

# Lawrence Webster, M.A., M.L.S. Montpelier

May 16, 2023

## Library Structures and Organization - Overview and some resources Prepared for the Working Group on the Status of Libraries, May 26 session on Library Structures and Organization

### Introduction

First, a personal note. I'm something of a library evangelist. Libraries have been woven into the fabric of my life since before I learned to read, from my first storytime some time in 1950 through college and graduate school, up to just this morning, when I downloaded an ebook thanks to Green Mountain Library Consortium. Much of the following text is written with public libraries and their constituents in mind, but academic and special libraries share a set of values and I'll touch on them.

Before I retired, I worked in public, academic, and special libraries and was a consultant, first on the staff of two state libraries, then independent. As I worked with more and more libraries, I was struck by the huge number of different ways libraries and library systems have organized themselves. Not many of my colleagues seem to share my fascination - whenever I bring up governance questions or issues, many eyes will roll or glaze over. The underlying purpose of designing an organizational structure is to make the organization work optimally - in the case of libraries, to provide equal access and free access for all. We hear this so often, we forget what it means.

**But it's the law.** *Here's an excerpt from the Vermont Statute: "The General Assembly declares it to be the policy of the State of Vermont that free public libraries are essential to the general enlightenment of citizens in a democracy and that every citizen of the State of Vermont should have access to the educational, cultural, recreational, informational, and research benefits of a free public library."* – 22 V.S.A. § 67.

Providing such access to the riches and services of libraries to *all* Vermonters in an equitable fashion must be the underlying goal of any library organizational model. A good example of a heartening trend in this direction is the Department of Libraries (VTLIB) opening up Vermont Online Library to all Vermont residents, regardless of funding challenges faced by local public libraries. In addition, the establishment of the Green Mountain Library

Consortium in 2008 showed the way toward effective service delivery through cooperative cost-sharing. This is now possible with many electronic resources (some states do this for ebooks and audiobooks, for example), and some states are deepening access by providing this kind of statewide service.

Libraries have developed a lot of different organizational models and structures to serve their constituencies. Any discussion of structure and organization of libraries must include at least the following, which are touched on in the following text.

- State Library agencies
- Multitype library consortia and networks
- Single-type consortia and networks – especially public libraries
- Statewide Library Cards
- Professional Library associations - state and national

### **State Library Agencies**

Every state has one, but they are quite different from one another. Vermont's Department of Libraries (VTLIB) is in the Agency of Administration; some state libraries are under Secretaries of State; some in the Education Department; some are independent commissions. All are responsible for management of federal LSTA funds and all collect and report library data. Many also provide services to state government, support for public library development, support for technological networks, statewide access to electronic information and resources, consulting services to all types of libraries, data collection and interpretation, interlibrary loan networks.

For more information:

*State Library Administrative Agency Survey*, Institute of Museums and Libraries (IMLS) includes a lot of data and information on State Libraries. A recent report summarizes a lot of data and information:

[https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/2021-12/ims\\_slaa\\_functions\\_roles\\_brief.pdf](https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/2021-12/ims_slaa_functions_roles_brief.pdf)

COSLA - Chief Officers of State Library Agencies – <https://www.cosla.org/>

### **Multitype Library Consortia**

These are nonprofit associations of libraries who join to provide mutual support and enhance services. Membership can include public, academic, school, and special libraries.

Vermont has just one – Green Mountain Library Consortium (GMLC), a lively group founded in 2008 to widen access to ebooks and audiobooks, <https://www.gmlc.org/> It is open to all libraries in Vermont; and now has 155 member libraries, which serve approximately  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the state's population. GMLC

offers electronic materials, a shared catalog, and a delivery service and shared cost of ebooks and audiobooks. It is run primarily by volunteers with a simple and eloquent mission: "...to provide Vermont's libraries with access to goods and services otherwise unattainable, through the power of partnerships and collective purchasing."

Some states, such as Florida, have regional multitype consortia blanketing the state. These organizations provide a mix of services, including technological help, shared catalogs, staff training, and more.

### **Single type library systems - Public**

The goal of library systems is to broaden access and create consistent services across a given area. Vermont, with its very small population, could provide public library system scaffolding create a way to ensure that every Vermonter has equitable access and services. There are no formal public library systems in Vermont. We are perhaps the only state in the union in this condition. The old regional libraries that some still mourn used to blanket the state might have provided a blueprint for true public library systems, but they focused on print collections rather than such things as shared cataloging or technology, and they were phased out, with the last one closing in the 2000s. That said, there is much to build on in this state: local and informal cooperation such as HomeCard, county librarians' meetings, ad-hoc efforts such as agreements between Craftsbury and Albany, and an enormous helping of good will.

### **Public Library Organizational Models in Vermont**

*Municipal* - an arm of town government. We have 93.

*Incorporated* - a private nonprofit corporation chartered to serve all people in its service area. 58

*Community* - school/public combination. 12

*Special district* - Just one – Deborah Rawson library, by agreement with two towns - Jericho and Underhill.

### **Types of Public Library Systems—one state's approach**

Vermont library staff often express concerns about library systems—fearing that the local library would have to cede control of collections, policies, and even identity to a faceless bureaucracy. *This is not the case.* For example, New York's 60-year history of public library system development is proof positive that it's quite possible to maintain a library's look and feel, identity, collection, board, governance style, and everything that makes it special, while reaping the benefits of system membership which might include shared cataloging, roaming experts, administrative services, staff training, expert consulting, and more.

