

From: Green Mountain Library Consortium (GMLC) Board – Wendy Hysko
To: Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont and House and Senate Committees on Education
Re: Digital Library Collections to Vermont Citizens

May 16, 2023

The Board of the Green Mountain Library Consortium (GMLC) is writing to communicate the services and collections that GMLC provides and what are the needs for these digital library collections.

Who makes up your membership - GMLC includes 160 member libraries statewide. All GMLC member libraries have access to the ListenUp Vermont (LUV) downloadable books collection.

What is your organization's role - Our mission is to provide Vermont's libraries with access to goods and services otherwise unattainable, through the power of partnerships and collective purchasing. This is summed up in the consortium's tagline: *Vermont Libraries, Working Together.*

What is the cost to members - All members pay an annual \$100 administrative fee and \$.28 X # registered borrowers + \$.20 X # LUV check-outs from previous year. There is a discounted per checkout cost for libraries that invest in Overdrive Advantage titles that can be purchased for their own patrons and help alleviate some of the long holds lists for the general collection popular titles.

What support services does your organization offer -

- ListenUpVermont - The digital library, ListenUpVermont (LUV) which we steward has grown steadily over the past 15 years to become an integral part of the Vermont library landscape.
- VOKAL - a shared ILS using open source software with 64 libraries and growing
- Mango Languages
- Library delivery service - we started the courier service in 2016, now run by VTLib, as a pilot project establishing at least weekly service to over 100 libraries, contracting Green Mountain Messenger to establish this library materials collection, sorting and delivery system. Prior to this delivery service being launched, all interlibrary loans were sent through the USPS which was labor intensive and costly. The courier service was handed over to VTLib to manage in 2018.

What is Going Well LUV - LUV's growth and invaluable influence on Vermont's library culture can be shown in the following statistics:

1. An increase from 11,750 to 14,250 users in March 2023 compared to March 2022
2. An increase from 1,200 to 1,500 daily users in March 2023 compared to March 2022
3. An increase from 46,000 to 58,000 checkouts in March 2023 compared to March 2022
4. An increase from 22,000 to 28,000 holds in March 2023 compared to March 2022

The LUV collection has volunteer professional library selectors to build and maintain the shared collection. Through the shared volunteer effort, the LUV is a popular collection of titles heavily utilized by library patrons across Vermont.

Pinch Points - LUV's growth is hindered by three problems. Inadequate funding, unfair price structures and licensing agreements from publishing houses, and ease of checkouts. Together these three problems have created roadblocks to creating a large enough collection to adequately service our 27,000 active patrons. As such, LUV patrons often find long hold lists and wait times. GMLC invests over \$150,000 annually in LUV collections, which is still not enough. GMLC received over \$200,000 last year from VTLib with IMLS ARPA passthrough funding to help alleviate many years of growing holds queues. Funding like this really benefited libraries and library patrons statewide. As our patrons become more savvy they have found ways around some of these problems becoming more "power users" of apps, so morale is currently high, but limited funding for digital titles will be an ongoing pinch point.

What is Going Well - VOKAL koha ILS consortium - VOKAL was launched as the first shared ILS in Vermont using the koha open source ILS in 2010. VOKAL will grow to 66 libraries this year, finding a balance using a flexible shared system that serves the smallest to largest libraries in Vermont. Volunteer committees inform decisions made about the different modules of the ILS. Committees include: a Cataloging Committee to manage best practices in sharing bibliographic records; a Circulation Committee to manage best practices for stand alone libraries as well as libraries in reciprocal borrowing agreements like Homecard and One Card; and a Consortium Committee to navigate setting system preferences that will impact all VOKAL member libraries with representatives from different sized libraries having a voice. VOKAL sponsored developments have been incorporated

into the general software releases used by libraries around the world. VOKAL implemented the Aspen discovery system in 2021 which brings records from the traditional physical item catalog, and digital subscription records to one format. Member libraries can design its look and feature specific collections, as well as design a full website. Currently the VOKAL Executive Committee, comprised of members of the original Implementation Team including Wendy Hysko from the Brownell Library in Essex Junction, Kim Peine from the Dorothy Alling Library in Williston, and Richard Pritsky from the Carpenter Carse Library in Hinesburg manage membership inquiries and connecting potential new members to the support company, Bywater, that VOKAL partners and contracts with. Bywater also supports developments, coordinating consortium-wide training, and general consortium oversight.

