



MEMO

To: 2023 Public Library Standards Task Force Members
From: Tracy Cook, Lead Consulting Librarian and Cara Orban, Consortia Director
Subject: Brief history and discussion of Montana's requirement for MLS
Date: August 15, 2023

MSL staff were asked to research the history and reasoning behind requiring an MLS degree for public library directors that serve communities with 25,000 or more people.

[History of requiring an MLS for librarians](#) – Colet Bartow, our Continuing Education Coordinator, reviewed our documents and created a timeline that illustrates the changes over time.

Why was an MLS required? – The earliest existing historical record notes preference for librarians who are graduates of library schools. This preference mirrors national standards for the profession. In 1928 the first master's degrees in library science were conferred and the degree became the standard educational requirement for professional librarians.

Why was an MLS required at the 25,000+ population level? – A review of the transcript from the public hearing that first tied state aid to public library standards indicates the standard was written that way because libraries at the 25,000+ level had a big enough tax base to pay for a degreed librarian. A link to the transcript can be found in the timeline of public librarian qualifications.