

# Memo

**To:** Jennie Stapp, State Librarian      **To:** Montana State Library Commission  
**From:** Tracy Cook, Director  
Statewide Library Resources      **From:** Jennie Stapp, State Librarian  
**Date:** December 1, 2017  
**Re:** **Budget reports from Network Advisory Council members**

The Network Advisory Council met on November 14, 2017 to discuss their work plan, a project to solicit non-user feedback, and to share information about MSL and the state of their own budgets.

Their report on the budget situation in their libraries was very informative. Commissioner Newell asked me to share that information with the full Commission. I have copied the information below. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the meeting or this information.

## **State of budgets for NAC member libraries**

### *Academic Library Representatives*

#### University of Montana

UM has had huge budget reductions for 5 years. The recent statewide issue is just frosting on the cake. 33% budget reduction collections. 30% reduction in personnel. The amount cut has varied between the different UM campuses.

#### Great Falls College MSU

10% reduction here. Ours has nothing to do with library specifically. All directors across campus were told to make a plan. Luckily no personnel lost. But it is not library only. Now it looks like we will fare better, but who knows.

## Montana State University Libraries

Deans across the Montana State University campus (including the library) were asked to prepare plans for potential 1%, 1.5%, or 2% budget reductions.

### *School Library Representatives*

#### Whitefish

My personal library budget remains stagnant (10 years)

#### Helena High

Our budget has remained the same...so far. For the record the Helena High Library's budget has not increased in over 15 years.

#### School libraries in general

Other school libraries operate w/o a budget and have to get approval for every purchase from the district clerk

### *Public Library Representatives*

#### ImagineIf Libraries

We are holding steady at chronically underfunded. We are definitely not keeping pace with inflation and population growth

#### North Jefferson County Libraries

Our tax monies keep declining--but there seems to be a more intense demand. Hard to cover the bases and keep staff.

#### Bicentennial Library of Colstrip

I have been told that libraries are not essential and if we have to make cuts I would rather cut a library than the fire department.

### *Special Library Representative*

The State Law Library is under the Judicial Branch, a very small branch, so haven't been impacted to the extent you have. So far we have a couple of long-term vacancies and a reduced materials budget, and we are holding our breath during this Special Session.

## **General comments about the library budgets**

- This is a concern for intellectual freedom --a lack of awareness on one of the most compelling current frontiers - freedom and privacy! Fake news and the anti-expert stuff is a challenge and an opportunity. It does seem ideological - one of our commissioners has said that she has never had the need of a library card
- Economic development is a priority and we aren't tied into that well enough
- I don't think it is a political team issue--I think government isn't willing to really allow for the impact of how much usage we get and how much value we provide. Pointing the finger isn't productive.
- This is an ample opportunity for creative thinking and problem solving every day!

- We have concerns about administration asking about physical libraries and why we need them when everything is online
- I think the first signs of budget reductions led to very innovative trials such as Homework MT and MTlib2Go.
- Library's assist their public in many ways. Many people would lose out on very necessary services if we lost our library.
- Funding thoughts: If all libraries closed their doors for days, weeks, would we save money and show what the loss of libraries would look like in our communities?
  - Consideration posed by other NAC member: In my community my local government would not find that compelling--there is just a wall there of anyone can run a library and libraries aren't high priorities. I think working with patrons to advocate for us and building those tools for them (rather than irritating them by closing our doors) might be a more effective approach.
- How do we help out their "essential " departments –When the Volunteer Fire Dept formally thanked us--the commission definitely took notice!
- Paying staff well and keeping them is a huge challenge.

### **Some good news about budgets**

The MT Supreme Court and stakeholders such as the State Bar are very supportive of the Law Library and see our crucial role in statewide access to justice. We are lucky that they have seen firsthand how many low-income Montanans try to struggle through the legal system on their own, and we can help.

There is real push here in Lewistown for re-branding the town, and we are seeing growth as a town. I asked that we be put in as "an amenity" as a public library and not be put in as "essential service" - it is a different way of thinking, but people seem to respond to "this is what we offer you with our awesomeness" versus "you must come to our place."