

# THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LIBRARIAN'S ROLE



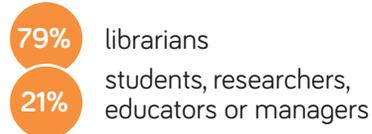
## INTRODUCTION

The Internet has transformed scientific communication, offering new ways of sharing research. Readership has expanded, and the potential impact of research is greater. However, promotion is still key for research to gain the full recognition it deserves.

Researchers, librarians and publishers all play a role in promoting research, but those roles aren't clearly defined. In a survey we conducted in May 2020 we asked librarians what they contribute to promoting research, and what they feel their role should be. By sharing the results of this survey we look to support the library community in the work librarians do to assist researchers in promoting their research. We hope the ideas shared in this whitepaper help librarians develop and refine their own library processes.

### SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS of the 95 responses to our survey:

#### Job titles



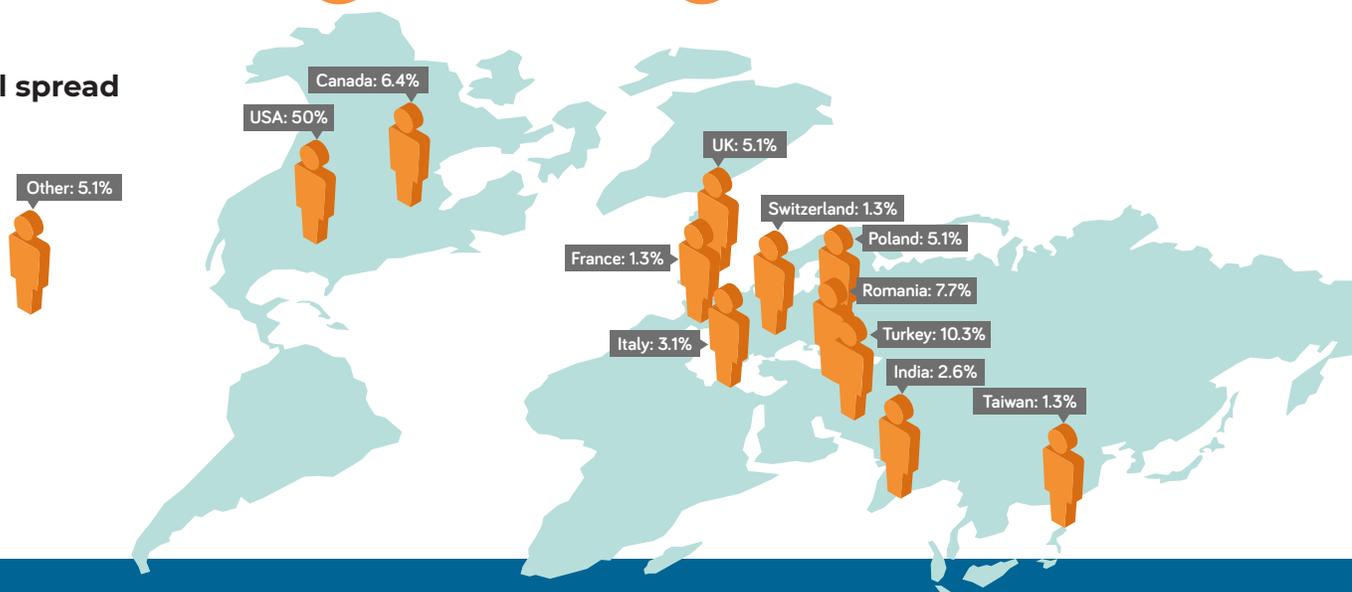
#### Place of work



#### Length of service



#### Geographical spread



## LIBRARIANS AND PROMOTING RESEARCH

The librarian's role is constantly changing and expanding - this is a profession which has proven its adaptability over centuries. While continuing their traditional role of curating and providing access to information, librarians are now actively facilitating the learning and research process as well.

“Helping researchers achieve their goals is what libraries are all about.”

