

Network Advisory Council (NAC)

Thursday, April 23, 2020

Montana State Library (MSL) – Online Only

1515 E 6th Avenue, Helena, MT

Attendees:

Council Members: Chair Jennie Stapp, Cody Allen, Colet Bartow, Pamela Benjamin, Honore Bray, Eva English, Kathryn Holt, Elizabeth Jonkel, Teressa Keenan, Sarah McClain, Susie McIntyre, Stacey Moore, Bruce Newell, Kate Peterson, Belinda Potter, Doralyn Rossmann, Nancy Schmidt, Jodi Smiley.

MSL Staff: Tracy Cook, Cara Orban, Jessica Edwards, Suzanne Reymer, Evan Hammer, Jennifer Birnel, Pam Henley, Marilyn Bennett, John Kilgour.

Guests: Joy Bridwell – Stone Child College; Deb Mitchell – Museums Association of Montana.

Call to Order and Introductions:

Chair Stapp called the meeting to order at 2:05 p.m., and the NAC members, MSL staff, and guests introduced themselves.

Approval of the Minutes:

Member Jonkel moved to approve the March 12, 2020, meeting minutes, and the motion was seconded by Member McIntyre. There were no changes to the minutes, and they were approved with all in favor, none opposed, and none abstaining.

Recommendations for Allocating Available Funds:

Chair Stapp explained that the purpose of the meeting is to seek the NAC's advice on how to best spend funding received as a result of the CARES Act, as well as some other funding, to meet immediate needs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. MSL will receive \$96,000 from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. MSL also has some remaining LSTA '19 funds and other remaining funds in its budget. The NAC's recommendations today will be presented to the MSL Commission on April 27, 2020.

Chair Stapp referred to MSL's "Recommendations for allocating available funds" memo and explained that CARES Act funding expires on September 30, 2021. The available state funds must be committed by the end of the current fiscal year, June 30, 2020. Following discussions with the Governor's Office, MSL is confident that state moneys would be available for the proposed purposes with the Commission's approval. In total, \$290,000 is available for allocation. MSL has also submitted requests to the Governor's Office for additional state funds.

Member Newell asked how MSL developed its proposals, and Chair Stapp explained that the proposals came from MSL staff and from discussions with libraries. The ideas for purchasing wi-fi hot spots and

improving wi-fi/broadband access grew out of needs identified in the Gigabit Toolkit study. The proposal for summer reading software was based on feedback received by Amelea Kim from libraries interested in an online summer reading platform.

Mobile Hot Spots:

The NAC discussed MSL's proposal to purchase mobile hot spots for libraries throughout the state. Tracy Cook explained that out of 53 libraries that responded to an MSL survey, 85% expressed interest in participating in the proposed hot spot program.

Member Newell asked about Montana Library2Go and the Montana Shared Catalog (MSC) and wondered if this was an opportunity to reach out to libraries not currently using those statewide services and extend those resources to underserved communities. Member Bartow said that this was an interesting idea and that enhancing infrastructure provides avenues to equitable access. With short-term funding, it might be good to get things established that enhance access.

Member McIntyre cautioned that some communities don't have the necessary connectivity to utilize the hot spots, so the State Library needs to be careful about distributing them where they can be used.

Chair Stapp explained that the state has term contracts with each of the three major cellular providers, so MSL would be able to quickly purchase and deploy the hot spots to libraries. Several libraries that currently provide hot-spot lending services are willing to share their policies for adoption by other libraries. MSL is proposing two hot spots for each library and a one-year data plan for each hot spot. At the end of the year, a library could choose to continue the data plan going forward. Chair Stapp added that this idea is very scalable. For example, if MSL is awarded additional funding, it would be very easy to purchase additional hot spots and deploy them throughout the state.

With respect to Member Newell's earlier question about expanding Montana Library2Go or MSC access, Cook explained that out of 56 libraries responding to the MSL survey, ten of them are not members of the MSC, and nine of those were interested in participating in the hot spots project.

Chair Stapp acknowledged that two hot spots per library won't make a huge impact in many communities. One question for the NAC is to decide if this proposal would have a meaningful impact. It could serve as a pilot project to explore this type of service.

The NAC discussed some logistical aspects of the hot spot proposal. The cost per hot spot is approximately \$40 per month, depending on the provider, so about \$480 a year. Hot spots do not offer great range; it is about 15-20 feet. They basically work for a single household. Member McClain wondered if there are ways to boost existing wi-fi service at schools and libraries to allow increased access.

