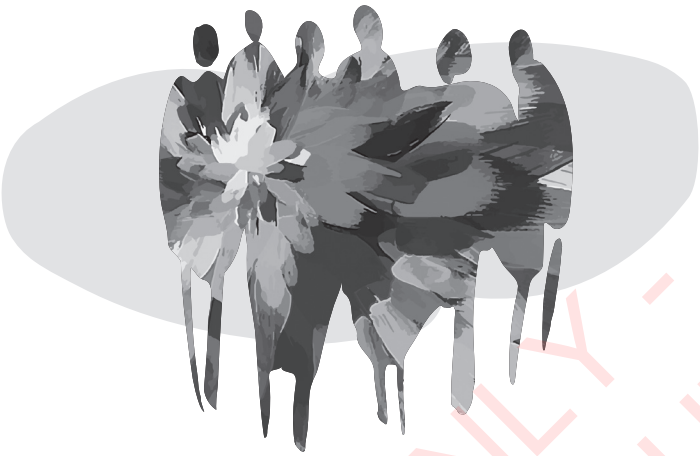

LEADING IN LIBRARIES

Perspectives from Lived Experiences

Edited by **Maha Kumaran** and **Beth McNeil**
Foreword by Trevor A. Dawes

ALA Editions
Chicago | 2026

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ISBNs
979-8-89255-267-7 (paper)
979-8-89255-270-7 (PDF)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Kumaran, Maha editor | McNeil, Beth editor | Dawes, Trevor A. writer of foreword
Title: Leading in libraries : perspectives from lived experiences / edited by Maha Kumaran and Beth McNeil ; foreword by Trevor A. Dawes.
Description: Chicago : ALA Editions, 2026. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2025030308 (print) | LCCN 2025030309 (ebook) | ISBN 9798892552677 paperback | ISBN 9798892552707 pdf
Subjects: LCSH: Library administration—Social aspects | Library planning—Social aspects | Leadership—Social aspects | Minorities in library science | Diversity in the workplace | LCGFT: Essays
Classification: LCC Z678 .L38 2026 (print) | LCC Z678 (ebook)
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025030308
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025030309

Book design by Alejandra Diaz in the Noto Serif and Effra typefaces.

♾ This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).

Printed in the United States of America

30 29 28 27 26 5 4 3 2 1

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FOREWORD

In a world of constant change and evolving societal expectations, libraries stand at a critical crossroads. As institutions traditionally dedicated to knowledge preservation and dissemination, libraries now face unprecedented challenges that demand innovative leadership approaches centered on equity, diversity, and inclusion. This book represents a vital contribution to this conversation—one that amplifies marginalized voices and challenges us to reimagine leadership through a social justice lens.

The collaboration between Maha Kumaran and Beth McNeil speaks to the power of intentional relationship-building in our profession. Their book, *Leading in Libraries*, does more than simply collect case studies—it addresses fundamental epistemic injustices that have shaped our field for generations and how some librarians work to dismantle them. By employing Anti-Racist Scholarly Reviewing Practices in their editorial process, they have created not just a book but a model for how knowledge creation itself can become more equitable.

As we reflect on leadership in libraries today, we must acknowledge that our institutions exist within broader systems marked by historical inequities. The chapters in this volume help us navigate this reality with both humility and determination. Whether examining the transition of scholarly journals toward anti-oppressive practices, reimagining library leadership in nongovernmental organizations (NGO) settings, or implementing Indigenous strategies in academic libraries, each contribution offers practical wisdom for those committed to transformative leadership.

The timing of this book is particularly significant. As the authors of the first chapter in this book observe, we are emerging from a period of global upheaval that has both exposed and deepened social inequities. The COVID-19 pandemic forced library professionals worldwide to rapidly adapt service models while confronting fundamental questions about access, inclusion, and institutional priorities. Meanwhile, social movements like Black Lives Matter have rightfully demanded that all institutions—libraries included—examine their complicity in systems of

oppression. This confluence of events has created both an urgency and an opening for reimagining leadership practices.

