

Montana Information Center

Introduction

The state's budget crisis, confusion between the roles of ITSD and the State Library, and the development of new methods of integrating and providing information have provided an opportunity for the managers at the State Library to propose merging the library and NRIS departments. This proposal builds on the State Library's history of serving information and its well-developed expertise in serving information primarily via the Internet.

The proposal also builds upon the most unique parts of MSL's collection -- Montana-related holdings. The library's state documents depository provides a single point of access to all state agency publications; the library's Natural Resource Information System (NRIS) disseminates information regarding land, water, plants and animals, and is the recognized source in Montana for geospatial information. MSL wishes to build upon the strengths of both services to make them more valuable to all users.

What is the Center?

The Montana Information Center (Center) is a virtual, digital library primarily containing information on Montana's government, its people, places and natural resources. It provides unparalleled integration and access to these information resources through a comprehensive catalog and a state of the art information discovery and retrieval system. The Center serves as an archive for state documents published within the past 30 years, databases, and geospatial data. The Center provides state employees with current and timely electronic information at their desktops and assistance with locating and accessing other information resources.

The Center's holdings are largely electronic in format and are served through a well-known, highly acclaimed Internet portal. The Center does not duplicate any collections found in other libraries. The holdings consist of:

- Comprehensive sets of statewide geospatial data layers
- Index of electronic databases maintained by state agencies
- Heritage databases
- Access to selected electronic books, periodicals, maps, reference materials about Montana
- State documents, hard copy
- State documents and federal document, electronic versions
- Access to purchased full-text periodicals selected to assist state employees and officials

The Center's holdings are cataloged according to library standards and indexed to allow discovery through the Internet. The Center works with other agencies to develop and implement a program for permanent preservations of important state publications.

Center staff concentrates their efforts on serving users through developing and supporting automated data discovery through user-friendly display and access tools. The Center also trains users to apply these tools to locate, visualize and obtain information, and assists state agencies by providing direct access to their information via Web Services.

The Center indexes or catalogs information so that it is easily located and used by the technologically savvy user or the person unskilled in computer use. The Center offers easy-to-use, web-based access to all information. The Center also offers reference or person-to-person services through on-line consultations, telephone, and walk-in services.

Specialized services to state agencies include the following types of assistance:

1. How best to make information available on-line. These services include instruction in metatagging, indexing, and display.
2. Web publishing of state agency information when the agency has neither the need nor the ability to develop the capability in-house.
3. Information assimilation, summarization, report development or map production.
4. Developing applications for the purpose of information dissemination.

Audience: The primary audiences for the center's services are state government agencies and officials. Other important audiences include businesses, other government employees, not for profit organizations, and Montana citizens.

Examples of how the Center will serve these audiences are:

1. A DEQ employee needs to research the history of the nitrogen dioxide ambient air quality standard. The Center contains this information, which includes state documents, professional journal articles, and assistance in locating legislative records.
2. An employee from the Personnel Bureau needs to find current articles regarding the use of a certain technique of performance evaluation. This employee searches Internet and finds that all the free information is out of date and that all the other sources require fees. The employee used the pertinent electronic index, provided by the Center, and finds five, full-text articles. Another article is indexed but not available on-line. The employee uses Center's services to borrow the article.
3. A citizen needs to know about the water quality indicators in Toole County. Using online tools, the citizen makes a simple request typing in "water quality indicators" and "Toole County." The MIC provides a comprehensive set of resources include current maps, links to available information, links to state and federal documents, bibliographic resources and other agency links.
4. A local watershed planner is interested in resource information about her watershed. Using the MIC online tools, she builds a dynamic watershed "Atlas" with maps, data summaries, statistic, trends, and bibliographic citations for information concerning her watershed. The "Chapters" in the atlas include land ownership, land use, water resources, soils, roads, abandoned miners, and demographic information. The atlas is automatically updated as new information is received. The atlas is always current with the latest information.

How does the Montana Information Center reduce the cost of government?

Implementation of the Center will provide an immediate cost savings, as follows:

- Eliminate from its collection any materials that do not pertain directly to its mission (space reduction, acquisition costs, maintenance costs);
- Reduce its physical holdings to the minimum, retaining only those materials that are not available in electronic format or for archival purposes (space reduction, acquisition costs, maintenance costs);
- Balance staff-assisted information services with web-based self-service information access (personal services cost reduction);

Beyond the initial cost-savings identified above, the Center would provide the means to achieve much greater savings over the long-term:

- Users at all level of government spend less on locating and acquiring the information they need for decision making;
- Recognition of a single portal of access to Montana information eliminates the need for other state agencies to develop information access mechanisms strictly for the purpose of serving their data to others. While state agencies should not be discouraged from developing in-house expertise to manage and serve their data, for agencies that have no reason to do so other than to provide public access to their data, the Center provides a cost-saving alternative.
- For agencies who have a need to directly serve agency data via the Internet, ~~technical~~ assistance about information dissemination available through the Center will support that capability, reduce the cost of development, and standardize the approach throughout state government.
- Space needs will be reduced as physical collections are eliminated and consolidated.

What will it take to build the Center?

The building blocks are all in place. Implementing the Center merely better integrates the expertise of LISD staff regarding cataloging, indexing and archiving data and customer service, and the expertise of NRIS regarding management and service of electronic information. The infrastructure to support the Center is built on an existing, highly functional integrated system of web, database and application servers and associated storage and is supported by MSL information technology staff.

