

# Convergences: Library, Archive, and Museum Collaboration and Future Trends

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## Introduction

The convergence of libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs) is increasingly driven by shared challenges, technological advancements, and the evolving needs of users. Convergence refers to the process by which these distinct institutions increasingly align their functions, practices, and goals to address common issues and serve broader societal needs. This literature review investigates how collaborative research and operational efforts across LAMs contribute to institutional transformation, with a focus on conceptual alignment, digital integration, and public engagement. Theoretical convergence refers to the development of shared conceptual frameworks that bridge disciplinary divides and provide a basis for interpreting practices, values, and user engagement across LAMs. It identifies overlaps in research agendas and highlights areas where deeper collaboration and theoretical exploration are needed.

## Methodology

The literature review was conducted using a structured, iterative approach to identify scholarly and professional sources addressing the convergence of libraries, archives, and museums. The objective was to uncover current themes, emerging opportunities, gaps in research, and documented examples of cross-institutional collaboration relevant to CALMA affiliates. Sources were identified through academic databases such as Library & Information Science Source, Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA), JSTOR, Scopus, and Google Scholar, as well as through publications and repositories from major professional organizations, including the American Library Association (ALA), the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), and the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). The team also reviewed white papers, strategic plans, and toolkits hosted on the websites of these and similar organizations.

Inclusion criteria for the literature review were as follows:

- Topical relevance to institutional convergence, shared practices, and collaboration across LAM sectors.
- Representation of all three domains (libraries, archives, and museums), with preference given to sources that integrated or compared them.

- Date of publication, emphasizing literature from 2018–2024, while including select foundational works from earlier years to contextualize historical trends.
- Balance between scholarly and practitioner perspectives, including peer-reviewed journal articles, case studies, strategic planning documents, and toolkits.

Sources were organized according to recurring themes observed throughout the review process. These themes included:

- Institutional convergence and conceptual frameworks
- Digital transformation and shared infrastructure
- Public impact and user experience in LAM settings
- Strategic and future-oriented planning
- Interdisciplinary program design and collaboration models
- National and international research agendas

The source collection was conducted over multiple rounds. Initial searches prioritized foundational literature and conceptual discussions. Subsequent rounds incorporated recent case studies, practitioner tools, and forward-looking documents as the review became more focused. Regular team discussions guided the selection process, ensuring the relevance of each source to the overall goals of the project and allowing us to refine our focus based on emerging insights. This process resulted in a curated list of more than 25 sources that collectively provide a multifaceted understanding of LAM convergence and collaboration.

## **Institutional Convergence and Synergies**

In examination of institutional convergence and research synergies the shared needs of institutions are foregrounded. The motivation for collaborative research among libraries, archives, and museums is often to promote advancement in each of the institution's services.

Research reveals that convergence is often motivated by funding constraints, technological advancement, and the pursuit of shared goals (Given & McTavish, 2010). Initiatives like the iSchools movement exemplify potential for educational convergence, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue. Given and McTavish (2010)

explain that the iSchools emerged in response to shifts in how information is created, accessed, and preserved, providing “space for dialogue among and between information-related programs and professions.” They emphasize that iSchools encourage cross-sector training and curriculum development, equipping future professionals to navigate across institutional boundaries and tackle shared challenges in digital preservation, metadata standards, and user-centered design. By focusing on people, information, and technology, iSchools aim to break down traditional silos between disciplines and prepare professionals to work collaboratively across institutional boundaries. The authors also point to examples such as joint academic programs, collaborative digitization projects, and shared teaching across LAM sectors as evidence of growing educational and theoretical convergence. Given and McTavish (2010) highlight that “shared goals of preserving and providing access to cultural and historical information bring LAMs together.” They emphasize that as digitization projects progress and funding issues become more regular, LAM professionals have an increased need to collaborate to form a shared baseline knowledge to manage collections and access for future generations, using shared history as a foundation for convergence.

Dupont (2007) and Vårheim et al. (2019a) emphasize the need for a nuanced understanding of shared missions and institutional change, advocating for a theoretical framework grounded in historical institutionalism. Dupont (2007) asks, “Do common missions necessitate unified approaches?” while noting that collaboration is rooted in understanding both similarities and differences in values and practices. Vårheim et al. (2019b) further identify drivers such as user expectations and cost-efficiency, while critiquing the limited understanding of convergence impacts on workflows and user experience.

