



Project 2025 and Its Consequences for Libraries

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Introduction

Project 2025 from the Heritage Foundation outlines a regressive policy agenda that presents potential risks and challenges for public, school, and academic libraries. As a roadmap for the next Republican administration, Project 2025 has broader implications for various communities across the nation by reducing federal oversight protections and spending as well as reallocating responsibilities to states and localities, which have already demonstrated their willingness to ban books and punish library personnel. Project 2025 would, in no small ways, work to dismantle the federal government and remake the public sphere into a radically different America. This brief aims to focus on what this “dismantling” would mean for libraries and highlight the specific aspects of Project 2025 that endanger the library ecosystem, outline the broader implications for society, and advocate for the protection of these invaluable community resources.

Libraries are cornerstones of a democratic society, fostering lifelong learning, cultural preservation, and economic development. Public libraries provide essential resources and services, from early literacy programs to technology access, helping bridge the digital divide. School libraries support student achievement by offering diverse learning materials and fostering critical thinking skills. Academic libraries underpin higher education by providing access to scholarly resources and supporting research initiatives.

Our institutions are under threat by policy proposals that could lead to the elimination of federal funding and the rolling back of enforcement of protections for students, families, and the right to read. The Heritage Foundation manifesto institutionalizes censorship and paves the way for greater political control over educational content. By understanding the potential impacts of these proposed changes, stakeholders can better mobilize to safeguard the independence, diversity, and essential services that libraries provide to all Americans.

Reshaping Society by Vilifying Libraries

The Heritage Foundation's Project 2025, "Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise, calls out libraries as early in the text. In its opening section, the Heritage Foundation identifies "the ruling and cultural elite today," listing inflation, drug overdoses, and schools and libraries as examples. They say, "children suffer the toxic normalization of transgenderism with drag queens and pornography invading their school libraries." ([pg. 1](#))

Project 2025 makes claims that pornography, normally defined as content that is sexually explicit and designed to cause sexual arousal, is actually "manifested today in the omnipresent propagation of transgender ideology and sexualization of children." ([pg. 5](#)) The mandate calls for pornography to be outlawed, and "the people who produce and distribute it should be imprisoned." It further specifies that "educators and public librarians who purvey it should be classed as registered sex offenders." (pg. 5)

By conflating pornography with transgenderism, the Heritage Foundation attempts to co-opt a term with a distinct definition, not to increase awareness and understanding, but to leverage its fear factor to incite parents and others. By sexualizing gender and K-12 students, Project 2025 stoops to generating fear where there should be trust and condoning, even encouraging, the mistreatment and misunderstanding of minoritized communities and the targeting of librarians and teachers.

As [Democracy Forward highlights](#), Project 2025 would make public schools even more dangerous for LGBTQIA+ students, allowing them to be discriminated against and marginalized by insisting on a strict definition of one's "sex." Amendments to Title IX would define "sex" under Title IX to mean only biological sex recognized at birth; and strengthen protections for faith-based educational institutions, programs, and activities biological sex assigned at birth" while rescinding the Biden administration's expansion of Title IX protections.

By suggesting schools and public libraries are purveyors of pornography, the Heritage Foundation uses the word pornography's fear factor to vilify respected members of communities, spreading distrust, anxiety, and outrage. Book bans, censoring lessons, self-censoring library and classroom materials, mandated curricular changes, and vague legislative language outlawing topics and teaching styles are causing exhausted librarians and teachers to leave their jobs and often their professions as well.

Project 2025: Impact of Eliminating the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) on State Libraries and Public Libraries

The Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 is not written in a vacuum. It is consistent with their annual budget priorities, including the elimination of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), an independent agency that administers federal funds to libraries and museums. This policy change is most recently in its "[Budget Blueprint for FY2023](#)," which proposes to reduce federal spending and devolve funding responsibilities to states and localities. This policy change, part of a broader agenda to reduce federal spending and delegate funding responsibilities to states and localities, would have significant negative consequences on the library ecosystem.

The Heritage Foundation's budget blueprints for multiple fiscal years, including 2020, 2022, and 2023, have consistently proposed eliminating the IMLS. These blueprints emphasize cutting federal spending and reducing the size of the federal government, targeting agencies they consider non-essential, including the IMLS.

