



# Recommendations to the Department of Libraries Related to Updating the Minimum Standards for Vermont Public Libraries

The Vermont Department of Libraries has Minimum Standards for Vermont Public Libraries (the Standards) which went into effect on November 1, 1986. The Standards provide public libraries across Vermont with “criteria and direction for assessing and upgrading local library service” and “provide a base from which libraries in even the smallest Vermont communities can proceed to improve service.”

(<https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/documents/Scanned1986Standards.pdf>)

The Standards are intended to serve as a baseline for all public libraries in the state, and many libraries have long ago surpassed the minimums enumerated within them. There are also many public libraries that still do not meet the Standards and that do not have the means to do so, despite having had thirty-seven years to take action.

While much time has passed since they were implemented, the Standards went through the state’s Rulemaking process, were approved by the Vermont Legislative Administrative Rules Committee, and still have the force and effect of law.

The Minimum Standards for Vermont Public Libraries emphasize four central themes:

- public service;
- public access;
- interlibrary loan cooperation; and
- community involvement.

The Standards make clear that public libraries exist to serve the needs of the community and should draw their support from and engage their community, spend resources responsibly and transparently, and cooperate with other libraries to broaden their services. The Standards emphasize the responsibility of the library director for the overall operation of the public library, and the role of the library board in representing the community, developing library policy, and evaluating the work of the library director and the library.



However, the document clearly states that “Meeting standards is purely voluntary. The Department of Libraries provides service to all public libraries, whether they meet the Standards or not.”

There is no penalty to public libraries that do not meet the standards and there is no requirement that public libraries meet the standards to receive support from the Department.

The Standards have not been updated in thirty-seven years, during which time public library services have continued to evolve.

The Working Group was charged by the Legislature with sharing “recommendations for updating the statutes, rules, standards, and the governance structures of Vermont libraries to ensure equitable access for Vermont residents, efficient use of resources, and quality in the provision of services.”

**The Working Group recommends that the Department begin the process of updating the Standards by the end of December 2024 and recommends the Department include the following topics in the Updated Standards:**

- All public libraries should have policies on Intellectual Freedom, Collection Development, Materials Reconsideration, and Programming and these policies should be updated at a regular interval (e.g., every 5 years). These policies should be developed and adopted within a non-discrimination framework that explicitly prohibits discrimination based on race, color, national origin, gender, sex, disability, religion, and other protected characteristics, applicable to all library services and activities;
- All public libraries should provide free internet access and public computing; and
- All public libraries should provide free Wi-Fi to the public 24/7.

**The Working Group further recommends that the Department consider the inclusion of the following topics in the Updated Standards:**

- ongoing continuing education for library staff to maintain and update skills;
- recommended library building sizes based on the size of the community served;
- Recommended collection sizes based on size of the community served;
- recommended minimum programming levels relative to the size of community served;
- recommendation that library buildings include meeting and program spaces;



- recommendation to inspect library buildings and property annually;
- recommendation to develop facilities maintenance and improvement plans including emergency preparedness and climate resilience;
- recommendation to update the level of municipal tax support for public libraries; and
- strongly recommend ongoing trustee training.