

Testimony for the Working Group on the Status of State Libraries: Collections

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Library collections vary widely from community to community based on local interests and available space for the collection. Vermont libraries are an independent lot, and one of the greatest benefits of that is that a well-trained librarian with enough time and resources can ensure a stellar collection for the community.

While I believe our libraries are doing an excellent job, I see two areas of improvement that could provide even greater benefits. One area concerns local collections, and the other concerns improving systems statewide.

Local Collections: There are few libraries in Vermont large enough to employ librarians with a dedicated collection development focus. Most librarians in our small libraries wear many hats and must be skilled in everything from cataloging to readers' advisory to collection development. In the past, librarians had a very useful aid from the VTLIB Library Consultant for Children's Services in the form of a quarterly Materials Review workshop. These sessions gave an overview of noteworthy material for juvenile patrons. They provided reviews of recently published works which served as a safety net of sorts for those responsible for collection development. While the Materials Review sessions were not a one size answer to juvenile collection development, they helped to make sure titles that would be appropriate for the collection did not miss the attention of the person in charge of ordering.

Why is this service needed for the juvenile collection when it was not provided for the adult collection? I see two reasons that this service was especially applicable for the juvenile collection.

- One big difference between juvenile and adult collections is that while our adult readers are quite stable our juvenile readers are always aging in and out of the collection. That means that a dynamic adult collection needs to be constantly refreshed as our readers may be reading adult fiction from our shelves for ten, twenty, even fifty years! In contrast, juvenile collections need the best material for different age groups from infants through young adult. While the collection must always be evaluated for relevance, inclusivity, currency of information, physical condition, and interests of readers, a juvenile collection can rely more heavily on the same material over time than an adult collection can.
- Quite often the children's librarian is responsible for collection development of the juvenile collection. In many of our smaller libraries, the director may be fully trained through a Master's Program or the VTLIB Certificate of Public Librarianship, while the children's librarian may not have had the opportunity to receive specific collection development training. The Materials Review sessions provided support to ensure new materials exemplifying everyday diversity and updated non-fiction texts were brought to the attention of multitasking children's librarians for their consideration.

I believe that bringing back the Materials Review workshops would provide a valuable service to children's librarians around the state, and would be an excellent way to help libraries develop and evaluate their collections, particularly through the lens of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Statewide Systems: In Vermont, many small independent libraries exist within close proximity to each other, and many library users are members of numerous libraries in order to take advantage of different collections. This "sharing" of library patrons is a good way to ensure that Vermonters have quick access to as much as possible within the constraints of the individual systems and patchwork of collaboratives currently in place. However, I believe Vermonters would be better served if we could look beyond our individual systems, and create larger collaborative systems that would better serve our users and reduce costs for libraries.

Throughout Vermont there have been different ways of addressing this issue, from the VTLIB sponsored Catamount Consortium of 19 libraries throughout the state to the Home Card, One Card, and LOCAL collaborations that allow users from one library to use their card at another nearby library. We can and should do better though, to improve services while reducing costs.

One step in this direction could be to implement a statewide library card that could be used at any library regardless of the Integrated Library System (ILS) used at each library. To provide better cost savings and more seamless discoverability of material, we should look at providing one ILS for all libraries.

Vermont is a small state, and there is no reason one system could not serve all Vermonters. That is not to say it would be easy. There would be many hurdles to overcome as we work to find common ground melding one system from many independent ones. However, we would all benefit from this process in the long run, through better access to materials and cost reductions if each tiny library did not have to bear the burden of their own ILS.