

Commission Report
July—mid-September 2005
Montana Library Network
Bruce Newell, bnewell@mt.gov

LDD Goal 2: To ensure that all Montana citizens have access to quality library services.

1. A Networking Task Force (NTF) meeting has been scheduled for October 17 in Helena. Tentative agenda items include:
 - Rethinking resource sharing; towards a course of action (recommendations to our State Librarian)
 - Montana Shared Catalog (MSC) budget, structure, calendar year 2006 new library campaign, Partners
 - Thin computing recommendations
 - Montana Library Network (MLN) planning

2. Mineral County Public Library withdrew its application to join the Montana Shared Catalog, due to unexpected fiscal constraints. We are hoping they will be able to reapply in the future. Work on adding the remaining four libraries is going forth.
 - Pablo Elementary (Ronan School District)
 - Plains School Library
 - Rosebud County Library (includes Colstrip branch)
 - Sheridan Public Library

Sarah has been working to add these libraries (and the Highwood School library), and with Sirsi, and reports that the process of adding them to the MSC is going "...pretty well, about as expected."

This leaves a project unexpended budgeted balance of approximately \$75,000. A second round of MSC startup financial assistance programs began September 1. New library applications are available on the MLN website <http://montanalibraries.org>. Start up assistance is available to libraries, based on the following:

- Program One: Larger Library: 100,000 or more bibliographic records, and 25,000 or more service area population (or over 15,000 full-time-equivalent students, staff, and faculty). Maximum request amount \$50,000
- Program Two: Middle-size library: 35,000 to 100,000 bibliographic records and 10,000 to 24,999 service area population (or 5,000 to 14,999 full-time-equivalent students, staff, and faculty). Maximum request amount \$25,000
- Program Three: Smaller Library: Not a larger or middle-sized library. Maximum request amount \$10,000

The deadline for this second round of new MSC library applications is December 30. Bruce has been traveling to interested libraries to answer libraries' questions. So far the biggest interest has been expressed in libraries west of Billings.

3. OCLC Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) is adding a “Tribal Library” view to MLNCAT. This will be available mid-October.

4. Bruce has been traveling throughout Montana, asking librarians how things are going, and answering questions about the MSC. With Pam Bailey, OCLC-Western’s Director, I visited libraries in:

- Billings
- Lambe Deer
- Colstrip
- Forsyth
- Glendive
- Sidney
- Circle
- Roundup

With Bob Cooper and a representative from the Institute of Museums and Library Services, I visited libraries in:

- Drummond
- Anaconda
- Sheridan
- Virginia City
- Three Forks

Subsequent to this eastern Montana trip, I have visited libraries in:

- Livingston
- Stanford
- Kalispell
- Stevensville
- Libby
- Manhattan
- Helena

Here’s what I have learned, directly and indirectly, from these visits. Some of these comments (not necessarily all) reflect Pam’s thinking in addition to mine—

a. Many librarians are still 'library-' or 'book-oriented', instead of 'user-focused'. These library-oriented librarians view their library's role and relative successes through their understanding of accepted library practices, instead of via their current (changing) environment and their users (changing) needs.

Increasingly these libraries find themselves “in competition” with retail organizations who have fundamentally different missions than that of libraries. Quality library services, defined by this relatively static model, are often at odds with our changing environment and users. The necessary shift from library to patron oriented outcome measures requires a significant change in values. Until decisions are made first in regard to users needs, library-oriented libraries will find it increasingly difficult to thrive in our rapidly changing environment.

We need to reexamine how we define and measure “quality library services”.

b. It is clear that many library users and librarians have low, dwindling, or outdated expectations of library content and services. These expectations are brought about by habit, dwindling budgets, non-thriving communities, and the inability to imagine things being ‘different’ or ‘better’. For instance, despite introducing innovative methods of

cooperation that opens the collection of the most of the libraries in the state to anyone, the focus remains on what's on the shelf. Part of the story MLN must tell is the "what's-possible" story. We need to encourage librarians to dream big and learn to ask big, too.

c. The message that, for our users, "more is always more", needs to be further explored in our library community. Better fiction collections will encourage library users to borrow an increasing number of fiction titles (by the same authors or others) through Inter Library Loans (ILL). And they'll want audio books by these authors too. Our patrons will want films of these books and sound tracks. Heavens! They may even want access to better fiction finding aids. They may become noticeably impatient with s-l-o-w acquisition workflows. Everything we do right, well, almost everything, will cost us more money as our success spurs higher demand for better content and quicker, more subscription-like services.

d. School librarians need help. They are way busy and way broke. They need more money to buy materials, and more time to get trained. They need permission to borrow and lend materials freely; knowing that the environment they create will raise high expectations in their users (which is a very good thing). They need, in many cases, permission to dream and to understand that by creating citizens that understand how to use information to make better decisions they are creating better students, better future parents, better more highly valued employees and smarter consumers. They certainly (in many cases) need the go-ahead to practice modern librarianship.

The following is Bruce's opinion: Until school library outcome standards include collaborative- and network-related requirements, and until school libraries are seen as essential to boosting test scores (in particular in relation to No Child Left Behind act), there is little institutional incentive to improve the degree to which school libraries participate in the increasingly collaborative and networked modern library world. This isn't intended to be a condemnation; it is intended as an observation and certainly as a concern.

e. Every library has treasures awaiting digitization. All have newspapers, many have other goodies such as photos, ledgers, collections of personal papers, art, etc. It's really quite amazing. This is often the collection that differentiates libraries in Montana from libraries anywhere else. It is also how Montana libraries can begin to embrace the notion that the library extends well beyond the walls of the building. These libraries do an amazing job of serving their communities as long as their communities come to them. Through digitizing these rare and often hidden collections, they provide a mechanism to extend themselves to the world.

