

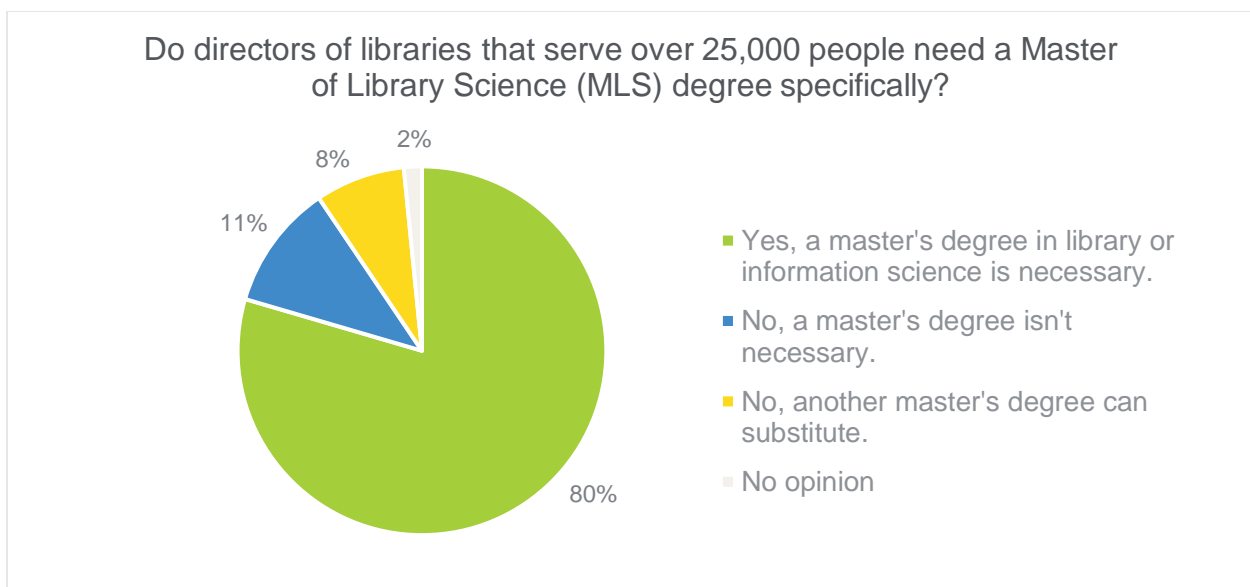
MEMO

To: 2023 Public Library Standards Task Force Members
From: Rebekah Kamp, Data Coordinator
Subject: Amend MLS Requirement Survey
Date: September 8, 2023

Montana State Library conducted a survey regarding the MLS degree requirement which garnered 127 responses from public library directors (22%), library staff (58%), board members (4%), the public (7%), and other (9%).

Master of Library Science

80% of respondents answered, “Yes, a master’s degree in library or information science is necessary” for directors of libraries that serve over 25,000 people.



Alternative Criteria

Staff Credentials

Regarding whether staff credentials can substitute for a director MLS requirement, 84% responded, “The degree must be earned by the director. Staff credentials cannot substitute.” Only 7% responded that a credential from senior level staff could substitute.



Other Degrees

Most respondents answered that there was no substitute for the MLS, but if another degree was to be accepted, the top recommendations included a master’s degree in public administration (22%) or a master’s degree in education (16%).

Work Experience

Most respondents did not think work experience should be considered a substitute for an MLS. Of those that thought work experience should be considered, the most common response (32%) considered the minimum qualification to be a bachelor’s degree combined with 5+ years of experience in progressively challenging library roles; library management; or library directorship.

In-State MLS Programs

Currently, Montana doesn’t offer a Master of Library Science (MLS) program. However, Montanans can access online degree programs offered in other states. 79% of respondents do not think this perceived barrier should impact the MLS requirement for directors of large libraries.

Comments

58 respondents provided additional feedback.