We found that librarians are keenly aware of the benefits of promoting research. Nearly **90%** felt this benefited their libraries and institutions' reputations most of all, but it is also a key factor in validating the library's value (nearly **80%**).



## WHAT LIBRARIANS ARE DOING TO HELP

The ways and the extent to which librarians help promote research varies greatly.

This depends on the size and the wealth of the institution, as well as the skillsets available. Larger institutions may have specific librarians who lead this work, such as scholarly communications librarians, subject specialists, or librarians focused on research services or research impact. In many libraries there's no designated person, and it is a shared process and responsibility.

Over **80%** of survey respondents' libraries are actively engaged in helping researchers with promotion. Through this survey we found the main reason given for libraries not helping is lack of resources (**44%**).

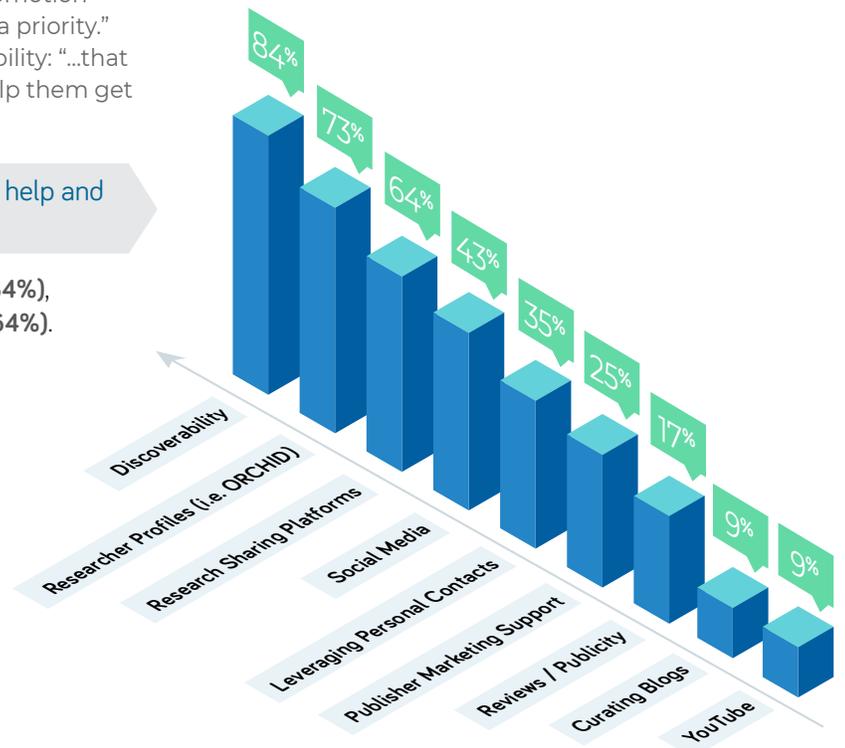
“As our numbers continue to shrink, activities like promotion are side-lined...our administration does not see it as a priority.” Only few libraries (12.5%) feel this isn't their responsibility: “...that generally falls into the researcher's purview. We'll help them get published but it's up to them to promote it.”

In which of the following areas does your library provide help and advice on promoting published research?

Generally, libraries focus their assistance on: Discoverability (**84%**), Researcher Profiles (**73%**) and Research Sharing Platforms (**64%**).

“Every year I prepare a bibliometric report for researchers and departments Using Web of Science, I log the journals they've published in, how many references have been cited, and which publishers they've published with. It's a snapshot of how the department has performed. The scholarly communications librarian promotes the institutional repository, helps faculty upload preprints and does altmetrics to help them promote their work on social media.

Librarian for Research Services,  
Canada, R1 Academic Research Institution



These areas are most heavily used by researchers. Some libraries provide help only when faculty request it, and some say faculty don't ask either,

“ ... because they're busy immersed in their research, mentoring grad students, managing labs ... promoting their work is not a priority.”

However, this represents an opportunity for libraries:

“ Librarians could do a lot to assist as this is their area of expertise.”