What distinguishes this volume is its commitment to both theory and practice. Chapter 6 of this book, which analyzes diversity in library guiding documents using Bolman and Deal's Four-Frame Model, offers a structured approach to document analysis that can uncover whether DEI statements are merely performative or genuinely transformative. Similarly, the exploration of inclusive strategic planning in chapter 5 provides concrete models for building trust and relationships during organizational transitions. These practical frameworks are balanced with critical theory that challenges fundamental assumptions about what leadership means in library contexts.

The geographic and institutional diversity represented in these chapters is also noteworthy. From NGO libraries in the Philippines to health sciences libraries in Australia, to academic libraries in Canada, we see that the challenges and opportunities of equitable leadership transcend borders while being shaped by specific cultural contexts. This global perspective reminds us that while our local circumstances may differ, we can learn from each other's experiences in profound ways.

There is great care and attention given to Indigenous perspectives on leadership in this book. Chapter 3, on the Indigenous Strategy Working Group at the University of Calgary, situates library leadership within the broader context of colonial violence and ongoing reconciliation efforts. By centering Indigenous voices and knowledge systems, the authors demonstrate how libraries can participate in addressing historical injustices while building more inclusive futures. This work reminds us that true leadership requires both acknowledging painful histories and actively working to create new possibilities.

The abundance mindset framework presented in chapter 3 offers perhaps the most hopeful vision in the volume. By shifting from scarcity thinking to a perspective that centers relationships over metrics, the authors invite us to elevate marginalized voices and reimagine professional practices. This approach recognizes that our most valuable resource is not our collections or our technologies, but our capacity to build meaningful connections with our communities and with each other.

As library leaders at all levels grapple with workforce challenges, technological change, and shifting user expectations, the competencies identified in chapter 7's study of Australian health sciences libraries have

become increasingly relevant across all library types. Strategic thinking, change management, risk-taking, and emotional intelligence emerge as critical skills that transcend specific institutional contexts. The findings from Canadian academic libraries in chapter 8 regarding hiring practices highlight the need for greater consistency and transparency in how we develop, select, and hire our leaders.

What makes this volume a must-read, however, is its commitment to advancing social justice through both content and process. The editors have not merely assembled a collection of chapters on diversity and inclusion; they have modeled inclusive editorial practices that challenge traditional scholarly publishing norms. By addressing epistemic injustices and centering marginalized voices, they remind us that how we create knowledge matters as much as what knowledge we create.

As you engage with the chapters in this book, I encourage you to approach them not merely as descriptions of what others have done but as invitations to reflection and action. Each case study, theoretical framework, and personal narrative offers possibilities for transforming your own leadership practice and institutional context. The authors do not present simple solutions to complex problems, but thoughtful approaches that acknowledge both challenges and opportunities.

The future of libraries depends on leaders who can navigate complexity with both compassion and courage. We need leaders who understand that diversity is not merely about representation but about fundamentally reimagining how power operates within our institutions. We need leaders who recognize that inclusion requires not just adding new voices but transforming systems to value different ways of knowing. And we need leaders who see equity not as an add-on initiative but as central to our mission as libraries.

This book stands as both a testimony and a call to action. It challenges institutional leadership to recognize and nurture the unique strengths that BIPOC librarians bring to our field. These colleagues may not always fit conventional leadership archetypes shaped by dominant cultural assumptions. Yet they demonstrate remarkable leadership through their innovative approaches, community connections, and ability to navigate complex intersectional experiences.

The wisdom shared throughout these chapters invites us to reimagine what effective leadership in libraries looks like. When we embrace these diverse leadership styles and perspectives, we don't merely achieve

representational diversity—we transform our institutions into more responsive, creative, and truly inclusive spaces for all.

This volume arrives at the moment when such leadership is most needed. As we emerge from global crises and confront ongoing inequities, the insights gathered here offer both inspiration and practical guidance for those committed to creating more just and inclusive libraries. Whether you are a library administrator, a department head, a front-line librarian, or a library science student, you will find here both challenges to your thinking and concrete strategies for moving forward.

In closing, I express my gratitude to the editors and contributors for their work in creating this important resource. By sharing their experiences, insights, and methodologies so generously, they have enriched our collective understanding of what leadership in libraries can and should be. May their words inspire all of us to lead with greater intention, humility, and commitment to justice.

