

# Memo

**To:** Montana State Library Commission

**From:** Jennie Stapp, State Librarian  
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**Date:** June 1, 2020

**Re: Highlights from the May Network Advisory Council Meeting**

The Network Advisory Council met on May 28, 2020 to discuss economic development ideas, COVID-19 and its impact on libraries, work plan priorities for MSL staff, investment in digital content, and a budget for library development services. The following is a summary of their work.

Economic Development Update:

- Anne Booth was hired to provide economic development expertise and ideas for libraries to implement to support their community members.
- She shared what she has been doing in the following areas: professional development, outreach and partnerships, community and economic development programming, technology investments, models, and funding options.
- The group discussed her proposal and gave her feedback. Key takeaways Montana Economic Development Association (MEDA) has a NextGen project that is going to be a legislative agenda item. She encouraged us to follow this project and look for ways to work with the NextGen project.
- Boothe pointed out that libraries are already doing a lot to support economic development. We would benefit from coordinating our efforts, marketing our services, and looking for partners that can help provide the resources we need.
- Council members stated that they receive a lot of requests for how to start a small business. They are also looking for ways that libraries can be a bridge between local government and economic development groups.

## COVID-19 De-brief:

- The Council members discussed their experiences with handling the COVID-19 crisis and what they learned as they look to the future.
- What went well for them
  - It was an opportunity to complete projects that have been on the to-do list for a long time.
  - Library staff discovered each other's strengths and weaknesses.
  - There was an outpouring of support from community members as libraries began to re-open.
  - Some of the libraries were able to smoothly transition to the digital world.
  - MSL staff were of great assistance in providing advice; helping with the Montana Shared Catalog; pulling librarians together; and providing digital content and resources.
  - Patrons learned how to use the online resources from how to place a hold to how to use Libby (the MontanaLibrary2Go Overdrive app).
  - Curbside service and virtual programs have been successful.
  - Connecting with area librarians to share ideas and problem solve.
  - We'll be better prepared for future disasters.
- What they learned and challenges they faced
  - Social media including Facebook is a great way to communicate with patrons and students.
  - Virtual programming is something patrons enjoy.
  - It is important to have meaningful projects for staff to work on at home.
  - There were so many opinions and ideas flying around that it was hard to make wise decisions.
  - There was conflicting information at the local level.
  - It was difficult to figure out how to serve the homeless population, those without safe places to go, and those without Internet access.
  - It was hard to provide support to students and teachers who were stretched so thin and were unaware of library resources that could help alleviate that burden.
  - Some students found the shift to online learning extremely challenging. Some professors and teachers also found it challenging.
  - Libraries have valuable print materials that could be digitized but lack of time, resources, and copyright challenges make that difficult.
- How might library services change in the future?
  - Libraries might need to provide more digital/virtual programming. They may need to limit the number of people at physical programs – at least for the foreseeable future.
  - Libraries might need to invest in more digital content.

- Libraries may have to return to closed stacks where staff members take an order and retrieve items for the patron.
- Reference and reader's advisory services may have to be provided in a different way – using digital tools.
- The mobile hotspot project may help libraries provide service to those without Internet access.
- Libraries may need to change their hours or days open to give staff a chance to work on projects that improve patron experience and that cannot be done when the library is open.
- Libraries are going to be changed by the economics and people's behavior and habits. People will need assistance getting their lives back on track.
- Library funding may take a serious hit.
- There might be an increased need for help with landlord/tenant disputes, family law, and self-litigation assistance.
- There may be an increased need for mental health and suicide prevention resources.
- People may need help with re-training due to a loss of jobs.
- Teachers and professors may need help with shifting to an online environment.
- Community members need assistance connecting with each other.
- Community members may need assistance with information literacy.

#### Digital Content Discussion:

- Jennie Stapp and Cara Orban gave the NAC an overview of our current portfolio and possible options that are available to libraries. They led the NAC through a discussion about digital content.
- Key takeaways from the conversation:
  - Libraries cannot keep up with demand and recognize that demand is insatiable.
  - There is a need to fulfill demand for popular items and a need to create a more diverse collection for patrons.
  - The question of how to equitably provide this service and ensure that small communities are not further disenfranchised remains challenging.
  - The NAC recommends the following strategies to address these challenges.
    - Work with the Digital Public Library of America, Chief Officers of State Library Agencies, and others to negotiate more favorable licensing agreements with publishers.

- Pilot the SimplyE application in order to offer a more diverse collection.
- Explore the option of libraries having their own e-content collections as well as the group collection to see if this reduces the waiting time for patrons.
- Explore curating collections and pushing content that might be of interest to patrons to meet their needs.

#### MSL Work Plan Priorities:

- After discussing the options and pros and cons the NAC made the following recommendations for MSL staff:
  - Do not plan on offering face to face workshops in FY21. Shift funding and staff time to online learning.
  - Proceed with a study for the courier and how to best provide this service statewide.
  - Support the Montana Shared Catalog.
  - Coordinate economic development efforts in libraries
  - Support library staff and trustee professional development in the areas of community leadership and civil engagement – with a focus on the needs identified by libraries.
    - Helping community members with financial uncertainty; mental health challenges; managing children and schoolwork and helping their children process what is happening; managing family responsibilities such as caring for an older family member; connecting with others; managing their own safety if they are experiencing homelessness or a threat to their safety due to domestic violence concerns.
    - Help library directors, staff, and board members with a possible economic recession; budget cuts; keeping staff and community members safe during this time; and making wise decisions in a time when things are changing rapidly and information is conflicting.

#### Library Development Budget

- The Network Advisory Council recommended adopting the budget presented by State Librarian Stapp with the change of re-purposing part of the Director's Institute money and any cost savings from the OCLC contract negotiation for a courier study. These recommendations are reflected in the FY 21 State Library Budget to be presented for Commission action at their June 10 meeting.