Pam Bailey adds: "The history of the state of Montana is awe-inspiring. That story **MUST BE PRESERVED** and made available. The digitization commons is a first start, but only a start."

f. The cooperative spirit is alive and well in Montana. This cooperative habit continues past practices, and is a response to current conditions. Many rural communities'

populations are dwindling. Populations are getting older on average, while school enrollment is declining. There may not enough money in many parts or rural Montana to fund quality library services. (This is a working hypothesis, not an established fact.)

It was suggested that while some communities could better fund libraries, and don't, others simply lack the financial wherewithal to ever fund sufficient or adequate library services. Perhaps these truly 'distressed communities' could apply for state funds to help pay for basic library services. This presupposes that there would be financial assistance to apply for, but, as educational institutions, perhaps libraries might participate in the equalization 'discussion' currently focusing exclusively on schools. This in combination with other statewide purchases of networked or shared library services could go a long ways to continuing library services in these declining communities.

g. There is a disparity to the degree which libraries are working collaboratively. Why is it that in eastern Montana (for instance) that the adoption of cooperative efforts, such as the MSC, has lagged behind that of libraries in western Montana?

I think the answer to this question includes:

- Economic stagnation or decline
- Aging populations and declining school enrollment
- Librarians' enthusiasm for collaboration

The State Library is not likely able to turn around stagnant local economies, boost school enrollment, or reverse the aging-trend in many rural communities. We do have the opportunity to address the third bullet. Here are some things we might do:

- Make real our promise of finding collaborative solutions to individual problems. We could, for instance, address the concept of cooperative collections.
- Encourage libraries to be user-focused. True cooperation exposes the user to a world where the walls of the library have expanded to encompass at least the entire state and sometimes much farther than the state.
- Help make collaboration seem safe. For example, follow Alaska's example and insure in-state interlibrary loan against non-reimbursed loss. Or provide opportunities for librarians to interact, build trust, and enjoy the fruits of cooperation.
- Help libraries market themselves as both a public good and good investments in the economic viability of the community is necessary.
- Encourage heightened expectations of collaborative library services.
- Encourage team building

h. Libraries as a place, and as an aid to developing a sense of place (part of the 'what's my story' idea), was a shared theme of our visits. In some cases, it was clear the library served as the focus on both community and cultural events. As one librarian put it, the library is the, "outlet of the humanities in the area."

Pam and I both noted many Eastern Montana libraries served communities on Montana's Dinosaur Trail. Pam wrote: "The "Dinosaur Trail" is a theme that libraries could exploit perhaps state-wide." <http://visitmt.com/tripplanner/thingstodo/dino.htm>

The Dino Trail is largely a marketing scheme, listing and linking (on the Web) existing dinosaur-oriented tourism opportunities. Libraries could do the same thing with genealogy, the arts, local history, or natural history. This would require libraries have Web presence—Pam asked: "Why are there still libraries without web sites, or without adequate web sites? What can be done to help?"

i. There is lots of interest in (supporting) distance education, virtual reference, digitization, rotating shared collections of special materials such as large type and audio books, and thin-computing.

j. MSL and OCLC must train in the east if we want eastern librarians to attend.

LDD Goal 5: Montana citizens can easily access the holdings of all Montana and OCLC libraries and online electronic resources through their libraries.

1. OCLC enrollment has proceeded about as normal, and Montana's OCLC membership should increase about five percent this year. (OCLC is a worldwide library cooperative, boasting 54,000 member libraries in 97 countries).

We have 232 libraries signed up for next year (as of Friday, September 23, 2005); last year we had 224. I continue to anticipate that by Christmas we will have about 250 OCLC libraries, a growth of about a dozen or 5% (largely smaller school libraries) from last year.

LDD Goal 3: Montana citizens will understand, value, and use the services of Montana's libraries.

1. EBSCO was selected for our statewide auto repair content contract. Debbi Kramer, from the Judith Basin Library in Stanford, and her son, Curtis, assisted Bruce in reviewing request for proposal responses from Thomson/Gale and EBSCO.

This continues our relationship with EBSCO . This online service is available to users from within libraries and from their homes. Libraries must subscribe to the Montana State Library's Montana Full-Text Magazine Database service to qualify for use of these services.

2. Gale/InfoTrac enrollment is coming along about as usual, with the deadline for FY06-07 enrollment being the end of September. 181 libraries have signed up to date (Friday, September 23, 2005); 399 currently are enrolled. This is about normal, I expect a flurry of signups between now and the end of the month. We will deny libraries access until they have paid, probably in early or mid October. This too will lead to a cascade of renewals.

LDD Goal 6: Montana citizens and students will have dependable access to electronic information services at their libraries by the end of 2007.

We have received two responses to our thin-computer Request for Information (RFI). (See thin-computer definition below).

We will evaluate each solution and provide Montana libraries with a written comparative evaluation of identified integrated library thin-computer solutions, including pricing. We may elect to issue a request for proposal, based on what we learn from this RFI, for the purposes of establishing a term contract for an integrated library thin-computing public workstation solution.

What is thin-computing? Thin computers feature workstations that can be either a personal computer, 'dumbed-down' and turned into a terminal by applications and hardware, or a simple computer terminal. For the purposes of our RFI, we are only interested in thin-computer workstations that are terminals.

Applications and data typically reside on host servers. Hosts often serve multiple workstations. Thin-computing workstations typically have no disc or disk drives. Thin-computers are usually connected to their host server via a standard local area network.

Advantages touted for thin computers (over personal computer workstations) include: lower initial and ongoing cost, easier maintenance, far greater security and freedom from viruses, and integrated 'librarian hands-free' turn-key public computing. As promising as thin-computer workstations seem for public access workstations, they are not recommended to be used as staff workstations.