## Repositories

The most common area where librarians help is with uploading research into an institution's repository. Although this increases discoverability, many researchers don't upload their research, which librarians put down to lack of knowledge or time:

“ They're all thinking of the next paper they're writing already, although actual uploading only takes less than a minute.”

Eminent faculty who publish in highly prestigious journals don't always see this as important, so librarians have to persuade researchers to do this:

“ They're convinced their research is reaching the people who matter. They think they've done what they need to do.”

“ The library webpages explain what people have to do for the repositories. Faculty have to visit these pages - I don't know many who do though. The main cause isn't the repository, it's people being too busy, so I have helpers to encourage them. Our institution is wealthy enough for most faculty to have assistants so I encourage them - although they come and go so I have to keep striking up with them.

Scholarly Communications Librarian,  
US, R1 Academic Research Institution

## Research profiles

Many of our library responders said they helped researchers with their research presence, whether research profiles such as ORCID (73%), or using research sharing platforms (64%).

“ Libraries should help with ORCID in order to better support a robust and open research infrastructure and comply with funding and publishing requirements.”



## Social media

Most libraries are involved with social media, but this is largely to promote the library's resources to its users. It's a lower priority when it comes to assisting researchers (43%), as many younger researchers are more social media savvy and don't need help.

“ A lot of researchers are doing this anyway within their own circles, and it could even be seen as presumptive for the library to get involved.”



## Soft skills

Some librarians in our survey felt that researchers would benefit from help with other, softer skills, such as how to engage at conferences.

“It’s about knowing how to network too – young academics should get training for this.”

“One of the best things to do is directly engaging with researchers on “other skills” for promoting research. LinkedIn, Twitter, open platforms – not just Academic.edu and ResearchGate – learning about different methods of engaging with the community. It’s about knowing how to engage at conferences, how to network, too – they should get training for this in faculty for young academics. Time is a challenge but librarians are good at engaging well with researchers and this is a good area for them to take on.

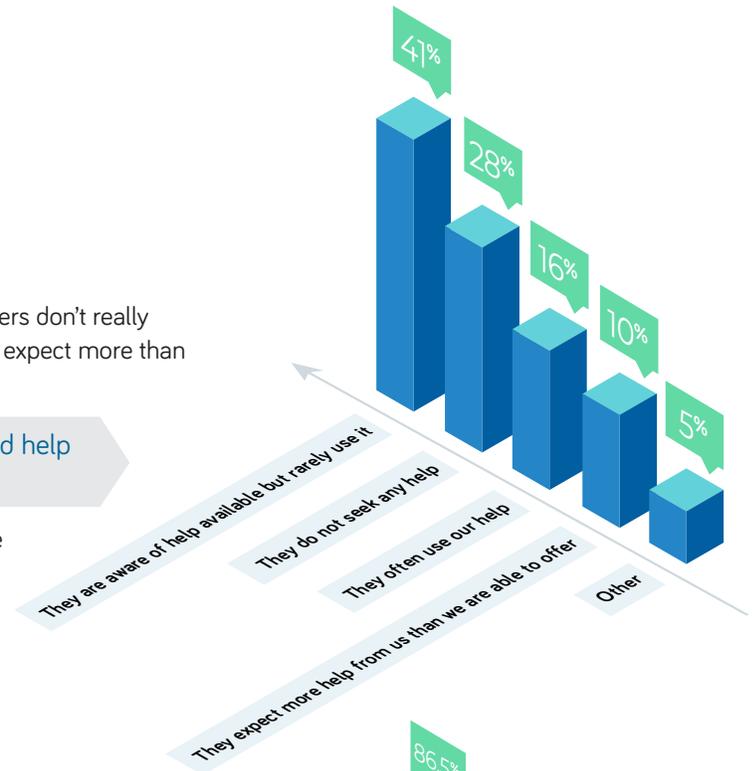
Open Access Policy Librarian, US, R1 Academic Research Institution

## Expectations

Librarians are also dealing with a range of expectations. Most researchers don’t really expect any help (69%), and a considerable number (26%) use help or expect more than the library is able to offer.

