

Memo

To: Public Library Standards Task Force

From: Tracy Cook, Lead Consulting & Learning Librarian

Date: May 19, 2020

Re: Summary of Public Comments

Participation stats:

- 84 people attended the online public meetings
- 18 libraries responded to the online survey
- 12 individuals sent comments to the consultants

Note: there is duplication as some libraries completed the survey and participated in an online meeting.

Overall comments on the public library standards

- There were real concerns about small libraries being able to meet these standards due to lack of resources.
- Montana State Library staff need to provide support through training, templates, resources, and assistance at the individual library level.
- The standards (especially the excellent ones) were overwhelming and discouraging rather than inspiring.
- 15 out of the 18 libraries that responded to the online survey were neutral to very uncomfortable when answering the question "How comfortable are you with these revisions as they are presented?"
- Several libraries in the online meetings and a few in the survey thought the changes were challenging, and that they will push libraries, but that is a good thing.

- Some were concerned that the board standards did not allow board members to focus on local priorities.
- Several libraries expressed concerns that we were putting too much on directors, and that their board members would refuse to comply with the standards which puts the director in a tricky place.
- Several libraries suggested rolling out the standards in stages.
- Tribal libraries were okay with being included. They would need accommodations for the financial and board standards.

Standards that several libraries saw as difficult, impossible to achieve, or not adding value

- Essential standards
 - At least one board member is certified by the Montana State Library
 - During open hours, paid staff are available to assist users.
 - The library offers a competitive enough compensation package to attract and retain high quality staff.
 - The Montana State Library trusts that library directors, board members, and staff strive for excellence. State Library staff will support and assist libraries in working towards excellence. Using a process that works best for the library, the Library Director, and Board will work towards achieving one excellent standard. The Director and Board will identify what assistance they need and will craft a plan for achieving that standard. The excellent standard should align with work the library is already doing. The Montana State Library recognizes that it may take time to achieve an excellent standard. Once a standard is achieved, the Montana State Library will ask the Library Board and Director to work towards another excellent standard.
- Excellent standards
 - The Board meets at least 11 times a year.
 - Board members are strong library advocates and receive training about advocacy at least every year.
 - 100% of local tax revenue funds support the services and personnel necessary to achieve the essential standards. Grants, private funds, supplement and help libraries meet the excellent standards.
 - At least three board members are certified by the Montana State Library.
 - The library participates in sharing groups in order to increase the number of library materials community members can access.
 - Users have access to devices that can be used in the library or at home.
 - The library provides software and programming that allows people to create and develop content.

- The Board reviews staff and Director salaries to see if they are compensated at whichever rate is higher - the salaries of other city or county staff with similar jobs or other directors and staff of libraries with similar size staff and budgets.
- Directors of libraries with a service area population of 24,999 and lower have a college degree or equivalent experience.

Standards that need clarification

- Essential standard
 - Timeline and process for the stretch standard were unclear.
- Excellent standards
 - The library evaluates the degree to which everyone in their community has access to library content and services, sufficient unto their needs. From this inclusive, ongoing individual-based discovery process, the library devises a community-based plan for addressing their community's needs. The plan is reviewed annually and updated, as needed.
 - The library participates in cooperative collection development.

Specific areas that need Montana State Library support

- Advocacy training for board members
- Board evaluation and continuing education
- Better defining what it means to be welcoming to all community members
- Help building better relationships with Montana Association of Counties (MACo) and the League of Cities and Towns (League) along with local government officials
 - Specifically communicating these changes to MACo and the League
 - Addressing salary, job description, and human resources work with local government officials
- Completing a salary survey and communicating the results to local government officials
- Providing implicit bias and trauma informed care training as well as talking points and language for why staff might find this training helpful and how the training might benefit the community
- Address geographic limitations and make it possible for all libraries to participate in the courier and other statewide projects
- Provide records retention training
- Provide maintenance and building template
- Provide training on how to develop collections and services for all
- Create individualized plans for libraries to help them meet the standards

Communication that needs to continue to happen regularly

- The Excellent Library Services Award (ELSA) will not be associated with the public library standards
- How the deferral process works
- The consequences of not meeting essential and excellent standards and why there are 2 levels
- Recognition that libraries in Montana are not the same and therefore not all standards apply to all libraries