

Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont

April 11, 2023

Catherine Delneo, Working Group Chair

Goals for Today's Presentation

- What is the Working Group?
- What has the Working Group heard so far?
- What is on the horizon?
- How can I get involved?

The Working Group

The Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont was established in 2021 by Act 66 (S.115) and is charged with studying the status of public, school, academic, and special libraries in our state.

The Working Group will submit a report on its studies to the House and Senate Committees on Education during the next legislative season.

The Working Group has been tasked with studying many topics, including:

Programming, Collections, Facilities, Technology, Staff, Cultural Diversity and Inclusion, Access to Public Programs and Services, Emergency Preparedness.

<https://libraries.vermont.gov/services/initiatives-and-projects/working-group-status-libraries-vermont>

Membership of the Working Group

- **Catherine Delneo** (Chair) - State Librarian and Commissioner of Libraries, Vermont Department of Libraries, Barre
- **Kelly McCagg** - VLA Vice President/President Elect, Burnham Memorial Library, Colchester
- **Christopher Kaufman Ilstrup** - Executive Director, Vermont Humanities Council, Montpelier
- **Jeannette Bair** - Public Library Representative, Director, Rochester Public Library
- **Susan O'Connell** - Public Library Representative, Director, Craftsbury Public Library
- **Wendy Sharkey** - Public Library Representative, Head of Circulation Department, Bennington Free Library
- **Meg Allison** - Past-President Vermont School Library Association, Librarian, U32 High School, Montpelier
- **Karen McCalla** - School Library Representative, Librarian, Mill River Union HS, North Clarendon
- **Maria Avery** - VLA Colleges and Universities Section Representative, Howe Library, UVM
- **Denise Hersey** - VLA Colleges and Universities Section Representative, Director, Dana Medical Library, UVM
- **Andy Kolovos** - VLA Trustees and Friends Section Representative, Vermont Folklife Center Associate Director and Archivist, Middlebury

Meetings of the Working Group

- Regular Meetings are held virtually on the 4th Friday of every other month
- Special meetings have been added to schedule
- Each Working Group meeting is focused on a specific topic or task
- Written comments are solicited in advance of each meeting
- Working Group meetings typically include:
 - a report on the topic by Department of Libraries staff or local experts,
 - scheduled comments from interested parties,
 - and discussion by Working Group members.

Topics of Study & What We've Heard So Far

September 2021 – March 2023

Programming

- Programming is a core library service
- Programming costs money and requires funding
- Programming should be mentioned within every library's mission statement
- Future public library standards should include programming standards based on the size of the library and community
- School librarians report a need for more support
- Programming should reflect the diversity and interests of the community

Collections

- Vermonters deserve equal access to information and collections
- Collections should reflect diversity in community
- Collections should include materials that ensure all community members feel seen and heard
- Collections decisions should be made locally by library professionals with knowledge of the community
- People throughout the state need materials in a variety of formats including both print and digital
- Increased access to non-English language materials is needed to meet Vermonters' needs
- Local library budgets and spaces impact how many physical and electronic items each library owns
- eBook and eAudiobook procurement models negatively impact library budgets and access to materials
- Shared, statewide resources can help to bridge gaps in local collections

Facilities

- Vermont's libraries have historically had limited resources to maintain or improve aging facilities
- Increased financial supports for maintenance of buildings is needed at public libraries
- Future public library standards could include recommendations of building size needed to serve communities of different sizes
- Future public library standards could include recommendation for inclusion of community meeting and program spaces
- Flexible spaces can be used to help small spaces adapt for different uses
- Training on building stewardship and capital projects are needed for library staff and trustees

Technology

- Public libraries continue to serve a key role in providing access to high-speed internet and computer equipment
- Libraries statewide report a need for real-time, in-person IT support
- Library staff need support selecting and maintaining computer equipment
- Cybersecurity is an emergent concern for all libraries
- Training of library staff is needed to better support the public in accessing and utilizing information
- The constant evolution of technology makes “learning it” a moving target
- Libraries can support the people in improving their information literacy through one-on-one or group instruction
- Public libraries play an important role in helping Vermonters achieve job goals, access telehealth, and other services

Staffing

- Library staff statewide have raised concerns about low wages and lack of benefits
- Staff retention has emerged as a growing concern
- Staff safety has emerged as a growing concern
- Many libraries rely on volunteers to provide core library services, which hides true staffing costs

Continuing Education

- Professional development ensures that library staff can provide core services to the public
- The Department's Certificate of Public Librarianship continues to be of value to library staff
- Access to library science programs is limited due to cost and geography
- Access to training increased when it moved online during the pandemic
- In-person opportunities for connection with peers are still important to library staff
- Boards can support library staff by providing paid time to attend trainings and sub coverage
- Library trustees and board members have unique training needs

Inclusive Services

- Librarians want to increase and improve access to library services for Vermonters
- Many library buildings are not accessible to all community members
- Many community members feel excluded from library services as a result of systemic neglect and maltreatment
- Increased training on areas of racial equity, systemic injustice, and library services to traditionally neglected community is needed

Social Services

- Unresolved social services issues can easily become public safety matters in libraries
- All public libraries (municipal and incorporated) should be recognized as an important part of a community's social safety net
- Library staff need training to help them better support patrons in crisis (including lists of available social services and de-escalation techniques)
- Behavioral guidelines should focus on providing welcoming environments for all community members and encouraging people to visit libraries

Emergency Preparedness

- Individual libraries should develop and periodically revise emergency plans that address likely emergencies for their institutions
- Libraries (both incorporated and municipal) should be at the table as their municipality's emergency plan is developed
- Libraries should be at the table as the State's Hazard Mitigation Plan is developed
- Plans to renovate or build new libraries should take extreme weather events, public safety, and other likely emergencies into consideration
- Shared pool of resources for libraries to support emergency preparedness
- Public libraries can be included in regional and statewide responses to weather emergencies (e.g. local cooling/warming centers and shelters). Training and support for library staff supported the public in this way should be provided. Staffing plans to facilitate expanded hours of emergency response should be developed.

Upcoming Topics of Study

Intellectual Freedom – April 21

Library Structures and Organizations – May 26

Survey Results – July 28

Public Safety – August 25

Report Writing – Fall 2023

Learn More

- Agendas and Minutes of Meetings
- Supporting documents and presentations
- Recordings of Meetings
- Written comments

<https://libraries.vermont.gov/services/initiatives-and-projects/working-group-status-libraries-vermont>

Get Involved!

- Take our quick survey
- Provide written comments via email to lib.contact@vermont.gov