Transformative change, as discussed by Vårheim, Skare, and Lenstra (2019b), refers to the gradual and cumulative shifts in institutional structures and practices within libraries, archives, and museums. Rather than abrupt overhauls, such change often unfolds through mechanisms like layering—where new policies or practices are added atop existing ones—and drift, where institutions evolve as external contexts change, even if internal policies remain static. Conversion is another mechanism, involving the reinterpretation or repurposing of existing structures to serve new objectives. VanderBerg (2012) questions if convergence enhances institutional

missions or dilutes them, cautioning that “technology alone [may not] foster meaningful collaboration” and could result in “a superficial rebranding” with a loss of distinct identity. These processes highlight that institutional convergence is not solely driven by technological advancements but also by internal dynamics and strategic adaptations over time. The article encourages a thoughtful evaluation of the convergence movement, emphasizing the need to preserve the distinct identities and functions of each institution while exploring collaborative opportunities.

## **Organizational Structures**

Libraries, archives, and museums share common roots in the preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage. Over time, though, their missions and practices diverged to serve different societal functions. Now, in an age of digital transformation and increasing complexity, there is a movement back toward mission alignment. Klimaszewski (2015) notes that convergence often “requires redefining roles, creating cross-functional teams, and addressing the institutional resistance that can arise when professional identities are threatened.” Dupont (2007) serves as a reflective piece on the 2006 Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) preconference, which examined the shared missions and potential collaborative futures of LAM institutions. Dupont discusses how these institutions, as cultural heritage organizations, share common goals in acquiring, preserving, and providing access to artifacts and evidence of human achievement. However, he also emphasizes the distinct professional practices and values that differentiate them. The article highlights discussions from the conference that questioned the extent to which common goals imply common means and what benefits might arise from closer communication among professionals in these fields. While convergence allows for shared resources and collective strategy, it requires careful balancing of institutional identities. VanderBerg (2012) notes, “LAMs have come from a shared past and are exploring a shared future, despite the reality that their paths diverged for a time. There are examples worth considering, though, that did not follow this pattern and seem to have ignored the distinctions of the past: one current example is archives located in museums” (140).

VanderBerg (2012) also states, “that when archives converge with museums in government contexts, there is a necessary change of the overseeing administration. Typically, archives are moved out from the administrative branch of the records creators they serve to the leisure or culture departments that house the museum” (142).

## **Conceptualizing LAMs and Their Relationships**

Disciplinary distinctions shape how LAMs engage with convergence. Rasmussen and Hjørland (2022) offer a conceptual exploration of LAMs, particularly focusing on the theoretical issues surrounding their convergence. Their work critically examines the intersections and tensions between the disciplines of library science, archival science, and museum studies. While libraries, archives, and museums serve as memory institutions, their approaches vary based on differences in standards and practices. They argue that these differences “have become blurry over time,” emphasizing the need for theoretical clarity to navigate the complexities of convergence. Rasmussen and Hjørland advocate for a nuanced understanding of each institution's epistemological foundations, cautioning against oversimplified models that overlook the unique functions and societal roles of LAMs. They observe that institutions focused on democratic access may not necessarily require staff trained exclusively in library and information science (LIS), prompting the question: “What kind of professionals are needed to develop research-informed practices in these fields?” This inquiry underscores the importance of developing interdisciplinary educational frameworks that equip professionals with the skills to address the evolving challenges and collaborative opportunities within the LAM sector.

Klimaszewski (2015) contextualizes convergence within “lumping and splitting” practices that reflect broader societal shifts. She states, “LAMs are often lumped in response to a perceived need for increased cross institutional collaboration, which often leads to discussions of convergence” (352). However, LAMs are “seen as being “split,” to use Eviatar Zerubavel’s (1996) term, both because they are conceptually different and because they exist as physically separate entities even when they are organized within the same overarching structure.”

The convergence of libraries can be tied back to the shift from library science towards information science more broadly. It seems that the distinctions between LAM institutions are most meaningful to those who work there and are not always obvious to users. Klimaszewski notes that policy makers want to make information available to anyone, anywhere. She states “This provides yet another example of the idealism that sees only the transformative effects inherent in digitization without considering the potential drawbacks. However, this idealism has yet to catch up to the reality of LAM professionals on the ground, where institutions are challenged by diminishing budgets and a lack of training and technology required to accomplish these goals” (356). The cognitive process of “lumping and splitting” LAMs reflects societal changes rather than inherent differences between these institutions. Klimaszewski also suggests that future research could explore the extent of LAM collaboration and convergence, how professional education will evolve, and the impact of convergence on institutional distinctiveness. Ultimately, the key question raised by Klimaszewski is what truly matters in the digital age for these institutions.

