

May 26, 2023

Response for Vermont

It would be helpful for the Working Group to understand the following about ILS:

Who is ultimately responsible for library services in your state's correctional facilities?

- According to the Washington State Administrative Code the state librarian is responsible for "Providing for library and information services to residents and staff of state-supported residential institutions". Sara Jones is the state librarian for WA State.

What is your organization's role?

- Institutional Library Services (ILS) is a program of the Washington State Library which is a division of the Office of the Secretary of State in Washington. This program locates branches of the state library in nine major prison facilities, 2 in psychiatric state hospitals, and 2 juvenile detention centers across the state. The program also supplies interlibrary loan services to these facilities and the nine minor prison facilities across the state. Laura Sherbo worked for ILS for over 40 years and has been the program manager for ILS for the last 20 years.

If possible, what is your budget – or approximately how much does it cost for the state library to provide services in each facility?

- The total 2023 budget for the Washington State Library for the DOC portion of the program is \$2,557,938.
- These funds come from a combination of state and federal sources with about 35% coming from LSTA funds (Library Services and Technology Act) 52% coming from the WA State General Fund and 13% from other state special revenue funds
- These funds cover library staffing and personnel management, materials for circulation, OCLC subscriptions, hardware and software used for circulation and other business functions, IT support, library specific supplies for processing and other library requirements.
- The Washington state department of corrections provides the physical space and maintains the space in good working order, as well as DOC IT equipment and support, furniture, operating and general office supplies, postage, and janitorial services.

How does the Washington State Library work with your Department of Corrections?

- The program is managed through an interagency agreement/contract. A program manager is identified for each agency, and they meet monthly to address issues and insure the successful operation of the libraries. Each branch librarian, in coordination with the program manager, meets on a monthly basis with a facility liaison for support and address issues to insure the successful operation of the branch library.

What kinds of library services do you provide in correctional facilities (collections, programs, classes, etc.)?

- The WA State model for providing library services to state prison populations is unique because it locates branches of the state library inside the state's 9 major prison facilities. Through the research related to our IMLS grant project we have found that in most states that have prison libraries, the libraries are staffed by DOC employees who may or may not be trained librarians or even have a background providing library services. Each ILS branch has a certified librarian, and the DOC branches also have a library associate, and our branches provide the same basic services that

public libraries in WA State provide except for internet access. Although ILS staff work to ensure that each branch provides the same level and quality of service to patrons in each facility, each branch librarian develops its collections, programs, and information services to serve the specific needs of the facility population. (WCCW example, WCC example) ILS branches are like the branch libraries of any library system serving their community – our community just happens to be incarcerated.

What is going well with regard to your support for correctional libraries?

- The Reentry services provided by ILS branches are particularly robust. ILS has an institutional librarian who has developed our collection of reference and material resources as well as a website that is available online to the friends and family of incarcerated individuals and a downloaded version of the website for our patrons.
- Laura Sherbo has developed a Library Card Program consisting of agreements with public library systems across the state whereby library accounts are created for individuals preparing to go back to their communities. The public libraries provide a means for ILS Librarians to set up accounts, and we provide physical library cards patrons receive the day they leave their facility. (Releasing homeless anecdote.)
- ILS services underserved and marginalized WA State residents who are at high risk for homelessness and recidivism.
- The library professionals working in ILS branches believe that our libraries should be just like any other library. We serve our community in the best way possible. It just so happens that our branches are located in prisons and patrons are incarcerated.

What are some pinch points with regard to your support for correctional libraries?

- Tensions occur because the state library and the DOC have very different purviews and objectives. On a basic level departments of correction set limits on access to information of incarcerated populations whereas libraries are committed to providing access to information needs of patrons who are incarcerated. ILS recognizes that safety and security are fundamental to corrections and corrections understands that information and recreation can contribute to successful outcomes for incarcerated populations. Restrictions on materials is an example of this tension. The DOC limits access to materials based on safety and security concerns and sets policy to support this need. The state library works to ensure that access to information is as unfettered as possible in a carceral setting. ILS complies with DOC policy, but because policy can be interpreted differently Laura Sherbo sits on the review committee that makes decisions about what will ultimately be restricted. She works very hard to insure there is a commonsense interpretation of DOC policy when it comes to restricting materials.

What do you see on the horizon for your organization in the next 10 years?

At present our circulations systems are offline and our patrons can only locate materials for the branch at their facility using our OPACs. We hope to network our circulation system soon so a patron can request materials from any of our branches.

We also hope to add limited internet access to the services we provide so our patrons can become more invested in designing their own reentry plan and resources that will best suit their needs. We would be able to add digital literacy to the information services we provide.

We recently added the 9 library associate positions to the DOC branches, and we are hoping to add associate positions to our juvenile and psychiatric hospital branches as well.

For the first time in WA state our juvenile detention centers have libraries with dedicated and trained library staff who can provide high-quality library services to the youth population at these centers. Again, the opportunity to develop their own return to their community or just prepare for the future in general is critical for this population.

What improvements in statewide structures would help the libraries and library staff your organization supports?

This response is from our state librarian Sara Jones.

The service to Institutional Libraries should be entirely supported with state funding. The Washington program relies heavily on LSTA funds. If state funding supported all the positions, the materials, and operating basics then LSTA could enhance the service with innovative programs supporting reentry, education and skills development. The partnership with the Department of Corrections is essential and ensuring the two entities remain in partnership status is key to the program's sustainability and success. Finally, our salaries are simply not competitive, this is true for all positions in the State Library, but the ILS library positions feel this lack of competitive pay directly, as they are in remote locations, with inherent challenges and isolation. Incentives and overall better compensation are needed to keep the program thriving.

IMLS Grant Project – State Prison Libraries Performance Initiative

This is a two-year project lead by the Washington State Library's Institutional Library Services program, in collaboration with the Washington State Department of Corrections. The project is an effort to develop strategies and tools designed to address disparities in the service standards and capacities of general services libraries located in U.S. state and territorial prisons. The project will bring stakeholders together to identify and discuss current policies, best practices, performance standards, and outcomes of prison library services, develop adaptable models for improving and providing services, and create an online workspace for these activities.

<https://www.ims.gov/grants/awarded/lg-252319-ols-22>