The proposed elimination of the IMLS would have far-reaching negative consequences for the library ecosystem. Federal support provided by the IMLS is critical for maintaining and enhancing library services, fostering innovation, and ensuring equitable access to information for all communities. State libraries can use a portion of federal funding for operations, including staffing and statewide collections. Advocacy and awareness are essential to protecting the IMLS and the vital role it plays in supporting libraries across the nation.

The loss of federal funding would end a wide range of programs, including library workforce development, technology upgrades, and community outreach initiatives. Libraries, particularly those in underserved and rural areas, would struggle to maintain current levels of service without federal support. This could lead to reduced hours, staff layoffs, and the elimination of important programs and services. Without grant programs like the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program, libraries would have to cut back on services that benefit the community, such as literacy programs, digital inclusion efforts, and educational workshops. These losses would disproportionately affect low-income and marginalized populations who rely on library services for access to information and opportunities for lifelong learning.

The IMLS supports state libraries, special libraries, and tribal libraries, which serve unique populations with specific needs. The loss of IMLS funding would undermine the ability of these libraries to offer services and resources to their communities. Tribal

libraries, in particular, would face challenges in preserving cultural heritage and providing educational resources. Federal funding through the IMLS helps to level the playing field by providing resources to libraries that may lack local funding. Without federal support, disparities between well-funded and underfunded libraries would widen, exacerbating inequities in access to information and educational resources. While libraries in affluent areas may be able to compensate for the loss of federal funding, those in less affluent areas would suffer.

Project 2025: Impact on Schools and School Libraries

The proposed changes to public education in Project 2025 would significantly reduce funding and support for public schools, directly impacting the quality of education provided. School libraries, which serve as critical hubs for learning, literacy, and resource access, would be particularly hard hit by these changes. The loss of federal funding, threats to librarians and teachers, and reduced civil rights protections would undermine the ability of school libraries to provide a diverse and equitable learning environment. Increased censorship and the threat of criminal penalties could discourage educators and school librarians from providing diverse materials, limiting students' access to comprehensive educational resources.

Simply put, Project 2025 calls for the end of the U.S. Department of Education. It would be dismantled, leading to a loss of centralized federal support and oversight. Without federal oversight, the consistency and quality of educational standards could vary drastically between states. Project 2025 also looks to radically alter programs like Title I funding, which support low-income students, would be converted into block grants with no federal strings attached and eventually phased out.

Special education funds under IDEA would be distributed as block grants or into education savings accounts for parents. This shift could lead to inequities in how special education services are provided. School libraries, which offer essential resources and support for special education students, could see a reduction in their ability to cater to these students' needs due to inconsistent funding.

The federal government's ability to enforce civil rights laws in schools would be significantly reduced, moving enforcement to the Justice Department and limiting investigations. Reduced civil rights enforcement could lead to increased discrimination and inequity in schools. School libraries, as inclusive spaces that support diverse student populations, might struggle to maintain a safe and equitable environment for all students.

Project 2025: Impact on Higher Education and Academic Libraries

Higher education is also under attack within the Project 2025 framework, with claims of liberal bias and plans for regressive agenda-setting designed to punish “liberal elites.” Elite is a word used repeatedly, and not unironically, throughout Project 2025. Just who are these elites of whom they speak?

Project 2025 proposes significant changes to higher education that align with a broader reactionary agenda to reduce federal oversight and funding. These changes have the potential to reshape the landscape of higher education, with substantial implications for academic institutions, students, and the quality of education. The broader cultural and educational policies proposed could undermine academic freedom, restricting access to research and materials that are essential for higher education and critical inquiry.

Project 2025 wants to overhaul how accreditation processes are established in Higher Education. Their proposals to the accreditation process would prevent accrediting agencies from enforcing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies and eliminate protections for the governance of state-supported colleges. Reducing DEI initiatives would undermine efforts to create inclusive and supportive environments for all students, potentially leading to increased discrimination and less diverse campuses.

