Memo

To: Network Advisory Council

From: Suzanne Reymer, Statewide Consulting Librarian and Tracy Cook, Lead Consulting & Learning Librarian

Date: October 21, 2022

Re: **Updates from Technolgoy CSC**

Here is a summary of what discussions have happened within the technology core services committee. The committee is struggling and has had poor attendance at meetings. Staff believe the committee would benefit from additional guidance from the NAC. Technology includes so many elements that it would help for the NAC to identify some priority areas for the committee. The items below give you a sense of what the committee has discussed. Staff would appreciate feedback on the items and your thoughts on where committee members can focus their energy.

Initially, the committee talked about the state of broadband connectivity in Montana and about various digital equity initiatives. Staff looked at it as trying to bring people up to speed on some of the issues. And while the committee had some interesting discussions, staff doesn't think much progress has been made in coming up with ideas for improving broadband or digital equity. The committee gave some feedback on the question about what sufficient technology would look like for their libraries. That was shared previously with NAC.

We received a suggestion from NAC on the need for IT support in libraries. Suzanne Reymer informally polled library directors during summer site visits. Their current levels of tech support and need are wide ranging from needing little or no outside support due to good IT support from city/county or staff/volunteers to needing a variety of hardware, software and network support. Coming up with any solutions would require a survey of libraries as to their needs followed by an RFI to get an idea on pricing and potential service providers. If directed by the NAC, staff can certainly add these to their workload.

One of the programs staff finds intriguing is that of digital navigators. In many states individuals are hired to assist library patrons with tasks ranging from learning how to use a computer to completing various applications. This could help take up some of the burdens of digital literacy support from library staff. It could be staffed by volunteers or perhaps utilize some digital equity dollars. The main obstacles at present are organizing such a program, coming up with training, and coordination.

While attempting to complete the assigned evaluation framework, staff realized it would be very difficult to bring committee members up to speed on a program like E-Rate enough to evaluate it adequately. So, Suzanne Reymer is working on completing the evaluation and will share it with the committee. Currently, she suspects she will make a recommendation that a consultant be hired to assist with E-Rate filing.

Staff have discussed the possibility that this committee may not have the right members to achieve its goals. We were looking for representation from all library types. However, many of our programs are focused on public libraries. But without clear goals, it's difficult to know who would be better qualified. Technology is a very broad topic area. We're attempting to look at this from 20,000 feet while even library systems specialists are more accustomed to working with those devices and tools used by their specific libraries.

Staff look forward to whatever direction NAC might be able to provide.