## Cultural Heritage

The preservation, curation, and dissemination of cultural heritage is central to LAM missions. Rasmussen & Hjørland (2022) explore the conceptual underpinnings of LAMs, emphasizing their shared mission of safeguarding cultural heritage in various forms—whether through archival records, museum collections, or library resources. Further, Carbonell et al. (2022) illustrate collaborative benefits through case studies that “provide a richer experience for the public,” underscoring how the synergy between LAMs can foster deeper, more engaging public experiences. For example, their case study highlights a collaboration between a college campus museum and library, where each institution contributed unique resources and expertise to enhance educational programs, research opportunities, and public access to cultural materials. This collaboration enabled both institutions to reach broader audiences and maximize their impact, offering more comprehensive and diverse resources for understanding cultural heritage. Such partnerships can also support interdisciplinary research, improve collection stewardship, and generate new ways of engaging with collections through shared technological tools, such as digital archives or joint exhibitions.

However, Carbonell et al. (2022) also note concerns about the potential loss of disciplinary specificity in preserving culture within convergence. They question whether the blending of institutional roles and missions in a collaborative framework could “dilute the quality and authenticity of cultural heritage representation.” This tension reflects a broader debate about balancing specialized expertise with the benefits of interdisciplinary or cross-sector collaboration. When examining LAM convergence through the lens of cultural heritage, it is important to consider how to preserve authenticity while promoting shared goals and research efforts. Ensuring that each institution's specialized knowledge is preserved and respected within collaborative frameworks, while also exploring ways to merge resources and perspectives, is key to maintaining the integrity of cultural heritage work.

## **Public Engagement**

The success of LAM convergence efforts is often gauged by public perception of cultural heritage institutions through the examination of user experience. Robinson (2018) discusses the impacts of convergence from a museum perspective with attention to interpretive practices and cultural significance. She examines how integrated collecting institutions curate objects across the library, archive, and museum sectors, raising questions about the public's perception of such objects when they are handled in new ways across converging institutions. While convergence may offer a more nuanced interpretation of collections for the staff that work with them when compared to standalone organizations, she explains that enhanced interpretive processes are not something that happen automatically as convergence can “neutralize staff engagement with the interpretive process.” by requiring staff to work across different collection types and outside their disciplinary expertise (p. 534). Robinson warns “that collection practices of meaning-making that help make sense of collections and establish their relevance to stakeholder communities can be stymied by the pursuit for efficiency, compromising the professional competencies that enable museums to deliver their unique contribution to society” (p. 535). Logan and Liew (2023) note that convergence sometimes improves public experience, though “the cross-disciplinary nature of convergence is more difficult for staff.” They focus on user perception and experience, emphasizing how the convergence of LAMs provides users with diverse

perspectives and positively impacts cultural wellbeing of those who interact with collections. Their study highlights both the opportunities and challenges in making information more accessible across institutional boundaries. The article suggests that further research should be done to understand how convergence impacts user experience.

Rasmussen (2019) critiques the lack of theoretical depth in current discussions of LAM convergence, arguing that while much of the discourse focuses on digitalization as the driving force, there are deeper, external socio-economic and cultural factors at play. He proposes that convergence is not solely a result of technological advancements, but also a response to “the new spirit of capitalism, user-orientation, and the participatory turn” (Rasmussen, 2019, p. 1263). This perspective shifts the focus from a purely technological determinism to a more nuanced understanding of the broader cultural, economic, and ideological forces shaping the evolution of LAMs. According to Rasmussen, these external pressures are instrumental in reshaping the roles and identities of LAM institutions, leading them to reconsider their functions and relationships with the public.

Rasmussen cautions against seeing digitalization as the sole driver of convergence within LAMs. While he acknowledges that digital tools and the internet have played a pivotal role in breaking down institutional silos, he argues that “digitalization does not have to be the only stimulus for convergence” (p. 1265). Convergence, according to Rasmussen, is influenced by a variety of other factors, including economic pressures, changing societal expectations, and institutional imperatives that are not purely technological in nature. For instance, the increasing emphasis on user-centered services, the rise of participatory culture, and the global demand for cultural accessibility are driving LAMs to reconsider their missions and institutional boundaries. In particular, LAMs are responding to the broader socio-economic context in which they operate, including the shifting expectations of the public and the pressure to be more responsive, transparent, and service-oriented. These external factors often converge with technological advancements to reshape the identity and functions of LAMs, encouraging them to move beyond their traditional roles as custodians of culture to become dynamic, user-oriented institutions.