The Heritage Foundation consistently focuses on workforce skills and certification over traditional degrees. Project 2025 would minimize federal post-secondary education investments and would prioritize workforce skills and career and technical education over traditional four-year degrees. This shift would de-emphasize liberal arts and research-based education, potentially limiting students' educational choices and the development of critical thinking and analytical skills. Academic libraries sit at the confluence of scholarship, individual inquiry, and academic freedom. The diminishment or dismantling of post-secondary institutions will also immediately impact academic libraries. They do not exist independently of their institutions.

Understanding the Regressive Ecosystem Relationships

Moms for Liberty (M4L), a well-funded right-wing organization, has been active in the anti-library effort and book ban battle. As reported by [GLAAD, the Heritage Foundation and Moms for Liberty](#) are closely aligned in their efforts to promote conservative policies, particularly those that impact education and LGBTQ rights. Both organizations are part of a broader network of groups that advocate for "parental rights," often at the expense of inclusivity and intellectual freedom in public and school libraries. M4L is a

prominent anti-LGBTQ extremist group known for pushing book bans and anti-LGBTQ school policies under the guise of "parental rights." The group often collaborates with other anti-LGBTQ organizations to advance its agenda. Here is how the Heritage Foundation and Moms for Liberty are related:

1. Financial and Organizational Support: The Heritage Foundation provides significant organizational and financial backing to M4L. This support helps amplify M4L's initiatives, including its efforts to ban books and restrict LGBTQ-inclusive education.
2. Shared Agenda: Both organizations share a common goal of reducing federal oversight and promoting local control over educational content. They advocate for policies that align with conservative values, including efforts to eliminate or restrict LGBTQ content in schools and libraries.
3. Litigation and Advocacy: The Heritage Foundation's legal arm, the Oversight Project, represents M4L in lawsuits against federal agencies and other entities. For example, it has filed complaints on behalf of M4L chapters challenging policies that promote LGBTQ inclusivity. M4L and the Heritage Foundation collaborate on advocacy campaigns that push for changes in educational policy at the local, state, and federal levels.
4. Training and Mobilization: The Leadership Institute, closely connected with the Heritage Foundation, has been involved in training M4L members and supporting their efforts to influence local school boards and educational policies. M4L co-founder Bridget Ziegler has held positions with organizations linked to the Heritage Foundation, further cementing the relationship between the two groups.

The collaboration between the Heritage Foundation and M4L poses a significant threat to public and school libraries. Their joint efforts to promote book bans and restrict LGBTQ content undermine intellectual freedom and the inclusivity of library collections. Their shared agenda could lead to widespread censorship and a reduction in the diversity of educational materials available to students. This threatens the quality of education and the ability of libraries to serve as open and inclusive spaces for all community members.

Intellectual freedom and the inclusivity of public and school libraries are also under threat. Policies promoted by Moms for Liberty often lead to the censorship of LGBTQ-inclusive materials, limiting access to diverse and critical information. Project 2025's proposed changes, coupled with the influence of anti-LGBTQ and "parental rights" groups, present significant challenges for the quality of education and the role of public libraries. The potential impacts extend beyond libraries, threatening various

protections and programs essential for millions of Americans. Advocacy and awareness are crucial to protect the independence and mission of libraries, ensuring they can continue to serve all community members effectively.

Project 2025: A Call to Action for Library Advocates

As an organization that values the role of libraries in society, democracy, education, culture, and economic development, the Project 2025 plan is of significant concern to EveryLibrary. The potential elimination of the IMLS, increased censorship, reduction in educational and cultural programs, and increased inequity threaten the essential functions of libraries. Advocacy and awareness are crucial to protecting the independence and mission of libraries, ensuring they can continue to serve all community members effectively and equitably. If you believe that libraries are crucial for society, democracy, education, culture, and economic development, we must work together to inform the public, other library stakeholders, and policymakers of these specific concerns.

The Project 2025 proposals must be taken seriously. The Heritage Foundation has tremendous influence in certain political circles. We have seen the impact of the alignments between Heritage and like-minded movements like Moms for Liberty about censorship, the Koch Brothers network about anti-tax movements, and the Trump administration's repeated proposals to defund IMLS. Voters who care about libraries — and the people they serve — need to understand the impact that implementing Project 2025 will have on society and libraries.