Pinch Points for VOKAL - because of the volunteer support from member libraries, VOKAL manages to keep costs down while having funds to help sponsor developments contracted through Bywater. The VOKAL Executive Committee is working on thoughtfully restructuring to create additional committees over the next few years to split up some of the work of the Executive Committee to ensure the consortium remains a stable and reliable ILS for the range of libraries using the VOKAL system.

What is going well Mango Languages - Mango is offered as a language resource including over 60 languages with over 20 libraries subscribing. Mango, as a direct subscription service, is low maintenance for GMLC to administer and pass along consortium savings to participating libraries.

On the Horizon for GMLC - GMLC is always looking to add shared resource services to what we offer Vermont libraries. Again, our mission is to provide Vermont's libraries with access to goods and services otherwise unattainable, through the power of partnerships and collective purchasing. Over the next ten years we will continue to look for services that enhance what we offer to Vermont libraries and their patrons and maintain our current offerings that Vermont libraries rely on.

Improvements in Statewide Structures - We have several recommendations for the Working Group and the House and Senate Committees on Education.

- Help find ways to fund digital libraries - this is not a technology that is going away. Traditional paper books are beloved by many and desirable by those who need a break from screens, but there is solid evidence that the ease and

24/7 access of digital books is essential and expected for libraries to provide.

- Vermont schools need a voice at the table in their bargaining with Overdrive. The Vermont Schools Shared Digital Collection has no ownership in Vermont. Each school is paying a price set by Overdrive. Vermont schools need a voice working for them.
- Begin a conversation with publishing houses. Libraries are currently being charged unsustainable fees for the digital content they are purchasing. Other states have sought to influence the pricing structure and succeeded.
- Speak to LUV users to understand the genuine enthusiasm for this resource.
- As we try to share resources statewide there is at times a divide between the haves and have nots, which lowers Vermont libraries' collective goodwill. This limits all librarians and libraries' ability to share in the most positive way possible. When GMLC tried to make LUV more available statewide 10 years ago, we offered 10 grants (funded through the Tarrant Foundation) to libraries that weren't using LUV yet. GMLC thought we had broadened our reach and offered libraries who couldn't afford the service a wonderful chance to try it for 2 years. However, we received pushback from libraries who could just barely afford the service that they should have been included in the grant round. Another example is when GMLC began offering Overdrive Advantage 7 years ago. This service allows for specific libraries to add extra ebooks and digital audiobooks to LUV at the library's own expense for that specific library's patrons. There was pushback with this as well. Librarians felt that it was unfair that libraries with more money could get more books for their patrons. Creating good will and positive relationships go hand in hand with creating better library services for Vermont's patrons. Our public librarians need someone they trust to help them make their libraries better. Libraries and library staff need to know GMLC and VTLib have their best interests at heart. The capital projects grants being offered through VTLib are a wonderful place for this 'best interest' to be shown. If we learn to trust each other a little more, our ability to share might grow stronger.

Thank you members of the Working Group for Vermont Libraries. The work libraries do across the state is so important to share resources and improve equity and encourage lifelong learning. GMLC is proud of the services we provide to Vermont libraries and look forward to continuing these partnerships moving forward.

Sincerely,

The GMLC board of Directors

Wendy Hysko, President

Kim Peine, Treasurer

Owen McDermott, Secretary

Chris Kirby, Director

Mara Seigel, Director

Richard Pritsky, Director