1	I was raised in Montana, and I am employed in a Montana library. The MLIS degree provided me with a solid foundation on the history, ethics, research, management, and principles of library and information science. While no degree can equip a professional with all the skills needed to carry out a job, the course work provided context for professional experience post-graduation. I think this common education is essential for serving as a librarian in a large community. I wanted to note that I received my degree from the University of Washington, which offers in person, online, and hybrid degree paths. My cohort included professionals from across the country - not just Washington. It is typical for students to receive an online degree in this field, and there are many accredited options. The lack of an in-state degree program doesn't remove the necessity for the degree.
2	Doing away with this requirement would just be a continuation of the attack that is going on against education and the dumbing down of long standing professions.
3	Public libraries are highly trusted community institutions, operating under a specific and well-proven model of civic sharing, intellectual integrity, and equitable access. De-professionalizing librarianship will erode a community's trust in its library.

4	A master's degree is the very standard for libraries across the United States. It will set off internal alarm bells for job candidates if Montana requires less education for library director positions than most states require for run-of-the-mill librarians.
5	While you can always learn on the job, I think the MLIS requirement is important to our profession as a whole. Perhaps a director wouldn't necessarily need one to get a job, but the requirement would be that they would obtain one within 5 years, for example.
6	I can't believe this question is even being considered. I am ashamed by what has happened to the State Library Commission. Political hacks with zero understanding of how libraries work. I feel so bad for the staff of the Montana State Library, and I worry for all public libraries in this state.
7	Professional staff should have professional degrees. It devalues other MLS degrees by being able to hire directors at other larger institutions without them. Salaries also become over inflated, why should you pay someone the same with no degree.
8	I have worked in large libraries and small libraries but I have never been a director. I would expect a director of a larger library to have a degree. Libraries that serve larger communities have a lot more demand for services. Large libraries have challenges that small libraries may not have because of larger budgets, more staff, and larger community involvement. A Masters prepares someone for knowing about all the areas of the library. Someone without a Masters will have a harder time succeeding in the role, to the detriment of the library and community. Experience working in a library is not the same as formal training from a degree. I don't want a dental hygienist, a teacher, or an accountant without formal training and a library director is no different.
9	Several directors of smaller libraries in Montana have an MLIS degree. Obtaining the degree is not an unnecessary barrier.
10	The fact that this is even being discussed is ridiculous. This is obviously the result of recent events at the Imaginelf library coupled with the political bent of the recently appointed members of the State Library Commission.
11	How did the candidate interview? What knowledge do they have of larger library operations? Are they familiar with community, and its values? Honestly, I don't think there is an across the board answer to your question, and strongly feel that with the communication methods we have now through technology, decisions could be made as the need arises. I disagree with a one size fits all method. Personally, I think it would be nice to have a director with a masters, so if a candidate applies, and has a masters, I would be inclined to choose that candidate, depending on their interview. If a

	candidate has a bachelors, and 15 years library experience, I would definitely interview them, and compare the two candidates.
12	Our Library is a District. Especially for us, our Director has the perfect degree (Business) and experience to run our organization. Management, personnel, accounting, fund management as well as collaboration with Friends of the Library and Foundation are key to our success. I believe at least a bachelor's degree should be required with extensive experience in management.
13	I do not have an MLS degree, but I do have a BA in Business Administration which has helped me immensely in my role as director. I have learned the "library stuff" through on the job work and MSL, MLA and other continuing education opportunities. The director is the CEO, they need to understand how to run the "business" and rely on staff to handle the specific library tasks.
14	There should be a distinction between the very large libraries in the state and the smaller large libraries. For example Billings, Great Falls, Bozeman, Missoula, Imagine IF type size should definitely have higher standards than compared to Glendive, Glasgow, Sidney (smaller/larger). etc. If for no other reason these smaller towns have an extremely difficult time attracting someone with a Masters Degree. The smaller large libraries could have a Bachelor degree in Library Science or similar and 5 years experience as a Director or Assistant Director. It would be more beneficial to the smaller communities.
15	Library experience is better than having a MLS. The requirement is antiquated.
16	Perhaps an MLS for larger populations of service areas.
17	Consider people's lifetime achievements, even if they weren't at a university. There's value in real life experiences. People who never had the privilege of university probably understand the needs of today's library patron better than any university could ever teach.
18	The MT standards were instituted to promote excellence in public libraries. Is this always achieved? No. I have worked under a couple of directors who despite an MLS/MLIS were not qualified for the position. It offered the highest pay scale, so they served with a faulty skill-set. Nevertheless, once the MLS standard is remove or eroded, it becomes a free-for-all with every exception and scenario being justified. A deep commitment and understanding of intellectual freedom, privacy, and equal access to all is foundational to the mission of public libraries and those concepts are usually not taught and inculcated in master degree programs in business, administration or other professional sectors. Keep the standards.

