

The People's Case for Curators



We're surrounded by so much information, on topics ranging from voting behaviour to new viruses. Figuring out what is reliable in a world of agendas, fakes and contradictions is hard and getting harder.

Concerns about information overload, disinformation and misinformation get a lot of attention. Meanwhile, the very people in society who work to the standards of good science to uncover reliable information and share knowledge, and who protect the public's access to it – such as librarians, editors, research integrity officers and specialist journalists – are overlooked and undermined.

No matter our viewpoint on different subjects, we need those people to meet us, the public, where we are and help us ask our questions and protect our routes to answers. Let's call them **public-good curators**. Their work benefits all of us, and the further we are from power and influence, the more they benefit us.

Here, for the first time, we have asked them to come together to describe what good curation looks like and the principles that underpin it – principles that we as a society urgently need to make more **visible**, **respected** and **protected**, so that we can continue to rely on them.



We recognise that there are many kinds of curator who help the public access reliable information, but the groups described in the table below are the ones we spoke to for this guide.

Who are public-good curators?

Research professionals	Conduct and assemble research and data that advances understanding and underpins policy, practice or innovation based on principles of honesty, integrity and rigour
Editors and research integrity officers	Ensure honesty, integrity and rigour and promote good practice in the conduct and dissemination of research
Librarians	Source, organise and provide access to information and help people develop skills to use reliable sources critically and confidently
Specialist journalists	Investigate, verify and translate expert knowledge into accessible, accurate reporting for the public



Science only works when we can trust its foundations. For me, that means upholding transparent standards of practice that not only guard against misconduct but also foster curiosity, invite questions, and help us all become sharper at identifying, validating, and evaluating what is true.

Dr Elisabeth Bik, Science Integrity Investigator



Curation in the age of algorithms

Most of the information we engage with is curated in some way, meaning someone or something is deciding what we see. Public-good curators provide information guided by transparent standards of practice and codes of conduct that are available for all of us to see. Librarians have the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), specialist journalists have the Society of Professional Journalists in the US or the National Union of Journalists in the UK. Researchers and editors have the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), while research bodies work with organisations like the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) or the Office of Research Integrity (ORI) which have codes of practice for research integrity.

By contrast, artificial intelligence (AI) summaries are frequently error prone, misleading or flat-out wrong, but no-one is accountable for that, and the streams from social media platforms are curated by algorithms that no-one can see and which are primarily driven by commercial priorities. The convenience of AI tools can be irresistible in a fast-moving world and while they can play their part, when it comes to scientific information, transparency about where it comes from and its robustness is crucial.

How does an algorithm feed you information?

- Social media algorithms use user interactions to display hyper-personalised content and advertisements which prioritise engagement
- Recommended content can lead to the creation of information bubbles – where we are surrounded by limited and similar information
- This can also lead to filter bubbles, where algorithms filter out information it determines we aren't interested in or doesn't align with our beliefs
- This means we do not get to see the underlying processes and criteria used to determine how information is selected, often referred to as the 'black box' of AI



One of the new things we're having to face is AI and what that means for how people get their information. If you just do a simple Google search, you can now be served up an AI summary, which is often incorrect.

Simon Evans, Deputy Editor,
Carbon Brief



As AI reshapes how information is produced and accessed, the role of public-good curators has never been more essential. By embedding AI literacy into our work, we help communities not only find reliable knowledge but also build the confidence to interpret and evaluate what machines generate alongside traditional sources. This combination of human judgment and digital fluency will be critical for a healthy information ecosystem.

Dr Leo S Lo, Dean of Libraries and
University Librarian, Advisor to the
Provost for AI Literacy, University
of Virginia



Public-good curators are committed to transparency about where they source and how they evaluate information.



I think that transparency is a decent way of dealing with fallibility, accepting that we're human, but we are following these rules and these principles as far as we can. And we are there to answer questions and explain them. An algorithm doesn't do that.

Stephen Wyber, Director of Policy and Advocacy, IFLA



You should almost put as much effort into communicating the processes of science and publishing to people as the science itself. Scientists aren't beyond bias – transparency is what's important.

Wendy Sadler, Senior Lecturer in Science Communication, Cardiff University



We need a transparent and visible knowledge infrastructure – one that supports a better public understanding of science and the scientific process through the identification, validation, curation, and sharing of reliable information.