Member Bray explained Missoula Public Library's recent purchase of hot spots. They have worked very well for staff working remotely. There is a real need for patrons without internet service at home. 40% of households in Missoula County don't have internet service and can't get it. The hot spots would be for families with children doing schoolwork, etc.

With respect to boosting broadband infrastructure within libraries, Chair Stapp mentioned that that is the thinking behind the recommendation for funding additional broadband equipment. Based on the Gigabit Toolkit analysis, there are libraries that need to update their internal infrastructure.

Member Newell asked if sending two devices to each library is the best method for addressing the situation. Member Bartow noted that equal distribution does not mean equitable access. The information assembled by MSL illustrates where the greatest needs are. Resources should meet the greatest need. Member Newell asked if it is better to send many hot spots to communities with the greatest need rather than two for every community.

The NAC discussed possible ways to allocate hot spots based on need and what metrics should be taken into account when developing a formula for distribution. Possible factors could be level of broadband access in a county, size of the population, affordability of broadband, etc.

Member Newell observed that, to a certain extent, this would be a demonstration project. Sending only two hot spots to a community might not make a big difference, but sending 100 to a community would make a big difference. Maybe there is an argument for giving a few libraries what they need and seeing how it goes. Member Allen noted that allocating the hot spots to the greatest need seems like the right approach.

Member Bartow suggested triangulating data. Schools have a very good understanding of which students are in need and which aren't. They know who they can reach with online remote learning and who they can't. There is an opportunity for schools and libraries to collaborate. Member Bray agreed and also expressed a concern that some patrons may not have a device they can use to access the hot spot, i.e., some families might not have a computer.

Chair Stapp explained MSL's plan for paying for the hot spot data plans for one year.

Member Newell asked about having MSL holding the hot spots and circulating them to libraries by request. Tracy Cook responded that some patrons are savvy about placing holds on items while others are not, which is a concern, and the logistics of this method would be challenging.

Chair Stapp questioned the group about the best approach. Would it be a minimum number of hot spots for each library or a method targeting libraries with the greatest need? Member McIntyre said that focusing on need is a good idea, but it's important to make sure that libraries have the capacity and willingness to manage to the hot spots. Member English also supported a more targeted approach.

Chair Stapp asked about the availability of school-need data, and Member Bartow explained that there isn't a data set, but Kirk Miller, School Administrators of Montana, would be a good resource to contact.

The NAC continued to contemplate the best method for distributing hot spots, and Member McIntyre suggested that the NAC direct MSL to figure out how to make the biggest impact with the hot spots and let MSL staff explore different models. Tracy Cook asked how much of the available \$290,000 would the NAC want to dedicate to the mobile hot spots, and would the NAC recommend the targeted approach or distributing evenly throughout the state.

Member Newell wondered if this proposal is something MSL should be doing, and Chair Stapp replied that she thought it is absolutely something MSL should be doing. The proposal would extend library services to patrons and provide information sufficient unto people's needs.

Several NAC members expressed support for a targeted approach. Member Bray noted that if the hot spots are targeted and they are not circulating, they can be moved to a different library. There is a great need, especially between now and the end of the school year.

Chair Stapp asked the NAC what a targeted model could look like. She noted that a lot of libraries might not get any hot spots initially and asked if the NAC would be comfortable with that. Member Newell suggested picking 10 libraries and trying to make a big difference in those communities. It would provide a good idea of how the program will work. Chair Stapp asked what factors should be considered when deciding which libraries to target. MSL has data about broadband access and could also reach out to Kirk Miller and look at demographic and unemployment information. Member Bartow also suggested using the Education Superhighway data set. She noted that each community has its own unique needs. Maybe what they need is funds to address needs that they have identified. A direct grant process might be another approach to think about. Chair Stapp mentioned that MLA has requested funds from the Governor's Office, which would be in the form of direct funds for libraries. Member Newell suggested using school lunch data as a possible metric for distribution of hot spots.

Deb Mitchell noted that museums are a big part of their communities and host a lot of community events. Hot spots would be very beneficial in a museum setting.

Summer Reading Online Software Tracking:

Chair Stapp transitioned discussion to the online summer reading software proposal. Tracy Cook explained that MSL was approached by about 20 libraries about shifting summer reading programs to an online format. Beanstack and READsquared are the two products used by other states. Beanstack is probably not a viable option for Montana because of time constraints, but READsquared is probably a good choice. MSL needs to have a decision on this product right away. It is unlikely that all libraries would want to participate. Cook displayed research conducted by Amelea Kim comparing the two products and their costs.

Member Allen said that Billings Public Library uses READsquared and thinks it is a better option than Beanstack. READsquared is easy for libraries and patrons.