TREVOR A. DAWES
Librarian, Educator, and Consultant

PREFACE

I (Maha), an Indo-Canadian immigrant librarian, was a fellow of the Association of Research Libraries' Leadership and Career Development Program (LCDP) in 2020–2021, and Beth was my mentor. It was a year of racial violence, COVID-19, global shutdown, family, professional, and societal disruptions, and many local and global tragedies. I (Beth), in my role as dean of libraries at Purdue University, had been active in the Association of Research Libraries' leadership development programs and was delighted to partner with Maha in the LCDP. Our time together was challenging, as Maha writes, and we relied on virtual interactions to lay the foundations for a productive collaboration.

When Maha visited Purdue in September 2023, our conversations naturally turned to our publications, and we landed on a keen interest in publishing together, especially on a leadership project. After many discussions, reflections, and further discussions throughout 2024, we committed ourselves to a project early in 2025. Since Beth had been asked to update her previous manuscript on management and supervision, we thought our proposal could serve as an update. However, our proposal was unique and not focused as much on supervision or management, so it turned out to be a stand-alone manuscript—*Leading in Libraries: Perspectives from Lived Experiences.*

We were particular that our book should not only amplify marginalized voices but also address the epistemic injustices within librarianship. *Epistemic injustice* refers to the unfair treatment of and diminished credibility offered to individuals as knowers, scholars, or contributors to knowledge. This form of injustice often manifests when scholars are denied the credibility they deserve and opportunities to share their knowledges in academic spaces are not intentionally cited (citation justice). It is often the marginalized scholars who are affected by this injustice due to their identities, the content they want to share, the scholarship they choose to engage in, or their preferred writing styles. Challenges to dominant narratives and divergence from traditional narratives or content are less palatable or are outright dismissed by knowledge gatekeepers except when interests converge.

We did not know or anticipate the current political landscape mess when we first started this conversation (fall 2023), but by the time our book proposal went to the American Library Association, we understood things were going to change. We were pleased to be accepted within twenty-four hours with a very encouraging note about our bold proposal. We signed the contract in early February 2024, created a shared Gmail account to communicate with each other and contributing authors, sent out calls for chapters to various electronic mailing lists and individual librarians in March 2024, and got to work soon after to find and collaborate with interested contributors. We had to work through a few learnings and hurdles along the way, including systemic issues. Publication systems and practices have their limitations and, while EDI-supportive, they are not always EDI-compliant. A shared Gmail account is great and keeps specific research away from your everyday work inbox, but it is important to remember to check that email regularly. Working with authors across the globe means going beyond 9-to-5 workdays and local time zones, having clarity in communication, and being willing to keep communication lines open until all questions are answered.

Inclusive Review and Editing Processes

We used the "Anti-Racist Scholarly Reviewing Practices: A Heuristic for Editors, Reviewers, and Authors" document as a guide throughout this inclusive process. Scholarly publishing is a privilege, not a neutral space, and is fraught with discrimination or explicit racism that is inherent through its various stages—starting from the distribution calls for submissions, to the selection of authors, the mechanics of the review processes, and the final publication venues. These steps collectively uphold gatekeeping and the dominance of established norms and voices. The traditional approach to scholarly publishing and its conventional writing standards urgently needs to evolve. In our book we committed to a collaborative process, not merely dispensing peer feedback but actively guiding authors through their writing and editing process. This approach sought to dismantle outdated standards of what is considered "acceptable" work. Such dated standards are not only unjust but also detrimental, especially in a field like librarianship scholarship, where a rich diversity of backgrounds, experiences, knowledges, and disciplinary perspectives naturally produces a variety of writing styles and preferences.

We met the challenges of this project with as much grace as we could, our grace largely attributable to our chapter contributors, who remained open to all communications about changes, revisions, and delays, and who placed their faith in our editorial processes and decisions. We are immensely grateful for their trust, and we hope our efforts have made you proud. In the end, we as coeditors are glad that we chose this topic and that we invited voices that need to be heard repeatedly, particularly now when voices are being suppressed.

A few things to remember: We have Canadian, American, Asian, and Australian contributors with varying identities, something to keep in mind when you encounter spelling differences. We accepted most capitalization or lack thereof based on what contributing authors chose to provide us with. We asked all contributing authors to be mindful of global readership and provide additional content or clarity as needed.