19	Is there any way to encourage a Montana University to offer an MLS degree?
20	Librarianship values are part of one's education while obtaining a Master's in Library Science. Library director's need this education to stay true to the right to read for anyone. Otherwise we risk the United States becoming a totalitarian society where one group dictates what others can learn and explore.
21	Wait a second: the board at Imaginelf Libraries have a whole kerfuffle because they hired, counter to their own HR and advertising, a director without an MLS, and are shocked (they were shocked, I tell you! Shocked!) to learn that this means they lose some state funding, and then someone involved in the whole business up there gets appointed to the Montana Library Commission, and alla sudden the Commission questions the MLS requirement? What a koinky-doink! This couldn't be about retribution at all, no no no. That'd be just silly, immature, and disingenuous.
22	There is no substitute for a Master's of Library/Information Science. This degree provides an essential grounding and framework for successful work in librarianship, especially at the management/administrative level.
23	This discussion is like saying it benefits a school to not hire teachers who have master's degrees in their related teaching/subject areas (biology, history, etc.) There are reasons this requirement is a standard, not a suggestion. At the very least a bachelor's degree in business or one of the soft sciences should be required. Heck, any degree! Coupled with increasing library experience and responsibilities would be a start.
24	If librarian-level positions are required to have an MLIS, like some MT libraries do, then a library director must also have that requirement. Many MLIS programs that are accredited by the ALA offer online degree programs.
25	I've worked for 20+ years as a school librarian. With a library endorsement. I feel qualified to work with young students, but have no illusions I can run a large library. A library with a large number of patrons needs someone with a MLS. The person running a large library needs to understand the library business. They can only be accomplished by pursuing a masters degree in library. I have worked with several school colleagues that have acquired a MLS. Many of whom did this by traveling to Arizona or Washington during the summer. Online learning has made this even more achievable.
26	This is a difficult question to answer as every situation is different. The experience I had with someone in the lead role without an MLS was not good. I could see a big difference in foresight and vision between that manager and managers with an MLS.

	They just weren't as professional and they disdained the thought of striving to be a professional. It hurt the staff and the library.
27	Library managers often lack formal management training, and everyone suffers as a result. All new managers should go through a management training program that includes HR training.
28	MLS can be earned on the job within a set time period (2-3 years)
29	Something else to consider is the extremely high cost of 'going online' to earn this type of a Master's degree. Just with a quick 'Google' the first two online programs would run the individual over \$120k to earn this degree. Most public libraries in the State of Montana cannot afford the pay raise/ scale that the individual would need to make it worth it. My vote would be to change and update this MSL requirement.
30	While it is true that Montana currently doesn't offer a Master of Library Science (MLS) program, Montana also does not offer an in-state MD (Medical Degree) program, but allows for Montanans to obtain their degree from other partnering states. I believe we would want our physicians to be credentialed showcasing the knowledge and skills inherent in their professional responsibilities. Why would we expect a Library Director of any type or size to have less than the proper education as represented by obtaining an MLS degree? It is true that most people do not understand what knowledge is derived from an MLS education until one experiences the program; those with an MLS can easily notice the lack of knowledge of those in the profession without the MLS education. There are components in an MLS curriculum unique to the profession not found elsewhere. For example, we have masters level Educators who do not know how to effectively and efficiently search, retrieve and assess the literature; and they're passing this information on to their students. For a public official using community dollars, we should uphold the standard education for that job occupancy. We expect all other industries' employees to be operating with proper licenses, don't we?
31	The training received through a Master's in Library Science program is essential to running a library. Most MLS programs take 1-2 years, a minimal commitment. Librarianship is a profession with professional credentials - to ignore that is like hiring someone as a nurse with no nursing degree. If nothing else, you could commit to supporting a hire with the stipulation to complete an MLS within the 1st two years of hired, paid by the library.
32	Library Directors are leaders. Leaders of larger and more complex Montana libraries need to have the best training and education possible. The best training and education for a library director position is an MLS degree.