Cook suggested that it would be helpful for MSL to know if the NAC would like to allocate funding to projects like summer reading software, replacing old broadband routers, and adding funding to Montana Library2Go, and then use whatever is left for mobile hot spots. Cook asked the NAC if they would like to fund summer reading software and at what level. Funding for 40 libraries would include about half the state. Chair Stapp added that MSL would maximize its investment if it signed a two-year contract. Two summers of the program could be paid for with LSTA funds. READsquared would be \$40,000-50,000 for two years. MSL staff responded to several questions from the NAC about READsquared and how the program would work, what ages it is designed for, and so on.

Member McIntyre moved to support the funding of READsquared for 40 libraries for two years, and the motion was seconded by Member Holt. The motion passed with Member Newell abstaining, all others in favor, and none opposed.

Improving Broadband/Wi-Fi Infrastructure:

Chair Stapp referred to the Gigabit Toolkit analysis and replacing old broadband and wi-fi routers. MSL staff have recommended allocating \$10,000 to upgrading hardware.

Member Holt moved to support the recommendation, and the motion was seconded by Member Schmidt. The motion passed with all in favor, none opposed, and none abstaining.

Montana Library2Go and Mobile Hot Spots:

Chair Stapp addressed the two options remaining for consideration—mobile hot spots and Montana Library2Go. Any or all available funds could be allocated to either of them or split between them.

Members Moore and Holt suggested dedicating funding to children’s content for Montana Library2Go, and the NAC discussed the pros and cons of purchasing more children’s content. Member McIntyre said that children’s content checks out at a lower rate than other content.

Chair Stapp explained that, so far, \$10,000 has been allocated for purchasing broadband hardware and \$24,000 has been allocated to summer reading software. There is \$256,000 remaining to be allocated. Chair Stapp asked if the NAC would like to dedicate an amount of funding to Montana Library2Go or to mobile hot spots, knowing that whatever is left could be dedicated to the other option.

The NAC discussed the two options. Member Newell wondered if the funding could be used to subsidize adding libraries to Montana Library2Go that are not currently participating. Cara Orban said that it would not be expensive for those libraries in the short term, but they would need to be able to pay for it in subsequent fiscal years. Member McIntyre added that there would also be a lot of staff training required to add additional libraries.

Several NAC members advocated funding the hot spots proposal and allocating the remaining funds to Montana Library2Go. Chair Stapp asked how much the NAC would want to allocate to the hot spot proposal. Two hot spots for each library would be around \$77,000. There is \$256,000 remaining to allocate. The NAC could recommend allocating \$200,000 to a hot spot program and dedicate the remaining \$56,000 to Montana Library2Go. That would allow for two hot spots per library as well as a more targeted approach for some libraries.

Member Newell said that he favored more funding for Montana Library2Go and exploring the access issue more carefully. There was discussion of Montana Library2Go usage, and MSL staff noted that usage has increased significantly during the recent library closures.

Member Bray moved to put a certain amount of money into hot spots so that it can be a demonstration project, and then the remainder of the money would go into Montana Library2Go.

The NAC discussed Member Bray’s motion and how much funding should be allocated to each priority. Member Bray favored a targeted approach with the hot spots, which could be shared if they are not being checked out at certain libraries. Member English suggested using \$77,000 for the hot spot program as a starting point. Member McIntyre suggested allocating \$160,000 to hot spots, with half of that amount being used to purchase two hot spots for each library and the other half being used for a more targeted approach. Chair Stapp added that libraries could still share hot spots that aren’t circulating.

Member McIntyre moved that the NAC fund \$160,000 for hot spots to be spent providing two hot spots per library, and then the remainder to be used on a targeted approach designed by the Montana State Library staff to get hot spots to the libraries in the most need. The motion was seconded by Member Smiley. The motion passed with Member Jonkel abstaining, Members English, Holt, and Newell opposed, and all other members in favor.

Chair Stapp stated that there was \$96,000 remaining for content for Montana Library2Go. She asked the NAC if that balance should be dedicated to Montana Library2Go to be allocated by the collection development committee.

Member Newell moved to dedicate the remaining \$96,000 to Montana Library2Go to be allocated by the collection development committee. The motion was seconded by Member English. The motion passed with all in favor, none opposed, and none abstaining.

Public Comment

There was no public comment. Chair Stapp explained that the NAC's recommendations would go to the MSL Commission on April 27, 2020, for their consideration.

Other Business and Announcements

There was no other business or announcements.

Adjournment

Chair Stapp adjourned the meeting at 3:52 p.m.