## Digital Integration

Digital integration in the context of LAMs refers to the process by which these institutions use digital technologies to unify, streamline, and enhance their data, resources, and services across various platforms and systems. This integration involves not only the technical aspects of connecting disparate systems but also the conceptual and institutional shifts that occur as these organizations adapt to new digital paradigms. Drawing from the insights in Isaac and Baker (2015), Rasmussen (2019), and Acker (2021), we can define digital integration as a multifaceted process that involves both the alignment of data structures (e.g., linked data) and the transformation of institutional roles and practices in response to digital and participatory forces.

Acker (2021) underscores the need for preservation models that address obsolete software, noting: “We need a theory of digital preservation that accounts for the experience of accessing emulated software.” She emphasizes that digital preservation should consider “software both as a utility for access as well as information and evidence found in the experience of using software emulation for its own sake.” This perspective challenges traditional approaches to digital preservation by recognizing that the act of engaging with the software itself—its interface, functionality, and even its limitations—carries critical historical and cultural value.

As LAM institutions converge their missions and expertise, the challenge of obsolete software becomes even more pronounced. For example, digital art collections or legacy video games housed in museum collections may require specialized software or even hardware to properly emulate their original environment. Libraries and archives may have the tools to preserve digital artifacts, but their ability to ensure these artifacts remain accessible in their original context—such as through the software used to view or interact with them—may require collaboration with museums that have the technical resources to maintain such emulation environments. Acker notes, “The importance of emulation is not only in enabling access but also in maintaining the full functionality of digital artifacts as originally intended” (1156). Without emulation strategies, a digital object

may be preserved as a file, but its original experience may be lost, stripping it of its full historical and cultural significance.

Wythe (2007) echoes this optimism: “We can adapt and use online tools to transform our professions by making the most of our collections... new tools demand new techniques.” Wythe elaborates, noting that “the development of digital infrastructure provides an opportunity for LAMs to work collaboratively to meet shared goals” (p. 53). This infrastructure could take many forms, from shared digital repositories and metadata standards to collaborative digital exhibitions and virtual research spaces. By developing these infrastructure frameworks, LAMs can ensure that digital collections are not siloed within specific institutional domains, but instead can be accessed, interpreted, and used across various platforms and by diverse user groups. Collaboration, Wythe suggests, is key to this transformation, as it encourages the pooling of expertise across fields—libraries contributing their knowledge of information retrieval and access, archives focusing on the preservation of primary sources, and museums providing context for objects and artifacts.

Furthermore, Wythe emphasizes that these efforts “should not merely replicate existing practices in digital form, but rethink access and engagement from the ground up” (54). In other words, the adoption of new technologies should be an opportunity for innovation, not just an extension of old ways of working. Instead of simply digitizing physical collections and making them available online, LAMs should consider how digital tools can enable more interactive, dynamic, and participatory forms of engagement. For instance, digital archives might allow users not only to search and view materials but also to engage with them in new ways, such as through crowdsourcing, annotation, or collaborative research. Similarly, digital museum exhibits could move beyond static displays of images and objects to include immersive experiences that incorporate multimedia, virtual reality, or user-generated content. This shift requires LAMs to rethink their approach to curation, access, and even user interaction with their collections, focusing on how to leverage digital tools to provide richer, more engaging experiences rather than simply mimicking the physical interactions users might have had with collections in the past.

Isaac and Baker (2015) highlight the complexity of linked data systems in the context of libraries, archives, and museums, emphasizing that “in the LAM context, the semantic level of those artifacts may differ significantly according to specific application requirements” (p. 36). This observation underscores the inherent diversity in the types of data managed by LAMs, and the challenges that arise when attempting to create a unified linked data framework that can accommodate the varying needs of each institution. Libraries, archives, and museums each have distinct goals, workflows, and user needs, and these differences often shape how they structure and represent their data. For example, libraries tend to focus on bibliographic data—such as authorship, publication, and subject categorization—while archives prioritize provenance, content creators, and context-specific metadata related to the preservation of records. Museums, in contrast, emphasize visual and contextual information about objects, such as artist details, exhibition history, and material composition. As a result, the semantic precision of the data—how detailed or generalized the information needs to be—can vary significantly across institutions, complicating the integration of their data into a cohesive linked data system.