33	<p>In my personal experience as an employee of the library that spurred this discussion, I have seen that a MLS is needed as a strong foundation for the position. The director of an organization must be an expert in the field, and the lack of this education is a detriment to the community, to library staff, and the to director themselves because they cannot confidently and competently fill the role.</p>
34	<p>The larger the community the more a library provides in regards to services, collection scope, etc. The professional and industry recognized credential ensures the community has well-trained and informed leadership trained in all aspects of librarianship. This means the director is able to make informed decisions in hiring. How does one know about cataloging and metadata standards with a Masters degree in a different field or experience as a library programming associate. Relying on staff to have the degree leaves a power imbalance and could set the team up for an awkward working dynamic? What if those staff members leave? When filling positions would other jobs in that library require a masters? Would the director hire someone with the degree who isn't the best fit to ensure they meet standards? Ensuring the director has a masters degree means they have all of the skills needed to best serve their community, which is what taxpayers expect. Hiring without a masters degree is an inherent disservice to the library, library staff, and larger community.</p>
35	<p>Libraries can coast with a director lacking an MLS degree, but attrition of events and minor mistakes will catch up and create a less-than-optimum space for people to use. The director should know why they are making specific decisions while balancing different factors. They should not just be advised by someone with an MLS.</p>
36	<p>I would consider a combination of a Master's degree in another field and library work experience.</p>
37	<p>Library directors who are currently employed in a service area greater than 25,000 who do not have a MLS should be grandfathered in without penalty in funding to the library in question. How many libraries does this currently affect in the state? That would be important to know.</p>
38	<p>An MLS (or equivalent) degree is critical to the understanding of the ethical and historical foundations of the profession, and necessary to inform current practice. A school library or tribal library certificate may be a reasonable substitution.</p>
39	<p>A Master's in library and/or information science is a professional terminal degree. The degree outcomes comprise a discipline-specific nuanced skill set. The library commissioners should be required to learn more about the work of professional librarians rather than stripping down credentials. When Governor Gianforte asked Commissioner Hall to join the library commission she wondered who uses libraries</p>

	<p>other than pedophiles and the homeless. She is doing a very poor job supporting libraries because of her lack of expertise or common sense. The Governor is failing Montana by soliciting poorly educated people while seemingly bypassing the nomination system. If library boards were to solicit people ignorant of professional library work, as the governor has done, local library boards will begin to fail their communities just as the State Library is now failing Montanans.</p>
40	<p>Public libraries are funded with tax dollars; work with myriad layers of government; and have become increasingly complex. The demand for technology adds additional challenge. And then there's the books! YES-a masters degree is absolutely required in larger libraries, especially since branch and smaller libraries in the area look to these larger institutions as leaders and experts in the field.</p>
41	<p>Library Directors at our larger libraries have a leadership role in the state. It's important that they have the knowledge and credentials to assume that role. It's difficult enough to get elected officials and boards to acknowledge the critical role of libraries. Putting someone without the educational background and credentials in a leadership role puts them in a disadvantaged position from the start. Neither can you substitute staff credentials. That creates an unhealthy balance in the workplace if it appears that staff are more knowledgeable and qualified than the director.</p>
42	<p>There is value in the degree. Having other senior level staff who have the degree likely would work in most situations, but perhaps not all.</p>
43	<p>We are continually watering down our profession. If we want to maintain our profession and be treated as a professional we need to maintain standards. Maybe there could be a director who is working on line to get their MLS, if they are given 2 or 3 years to obtain the degree then it would be a win win.</p>
44	<p>There are a number of excellent conversations about this topic happening in our profession, and I am open to a variety of ideas. It is interesting to see diverse professionals state the need professional credentials so that hiring committees do not consider "under qualified" candidates that reflect the committee's demographic composition.</p>
45	<p>I realize that this is a difficult question, but I think it is more nuanced than a simple rule that says x degree and y number years experience. I also think it could be possible to encourage the director to obtain an MLS, or make continued employment contingent on obtaining an MLS in a specified time. To be perfectly honest I have two masters degrees and my first degree in education is actually a lot more helpful to me on a daily basis than my MLS.</p>