New York makes a useful distinction among three types of systems. Numbers in parentheses are the number of such systems in each category. *Consolidated*: (3) Chartered as a single entity under a board of trustees (Brooklyn, The New York Public Library, and Queens Borough Public Library). *Federated*: (4) Created by action of the board or boards of supervisors or legislature of the county or counties involved while member libraries retain their own charters (Buffalo & Erie, Clinton- Essex-Franklin, Monroe, and Onondaga). *Cooperative*: (16) An association created by agreement of boards of chartered member libraries, which retain their autonomy. - New York State Library <https://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/libs/brochurp.htm>

For more information on the many models for public library organization take a look at *Public Library Structure and Organization in the United States*. National Center for Education Statistics, 1996. Yes it's old but it's a very useful set of definitions and conditions in each state. [https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/publications/documents/publiclibrarystructureorg3-1996\\_0.pdf](https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/publications/documents/publiclibrarystructureorg3-1996_0.pdf)

### **Single-Type Library Systems – Academic**

Most multi-campus institutions have consolidated library systems with shared cataloging at a minimum, and easy reciprocal collection use. In addition many colleges and universities have banded together to share what makes sense to provide better service to all. Two examples include COMPASS (Smith, Hampshire, Mt. Holyoke and Tripod (Swarthmore, Haverford, and Bryn Mawr. Both focus on joint management of digital collections. Vermont's new Vermont State University will have a library system,, as do UVM and Community College of Vermont.

The Vermont Consortium of Academic Libraries provides cross-institutional connections. It was founded in 2008 to "... to promote interlibrary cooperation, support resource sharing among member institutions, facilitate shared access to online information resources, and provide timely and economical delivery of books and other materials between libraries. VCAL membership includes major private colleges as well as state institutions.

### **Statewide Library Cards:**

Even without a robust system, a statewide library card can broaden access considerably. Twenty four cities in the United States have populations greater than the entire state of Vermont (U.S. Census Bureau <https://www.census.gov/>). With such a small population it is perhaps worth investigating how other states have introduced statewide library cards, whether such an egalitarian service could work in Vermont.

Fifteen states have statewide public library cards, according to an ALA

report, the *ALA Reciprocal Borrowing Survey (2005)*, Three of those states - Iowa, Michigan, and Minnesota - do not have readily available information about those programs online as of May 10, 2023. Links for the remaining 12 state library card programs are provided below.

- Colorado CLC  
<https://www.coloradovirtuallibrary.org/resource-sharing/clc/clc-for-libraries/>
- Connecticut BorrowItCT <https://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/dld/ccard>
- Georgia Georgia PINES <https://georgialibraries.org/your-library-card/>
- Hawaii Public Library System  
<https://www.librarieshawaii.org/2022/03/25/visit-the-library/#HoursofOperation>
- Indiana PLAC  
<https://www.in.gov/library/services-for-libraries/ldoresources/placrules/plac/>
- Kansas eCard <https://kslib.info/FAQ.aspx?TID=17> Electronic information only provides access to collections in academic libraries as well as public to all Kansans.
- Maryland MPOWER  
<https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc5300/sc5339/000113/001000/001339/unrestricted/20054003e.htm>
- Nebraska - NebraKard <https://nlc.nebraska.gov/nebraskard/faqs.aspx>
- Pennsylvania  
<https://www.statelibrary.pa.gov/Libraries/Library-Programs-and-Services/Pages/Statewide-Library-Card-Program.aspx>
- Rhode Island - Ocean State Libraries <https://oslri.org/application/>
- Wyoming  
<https://library.wyo.gov/what-a-wyoming-library-card-can-do-for-you/>

### **National and Statewide Professional Associations**

For more than a century, professional associations have played a large part in the development of library services of all kinds. At the national level, The American Library Association (ALA) and its divisions have more than 50,000 members from public, academic, school, and specialized libraries. ALA provides training, conferences, peer support, advocacy, accreditation of graduate programs, and a vigorous publications program. Other important national groups: the Association of Small and Rural Libraries (ASRL), Special Libraries Association (SLA), the Association for Information Science and Technology, and special subject groups. There are also regional groups, such as the New England Library Association.

Each state has a state library association, usually a chapter of ALA. The Vermont Library Association (<https://www.vermontlibraries.org/>) is active in continuing education, peer support, representation in policy discussions, and advocacy. As in many states, the VLA often works closely with the Department of

Libraries to ensure the healthy development of library services, and to smooth the way as technological and social change influences the way we use libraries and the way we run them.

**Summing Up: Key points for Vermont library leadership**

- If Vermont libraries, in particular public libraries, have weakness, it is in the lack of formal public library systems. Particularly in this era of expensive electronic resources, rapid change, and higher expectations from users who have lived elsewhere, it is important for library leadership here to investigate the possibility of developing one or more comprehensive public library systems.
- Library systems can greatly enhance the services we provide Vermonters, as well as provide some cost-sharing for expensive resources, continuing education and peer support for staff, and happier users.
- You do not have to give up autonomy, identity, or home rule to participate in the benefits of a system.
- Another project I would urge the Vermont Library leadership to consider is how to educate the general public as well as policy makers and officials about the true value, breadth, and depth of libraries. The recent flap about Vermont State University's proposed total revamp of its library system might have been averted if everyone had gone into the planning with a shared body of knowledge about library operations, print and electronic publishing, and best practices as they are evolving throughout the country.

Lawrence Webster, M.A., M.L.S.  
Montpelier, VT  
lawrencewebster@gmail.com