

Memo

To: Montana State Library Commission

From: Sarah McHugh, Director Statewide Library Resources

Date: January 22, 2015

Re: **Statewide consulting survey results**

MSL made changes last year to the way in which consulting services are provided through the three statewide library consultants (Suzanne Reymer, Lauren McMullen and Pam Henley). These consultants are now made available to libraries when needed, based on a consulting by demand approach. While they are always available for individual consulting library visits, new library director trainings and board development, they no longer have assigned library territories. All Statewide Library Resources Library Development (SLR-LD) staff are able to respond to a basic level of consulting requests through guiding librarians to existing resources available on the Statewide Library Resources portal. All SLR-LD staff are considered consultants in the area of library development, through this approach.

In addition, the three consultants now serve as specialists in particular library development areas identified by MSL and the Montana library community and based on changing library development needs of Montana librarians, the focus of statewide projects and MSL's strategic plan. Currently, these areas include e-rate, digital literacy, bandwidth development, community outreach and partnerships, lifelong learning, access to digital content and assistance with the Discover IT search tool.

During Fall, 2014, we solicited feedback from public library directors regarding the changes to MSL consulting services, through a Statewide Consulting Survey. We asked, among other questions:

- If directors thought our consulting services had improved, declined or stayed the same under the new approach
- Whether or not they have benefitted from the new emphasis on specialty areas for the consultants

- How often they felt it was beneficial to receive an in person visit from a consultant
- Whether or not it was important to them to have a particular consultant assigned to their library
- Whether they felt their library benefits from being able to contact any member of the SLR staff with basic consulting questions

45 people responded to the survey and each respondent answered every question. 62% of those responding felt that consulting services remained the same under the new approach. 18% felt services have improved and 20% felt they had declined. Follow up comments about either improvement or decline in our services show that some directors miss having an assigned consultant who they know they can call and who consistently visits their library. Developing a long term relationship with a consultant was seen as important in at least four follow up responses. Others felt that all the consultants and other MSL staff were always available when needed and that an assigned consultant was not important. Others have not used the consulting services at MSL.

38% of respondents felt they had benefitted from the new emphasis on specialty areas for the three consultants. 18% did not and 44% didn't know, primarily because they had not requested assistance in the specialty areas. One particular area of consulting need continues to be library law.

47% of respondents are comfortable just getting in touch with either the consultants or one of the other SLR-LD staff when they needed assistance. Annual in person visits were nevertheless viewed as valuable to many who offered additional comments.

62% of respondents did not feel it was important to have an assigned consultant, as long as they receive consulting services in a timely manner in a variety of ways (phone, email, online meeting, in person visit). 18% felt it was important to have an assigned consultant and 20% had no preference. However, some follow up comments in particular show the value of assigning territories to the consultants:

“Having a shared history and relationship was a major strength of the assigned consultants—I could just ask my questions without explaining the situation from square one...”

“I think having a designated consultant builds a better relationship....”

Finally, over 73% of respondents felt their library benefitted from the wider approach to basic consulting assistance that MSL has put in place in the last year. The sense that any member of the SLR-LD staff can guide a director to relevant resources in all areas of the library consulting and then refer them to a specific library consultant when needed is obviously appreciated by public library directors. That said, the responses to

this question included comments that it was time saving and efficient to start with an assigned, known consultant for specific questions.

The State Librarian, the three consultants and I are currently discussing the survey results. We are particularly focusing on these tasks:

- Re-establishing assigned consulting territories that would be based on the existing six library federations, and rotating these assignments every three years.
- Creating a standardized approach to visits to new library directors that will include the number of visits needed within the first year and topics for each visit
- Developing a shared understanding of when travel versus online options are required, with the awareness that there will be increasing use of online meeting tools to provide some of our consulting services
- Continuing to track the specific workload related to the three specialty areas and the impact on other consulting demands