

To: MSL Commission

From: Karen Strege, State Librarian

Re: The future of the Library Services Advisory Council & other Task Forces

Date: February 12, 2001

The Library Services and Technology Act of 1996 made a state library advisory council permissive rather than mandatory. The state law that governs advisory boards requires that the Governor establish non-required councils through an executive order. The current executive order expires in May 2001.

In April 1999, the Commission asked staff to consider the value of the council in light of changes in the federal law and in the implementation of the LSTA program. In brief, implementation of LSTA has moved from a sub-grant program, in which MSL awarded grants in a competitive process, to a program in which MSL uses federal funds to build statewide, centralized services.

Furthermore, in 1997, the Commission established two task forces, Law Revision and Networking. Because of new focus on technology in the federal act, the Networking Task Force, which is composed of representatives of all libraries, has guided the activities of many federally funded projects, including the Montana Library Network (MLN). Therefore, this task force fulfills many of the functions of the council.

The Law Revision Task Force has provided the impetus to revise Montana's library laws and to introduce new laws. To date, the group has successfully studied and then drafted changes in federation and public library laws. In addition, during the past 18 months, the Task Force has studied revising state funding to public libraries. Although former Governor Raiciot approved one component of this program, Governor Martz did not. Therefore, the question of revamping state aid to public libraries is still open and needs attention. However, other than the state aid question, I believe that this Task Force has completed its work.

To comply with the Commission's request to study the council, MSL staff brought the question to the council. Most of the members thought that the Commission should ask the Governor to appoint a council only if it determines that MSL needs such assistance. Some council members said that the council was the only venue for library users and those with disabilities to have access to policy-making at MSL. The outcomes of this discussion were that the council and the staff agreed that MSL should call upon the council during the study period and after that time assess the need for its continuation.

During the past year, we have used the council twice. A sub-committee of the council reviewed a staff report and recommendation on continued funding for public library services to residents of institutions in February 2000. This month, council members served as readers and evaluators of vendor responses for the evaluation study. In both cases, this assistance was invaluable to the staff. In both cases, staff could have asked members to participate in these projects without the auspices of the formal council.

Given these facts and circumstances, we recommend to the Commission the following:

That the Commission allows the executive order that establishes the advisory council to expire without renewal in June 2001.

That the Commission continue to support the Networking Task Force, encourage the staff to fill the vacant position of library user, and add an additional seat for a representative for those citizens who have difficulty using traditional library services.

That the Commission establish and support a new task force to review the state aid to public libraries and federations. That the task force begin its work in June 2001 and conclude its work with a recommendation to the Commission by May 2002. Membership of the task force should consist of two federation coordinators; a public library director and trustee from a large, medium and small public library; a member of the commission; and a legislator.