

HARVARD
LIBRARY



Advancing Open Knowledge

SEPTEMBER 2026

We are the libraries and archives of Harvard University.

INDEX

<i>Introduction</i>	2
<i>Our Academic Community</i>	3
<i>Our Information Environment</i>	4
<i>Our Strategic Directions</i>	6
<i>Our Organization</i>	8
<i>The Road Ahead</i>	9

Our Purpose

We champion curiosity for the betterment of the world.

Our Vision

We aspire to be global leaders in expanding world knowledge and intellectual exploration.

Our Mission

We are expert partners on the pathways to knowledge. We engage with our communities in the creation and sharing of new knowledge, connecting them with vast collections that we curate and steward with collaborators around the world. At its core, our mission is to advance the learning, research, and pursuit of truth that are at the heart of Harvard.

Our Values

Lead with curiosity

We expand intellectual frontiers and remain in awe of what we do not yet know.

Seek collaboration

We bring people and ideas together from within and beyond because we believe partnership creates more interesting results.

Embrace diverse perspectives

We cultivate and celebrate diversity in our collections and our community to construct a more inclusive and just world.

Champion access

We enhance access to information and advance inclusive models of scholarly communication.

Aim for the extraordinary

We drive progress and deliver the unexpected, building on our past and forging the future.

Introduction

In 2020, Harvard Library articulated a strategic framework grounded in a core set of values, and in a vision for advancing open knowledge through equitable access, meaningful discovery and engagement, and thoughtful preservation for the future. That framework emerged during a period of profound disruption and uncertainty, as the coronavirus pandemic transformed how research libraries operated and as societies around the world confronted urgent questions about trust, equity, and the value of higher education in public life.

In the years since, the landscape surrounding research libraries has continued to evolve rapidly. Most significantly, generative artificial intelligence is fundamentally changing how knowledge is discovered, interpreted, created, and shared. At the same time, research and teaching increasingly depend on complex digital ecosystems that blur traditional distinctions between collections, data, infrastructure, and services. Higher education institutions are also navigating heightened political polarization, questions about academic and intellectual freedom, cybersecurity and privacy concerns, and new financial pressures.

These changes have altered important aspects of the environment in which Harvard Library operates, but they have not altered our fundamental purpose. Indeed, one of the lessons of the past several years

is that the central insights and directional goals of *Advancing Open Knowledge: A Discussion of Harvard Library's Strategic Directions* have proven both relevant and resilient, providing a durable framework for navigating change while remaining rooted in our mission and values.

“Our work remains grounded in a conviction that knowledge thrives through collaboration, stewardship, and the broad exchange of perspectives across disciplines, cultures, and communities.”

That enduring purpose begins with an understanding that expanding access to trustworthy knowledge, supporting rigorous inquiry, preserving the scholarly and cultural record, and fostering meaningful engagement with ideas are essential contributions to research, teaching, learning, and the broader public good. Our work remains grounded in a conviction that knowledge thrives through collaboration, stewardship, and the broad exchange of perspectives across disciplines, cultures, and communities.

From this foundation, we have updated *Advancing Open Knowledge* for our current context.

Our Academic Community

For nearly four centuries, people have come to Harvard in the pursuit of truth, knowledge, and the betterment of society. Today, world-class faculty and talented students come together to advance the common good through groundbreaking research, cutting-edge innovations, and transformative scholarly work.

For Harvard Library, the University's priorities are our priorities. This includes adjusting to current financial realities by making strategic, structural, and sustainable decisions about how we fulfill our mission. It also means understanding the different academic contexts and research programs of each faculty and School, and at the same time recognizing common themes across them.

Several current themes are particularly important for the Library. Harvard champions a culture of pluralism, recognizing that our community is strengthened by many different perspectives, cultures, and ways of knowing. For the Library, this means a continued emphasis on providing a broad diversity of perspectives in our collections, services designed for all users, inclusive spaces, and staff who reflect our community and feel they belong. For this pluralistic community to be a thriving academic community, the University is prioritizing open inquiry and constructive dialogue, as well as academic freedom. The Library plays a vital role in this focus: our collections, services, and spaces are designed for sharing perspectives and exploring difference, and supporting intellectual freedom and information literacy are at the core of our work.



Equally important to the University and the Library is the broader societal context in which we are situated. When the value of higher education and research is routinely questioned, the Library can demonstrate that nurturing our knowledge ecosystem enables groundbreaking discoveries around the world and benefits the public broadly.

Harvard will be celebrating the 400th anniversary of its founding in ten years. In many ways, the history of the University and its impact on society is visible in our libraries, and telling that story will be one of our priorities in the decade ahead.



Our Information Environment

Today, research crosses disciplines and borders more fluidly than ever before. In centuries past, libraries arose in the distributed academic communities of the University to provide physical disciplinary collections close to their scholars. Now, those scholars have materials from any field, anywhere in the world, at their fingertips. Our users start their work online, often before they realize they are engaging with the Library at all: roughly half of the traffic in our library systems now arrives from commercial search engines, and students are turning routinely to generative AI tools to begin their research. The library resources they reach may be physical collections such as historic and institutional archives or print materials from around the world, as well as current

electronic publications or datasets. The scholarship they produce inevitably takes a digital form.

At the same time, demand for physical libraries remains high, reflecting their value as academic hubs. They showcase knowledge and invite exploration. They offer research consultations, course sessions using digital or physical collections, specialized information tools and production studios, inspiring events and exhibitions, and a spectrum of learning environments for both individual and collaborative work. They are places for productive dialogue across a diversity of perspectives and a space to contemplate the most challenging issues of our time.