46	with current attacks by certain groups who think that libraries should only carry books that they like and serve only them instead of the whole population, it is important that the library director be fully informed and committed. Requiring the degree will help ensure this.
47	While it can be beneficial to have an outsider's perspective on library administration, knowledge gained through obtaining an MLS is invaluable. It does not make sense for a director to not have an MLS when other staff members do. I would not go to a doctor if she didn't have a medical degree even though other staff did.
48	The library director has the background and credetials for managing all library staff and programming. It is unthinkable that the director not have the background and education specifically for running a library.
49	Sometimes real world / job experience might be even better than a degree.
50	I feel it is more important for directors of small libraries to have an MLIS as they may be involved in more 'hands on' aspects of running a library. For larger libraries, the skills needed for a director are more related to administration, fundraising, and public relations.
51	A broad range of experiences are just as valuable as education
52	There is no substitute. Thank you.
53	In Montana, this requirement affects only 8 libraries. If it's a question of continuing legitimacy for those directors, then keeping the requirement makes sense. But if, in the future, libraries need a larger pool from which to search, a advanced/bachelor's degree plus work experience combination is best. Most directors would say that experience as a manager and then director creates a more complete employee/employee experience.
54	I am the Library Director of a much smaller public library (under 10,000 service area population). I do have my MLIS, so maybe I am biased. That MLIS didn't prepare for every element of my job (especially maintaining facilities and grounds), but it meant I came in to my job with broad and specific knowledge related to the library profession, both of which made me better as a library professional. I don't wish to become elitist or exclusionary, and there are plenty of people in the world who can do excellent work through experience and training, without a degree. I'm sure there are people in the world with an MLIS who don't succeed as library directors. I would hope all Library Directors would be expected to come in with professional experience in addition to a degree, and 100% do not discount the importance of that professional experience.

	<p>However, if we would like to continue to hold Montana public libraries to a high standard, and continue to challenge our cities and counties to pay library directors appropriate wages, one of the best ways to ensure this in our largest public libraries is to have a MLIS as an educational requirement. I worry that it is a slippery slope for our profession and for public libraries of all sizes if we begin to chip away at these standards. I do not believe that the benefits outweigh the risks. Across many professions, degrees are hoops that we jump through so that we can achieve a desired professional level. If over time, that standard changes across the board for all professions, then perhaps this is worth revisiting. Until then, the idea of lowering this standard is very concerning to me.</p>
55	<p>Too many individuals are considered not qualified because of the need for an MLS degree. Skills needed are not the day to day work but ability to advocate on behalf of the organization to secure funding, respond to community issues, and work with the State or governing body. You don't need an MLS for that and often requiring an MLS limits the pool of exceptional candidates.</p>
56	<p>A MLS doesn't replace management skills needed to run a large library, possible with branches. However, a MLS degree will ensure that an understanding of library science is attained as well as proving your communication skills that required with this level of public interface.</p>
57	<p>The standard as it currently stands places value on an education, and an education with an advanced degree of study. I think it is important that libraries continue to uphold education as a necessary and important component of running a library and program that is, at it's heart, to educate the populace. I wonder how many Imaginelf library trustees have advanced degrees in any subject.</p>
58	<p>A MLS is essential for large libraries. We are a smaller library, but our director has an MLS (the first time a director at our library has had one) and the difference is exponential. Our current director is head and shoulders above any previous director and has made an IMMENSE difference. Degrees are important and our large urban populations need directors with MLS degrees.</p>