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What Makes the Maine State Library Unique?

By Linda Lord

Each state library is unique. The Maine State Library (MSL) differs from other Maine libraries and from some other state libraries. The MSL's service model requires it to provide services to other libraries in the state; to deliver and provide resources to the citizens of the state; to serve other state agencies; and to be a conduit with federal agencies and the Maine State Legislature.

The Maine State Library is a state agency under the executive branch. Oversight of the library is the responsibility of a 17-member commission, the Maine Library Commission. The 17 commissioners are appointed by the governor for five-year terms and most represent a specific constituency. The exceptions are the Bangor and Portland area reference and resource center directors who are *ex officio* members. The commission helps establish guidelines, policies, and rules that govern services other libraries in Maine may receive from the Maine State Library. In furtherance of this, the Maine Library Commission, along with staff of the Maine State Library, established a working strategic plan to help guide the library's long-term goals. This plan includes a vision statement: "The Maine State Library contributes to the prosperity of the state and the quality of life of its people through access to knowledge, ideas and inspiration" and a mission statement: "The Maine State Library will advance and promote library services and collection resources for all of Maine."

The Maine State Library is divided primarily into two operating divisions. The Library Development Division provides for the development of all types of libraries throughout the state. Specific programs

include the Maine Regional Library System (consultant services, direct free walk-in service, interlibrary loan, and federal and state aid for public libraries) and special services (books-by-mail, video services, talking books and large-print books, school library/media services, Maine InfoNet, and electronic database licensing).

The Reader and Information Services Division provides for the delivery of quality information, reference, and loan services to state agency personnel and the general public. This includes supporting and complementing the collections of all types of libraries throughout the state. Specific programs include reference, circulation, government documents, collection services, and interlibrary loan.

SERVICES TO LIBRARIES

The Maine State Library provides many critical services to Maine libraries. These services help libraries to build their capacity to deliver robust services to their own communities. Although there are many services the public libraries rely upon in their day-to-day work, there are a few that stand out as crucial to their success. The MARVEL collection of databases, a collaborative project with the University of Maine, Colby, Bates, and Bowdoin colleges, and the Maine Telecommunications Educational Access Fund (MTEAF), is provided to all libraries in the state, giving them all access to more than 60 databases. A van delivery service provides low-cost transportation for the thousands of books that circulate between libraries each year.

The state library provides a number of other services to libraries such as district consultant services, continuing education, and support for small group regional meetings of specialty groups. It also provides technology support for all libraries (e.g., E-rate, automation, and distance learning) and provides funds in support of positions for Maine InfoNet. The state librarian is a permanent member of the InfoNet Board.

SERVICES TO CITIZENS

The Maine State Library maintains a core collection and special collections that are available for

the public, with a focus on Maine history and literature. MSL is the primary repository for current and historical state government publications. It houses Gov. Percival Baxter's papers; Maine town reports (including online access); historical and contemporary maps of the state, counties, and municipalities; an extensive genealogy collection; and microfilm collections of Maine papers, census records, and Sanborn insurance maps.

The Maine State Library operates as a public library, providing a free library card to any Maine resident. Among its many public services, it provides downloadable audio and e-books; has wireless connectivity, public computers, a digital scanning lab, video-conferencing, and equipment for loan; provides online and telephone references for all Maine residents and libraries; and offers classes and other activities, including tours.

SERVICES TO UNDERSERVED CITIZENS

The Maine State Library Outreach Services is a member of the Consortia of User Libraries (CUL), which is dedicated to creating a circulation program suited to the unique needs of a library for the blind and physically handicapped. It is the official talking books library for the state of Maine. The talking books program originates at the National Library for the Blind, a division of the Library of Congress. It is available to any resident who is visually and/or physically impaired. Talking books can be loaned to schools with eligible students. Outreach Services also provides large-print books to libraries for local circulation.

BARD is a national web site that people in the talking books program can use to find books in digital format. These books can then be downloaded to patrons' computers and then to their digital players. Institutions can now borrow digital players from MSL. BARD accounts will be approved for institutions in a month or so. Blank cartridges may be purchased from the Perkins School for the Blind or a USB drive may be used. Outreach Services also has the capacity to produce recordings for other state agencies to better serve blind citizens.

The Books by Mail program provides postage-free homebound service to Maine libraries.

SERVICES TO STATE AGENCIES

State agencies have access to most of the services available to the citizens of the state. Beyond these services, library staff will, upon request, provide in-depth research and consult on information resources and provide news and subject tracking. The Maine State Library houses and makes accessible state documents and works with state agencies to ensure their publications are permanently on record at the state library or via Maine State Documents, a digital repository.

The Maine State Library is unique in the state. Moreover, across the nation, each version of a state library is special to its location and mission. The services the Maine State Library offers to the public libraries and to the citizens of the state of Maine set it apart and make it indispensable. The library, through its staff, is highly visible throughout the state and adds to the collaborative work that makes library services in Maine responsive to all users. 🐟



Linda Lord has been the Maine State Librarian since 2009. Previously, she served as the instructional technology coordinator for the Maine Department of Education and as a social studies teacher and middle school/high school librarian.

She serves on several American Library Association national committees.