

Montana Library Card – Brief Discussion of Opportunities and Barriers Fall 2018

History

- The concept of a Montana Library Card has been around for many years. There was a law within the Montana Code Annotated that encouraged the implementation of a statewide library card. It was changed in 2009 to [MCA 22-1-329: Statewide library access](#).
- Over the years various libraries in Montana have partnered to provide their shared patrons with access to library materials from different libraries.

Why consider a Montana Library Card?

- Montanans have equitable access to materials. It increases the number of items they can access.
- It makes it simpler for Montanans to have access to a library wherever they are.
- A ready-made infrastructure, built on common policies and standards, to support a Montana Library Card, means that Montana libraries can spend more time with their patrons, and in their communities, and less time managing systems.

Proposal/Working Definition

- The State Library is proposing that the time is right for a Montana Library Card. We define a Montana Library Card as:
 - A patron can walk into any public library and have access to any materials at that library whether or not they have a card at that library.
 - It includes the ability for a patron to remotely access circulating materials from any other Montana library.
 - This should include content that is freely accessible such as government information and materials in the public domain.
 - By “remotely access” we mean the ability to place a hold on an item from a resource sharing group and/or requesting the item via ILL and/or accessing items via online platforms.
 - It avoids multiple cards.
 - It would be ideal to include academic libraries in this proposal.

Barriers to this proposal

- There may be libraries who do not see value in sharing their materials with patrons from other libraries, especially when those materials were paid for through local tax dollars and/or by local friends groups.
- Librarians and board members may be concerned about how it will impact their statistics. How will the usage of this material be counted? Will it be counted as a usage stat for the library loaning the item or for the patron’s “home” library?
- Libraries want to protect new items and/or other collections.
- Patrons may ask for multiple cards, because they want a card at a library. We would then have duplicate user records.

- If a patron loses items, who collects the money? Does the user library collect? Or the library where the patron checked out the items?
- This proposal becomes trickier when libraries use different integrated library systems.
- E-content – some libraries have local subscriptions that couldn't easily be shared statewide.
- E-content is dynamic. Static links become hard to maintain. We would need to have links directly into the content.
- We and other Montana libraries may not have enough staffing nor the right technology to implement a seamless Montana Library Card for patrons.
- There are concerns about maintaining local control.
- The current courier infrastructure may not be robust enough.

Moving forward – short-term, mid-term, and long-term

- Short-term ideas
 - Patrons of MSC libraries can physically be in another library. Their card would work.
 - We could change everything in an hour to remove any software barriers. Libraries don't have to change their circulation policies.
 - We don't have to have one single library card.
 - We can include Digital Library content which includes state publications, Overdrive, and other information resources.
- Mid-term things that could be achieved
 - Connecting different buckets of e-content in a way that makes it discoverable by patrons. There may be existing solutions to this problem.
 - We need to consider ideal library policies for implementing this long-term. Patrons need libraries to agree to an interlocal agreement that is clear and concise.
- Long-term plans
 - Subscription databases and locally curated content – leased books, local e-books – would need to be handled. Ideally, we would have a statewide contract for things like Hoopla, etc.
 - MSC vs. Non-MSCL libraries – we couldn't provide support for non-MSCL libraries although we could open the SIP port of those libraries maintaining their own SIP connections.
 - We need standards. We should work towards every library having the same circulation policies. It's much easier for the patrons.
 - We need to increase funding or raise new funding sources to support this program. This might eliminate the need for out-of-county cards. Could we ask for funding for the existing state law?
 - Statewide RFID would really help.

Questions/items to consider

- Do we have any data about patron preferences? What do patrons want in terms of the arrangement of the library? What do they want in terms of checkout time?

- What is the impact on libraries? What are their concerns?
- What do we need to do policy wise?
- What do we need to do technically to make it happen?
- What would it cost to do something like this?
- How will we raise funds to support this over the long-term? Are the libraries paying into this?
- What data do we currently have that might support this effort and show libraries and their funding bodies why there is value in sharing?
- What is the impact on individual library and Library Development staff? Who will need to be a part of this effort?
 - MSC staff will need to assist with the implementation.
 - Consultants will need to be a part of this and interpreting technical issues.
- Identify interim steps for libraries to join an effort like this – should it be a requirement that the library is a member of the MSC? There are only 14 public libraries that are not in the MSC.