

Wendy Hysko, Director
Brownell Public Library

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TECHNOLOGY:

In late 2007, a group of approximately 15 libraries joined together in hopes to provide downloadable audiobook services to the State of Vermont. The Green Mountain Library Consortium was officially born in 2008 as a result of these meetings. ListenUp! Vermont was the inaugural project of GMLC, initially bringing together over 80 public and school libraries to provide downloadable audiobooks via Overdrive. In the same year, VOKAL, the Vermont Organization of Koha Automated Libraries was formed, dedicated to creating a shared catalog and Integrated Library System. It launched its first three circulating libraries in 2010, and now has 59 member libraries. Mango, an individualized language learning service available to patrons for use at home, is another service facilitated by GMLC. This online service provides visual and auditory learning in over 60 languages. Finally, after a lengthy feasibility study, GMLC launched a statewide interlibrary loan delivery service in 2016, with 78 participating libraries. The service quickly grew to over 100 libraries and was adopted by the Department of Libraries, as an essential service. Though Vermonters are known for their fierce independence, this consortium proves that working together has its advantages.

This is especially true for Vermont's smallest, rural libraries. Bucolic communities love their libraries, but they often fail to fund them adequately. Staff are not paid a livable wage. This results in high staff turnover, which is a huge deal when you run a one-person library. Institutional knowledge can be lost with each changing of the guard. Often times these librarians have little to no training in information science or technology. So, in addition to being asked to do an exorbitant amount of work for too little pay; they are now responsible for keeping on top of the library's technology needs. To date there are four VOKAL libraries still operating on an EZ Proxy system, and 54 GMLC members are still in need of being transitioned off this old legacy system, which requires thousands of dollars each year, and three organizations to keep it hanging on by a tenuous thread. Upgrading to a session initiated protocol (SIP) server is needed because it actually logs into the system and authenticates the patron's account, instead of just accepting any barcode within a specific range, making for a more secure transaction. Many Vermont libraries have chosen less robust, but more affordable ILSs that do not accommodate SIP. They will be transitioned to Universal Login Manager (ULM) that requires more manual updates by the library, but is a more secure system to protect patron privacy with passwords. In equal measure, patrons want digital media, but they are unwilling to update their current devices to ones that support the ever-changing technology. As a state, we still struggle with broadband availability. By looking at the issue of technology, we are shining a bright light on the dichotomy that haunts Vermont—inequitable service models.

Consortiums like GMLC have worked hard to bridge the gaps they find amongst member libraries, but state support and funding are needed. There is huge range in education levels, technologically speaking—the state must step up and provide more robust training to bridge these divides. Technology is not going away and support to tech services must become a priority. Communication needs to be improved, from both directions. Completing the annual report cannot be optional. Lack of state funding is holding Vermont libraries back from obtaining true equity of services. Libraries have managed to keep their heads above water during these trying times, but it's time for state government to recognize the value public libraries offer to the communities they serve; it's time for state funding.