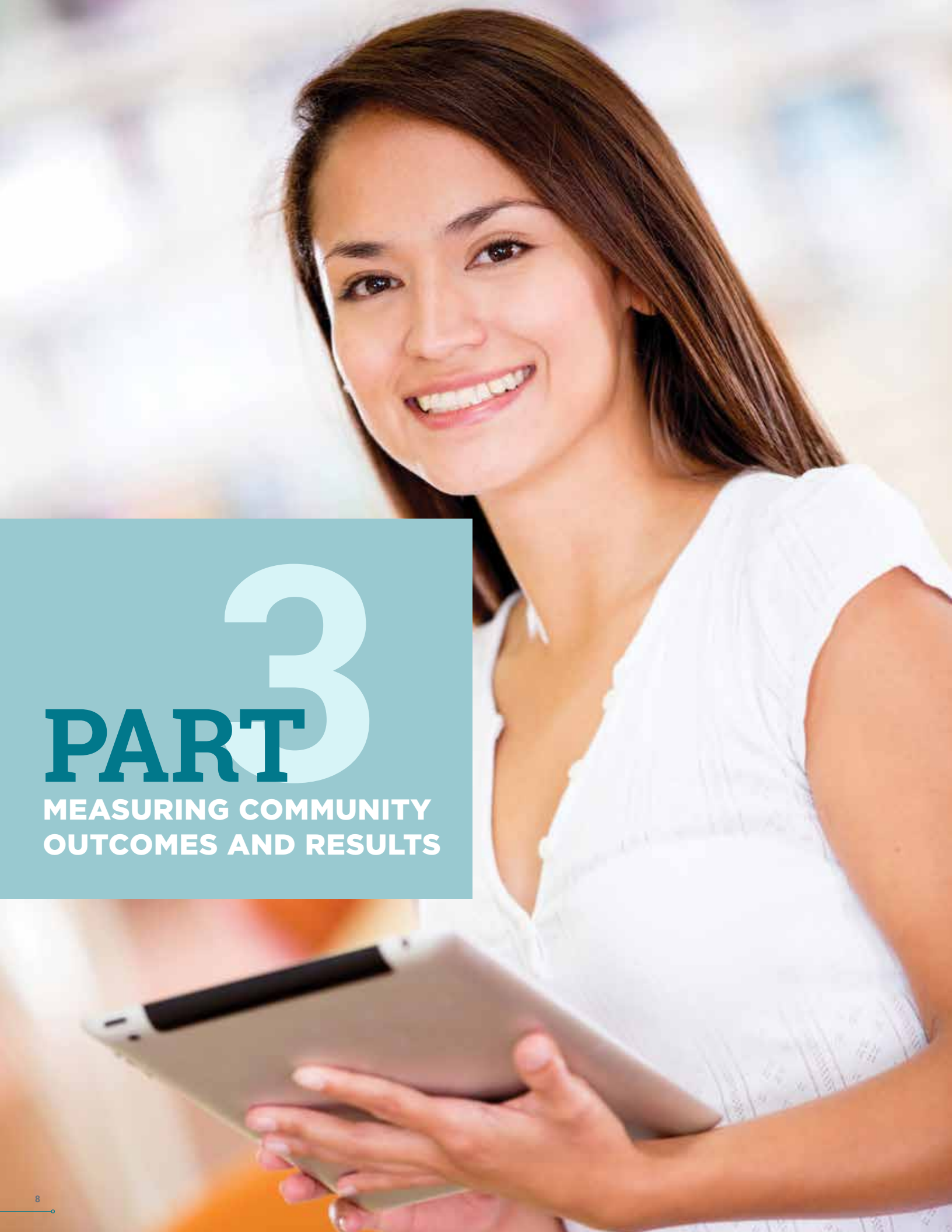
### **INCREASED TURNOVER AND CIRCULATION**

Turnover is a valuable performance metric that considers the circulation of material in relation to the number of items in your library collection. Our research have also shown that, by using an evidence based tool, the turnover of a library’s collection can be increased by 3% and circulation increased by 9%.



Atlanta-Fulton Public Library, GA, is a 34 branch library system serving a population of more than 1,000,000. The staff began using ESP on discovering from the collectionHQ Dashboard that almost 53% of material in the library’s collection was DOA. Since introducing ESP, the Library Director, Dr. Gabriel Morley, has reported:

- A 10% reduction of DOA in the first 5 months.
- An increased turnover from 1.44 to 1.70 after 12 months.
- More staff time to spend on activities that add value to patrons.



# PART 3

**MEASURING COMMUNITY  
OUTCOMES AND RESULTS**



Education empowers communities, with studies having revealed that: “for every dollar spent on adult illiteracy, society reaps \$7.14 in returns—through increased individual earnings and decreased societal expenditures.” (Literacy Partners, n.d.). Libraries are facing increased pressure from government to demonstrate the efforts they are making to support stronger societies through the promotion of literacy and education.