We hope that you will find this book an insightful exploration of the triumphs and challenges of leading in libraries as seen through the eyes of contributing authors; and that you will find this book as informative and enjoyable as we did. The contributing authors led while navigating the complexities of higher education and librarianship and dealing with the largely unanticipated dynamic shifts over the last few years in political landscapes, pandemic disruptions and tragedies, racial violence, and higher education institutions and their libraries rapidly embracing EDI, Indigenization, and decolonization. Happy reading.

INTRODUCTION

The chapters in this book are organized to let you travel in and out of Canada, the United States, Australia, and the Philippines. Outside of leading, there is another common theme that is either explicitly stated or implied—slowing down. Slowing down involves reflection, intentionality, and non-reactivity. It embraces thoughtful planning and implementing sustainable practices and ethical approaches in leading and professional practice that aim to dismantle systemic and historical injustices. It fosters building meaningful relationships, resisting political, societal, and personal pressures, and driving cultural transformation (Farkas, 2021).

The first chapter is from Doi, Guise, and Watson, current and past lead editors of the *Canadian Association of Music Libraries Review* journal (hereafter called *CAML Review*), who share the realities of scholarly publishing. Their chapter reflects on key challenges, particularly in light of events such as COVID-19 and the widespread acts of racial violence across North America and beyond. The Canadian Association of Music Libraries (CAML) traces its roots back to the 1950s. CAML began publishing a newsletter in 1967, and this publication transitioned to a scholarly journal called *CAML Review* in 2001. This is now a diamond open-access, online journal that continues to publish scholarly articles on music and music librarianship in Canada. In June 2020, amidst tense social and political upheavals related to racial justice, a new editorial team stepped in at the *CAML Review* as the previous editor stepped down. This was an opportunity for the new team to address racial injustices. They brought their deep commitment to CAML's work by discussing and addressing anti-racism and anti-oppression and creating a safe space for discussions. Based on their commitment, extensive learning, readings, and critical engagement with the tools and literature, they developed an intentional editorial practice. *CAML Review* now incorporates the principles outlined in the document "Anti-Racist Scholarly Reviewing Practices: A Heuristic for Editors, Reviewers, and Authors." For those who follow inclusive practices as a reviewer, this chapter has many insights to offer.

In chapter 2, Buenrostro-Cabbab and Baylen offer a compelling argument for reimagining library leadership based on their experiences with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the Philippines. In the Philippines, NGOs often have libraries which provide information services that preserve and disseminate information, though often operating without library-trained staff, physical spaces, and resources. In this chapter, the authors address the gap between formal and informal library and information-related services offered by NGOs through interview data collected from three NGOs: the Purita Kalaw-Ledesma Center, Children International Philippines, and IBON. Four areas that emerged through interviews were managing resources, programs, and staff; fostering connections; ensuring sustainability; and developing NGO identities. Buenrostro-Cabbab and Baylen argue that NGOs braving the path less-traveled offers an important alternative meaning to leadership in libraries.

In chapter 3, Geraldi and MacLeod record the creation and the work of the Indigenous Strategy Working Group (IWG) at the University of Calgary and lessons learned through this process. They believe this chapter will help others who want to create such a working group. They begin with a review of the history of colonial violence against Indigenous people in Canada and the harmful impact of residential schools; and they provide additional context from other reports such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission—all of which set the stage and guided the work of the IWG. As a formal group with clearly defined annual responsibilities, they were able to focus on setting expectations, their leadership styles, sending detailed thank-you letters to members for their contributions, networking with faculty and staff across units, and dedicating time to learn and practice pronunciation in the university's land acknowledgments. Their well-intentioned work was not without challenges: finding a dedicated space in the library, one that was conducive to smudging ceremonies; having a committed budget so the working group could offer food and beverages at their various sessions; being able to bring new voices into their sessions; finding their space when their responsibilities overlapped with other working groups; and creating visibility for all the Indigenization work at the library were some of the challenges they highlight in their chapter.

