

Summary Report to District Council at MLA

Evaluation and Restructuring of the Maine State Library Consulting Services

November 15, 2016

Background on the Maine Regional Library System:

The Maine Regional Library System (MRLS) was established in 1973. In Title 27 the Maine Library Commission is given the authority to divide the state into as many districts as the commission determines and that each district shall have a council.

§113. Library districts

The Maine Library Commission shall divide the State into as many districts as the commission determines are required and shall establish or modify the geographical boundaries of each district.

§114. District council

Each library district shall have an advisory council which shall be known as the district council. [1973, c. 626, §6

§117. District consultants

The State Librarian, with the advice of the district council, shall appoint a staff member, or contract with an area reference and resource center, to provide district consultant services to one or more districts.

The state was divided into three regional districts to serve all library types (public, school, academic and special). The Northeastern Maine Library District (NMLD) serving Aroostook, Hancock, Knox, Penobscot, Piscataquis, Waldo, and Washington counties, the Central Maine Library District (CMLD) serving Androscoggin, Franklin, Kennebec, Lincoln, Oxford, Sagadahoc, Somerset counties and the Southern Maine Library District (SMLD) serving Cumberland, York and selected Oxford county towns (Brownfield, Denmark, Fryeburg, Hiram, and Lovell). At that time, the decisions regarding district size was determined by population as well as available funding for personnel at the Maine State Library.

This model is now 43 years old. A paper entitled **Maine's Regional Library System: A History** was presented by Robert C. Woodward on February 24, 1999, at the Bangor Public Library during a meeting of the Executive Boards from the Central, Northeastern, and Southern Maine Library Districts. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the history and future of the Maine Regional Library System. Mr. Woodward was the first Chair of the Maine Library Commission, and a former director of the Bangor Public Library. This was the 25th anniversary of the MRLS. It can be assumed that no changes resulted from that meeting and discussion and at the time the conclusion was "The Regional Library Systems Act has worked remarkably well" but "There is still some unfinished business - a statewide borrower's card, for instance. Many libraries do not tie into the system. They seldom use interlibrary loan services and they seldom call for reference help. What can be done to widen and improve access to library services for residents of those Maine towns?" It was noted in the 1999 paper that Maine libraries "per capita expenditures and circulation activity are above the median for all states." Unfortunately, today we find that we are below in the national averages in both per capita and expenditures and circulation according to the latest national PLS Survey. "Regional library districts" in Maine did not develop and grow in the same way most regional systems grew nationally – organized around a centrally managed and shared ILS for all the libraries in the region along with ILL and shared card activities.

Much has changed since 1973 and the report in 1999 including:

- **Technology** (email, the Internet, video conferencing)
- **ILS** (the creation of Minerva and MILS; libraries using their own systems, their own OPACs)
- **Statewide Online Catalog** (MaineCat - Interlibrary Loan could not be accomplished without the three ARRCs because libraries had no access to collections and online catalogs)
- **Interlibrary Loan** use has increased dramatically and continues to grow. ARRC services filling ILL requests for libraries not participating in MaineCat is vital to Maine libraries.

The 1999 paper addressed the infrastructure more than the work of the consultants. The paper stated: “Local library staffs are better prepared through the support offered by the District Consultants.” The role of the district consultants has changed along with the changes that have occurred in libraries. The initial intent was to educate, promote and develop interlibrary loan and the use of ARRC reference services in Maine’s public libraries. The Council meetings purpose (as interpreted by Title 27) was to provide the opportunity for the flow of information back and forth from the Maine State Library and the Maine Library Commission. The roles of the regional consultants, district councils, district executive boards and their relationships and focus have undergone significant change. The expansion of continuing education for librarians has been a result of the rapid changes in librarianship and library services. Maine’s unique library governance (57% of Maine public libraries are private/non-profit institutions with the balance being municipal departments) and high rate of public library directors without a library degree (72%) have created needs for training and consulting that are not the norm nationally. Add population sizes, vast geography, lack of regional or county systems built around an ILS and services plus the lack of direct state aid and Maine unique library challenges set it apart nationally.

The addition and evolution of statewide consultants in E-rate/Technology and Early Literacy demonstrated the need for focused “specialty” assistance from the state library that grew beyond what a “generalist” could answer. These statewide specialists could help both small and large libraries as well as scale the delivery of their assistance to size and ability. More and more the district consultants were consulting with other MSL staff when faced with questions beyond their realm of expertise. It became apparent that Maine libraries had expectations for more in-depth knowledge from MSL library staff. Discomfort grew as libraries consulted with another regional consultant on a special topic and consultants felt inadequate if they did not have the knowledge to provide all consulting services needed by their region. At the State Library level, it is difficult to find and hire a “generalist” today who is equipped to handle all questions from a geographic region. It is more logical to hire librarians with specialties and train them in some of the “generalist” skills. It is not financially viable to employ a cadre of specialists plus three or more regional consultants. The districts had never been created equally. Population made sense from an infrastructure viewpoint but did not from a consulting services delivery model. The NMLD was too vast and the needs from libraries serving small populations statewide were different. The inequities of the original district configurations when viewed by number of libraries and geography grew more obvious as training and consulting needs evolved. Maine is very rural and 70% of our libraries serve populations 5,000 and under.

We see the discussion about regional consultants versus specialists happening nationally. In September 2016, the South Carolina State Library advertised for an **Equity & Inclusion Consultant** “a position created in response to the growing call of South Carolina public libraries for knowledge and guidance on issues of access and inclusion, this position will promote and support accessible services, resources and programs, and improved staff skills for working with the state’s diverse population. The specialist trend is growing nationally and we believe that specialist consultants will benefit Maine more than regional consultants.