Behind the scenes, our librarians are navigating an increasingly complex landscape: engaging with AI-enabled tools and related licensing and rights issues; facilitating evolving scholarly communications models and open science; balancing “digital-first” and “analog when appropriate” collection strategies; and managing the technical and financial demands of digital resources alongside ongoing stewardship of print.

In this environment, our libraries are key partners in research and teaching, helping people and their machines find, use, and create knowledge responsibly. We see knowledge

as simultaneously global and local: shaped by diverse communities, informed by differing experiences and traditions, and strengthened when a wide range of voices can contribute to and benefit from the scholarly record.

We also recognize that openness is challenged in an era of restrictive licensing regimes, closed platforms, competition, and rising cybersecurity concerns, and that ethical stewardship and the protection of rights and privacy are as essential as information access. On behalf of our academic communities, we ensure that knowledge is shared as openly as possible and as securely as necessary. Research libraries play an essential role in upholding that balance.

Within the University, we play another essential role as stewards of institutional memory and University records. This includes in-depth administrative research in University archives, and collaborations across campus to ensure appropriate retention of current records — the future historic record. Also, we are seeing increased interest in our own administrative data, such as library acquisitions records, as fuel for data-intensive research projects. With information policy at the core of our work, we are active partners in the continuous development and application of the University’s data governance strategies.



Our Strategic Directions

The directional goals of *Advancing Open Knowledge* remain central to Harvard Library's work and are updated here to reflect our current context. These goals continue to reflect the distinctive strengths and responsibilities of Harvard Library as one of the world's leading research libraries in one of the world's most renowned universities. Our goals also drive our ongoing commitment to collaboration — across Harvard, with peer institutions, and with partners around the world — in support of a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable knowledge environment.

Diversify and Expand Access to Knowledge

One of Harvard Library's exceptional strengths is our collections. They reflect the global reach and depth of the University's remarkable academic programs and the development of many disciplines. They include premier holdings of rare and unique material that contribute to a broader corpus of scholarly resources available to scholars, students, and citizens around the world. Now, with generative

AI changing how knowledge is discovered and produced, our collections are essential data to be paired with new tools, and our digital initiatives will need to scale accordingly. Our ongoing collection development will reflect future research needs as well as current academic priorities. We will facilitate research dissemination for maximum impact and support equitable opportunities for a broad range

of perspectives to be shared, from and in all parts of the world. We do not do any of this alone — we work with peers and partners in an ecosystem that leverages our collective strengths to further diversify and expand access to knowledge.

Enhance Discovery and Engagement

Research, teaching, and learning depend heavily upon the ability to easily discover, explore, create, and share information, and the methods for doing so are changing dramatically. Harvard Library envisions a digital ecosystem that leverages new technologies such as generative AI, is embedded wherever research happens, and is grounded in library values of trust, provenance, accessibility, and equitable access. This includes both the technical work of applying AI to how we manage and connect our collections, and the human work of helping students and faculty use AI-enabled tools across the research lifecycle. Human expertise fuels our contributions to discovery and knowledge creation, and Harvard's librarians and archivists are leaders in their fields. We also recognize that discovery is nurtured in community. Our physical libraries are academic community anchors, places of open inquiry and stability where students can engage deeply with issues and perspectives, and research subjects that will help them forge a better tomorrow.

Preserve for the Future

As one of the most comprehensive research libraries in the world, and a leader in preservation, Harvard Library has a strong sense of responsibility for the stewardship of information resources that we acquire, access, and produce. This pertains to burgeoning born-digital content as well as our

analog collections and the digitized surrogates created from them. In the physical realm, we continue to leverage our ReCAP partnership and prioritize vulnerable collections. In the digital realm, building on a successful multi-year initiative to modernize our digital repository service, we are well positioned to support perpetual access to digital assets at Harvard, including research outputs and University records as well as library collections. At the same time, cybersecurity threats, geopolitical instability, and environmental disruption put collections at risk everywhere, and no institution can address these threats alone. We are committed to engaging in collaborative networks that increase resilience in the global knowledge commons upon which we all depend.





Our Organization

Harvard Library consists of all the libraries of the University, each of which is deeply embedded in its academic community. Together, we fuel knowledge and innovation across the University. We function as a center of excellence befitting a great university, providing leadership, innovative best practices, and strategic alignment in the broader ecosystem. We provide distributed discipline-focused services and standards for seamless access across them. Underpinning all this are sustainable, secure systems and services supported by enterprise infrastructure.

As seen throughout this document, our work is accomplished through collaboration: with faculty, in academic programs and research; across disciplines, enabling connection without flattening difference; across campus, with University

information technology services, research services, centers for teaching and learning, and academic community initiatives; with peer research libraries; and across international boundaries.

At the heart of our library is our people. In our rapidly evolving environment, we aim to cultivate critical thinking, creativity, and agility, and encourage continual growth in knowledge and expertise that advances professional practice and the University's mission. We work as a community, understanding and bridging difference and nurturing an environment where all are engaged and feel they belong. We enable our staff to do their best work in support of our directional goals, and to shape those goals through their experience and ideas for both the "why" and the "how" of our work together.

The Road Ahead

Our context has changed significantly in recent years and will continue to change in the years ahead. New technologies, new forms of scholarship, and new social and political realities will shape how knowledge is created, accessed, interpreted, and preserved. Yet the underlying purpose of research libraries endures.

At Harvard Library, we remain committed to advancing knowledge in ways that support academic excellence, intellectual exploration, and the long-term public value of research and learning. In a world of constant motion, the Library remains a place where curiosity is nourished, histories are protected, voices are invited into conversations, and knowledge is passed forward for generations to come.

