

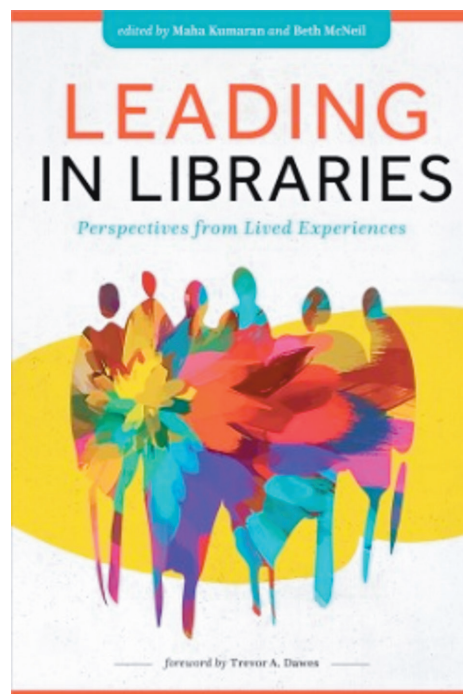
Leading in Libraries: Perspectives from Lived Experiences, Maha Kumaran and Beth McNeil (eds.), American Library Association, 2025. 232pp. Softcover, \$64.99. 9798892552677.



Libraries are among the institutions most consistently shaped by systemic social, political, and economical issues that arise. As such, they must continually strive to rise to the occasion of examining, addressing, and offering progressive solutions to inequities. Libraries remain key spaces for observing how changemakers adapt within shifting institutional landscapes. In *Leading in Libraries: Perspectives from Lived Experiences*, editors Maha Kumaran, a librarian focused on equity, diversity, and inclusion in libraries, and Beth McNeil, a leader in library management, present a collaborative and timely volume that helps LIS students and faculty, librarians, and library administrators learn how to engage in and support transformative library leadership.

This collection is anchored by a central premise that effective leadership must be informed by diverse perspectives, grounded in social justice, and sustained through ongoing intentional, reflective practices. Through a combination of case studies and essays, *Leading in Libraries* examines leadership evaluation, practices, and emerging approaches through a social justice lens. Its 19 contributors represent a wide spectrum of professional roles, including library administrators, faculty, archivists, and practitioners in library adjacent fields. They also notably represent a range of geographic regions, as the editors state in the introduction, “to let you travel in and out of Canada, the United States, Australia, and the Philippines” (p. xix). Structurally, the text is organized into eight accessible article-style chapters that address leadership and hiring practices, strategic planning, scholarly communication, policy review, and organizational changes. Several chapters stand out for their practical and theoretical contributions that aim to disrupt systemic injustices in librarianship and offer motivation and guidance through clear calls to action and execution strategies.

For example, Chapter 1, “Practicing Slow Dwelling as an Approach to Anti-Oppressive Journal Editorship,” investigates how reflective and intentional leadership among editorial board members can challenge long-standing barriers for contributors and readers in scholarly publishing. Building on the premise that authority is constructed and contextual, the contributors emphasize that scholarly publishing is shaped by culture, identity, lived experience, and institutional power structures, ultimately challenging traditional notions of expertise in scholarly communication. Broadening this assessment of institutional norms, Chapter 4, “Reframing with Abundance,” demonstrates how library professionals can adopt an abundance mindset approach that prioritizes relationship-building, shared goals, and collective growth over deficit-based thinking and metrics-centered outcomes. The chapter reflects on the experiences of three librarians at different career stages and how they successfully implemented an abundance mindset within their respective areas of librarianship.



Similarly centered on collective practice and organizational transformation, in “A Blueprint for Belonging,” Jeehyun Davis offers a compelling model for inclusive strategic planning within academic libraries by cultivating a “shared sense of purpose and a renewed appreciation for collective learning” (123). Davis further highlights how meaningful it was for the library community to develop and publish an inclusive and accessible strategic plan for American University, a first of its kind. This emphasis on collective well-being and institutional healing is especially relevant in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing burnout across academic library environments.

Shifting to questions of institutional accountability, Chapter 6, “Assessing Library Guiding Documents Through the Symbolic Frame,” critiques performative DEI language in strategic plans and policies, drawing on Sara Ahmed’s warning that “such statements may hinder progress by implying that equity and diversity issues have already been addressed” (127). This chapter emphasizes the importance of ensuring policies are not merely well written but also translate into meaningful guidance with the ability to adjust as needed over time.

Together, these chapters challenge traditional models of leadership grounded in hierarchy and neutrality and instead advocate for approaches rooted in reflection, accountability, and care, promoting leadership practices based on lived experiences as scholarly knowledge. These contributions also reveal the collection’s broader argument: emerging leadership in libraries is deeply ethical and interpersonal. Thus, Kumaran and McNeil make the case for more communication, mentorship, advocacy, and community engagement. To further advance these ideals, the editors employed the “Anti-Racist Scholarly Reviewing Practices: A Heuristic for Editors, Reviewers, and Authors”¹ as a guide throughout the editorial process, underscoring their commitment to collaborative and more equitable approaches to scholarly publishing.¹ What the contributors ultimately ask of readers is that they challenge the status quo by considering and implementing responsive and not reactive problem-solving frameworks within library leadership.

As with many edited volumes, the collection may appear to lack cohesion. Its distinct stories, while a strength, may create uneven engagement across chapters. The collection is most effective when approached as a series of complementary perspectives rather than a linear resource. One benefit of this approach is that faculty can assign individual readings. This pedagogical flexibility makes it particularly useful as a primary or supplemental resource in instruction on academic librarianship or scholarly communication. The book concludes with an appendix, brief professional and personal biographies of the authors, and a comprehensive index.

Ultimately, *Leading in Libraries: Perspectives from Lived Experiences* represents a significant contribution to the literature on library leadership and evolving professional norms while amplifying credible voices that have historically been underrepresented in leadership discourse. It offers both encouragement and practical guidance for those seeking to engage in transformative, inclusive leadership. This book is highly recommended for faculty and students of LIS programs because of its emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion, which resonates strongly with current curricular priorities, however contentious that may be at the moment. It also serves as an effective bridge between theory and practice—an ongoing challenge in LIS curricula. The book invites critical reflection of what library leadership can look like when established systems and new thinking are in conversation. — Allison McFarlane, Manager of User Services, Adelphi University

¹Anti-racist scholarly reviewing practices: A heuristic for editors, reviewers, and authors. (2021). Retrieved from <https://tinyurl.com/reviewheuristic>.