

Montana State Library Digital Library Initiative

Introduction

The Montana State Library (MSL) manages a unique collection of print and digital information; it is *the* point of access for state government publications, Montana-related digital maps and information related to Montana's natural resources. New methods of integrating and providing information offer an opportunity for reorganizing and refocusing MSL to create greater efficiency, reduced costs, and superior service to Montana decision-makers, businesses, students and citizens. This proposal builds on MSL's history of serving information, its staff expertise, and its nationally recognized success in serving digital natural resource information via the Internet.

MSL will merge and transform the Library Information Services department (LISD) and the Natural Resource Information System (NRIS) to create the Montana State Library Digital Library (Library), as a reliable, easily accessible source for information. This Library will enable the state to more effectively meet growing demands for direct access to rapidly expanding information resources, as well as the business imperatives for greater efficiency and lower cost-for-service.

This proposal also builds upon the most unique parts of MSL's collection -- Montana-related holdings and information resources produced by state government. The Library's state documents depository provides a single point of access to all state agency publications; NRIS disseminates information on Montana's land, water, and biological resources and is the recognized source in Montana for geospatial information. MSL will build upon its strengths in information management and services, and the synergy of its diverse staff expertise to substantially increase access and benefits to information users.

What is the Digital Library?

The Library will be a professionally catalogued, maintained and supported collection of state documents, Montana-relevant federal documents, reference materials and periodicals, and appropriate state agency data maintained in an integrated system -- all supported by professional librarians and information specialists, providing state of the art discovery, visualization and access tools, guided by library law and policies.

The Library's holdings will be largely electronic in format and served through a broadly-known, state-of-the-art Internet portal. Although most of its resources will be digital, the Library will also continue to house relevant printed reference materials not available in digital format.

The Library will focus on meeting the needs of Montana's decision-makers (including state and local agency managers and business leaders) with information. In doing so, it will also ensure that all Montana citizens have access to information created by their government. A second focus will be to serve Montana libraries, which play a critical role in the state's information service network. As MSL transforms itself into a primarily digital library, it will be increasingly able to provide high quality Montana-relevant information, discovered remotely and delivered directly to users' desktops -- in offices, libraries, schools, and homes.

The Library will not duplicate collections found in other libraries. It will complement DiscoveringMontana.com and state agency libraries by providing value-added organization, presentation and archival of important state documents and electronic information. It will partner with the Information Technology Services Division (ITSD), using Montana's strong information technology infrastructure to deliver information resources and services.

The Library's holdings will include:

- State documents and federal document, electronic format
- State documents, hard-copy format
- Access to selected full-text periodicals of particular importance to Montana decision-makers.
- Comprehensive sets of statewide geospatial data layers and selected related tabular data
- Index of electronic databases maintained by state agencies
- Access to a diverse spectrum of electronic books, periodicals, maps, and reference relevant to Montana

Library staff will focus on systematically assembling, organizing, ensuring the quality and integrating these resources, and on developing user-friendly tools for accessing and displaying information via the Internet. The staff will also train users in locating, visualizing and obtaining information with these tools, and will assist state agencies by providing direct access to their information via the Internet. The Library ensures that information can be easily located and used by both the technologically savvy user and the person unskilled in computer use. The Library also offers individual assistance and reference services via on-line consultations, telephone, and walk-in services.

How does the MSL Digital Library reduce the cost of government?

MSL will realize immediate cost savings by eliminating materials not germane to its new digital library role, and by reducing the number of staff required to support its former paper-based collection and services.

In addition to realizing savings, the Library will provide new value for Montanans:

- Information relevant to Montana will be easier and less costly to find and obtain, from sources that have been documented to be of high quality and reliability
- By standardizing the organization, storage, and dissemination of state government digital information, state agencies will save development and production cost
- Costly re-creation and duplication will be prevented because government and business will be able to readily find and utilize information that already exists
- All Montanans will benefit from better and timely decisions made with the advantage of efficient access to relevant information.

What will it take to build the MSL Digital Library?

The infrastructure to support the Library is built on an existing, highly functional integrated system of web, database and application servers and associated storage developed and maintained by MSL information technology staff. Implementing the Library will involve integrating the expertise of LISD and NRIS staff. The Library's information systems specialists will integrate and manage the center's electronic resources, develop automated data discovery and access tools, and assist state agencies in archiving their data and making it available to other users. Professional librarians and subject specialists will identify, assemble, ensure the quality of information, and assist users by assessing needs, linking them with appropriate resources, and helping them interpret and apply technical information.