In chapter 4, Lauron, Gillies, and Caseñas from New Westminster and Kwantlen libraries in British Columbia, reflect on how COVID-related disruptions amplified social inequities while also creating opportunities to explore identities and their influence on professional practice. Drawing from their diverse career stages, the authors employ the abundance mindset framework to rethink professional practice. This mindset opens multiple positive pathways for all library employees and elevates marginalized voices by centering relationships rather than relying on statistics and metrics. The abundance mindset also has far-reaching applications: It can reshape instruction and teaching methods, critically evaluate metadata and cataloging practices in technical services, and foster sustainable relationships across institutional partnerships. The authors interweave this framework with others, such as slow librarianship, critical librarianship, and principles of positive change. Through their narrative, they share impactful experiences: empowering students by journeying alongside them, collaborating with technical services teams on an Indigenous collection project, and engaging in outreach with diverse communities and partners. Across these endeavors, the authors remain committed to creating spaces that amplify voices and nurture meaningful connections.

In chapter 5, Davis writes about an inclusive strategic planning process at her university library as the campus was transitioning back from remote operations due to COVID-19. After outlining the many benefits of strategic planning that aid operations and enhance an organization, she goes on to describe the attributes and process of inclusive strategic planning at her own institution, the American University's Library in Washington, DC. Inclusive planning builds trust and cultivates a sense of belonging, as it reflects the diverse backgrounds and experiences of users who can see themselves in the planning. As the new university librarian, Davis's priorities before embarking on this planning process were to understand her organization's structures and people, build relationships, and earn trust through an equitable listening tour. She presents her findings and inclusive planning processes, which included multiple library leadership retreats. In addition to the planning processes, this chapter provides details about relationship-building both within the library and with other experts on campus; ensuring transparency;

prioritizing levels of engagement, and adapting different engagement methods for different stakeholder groups; and reviewing and refining the process and implementing the plan. An assessment tool was built to capture progress, milestones, and challenges. DEI impact was assessed as part of this process to assess how actions from the strategic plan aligned with and advanced institutional DEI values. The plan continues to be discussed and reviewed at leadership meetings.

In chapter 6, Andres and Herold analyze the diversity, inclusion, and equity aspects of two library guiding documents by using Bolman and Deal's Four-Frame Model. The documents are from two allied libraries—one in the United States and the other in Qatar, with cultural and contextual differences due to geographic, legal, cultural, and population diversity. Their analysis is grounded in Bolman and Deal's symbolic frame, and through document analysis, they consider whether the two documents unite library teams or perpetuate existing inequities, and they offer practical suggestions for consideration. The symbolic lens provided a new approach to document analysis, and a more meaningful exploration of library identity and values than the common metric-based analysis of most planning documents.

In chapter 7, Ritchie, Gaca, Anderson, and Siemensma write about leadership roles and the necessary competencies of health sciences librarians. They provide background on the health library and information services workforce in Australia and review the current standards and policies for health libraries and services in Australia, Canada, the United States, and Great Britain, with a focus on the roles, competencies, and qualifications of Australian health librarians and leaders. After structured consultations with seventeen leaders in Australian health sciences libraries, they compare themes that emerged from the consultations with an analysis of the literature review and of the leadership and management competencies identified by Health Libraries Australia in 2018. The themes identified include strategic direction; navigating change, innovating, and risk-taking; risks for leaders; and leadership skills development. The discussion draws on their leadership journeys in health sciences libraries and offers strategies for effective leadership and perspectives on the skills, roles, and competencies needed for the future success of leaders in the field of health sciences libraries and librarianship.

In chapter 8, Eva and Hoover investigate the state of administrative structures, hiring processes, and best practices in Canadian academic libraries. The number of library leadership positions has remained unchanged compared to the increasing number of administrative-level positions in Canadian universities. In addition, there are an increasing number of hires in nontraditional roles that impact librarian credentials. There are examples of library leadership roles being combined with other leadership roles or joint leadership of libraries. Eva and Hoover deployed a survey with questions for Canadian library leadership across Canada. The findings indicate variations in hiring processes, especially differences between the hiring practices for associate university librarian and university librarian positions. University librarians did not always have an MLIS accreditation and sometimes had combined titles that indicate other responsibilities. It was the same for associate university librarians, and the number of associate university librarians (AULs) was based on the size of the institution. There were differences in where the jobs were posted; whether candidates were hired from within or externally; the size of the search committees; whether AULs could return to faculty ranks; and the length of terms and renewals. The authors recommend consistency in these practices for the benefit of librarians who are interested in library leadership.

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