What are researchers’ expectations of how the library can/should help them promote their published research?

Given the importance of promoting research, librarians have a struggle on their hands convincing researchers that they can help them.



## How help is delivered

The methods librarians use to deliver help vary, and many librarians use a combination.

How does your library deliver this help?

Individual consultations are seen as the most effective way of helping researchers, although workshops also get good results when they get the attendance. Organizing workshops is hard, as it’s difficult to attract interest:

“People don’t necessarily come to workshops ...they would have to offer something new that people want to know about.”

One way around this is virtual workshops:

“It’s easier with Zoom to get people together.”

Or, prerecording short workshops which are available on demand on a video streaming service – these provide visibility into how many people have engaged with the content.

Providing guidance online is cost-effective, but many librarians pointed out to us that researchers don’t actively look for help so this isn’t always effective.



## PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

“The main cause is people being too busy.”

Helping researchers promote their research isn't easy for librarians, who more than ever are used to doing more with less. Time is the most significant barrier, as well as a general lack of resources:

“We would do more if we had the manpower.”

Getting faculty's attention is a significant issue.

“You have to be invited by faculty if you want to speak to them in a group, you can't reach out.”

Researchers are often unaware that help is available, or don't respond when approached by the librarian (unless they're being informed a subscription is about to be cancelled).

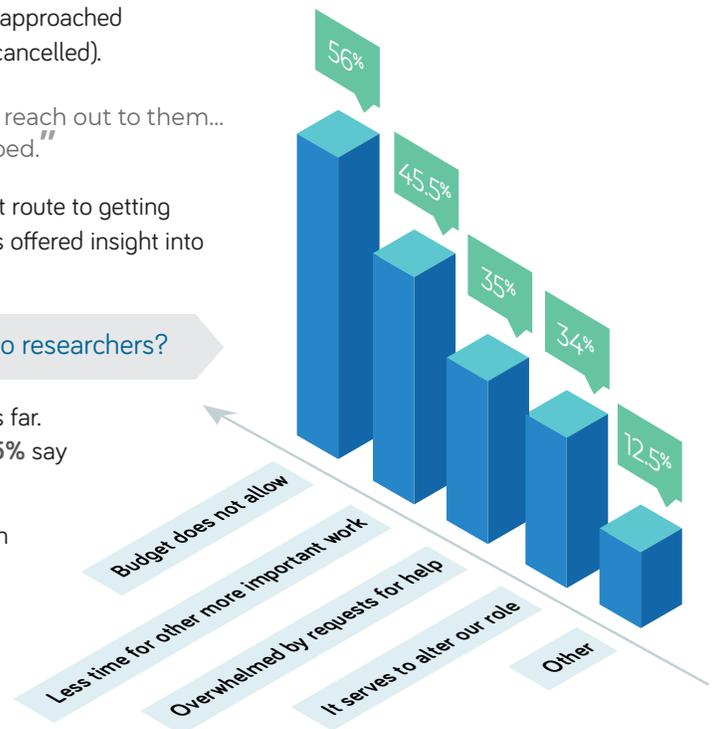
“The main challenge is researchers not asking for help, we have to reach out to them... library emails are often ignored...response is very low, so I've stopped.”

Sometimes reaching out isn't enough, so librarians have to establish the best route to getting their attention, which might take a bit of work initially. Our survey responders offered insight into the costs to them of helping researchers promote their research.

### What are the drawbacks, if any, for librarians if they provide this help to researchers?

For the majority (56%), their budget is restricted and isn't able to stretch this far. Time is a close second (46.5%) – budget cuts mean staff shortages, and 35% say they're overwhelmed by all kinds of requests for help as it is.

However, for **one third** of library responders, helping with promoting research is seen as part of the evolution of their role.



## HOW LIBRARIANS CAN HELP FURTHER

Our survey has shown that above all, a proactive approach is necessary. Librarians know that researchers often won't come to them for help, and they have to take the lead.