Rearranging the blocks means:

- Reorganizing staff
- Identifying valid current holdings; archiving or otherwise dispersing all other holdings
- Developing collection plan (identify gaps, etc)
- Assessing if legislation is needed
- Planning and implementing physical changes to the work, storage, and public service areas.

How will MSL services change?

General reference services to libraries

Reference services to librarians continue to decline as librarians increase their skills using local print and online sources. Analysis of the last quarter of questions from librarians shows four categories of questions in an equal distribution. The categories are

1. Questions that could be answered by use of online resources;
2. Questions about library procedures or policies;
3. Questions that are difficult to answer without additional assistance; and
4. Questions about Montana.

Librarians who contact the Center with the first two types of questions will be referred to Library Development staff. Center staff will continue to answer questions that fall within categories three and four using center resources and by making appropriate referrals.

The Center will not collect resources exclusively to support the reference needs of Montana librarians.

Reference services to state employees

MSL will serve as an information broker to state employees that desire work related information in two ways. First, MSL will provide basic information through a collection of journals and other electronic reference materials. Second, MSL will continue to cooperate with other libraries to borrow work-related information for state employees. MSL will also explore resource sharing agreements and cooperative purchases with other major Montana libraries.

NRIS user support and requests

Resource intensive personalized map, report, and data summary production will be reduced in favor of serving a broader audience via web-based information services. Merging with LISD will also provide the ability to combine positions that provide mediated request services.

The Heritage contract

The Heritage contract will be reduced in accordance with overall budget reductions. Selected Heritage services will be evaluated to determine if they match the mission of the Center.

Outreach and training

Both departments currently have independent outreach and training programs. Such efforts will be combined and therefore, more efficient.

What's the difference between the Montana Information Center and Discovering Montana.com (DM)?

The user of Discovering Montana sees a site comprised of a series of non-integrated links to website resources and State agency websites. For a user to find information about water resources in the Helena Valley for example, the user would have to know what agencies websites to go to, and then be able to utilize each of those websites independently to obtain the information they are looking for. Using the Center, a user can define their geographic area of interest and the type of data they need, and the system will provide an integrated information solution for them in one step.

In short, DM is a set of links to information sources; the Center would be a professionally catalogued, maintained and supported collection of state and federal documents (electronic or otherwise), electronic reference materials and periodicals, and appropriate state agency data maintained in a integrated system, supported by professional librarians, providing state of the art discovery, visualization and access tools, backed by library law to ensure patron rights.

The Center and DM collaborate to provide users with seamless access to information about state agencies and information about the state.

What's the difference between the Montana Information Center and the Information Technology Services Division (ITSD)?

ITSD is mandated to serve the needs of state agencies regarding information technology. These needs include setting IT standards, policies, and providing assistance regarding IT purchasing, maintenance, and installation. ITSD is also mandated to provide support for the state's IT systems, such as accounting and other specific business applications. ITSD is also responsible for providing the network infrastructure. It is the role of the library, and not those of ITSD to collect, catalog, maintain, and disseminate information directly to the public.

What's the difference between the Montana Information Center and the other state agency libraries?

The two largest state agency libraries have different functions than the Center. The Historical Library (MHL) collects and stores information about Montana's past. MSL has an agreement with MHL that state publications, older than 30 years, are stored and made accessible at MHL. The State Law Library is the primarily source of law materials for the public and state government. The Center will not duplicate this important function.

The Census Economic Information Center (CEIC) at Commerce is an important source of information about Montana's lands and people. Currently, MSL has agreements with CEIC regarding information dissemination. NRIS also contracts with CEIC to provide dissemination services.

Staff configuration:

The programs affected by this reorganization together currently comprise 16 FTE. Reorganized as the Center, staffing level will be reduced to 13.

Positions needed:

- Manager- All pertinent management duties
- State Publications Coordinator - Works with state agencies to insure that all print and electronic publications are received by the center. Promotes the use of the center to state agencies and users.
- State Publications Assistant - Metatag all publications; adds locations to national catalogs, and informs and provides copies of state publications to participating depositories.
- Information Manager/Cataloger - Ensures that all center information is indexed and catalogued; develops/maintains metadata.
- Montana Information Specialist - Assists users with defining requests and locating needed information
- Montana Information Assistant - Clerical support, including record keeping, processing referrals and requests, managing loans from other libraries.
- Information Systems Administrator/Geographic Information Officer - Manages electronic holdings in accordance with overall collection plan; database administration
- Internet Applications Developer - Develops automated information discovery, visualization and access tools.
- GIS Programmer/Analyst – Geospatial data integration, augmentation, quality control
- Water Information Coordinator - Promotes development/enhancement and use of Center's water related holdings (statutory program)
- Web Administrator - Senior level web designer/programmer
- Network System Administrator - Network administration
- Resource and Referral Specialist – Oversees the requests, receipt and distribution of borrowed documents. Tracks referrals to ensure that request is answered and recorded.

Costs:

Total Staff	Current	New	Savings	GF	Total Cut
FTE	16.00	13.00	*2		
PS Budget	789,889	736,659	53,230	53,230	
Collections	195,866	154,072	41,794	41,794	
Equipment	73,750	73,750	0	0	
Fixed Cost/ Operating	437,483	437,483	0	0	
Heritage Contract /NRIS	331,432	293,932	37,500	37,500	
	1,828,420	1,695,896	132,524	132,524	132,524