The challenge of reconciling differing levels of semantic precision is further complicated by the ontological structures that underpin these systems. Isaac and Baker (2015) note the difficulty of reconciling “a person's identity as defined by a specific national library” with broader ontological frameworks. National libraries, for instance, may use authority control systems such as MARC or RDA to define a person's identity based on specific bibliographic and cataloging standards that are institutionally or nationally defined. These identity structures are highly structured and standardized but may not align well with other institutional or cultural contexts. In the museum context, the identity of a person—such as an artist—might be represented differently, depending on how the museum defines their role in relation to an artwork, exhibition, or cultural heritage narrative. Similarly, archives may have different conventions for defining a person's identity based on their role in relation to records, such as a donor, creator, or subject of the records.

## **Standardization**

Standardization plays a crucial role in supporting interoperability and enabling unified access to collections across libraries, archives, and museums. Hedegaard (2003) highlights the importance of establishing “minimum standards for cataloging and description,” underscoring that such standards are essential for ensuring consistency and quality in the representation of cultural heritage materials. Her work in Denmark provides an example of how voluntary cooperation between these institutions—despite differences in their operational contexts—revealed the critical need for standardized practices to ensure seamless interaction between diverse data sets. Hedegaard (2003) asserts that “if you want to have things of quality,” standards are not merely beneficial but essential for achieving high-quality, accessible cultural resources. In the absence of consistent cataloging methods, materials in different institutions may be described in incompatible ways, making it difficult for users to cross-search and access relevant content, regardless of the institution housing the resource

Robinson (2018) emphasizes the transformative potential of rapidly evolving digital technologies, noting that they have created opportunities for diverse collection databases to be accessed and searched through standardized metadata across single Internet portals, such as Europeana and Australia's Trove. These digital platforms serve as central access points for collections from a range of cultural institutions, including libraries, archives, and museums, allowing users to search and explore materials from multiple institutions in one seamless interface. The integration of standardized metadata ensures that items are described consistently, making it easier for users to find related materials across different collections. As Robinson observes, this standardization of metadata plays a pivotal role in enabling these platforms to aggregate and present content from various institutions with different focuses, formats, and user needs.

However, Robinson (2018) also cautions that the potential benefits of such digital integration, standardization, and convergence “may not be fully realized” without careful planning and coordination. While the idea of connecting diverse databases through standardized metadata is appealing, the success of this integration depends on strategic decision-making and collaborative effort. Institutions must work together to agree on common standards for metadata fields, vocabularies, and ontologies that are not only technically compatible but also sensitive to the

specific needs and practices of the different types of institutions involved. For example, what might be a suitable description of an artwork in a museum's catalog may not align perfectly with how a library describes a book or an archive records a historical document. Without a thoughtful framework to reconcile these differences, there is a risk that the interoperability between systems could be compromised, and users might encounter inconsistencies when searching across platforms.

Robinson (2018) further explores the importance of long-term planning to address these challenges. Simply digitizing and standardizing data without considering issues like sustainability, accessibility, and user engagement can result in platforms that are difficult to navigate, underutilized, or poorly maintained.

Vårheim et al. (2019a) emphasize the importance of consistency in user interfaces and metadata as fundamental elements for bridging gaps between the diverse institutional systems found in libraries, archives, and museums. They argue that standardized approaches to both user interfaces and metadata are critical to facilitating seamless interoperability across these distinct sectors. As they note, "standardized approaches help bridge gaps between library, archive, and museum systems," which often operate with different technical infrastructures, data structures, and user interaction models. By ensuring consistency in how information is structured, accessed, and presented, institutions can overcome the challenges posed by the inherent diversity of their collections and practices, allowing users to interact with cultural heritage materials more easily and effectively across various platforms.

Ultimately, Vårheim et al. (2019a) stress that interoperability between library, archive, and museum systems hinges on the ability to apply shared standards not only at the technical level but also at the level of user interaction. This process of convergence—achieved through the harmonization of metadata schemas and standardized user interfaces—enables institutions to work together more effectively, providing a unified experience for users who may be unfamiliar with the internal workings of each individual institution. It also enhances the public's ability to engage with cultural heritage across different sectors, promoting greater access to knowledge and engagement with cultural collections from a diverse array of institutions.