An article published by Library Connect (Appleton, 2018) suggests 3 strategic outcomes that should be considered by libraries:

1. *Percentage of a community regarded as information literate.*
2. *Percentage of a community regarded as socially engaged.*
3. *Percentage of an institution’s research outputs regarded as “world class.”*

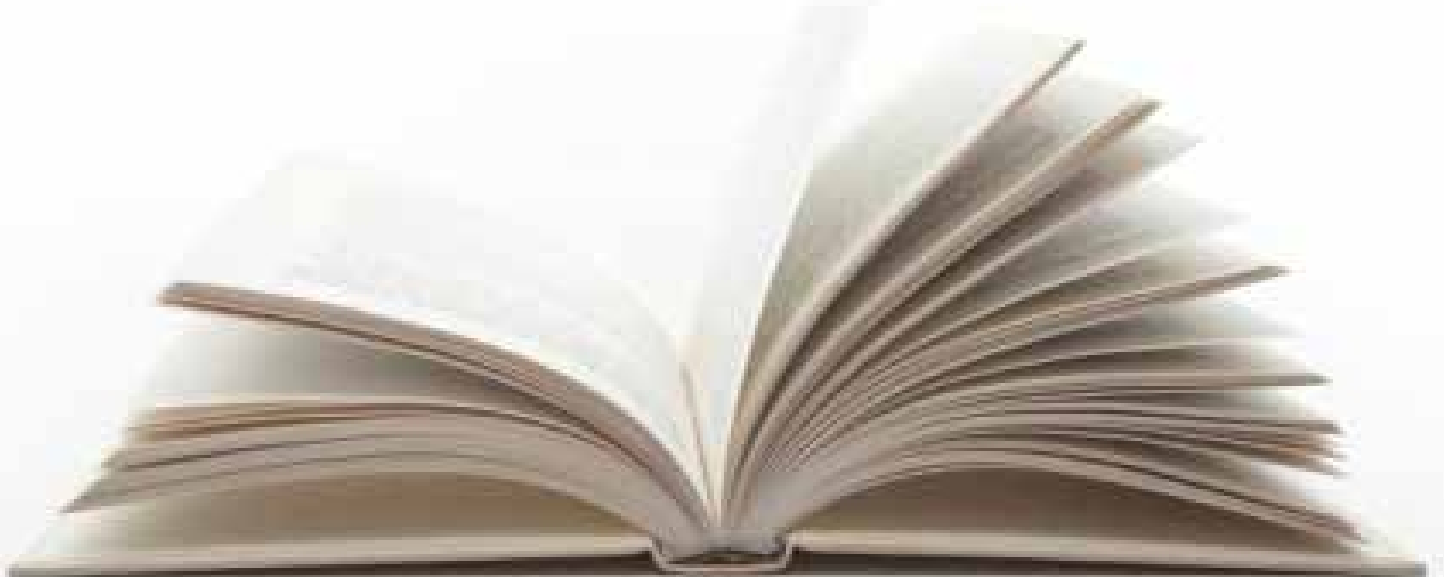
Short term performance goals set by libraries contribute to these long term outcomes by offering measurable, timed objectives that librarians can work towards collaboratively. It sounds simple, but deciding on the right metrics and tools to facilitate measurement can add to the ever increasing workload of library staff.

The techniques discussed in this whitepaper offer a good place to start: freeing up staff time to spend on community outreach programs, buying items that resonate with users, and making spending decisions wisely all demonstrate a library’s commitment to providing a service that is focused on its community.



collectionHQ and ESP were implemented at the Chattanooga Public Library, TN, to support the library’s budget for outcome. Regular use of the tools has helped the library to measure and improve circulation, turnover and DOA to demonstrate its commitment to delivering a service that caters well to the local community.

Library Director, Corinne Hill, commented: “We hit a million plus circs last year for the first time ever and I give credit to collectionHQ and ESP. Our turnover rate is 3.2 and I’m super pleased.”

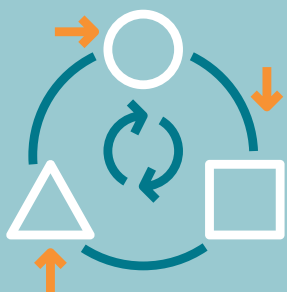


It's clear that public libraries face a number of challenges in their mission to provide a service that meets the changing demands of patrons.

Key to the success of this journey is a data-driven approach that creates efficiencies, enables librarians to monitor performance and share results readily with stakeholders.

Soon, libraries will be more transparent than ever and one step closer to a future ready service.

## REGULAR USE OF DATA ANALYTICS IN COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT CREATES RESULTS.



*REDUCE DEAD  
ON ARRIVAL  
(DOA) BY 7.26%*



*SAVE \$82,000  
FROM WASTED  
MATERIAL  
SPEND*



*IMPROVE  
TURNOVER BY 9%*



*INCREASE  
CIRCULATION BY  
3%*

Results are based on a sample of U.S. libraries using ESP and collectionHQ regularly.

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[collectionHQ.com/esp](http://collectionHQ.com/esp)



collectionHQ

*data. insight. solutions.*

esp

*evidence-based selection planning*