Ensuring researchers upload their papers into their institutional repositories is the single most effective way that librarians can help. Given a reluctance on the part of some researchers to do this, librarians can reduce resistance by including instructions on their websites, as well as contacting faculty directly. Invariably, a personal touch makes all the difference.

The time spent reaching out to researchers isn't always enough:

“We face the attitude that librarians are second-class citizens – I was on faculty before so I'm aware.”

Librarians can promote their expertise, but in order to be heard, they need the authority of their institutional leadership behind them. Therefore, it is important to get the Dean, Provost or University Librarian on board:

“...otherwise the message won't stick.”

## HOW CAN PUBLISHERS HELP WITH PROMOTING PUBLISHED RESEARCH?

If researchers don't seek help from the library, **53%** of librarians surveyed indicated that researchers turn to their peers. Only **11%** of librarians said they seek help from publishers.

**44%** of librarians felt publishers should provide more help, although around the same number were unsure how they could do this. But some felt that publishers were in a good position to help:

“ Publishers have a real role to play here...a greater ability to reach researchers than the library does as researchers pay closer attention to emails coming from somewhere they've published with.”

### Librarians suggested publishers can help by offering:

- Training workshops and events
- Collateral for promotion
- Auto-depositing papers in repositories
- Guides for librarians on promoting research
- Templates at an individual researcher and institution level
- Tips for promoting research when sending metrics to researchers.

## GOING FORWARD

The librarian's role never stands still.

As some tasks become less important due to the introduction of new technologies, new tasks take their place, such as assisting in the research process - including promotion.



Challenges such as lack of budget or manpower are unlikely to go away overnight, so it's a matter of prioritizing scarce resources. Getting the attention of researchers is also a major problem. If librarians don't already do so, it's important to start engaging with them now, particularly younger researchers with whom a relationship can be established from the start. By directing them to library-built resources, such as online workshops, whether live or recorded, researchers will start to understand that librarians can help them, and how.

Librarians can make the most of how publishers can help too. The publisher's role is to validate scientific research, certify it by publishing it, disseminate it on publication and finally preserve it.

Keeping the lines of communication with publishers open is key - by reaching out to familiar account managers, librarians can tap into a ready and often willing resource. Publishers can assist with developing guides to promotion, templates, training workshops or tips to pass on to researchers. Whatever it is, they're open to suggestions.

Our survey demonstrates the importance of assisting researchers in promoting their research. Well-disseminated research helps researchers in achieving their goals - this is core to the librarian's role. And everyone benefits, whether researchers, libraries, institutions, or publishers.

Collaboration is at the very heart of promoting research.

# TOP TIPS FOR PROMOTING PUBLISHED RESEARCH



Researchers, librarians and publishers all have important roles to play in promoting published research.

Here are some key ways they can collaborate.

## LIBRARIANS

“ Helping researchers achieve their goals is what libraries are all about.”

### 1. Discoverability

Teaching researchers how to upload research into the institutional repository is the single most effective way to help promote published research.

### 2. Creating a Research Presence

Offer help with researcher profiles (ORCID), and using research sharing platforms (ResearchGate).

### 3. Industry Networking

Educate researchers on how to engage with the community, through social media and at conferences.

### 4. Online Workshops

Offer short, topic-focused workshops either live, or pre-recorded to enable researchers to view on their own time. Publicize them well in advance and track who has watched.

### 5. Be a Proactive Leader

Take the lead and offer researchers assistance from the start, directing them to resources you create. Help gain their attention by enlisting the support of the Dean or University Librarian.

## PUBLISHERS

Publishers can also gain the attention of researchers through unique tools and expertise:

### 1. Training workshops and events

Offer subject-specific guidance on how and when to promote research, in workshops, webinars and presentations.

### 2. Guides, Collateral & Templates

Supply materials for researchers to use and adapt for promoting their own research, delivering them along with metrics when provided.

### 3. Reinforcing the library's role

Encourage researchers to take advantage of the library's skills and experience, to support librarians in their efforts to reach out.