Carbonell et al. (2022) present a case study of collaboration between a college museum and library, highlighting the practical synergies that emerge when different LAM sectors combine resources and expertise. Their study highlights collaboration in areas like “the discovery and access of book collections, curriculum integration, and exhibitions with public programming.” They find that effective LAM collaborations within “teaching, learning, scholarship, creative activity, and community engagement” lead to enhanced user experience, faculty engagement, and digital access (Carbonell et al., 2022). These initiatives demonstrate that collaborative exhibitions and programming can yield innovation. Further, the study offers a model for other institutions and broadens the literature on collaborations among galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAM).

## Research Agendas

Despite the growing attention to LAM convergence as examined through the literature above, a sector-wide research agenda remains elusive. Few efforts attempt to unite the fields under a common research framework. Most agendas produced by LAM professional organizations are discipline-specific or outdated. An examination of professional organizations will serve as a foundation that can be used to compile potential trends that span across the libraries, archives and museums sector as well as understand the future path for theoretical and real-world convergence.

The American Library Association's (ALA) Center for the Future of Libraries and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Trend Report explore global issues affecting libraries but do not yet offer a shared agenda that spans the full LAM spectrum. ALA focuses on understanding the future of libraries through the examination of society, technology, education, the environment, economics, demographics, as well as politics and government. The IFLA report focuses on more specific trends like: knowledge practices, artificial intelligence, trust, skills, digital technologies, information systems, and community connections for what will shape the future of libraries.

Museums, too, have trend monitoring efforts such as the American Alliance for Museums' (AAM) Center for the Future of Museums, which categorizes forward-looking topics through their 2022-2025 Strategic Framework. These topics range

from social & community impact, DEAI & anti-racism to supporting the museum community and equity within the field. However, these trend reports and framework share the fact that they do not provide a coordinated research plan.

The Society of American Archivists (SAA) has proposed a "Research and Innovation Roadmap" in July of 2023 as a strategic foundation for future archival research. While a broader, comprehensive research agenda is still under development, the roadmap identifies critical themes necessary for advancing the archival profession through inclusive, data-driven practices. It emphasizes the importance of demographic studies to track professional trends, guide training, and address gaps, while stressing the need for metrics and institutional benchmarking to support strategic planning and performance measurement. Diversity and inclusion are critical in advocating for research-informed practices that promote justice and accountability in access, recruitment, and collection care. Sustainable practices and environmental accountability will lead to an increase in ethical stewardship, maintenance, and sustainability. The agenda also calls for collaboration and convergence with complementary institutions to enhance impact, and prioritizes strategic outreach and community partnerships. Finally, it promotes user-centered design, encouraging a shift from record-focused systems to ones that prioritize user needs in archival discovery and access.

Similarly, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) has funded evaluations such as the *Community Catalyst Initiative* and *Understanding the Social Wellbeing Impacts of the Nation's Libraries and Museums*. In 2016, the Institute of Museum and Library Services launched the *Community Catalyst Initiative* to help museums and libraries support community-driven solutions through shared decision-making, collective action, and positive community change. The initiative offered funding, training, technical training, and peer support to build capacity for community-driven initiatives that are inclusive, collaborative, resourceful, and promote the use of existing community resources. In 2018, IMLS produced the *Understanding the Social Wellbeing Impacts of the Nation's Libraries and Museums* exploring how libraries and museums contribute to community social wellbeing. The study found that libraries and museums strengthen social and institutional connections, fostering creativity, empathy, and community engagement. The report includes 24 library and museum case studies with profiles, detailed program

insights, and network maps. The findings offer recommendations for future research and policy considerations to inform library and museum practitioners, funders, policy makers, and researchers. These studies emphasize impact rather than unified research directions.

Library-oriented research agendas such as those from Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), Public Library Association (PLA), and Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) are often reflective of overall domain trends, but tend to be specific to a certain library type. The Association of College and Research Libraries highlight priorities in the white papers and reports such as: environmental scans, information literacy, intellectual freedom, and the future of libraries and higher education. Further, the Public Library Association also provides insight to priorities within the 2022-2026 strategic plan. PLA envisions a dynamic public library at the heart of every community and works to make this vision a reality by strengthening public libraries and enhancing their impact on the communities they serve. This approach centers on goals like: transformation, professional growth, advocacy and awareness, organizational excellence, and equity, diversity, inclusion and social justice. These institutions highlight domain-specific priorities, often excluding broader museum or archival concerns.

