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February 21, 2017

I am writing to you as Chair of the Montana State Library Commission, and as a member of the Commission's new Funding Task Force. I am writing to you about money, or rather, Montana libraries' lack of it.

You count on the State Library to supply your library and your users with a variety of information resources and services, for example:

- The Montana Shared Catalog
- Montana's group OCLC contract
- Montana Library2Go
- Courier Alliance
- Montana Memory Project
- Lifelong learning programming such as the Ready2Read project
- Natural Resource Information System
- Digitized state government publications
- Montana geographic information

Together these information resources and library services form a useful information infrastructure, one that economically offers valuable content and library services to Montanans and Montana libraries.

These information resources and these services are, to varying degrees, expensive. Worth it, but expensive. We have paid for them using a mixture of state general funds, Coal Severance Tax revenues, federal Library Services and Technology Act funds, and of course, funds from your library's (and many other libraries') budgets. Routine cost increases often threatened our ability to pay for these services. While costs increase, many of our state or federal revenue sources fluctuate or are in decline. As is, perhaps, your library's local funding. Finally, some Montana libraries would like to offer their users these shared content and services, but cannot afford to do so. We think all Montanans deserve great library service.

We continue to believe there is great value in pursuing statewide funding for statewide information resources and infrastructure. In fact, we strongly suspect we could do more together to ensure Montana libraries have the information resources and the services our users need. The problem is, how do we pay for it?

'Paying for it' is what our task force is studying, initially focusing on two questions:

1. What do these shared library services currently cost Montana libraries? How much money do we have to raise? And,
2. What opportunities exist to acquire increased funding and more stable revenue sources (now and in the future)?

We're looking for sufficient funding, from stable revenue sources, to fund Montana's statewide information infrastructure and to support Montana libraries' missions. We think this will free up local funds to address local needs, and make it possible for our smallest libraries to provide their users with the mix of statewide information resources and library services enjoyed by many other Montana libraries.

We're interested in discussing any strategy that shows promise, and we look forward to hearing your ideas. Initially, we've begun the process by considering the possibility of a statewide foundation whose sole purpose would be to support this shared information infrastructure. We are not looking to compete with your library's local foundation's fundraising efforts. Instead, with your guidance and cooperation, we are looking for ways to assist your foundation's and your library's efforts by, in essence, adding an additional revenue stream to your library's budget — a revenue stream supporting those statewide information resources and services that your library has chosen to incorporate into its plan of service.

We plan to begin this discussion at the 'Conversation with the Commission' session on March 30, at the Montana Library Association's annual meeting in Billings. We will also discuss statewide funding strategies during the six spring Federation meetings¹ held throughout Montana.

We'd like to talk with your library's foundation. We'll be in touch, but please contact us if you have initial questions, or you have a time you'd like to meet. Jennie Stapp, Montana's State Librarian², is our contact person.

Thanks, I look forward to speaking with you soon.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce Newell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bruce Newell
Chair, Montana State Library Commission

cc. Jennie Stapp, State Librarian

¹

http://docs.msl.mt.gov/Central_Services/Commission_Councils/Commission/Archive/2017/02/20/170208workplan_calendar.pdf

² Phone (406) 444-3116, Email jstapp2@mt.gov