Alice Meadows, Author, The Scholarly Kitchen Blog



Through their work, public-good curators

- encourage curiosity
- provide skills & knowledge to aid understanding
- identify & inventory source material
- validate & evaluate information
- invite questioning

Encourage curiosity

Public-good curators don't want to tell us what to think; they want us to have the best access to a range of information which can help us make up our own minds. Guided by professional codes of conduct and ethics, and armed with unique and sometimes highly technical skills, public-good curators work to ensure the public has access to diverse and often contrasting information and reject censorship in all its forms.



[Libraries] are champions for intellectual freedom and so we are all about people coming in, reading whatever they want, studying whatever they want, forming opinions in their own right. We don't discriminate on what people want to read – we want people to read and to be able to freely choose what they read.

Elaine Westbrook, Carl A. Kroch
University Librarian,
Cornell University



I have used curated and verified information about plant cell biology from the Royal Botanic Garden Library in Edinburgh but, just as importantly, libraries have encouraged my nephew's curiosity of astronomy.

Dr Michael McDonald,
Researcher, UK



For over 200 years, the House of Commons Library has ensured that MPs have the information and evidence they need to make informed decisions. We make sure that MPs have access to a diverse range of sources, statistics and viewpoints. All of our work is impartial – supporting MPs of all political parties simultaneously. Librarians and researchers are crucial for identifying information and also curating and communicating that information to policymakers.

Grant Hill-Cawthorne, House of Commons Librarian



Provide skills & knowledge to aid understanding

Public-good curators understand that agency is important, and rather than telling us what information is good, they support us in learning the skills to be able to figure that out for ourselves. Librarians in particular provide training, resources, and publish guides which can help us understand how information is stored and catalogued, what the key information on certain topics is, how to find further information, and how to determine the quality of sources and information. Through this kind of assistance, curators also support workforce readiness and lifelong learning.



When we talk about access to information, we're also talking about the essential ability to independently and critically analyse and evaluate information and sources. Access to information is a basic right, but information literacy is what fosters opportunity.

Megan Janicki, Deputy Director,
Public Policy and Advocacy,
American Library Association



Throughout my career I have turned to librarians to find information. The first time was during my PhD, when I went through countless journals together with a librarian to find the reference image I needed. Another time, I needed access to some antique books. Being able to access these helped me launch my scientific career – very much thanks to the librarians' work!

Dr Gabriela Roca, Researcher,
Germany



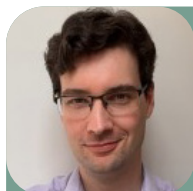
It's not just about giving people access to information, it's helping them know what to do with it when they have it and giving them the skills to make use of it. I think librarians see that as part of their job.

Louis Coiffait-Gunn, Chartered
Institute of Library and Information
Professionals (CILIP)



Identify & inventory source material

Unlike social media algorithms which often only show us information on subjects we've already engaged with, public-good curators provide information on a wide range of topics and aim to be transparent about where the information came from. Research professionals are required to be transparent about how they are funded, their methods, their research design and whether their work has been peer reviewed so that people can evaluate the quality, reliability and replicability of their research findings. For librarians, this could be useful tagging of sources as peer reviewed, preprint, or another type of publication, as well as adding relevant metadata. For specialist journalists, this may be reporting on all angles of a polarising topic and linking to reference points and sources.



The Wikimedia approach is that we need to show what the sources of information are and we need to put links to those sources front and centre. On Wikipedia, the principal of verifiability boils down to one thing: if you're adding new information, you need to include a reference to show where it came from.

Richard Nevell, Programme Manager,
Wikimedia UK



We vet information by reading papers, talking to experts in the field, asking them about particular papers and asking about developments in the field. We're looking for evidence-based opinions and expertise to contextualise and say whether something is a new finding or a trend that's happening in the research sphere.

Ivan Oransky, Editor-in-Chief,
The Transmitter



During the pandemic, it was hard for parents to have the time to research and fully know what the truth was. We are lucky enough to live in a town with a large university with academics who can help us seek information when we are trying to accurately write grant applications or who can teach classes for us with updated public health information. I lean on local researchers and people who I personally know who also care about seeking the truth to point me in the right direction or make sure I'm not missing the big picture.