Nonetheless, common themes do emerge from these varied sources—pointing to potential cross-sectoral research areas. These include the socio-emotional and community impacts of LAMs, civic engagement, informal learning, workforce wellbeing, and community-driven models. Societal concerns such as user privacy in collections, AI integration and disruption, climate change and institutional resiliency, trust in institutions, information literacy, reparative and inclusive practices to address harm, and intersectionality with Indigenous knowledge systems appear repeatedly. Although theoretical convergence was not discussed as prominently in the LAM convergence literature, these themes suggest significant shared priorities that could benefit from collaborative research. These shared priorities are present throughout the literature above, however there is little sharing of ideas across institutional and disciplinary boundaries. Establishing a unified research agenda that encompasses libraries, archives, and museums, while preserving sector-specific distinctions, would help identify mutual goals, streamline

collaborative efforts, and promote convergence not only in operations but also in research and intellectual directions.

## Conclusion

LAM research convergence is a complex and evolving phenomenon, driven by shared institutional goals, technological innovation, and shifting public expectations. While collaboration across libraries, archives, and museums offers considerable benefits—including resource efficiency, expanded access, and holistic engagement with cultural heritage—it also presents significant challenges. These include reconciling disciplinary identities, maintaining the integrity and authenticity of collections, and navigating the institutional and epistemological differences that have historically defined each domain. The convergence process is not merely a matter of operational alignment; it requires deep reflection on the philosophical underpinnings, ethical commitments, and cultural responsibilities of LAM institutions.

As the research reveals, there is currently no comprehensive, sector-wide research agenda that fully integrates the perspectives and priorities of all three LAM fields. While professional organizations like the ALA, IFLA, AAM, and SAA have developed forward-looking strategies and thematic roadmaps, these documents remain largely discipline-specific. Similarly, national-level initiatives such as those supported by IMLS focus more on evaluating community impact and funding strategic programs rather than articulating shared research trajectories. This fragmentation limits the potential of LAMs to collaborate meaningfully on issues of mutual concern—ranging from digital preservation, artificial intelligence, and metadata standardization to social justice, reparative practices, and climate resilience.

Nevertheless, a closer analysis of these disparate efforts reveals overlapping themes that can serve as the foundation for a unified research agenda. Topics such as user-centered design, socio-emotional learning, civic engagement, and community-driven programming point to a growing consensus around the importance of public impact. Technological themes—particularly the challenges and possibilities of digital integration, linked data, and emulation—underscore a collective need to rethink infrastructure and access across LAMs. Moreover, ethical

imperatives—such as reparations, Indigenous knowledge systems, and equitable representation—highlight a shared commitment to justice and inclusivity that transcends institutional boundaries.

The convergence of LAMs should not be viewed as a threat to disciplinary specificity, but rather as an opportunity to elevate and amplify the unique strengths of each sector. Interdisciplinary collaboration does not require uniformity; instead, it calls for respectful integration, where specialized knowledge is preserved and leveraged within broader frameworks. As Carbonell et al. (2022) caution, convergence must avoid diluting the authenticity of cultural heritage. Institutions must therefore strive to build collaborative models that are flexible, inclusive, and context sensitive.

To move forward, LAM institutions must invest in the co-creation of a robust, cross-sectoral research agenda that fosters intellectual collaboration, innovation, and policy relevance. Such an agenda would not only articulate shared priorities but also provide mechanisms for joint funding, knowledge exchange, and professional development. This could be facilitated through multi-institutional working groups, shared digital platforms, and cross-disciplinary fellowships that bring together scholars, practitioners, and community stakeholders. Importantly, the development of this agenda must be grounded in participatory practices that reflect the voices of historically marginalized communities, ensuring that LAM convergence serves the broader goals of cultural equity, access, and empowerment.

Ultimately, the future of converged research efforts should be built upon the shared needs of LAM institutions and the diverse publics they serve. Key areas of focus—such as digital infrastructure, cultural preservation, educational engagement, and social impact—should not only drive collaborative research but also inform institutional missions and long-term strategic planning. By embracing a more unified and visionary approach to research, libraries, archives, and museums can collectively shape a resilient, responsive, and inclusive future for cultural heritage institutions worldwide.

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