District	Population	# Public Libraries
CMLD	403,545	89
NMLD	434,637	117
SMLD	491,146	61



Process

The process initially began with the Commission’s Statewide Shared Resources Subcommittee tasked with studying the Maine Regional Library System. After two meetings it was determined logical to look at the District Consultant model because MSL staff felt changes were necessary and had already discussed with some depth. With the recommendation of the committee, Library Development set out to craft a survey, look at the data, hold regional meetings and analyze the results from both. Our intent was to change the model but not without having a discussion with libraries statewide. Many comments from libraries prior to the survey indicated there was a desire at the local library level to move from the

generalist to specialist. The survey and regional meetings were intended to widen that discussion, ask for input on the change and allay fears about changing models.

The **MSL Consulting Services Survey for Public Libraries** was distributed online in October 2015. We had 173 respondents from all counties and library sizes in Maine. After holding a session about the change and survey results at MLA we determined that in spring 2016 we would hold regional meetings to discuss changes and receive feedback face to face with librarians across the state. We held 15 regional meetings including the MASL Spring Symposium.

Regional Meeting Schedule

County	Library	Date
Kennebec County	Maine State Library	3/15/2016
Lincoln County/Sagadahoc County	Topsham Public Library	3/18/2016
Cumberland County	Falmouth Public Library	3/22/2016
Penobscot County	Bangor Public Library	3/28/2016
York County	Springvale Public Library	3/29/2016
Franklin County	Carrabassett Valley Public Library	3/31/2016
Knox County/Waldo County	Belfast Free Public Library	4/4/2016
Washington County	Porter Memorial Library (Machias)	4/11/2016
Aroostook County	Washburn Memorial Library	4/13/2016
Piscataquis County	Thompson Free/Dover-Foxcroft	4/26/2016
Somerset County	Pittsfield Public Library	4/27/2016
Oxford County	Norway Public Library	4/29/2016
MASL Spring Symposium	Brewer High School	4/30/2016
Hancock County	Ellsworth Public Library	5/9/2016
Androscoggin County	Auburn Public Library	5/10/2016

We had 147 librarians and trustees attend the regional meetings. At the completion of all the meeting we gathered the feedback forms and our notes from each meeting. The results were clear from discussions, feedback forms and notes that there was very strong support for this effort. There were certainly a few concerns but no deep disapproval at the proposed change. Librarian concerns were focused on the lack of a personal relationship with a consultant and the fear that small, rural libraries would be left out or ignored in this new model. The fact that MSL came to 14 areas to cover the state geography was highly appreciated and voices expressed a hope that MSL would deliver more services regionally - (meetings, discussions, CE and demonstrations) after the service model change.

Actions in response to concerns raised at meetings and in the survey are being met in two ways

1. The NMLD open position should be filled by a "Small, Rural library Specialist" whose focus will be on libraries serving populations 5,000 and under.
2. Library Development specialist staff would also serve as liaisons at the county level. Each specialist will be assigned 35-40 libraries (county/region). There will be a dedicated contact person for each public library.

For school libraries, we know needs are unmet. The DOE School Consultant focus has continued to be absorbed by work in the MLTI program. Specialists in early literacy, technology and STEM have branched out to serve school librarians. Our State Data Coordinator is working on a school library survey for 2017 to provide much needed data for them to use. Our hope is that MSL's budget request for a school library consultant will be approved for FY18/19. Otherwise, we will continue our efforts through the current specialists and explore new ways to support school librarians.

District Executive Board Meetings

The executive board retreats were held and all boards held discussions about the new model and made recommendations about the creation of one statewide advisory board. The recommendations varied as far as size and representation in all discussions. From the discussions it seemed clear that the best way forward would be that the first statewide board should consist of those serving on the current three boards to work out details on number of members,

board makeup, focus, purpose, etc. The depth of knowledge, expertise and understanding on the current boards we believe is a key element to developing the new statewide board.

Recommendations to the Maine Library Commission

Our recommendations to the Commission for action are:

1. Create one Statewide Maine Library District
 - a. The district will have 9 service regions – arranged by single or combined counties but still aligned with the same ARRCs as to not disturb ILL and other current ARRC services
 - b. Each region will have an assigned MSL Specialist assigned as the liaison.
2. Create one statewide advisory board (initial board to consist of volunteer members from CMLD, NMLD, SMLD boards) who will meet to determine best board size and library type distribution and make recommendations to the Commission.
3. Continue with the 2 required council meetings consistent with Title 27 – one held at MLA each fall and one in the spring with rotating regional locations.
4. MSL staff will provide regional meetings and trainings in the 10 locations sending a team of specialists to an area at least once a year.

Proposed Service Regions



Region Number	County	Staff Liaison for Region
1	Cumberland	Deb Clark
1	York	Deb Clark
2	Franklin	To Be Hired
2	Oxford	To Be Hired
3	Androscoggin	Stephanie Zurinski
3	Kennebec	Stephanie Zurinski
3	Sagadahoc	Stephanie Zurinski
4	Knox	To Be Hired
4	Lincoln	To Be Hired
5	Piscataquis	Chris Dorman
5	Somerset	Chris Dorman
6	Penobscot	Jenny Melvin
6	Waldo	Jenny Melvin
7	Hancock	Jared Leadbetter
8	Washington	Lisa Shaw
9	Aroostook	Lisa Shaw