Monira Silk, Executive Director,
Athens Parent Wellbeing, Georgia, US



Validate & evaluate information

Public-good curators understand the importance of evaluating the reliability of information and being transparent about the criteria they use. For example, journal editors evaluate research manuscripts and, after weighing comments from expert reviewers, validate material by making final editorial decisions that contribute to the scholarly record. Librarians empower us by helping improve our information literacy – providing support in considering the authority, purpose, publication, format, scope, and sources of information. For specialist journalists, their code of conduct requires the information they disseminate to be as accurate as possible and to differentiate between facts and opinions.



As [specialist] journalists, we're only as good as our sources. I start with my research then speak to a number of people so I understand the scientific consensus and what other views are. Then I ask myself: how much weight do I give to one view and how much weight do I give to the other? Juggling that is a significant amount of the work that we do.

Dalmeet Singh Chawla, Freelance Journalist, UK



We need to get people engaged with, and thinking about, the scientific process to understand whether the information they are consuming is reliable. Rather than thinking about catchy headlines that aren't evidence based, thinking about where that information is coming from is crucial. Knowing whether it is an opinion or commentary from a small group, or evidence from large multinational studies, can help transform the ways we interpret scientific findings.

Adya Misra, Associate Director, Research Integrity, Sage



While working in addiction medicine, I learned about a new substance called Kratom from one of my clients. They said it was an energy drink sold at liquor stores that was helping them with their recovery. In doing research together, we were able to learn about Kratom through good quality sources and found out that it's actually a natural opiate which can be just as addictive as heroin and is not a harmless supplement. From this experience, I was able to connect other clients in recovery with good information about risks and help them make informed decisions.

Meghan Dooley, Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor, California, US



Invite questioning

Public-good curators create space for new information to change what we think. They understand that even the best scientific study contains uncertainty and that information and insight are never complete. It's important to be transparent about the status of what is known and invite questions.



Thanks to the information provided by the Mexican Network of Science Journalists, the communities of the Purificación and Cuitzmala river basins were able to have meaningful conversations about water governance and sustainability.

Dr Oscar Gilberto Cárdenas Hernández, Professor working with communities of the Costa Sur de Jalisco, Mexico.



"Nothing about me, without me" means working with your audience, and representing their diversity of experience. We can't always get things right the first time – we need to learn and to make changes by listening to people.

Douglas Badenoch, Co-founder, The Mental Elf



Be open to criticism and correct things when they are shown to be wrong. *Nature's* journalists correct errors as quickly as possible and transparently note that we've done so.

Richard Van Noorden, Features Editor, Nature Research



We need to continue learning about mechanisms to produce and publish high quality research based on our collective knowledge, understandings, and expertise across disciplines, time, and contexts.

H. Richard Milner IV, Cornelius Vanderbilt Professor of Education, Editor, Urban Education



Stand up for public-good curation

It is thanks to the individuals upholding these principles and standards of information curation that research becomes a reliable source of knowledge for us all. We recognize the importance of reliable information, yet we often fail to value the people who provide it. So, while people row about online censorship and fact-checks, the roles that empower us to find reliable information and answer our questions are dwindling quietly. Let's change that.

Knowledge doesn't curate itself – and it is in all of our interests that those who do it are visible and valued.

What you can do

Make a space for curators on your platforms

- Share your appreciation and these principles on Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, X, Facebook, BlueSky and wherever else you are
- Post a story or endorsement using **#PublicGoodCuration**
- When you're making use of or sharing information, credit all those who have enabled you to do that
- Wherever you see a debate about poor information talk up good curation and share this guide

If you are a librarian, publisher, researcher, editor or part of a science body or professional group:

Help us build a public voice for good curation

- Share these insights with colleagues
- Speak to your bosses about championing good curation in your work
- Send the guide to your government representatives
- Find space to discuss and promote public-good curation in the information age at your conferences and events
- Share your **#PublicGoodCuration** stories and accounts of why information curation matters with us and your networks using this hashtag
- Collect public testimonials from people describing how curated scientific information has helped them and demonstrate **#PublicGoodCuration** in your outputs.

Do you have thoughts about how to grow this campaign?
Sign up [here](#) or scan the QR code to join the campaign
for **#PublicGoodCuration**





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