



**Knowledge for Life.
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August 16, 2023

Working Group for the Status of Libraries in Vermont
c/o The Vermont Department of Libraries
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Dear Working Group for the Status of Libraries in Vermont,

My name is Mary Danko and I am the Library Director for the Fletcher Free Library located in Burlington, Vermont. The Fletcher Free Library was founded in 1873 and moved into a beautiful Carnegie building built in 1904. In 1981, a new addition increased the size of the library to over 46,000 square feet and included a beautiful 3-story glass curtain wall. The library had over 240,000 visits and over 380,000 circulations in 2018. The library has a budget that is over \$2.6M, has 27 employees and is open 7 days a week.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to write to you today on the topic of library structures and organizations in Vermont. As we discuss potential changes and improvements in this area, it is my hope that we can collectively work towards creating a more effective and impactful environment for our public libraries. Some ideas are already partially implemented and require expansion, while others present innovative approaches that merit thorough consideration. As we move forward with this endeavor, I hope we can foster discussions and implementations around these ideas for the benefit of our communities.

Direct Funding for Libraries

One immediate avenue for enhancing library services involves securing direct funding for libraries in Vermont. The recent legalization of marijuana has presented an opportunity to generate additional tax revenue. Given the intrinsic value public libraries bring to their communities, it's reasonable to allocate a portion of this revenue to support library operations and initiatives. There may be other ways to get direct funding for libraries that are unknown to

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us now, but providing direct funding to public libraries should always be at top of mind. Each public library knows the needs of their communities and would spend funds wisely.

To ensure accountability, it is essential to establish clear standards that libraries must adhere to in order to become eligible for this funding. Drawing inspiration from successful models like Maine's tiered standards system (Required, Enhanced & Exemplary), we can develop a pathway for libraries to meet and exceed standards while working collaboratively with their local governments. You can read more about the Maine Standard system here:

<https://www.maine.gov/msl/libs/standards/index.shtml>

Embracing Shared Systems

Considering Vermont's modest population of around 645,000 people, shared systems stand as an efficient solution for resource optimization. Implementing a single Integrated Library System (ILS) across the entire state would eliminate the need for individual libraries to maintain separate ILSs, resulting in significant cost savings. A unified state library card could facilitate access to any library within the system. Moreover, this shared ILS could pave the way for a seamless Interlibrary Loan (ILL) system, streamlining book borrowing and resource sharing among libraries. To complement this structure, a strengthened courier system is necessary, which could be organized geographically for optimal efficiency. Regional collection development could further enhance libraries' ability to cater to specific community needs.

Building a Collaborative Digital Collection

Expanding our digital offerings through collaborative efforts is another promising approach. A shared digital collection would encompass a comprehensive range of resources, including e-books, audiobooks, and streaming media. Pooling resources through group purchases would capitalize on economies of scale, leading to substantial cost savings. The establishment of a foundational digital collection can serve as a basis for future à la carte additions, further enriching the digital resources available to patrons.

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Access to Expertise for Libraries

In our pursuit of robust library services, a shared pool of specialized expertise would greatly benefit libraries. Experts in fields such as grants, legal matters, and human resources could be available on a consultative basis to assist libraries in navigating these intricate areas. This approach ensures that all libraries, regardless of their size, have access to essential knowledge, ultimately enhancing their operational efficiency and effectiveness.

Vermont's library landscape is comprised of over 180 public libraries, each with its unique character. However, by fostering collaboration and innovative thinking, we can enhance the impact of our libraries on a statewide scale. The structural and organizational ideas presented today, including direct funding, shared systems, collaborative digital collections, and access to expertise, have the potential to reshape the future of library services in Vermont. By embracing these concepts, we can empower our libraries to better serve their communities and ensure equitable access to valuable resources and knowledge.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mary Danko
Library Director

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