

# Memo

**To:** Montana State Library Commission

**From:** Tracy Cook, LDD Director

**From:** Jennie Stapp, State Librarian

**Date:** June 6, 2019

**Re: Summary of Comments on Fair Library Access Resolution**

We have met with the Network Advisory Council and Library Development staff to discuss the Fair Library Access resolution. We have also presented this item to libraries during federation meetings. The following is a summary of our conversations.

## Overall response to the resolution

- The response has been positive. Most individuals see value in the resolution. There have been questions about the next steps and some concerns with language or lack of information about barriers to implementation.
- Thanks to the State Library for the efforts. Small publics caught up with day to day. Don't have time to focus on bigger picture.
- **New comments from libraries**
  - Like the changes that were made between drafts

## Questions about the resolution

- What outcomes does the State Library want to see? How is this resolution going to be used? What are the end goals?
- Does this resolution apply to all types of libraries? Or only publics? We need to check our assumptions when working with all types of libraries. What are the missions of the different library types? How might consideration of that change this resolution and the work of MSL?
- How does this resolution relate to the strategic framework and the LSTA 5-Year plan? How is this document different from our current core practices?

- Is this about a statewide library card?
- Which populations do we mean? Does this include inmates, for example? Who are we trying to serve?
- Does it increase our resources and give us power?
- What are the next steps?
- How will smallest libraries be supported in providing these services? Would like to employ someone to work on how to make it work for small libraries
- **New comments from libraries**
  - If this is a broadening of MSL's scope from public library focused to include all types of libraries, how will you get the funding and resources to expand your services without causing harm to current users of MSL services?
  - What does equity look like for a small, rural town vs. a county seat?

### Concerns about the resolution

- The wording may -unintentionally- be polarizing – particularly the end notes.
- There are limitations. Most of us see value but don't have the time or resources to implement this vision. We would like to include barriers and/or limitations. Additional barriers include fear, not wanting to cause harm, feelings of inadequacy, low salaries for librarians, a lack of experience with advocacy, and a lack of buy in from decision makers and funders.
- We need to include how this work can assist with serving contemporary Native/tribal members. Yes, we say all Montanans, but we need to recognize the importance of including our tribal members.
- Yes – Montanans have rights, but shouldn't we address patron responsibilities? Sometimes their own actions lead to reduced library services.
- What is the line between social work and library work? This seems to walk that line okay, but do others agree?
- This resolution may not emphasize the inherent economic benefits of quality library services. That message might be more important for certain audiences.
- **New comments from libraries**
  - Operationalizing this will be really difficult, but the vision needs to push you and standards need to push our libraries. Like the document, but how do we logistically put this into place?
  - Local vision should be included in MSL's work
  - How will we sustain these services?

## Specific feedback regarding “sufficient unto patron’s needs”

- We can’t necessarily recognize all our patron needs, and we should acknowledge that.
- Need is a difficult and subjective word as so much of what we do is about improving quality of life. For example, do we really need audiobooks while doing housework? We may think a patron needs fast broadband access, but if they are living in their car that might not be a need.
- Should we focus on and use the concept of “universal design” which is about removing any barriers to learning? Could we apply this to libraries?
- Sufficient unto patron’s needs could place us in a constantly reactive mode. How do we move from reactive to proactive?
- We have concerns about the word “sufficient” as it can be used to justify “good enough” service that doesn’t really invest in what patrons want.
- Suggestion to specific definitions in resolution. Public Library Standards could also include that definition.
- How will the impact of the resolution be measured? Infrastructure could be. Library engagement in community could be measurable.
- **New comments from libraries**
  - Local community needs are critical; like how it includes recognition
  - Sufficient is a low bar; it doesn’t reflect other community expectations
  - Love the work of the Netherlands which has turned their libraries into true community cultural centers. Their libraries are really neat places for people to connect. However, funding is key.
  - Sufficient can give power to the good enoughers. We must be careful who we listen to for sufficient.
  - Could we consider changing sufficient to responsive to patron needs?

## Additional comments about the resolution

- Convenience is critical; sometimes people choose not to use the service, but sometimes it’s because they can’t use the service. We need to remember the importance of convenient library services.
- We need to recognize that it is more difficult and can be more expensive to provide library services in geographically remote areas. What is the point at which the return on investment isn’t viable?
- Libraries are uniquely American. We should state that.
- How do we communicate that libraries enrich people’s lives?
- We need to define equitable access, resource sharing, and sufficient. This may not be the document to do that, but those terms need definition.

- We need to make sure that we are focused on the community. We do not want to be an island unto ourselves.
- It is transforming.
- **New comments from libraries**
  - For the Network Advisory Council to consider – could we have funding for libraries to do community needs assessments? Or can MSL help libraries do surveys or find other community needs assessments?
  - Should we collaborate or work together with schools? How can we use this to work with others to create a vision that helps our communities? How can we find our common ground and work together across community divisions?

#### Ways this document could be used

- To communicate the success of libraries
- As a foundational piece that helps define “useful information infrastructure”
- To update the public library standards
- To communicate the value of collaboration
- To model values and behaviors that improve library access
- To obtain additional funding for library services
- To evaluate statewide projects and collaborative efforts
- To prioritize and allocate our funding wisely
- To open a dialogue about values and to help us identify our particular values when it comes to library services
- Could use in budget presentation to city/county council
- Make posters like Freedom to Read to show values
- Make into talking points/succinct statement
- There can be a situation. If it's not dealt with it becomes an issue. Issues can become problems. This is an approach at the situation level.
- **New comments from libraries**
  - Should we share and/or seek feedback from MACo or League of Cities and Towns?