



Knowledge for Life.
Knowledge for All.

August 16, 2023

Working Group for the Status of Libraries in Vermont
c/o The Vermont Department of Libraries
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Dear Working Group for the Status of Libraries in Vermont,

My name is Mary Danko and I am the Library Director for the Fletcher Free Library located in Burlington, Vermont. The Fletcher Free Library was founded in 1873 and moved into a beautiful Carnegie building built in 1904. In 1981, a new addition increased the size of the library to over 46,000 square feet and included a beautiful 3-story glass curtain wall. The library had over 240,000 visits and over 380,000 circulations in 2018. The library has a budget that is over \$2.6M, has 27 employees and is open 7 days a week.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to write to you today on the importance of significant advancements and challenges in the evolution of public libraries in relation to technology. The expansion of public library services has been a continuous journey, with technology being a key driver of transformation over the last few decades.

Equitable Access and Technological Expansion

Public libraries have historically aimed to provide equitable services to our communities. In recent years, the rapid expansion of technology has further emphasized this commitment. As we embrace technology, our goal remains steadfast: to ensure that all members of our community can benefit from the opportunities and resources technology offers and to offer, free and equitable access to technology.

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Internet Connectivity: A Foundation

Internet connectivity is the cornerstone of our technological services. Its quality and reliability are crucial for both staff operations and public services. Public libraries may offer a variety of computers, tailored to specific needs, such as public computer access online catalog computers and self-checkout computers just to name a few. Our Library manages over 75 computers as well as a myriad of other technology equipment including printers, mobile devices (iPads), a microfilm machine, a laptop & hotspot lending library, and more. In addition, our Wi-Fi services extend both within the library premises and to areas outside, accommodating patrons who access the internet from their devices. As we continue to see more and more patrons streaming content for workforce development, etc., we know we will need to keep up with the required bandwidths for these kinds of uses.

Diverse Services and Support

Our libraries provide essential services through our technology centers, equipped with desktop computers, scanners, fax machines, printers, and of course, free access to the internet. These centers cater to various needs, from job applications and job/career research to accessing social services. Librarians offer both formal and informal technology support, conducting classes on topics ranging from basic word processing to advanced coding. We also offer constant, daily, personalized support to individuals on their various technology needs. This personalized assistance is critical for patrons of all ages and backgrounds, as they navigate the digital landscape.

Ensuring Online Safety and Literacy

Librarians play a crucial role in educating patrons about online safety, information accuracy, and digital literacy. The diverse age groups we serve, from children to seniors, require ongoing guidance to navigate the complexities of the online world effectively.

The Need for Specialized Expertise

While librarians perform admirably in assisting patrons with technology, the evolving landscape demands specialized technology experts. These experts are essential not only for maintaining the technology infrastructure but also for staying ahead of emerging challenges and opportunities. Funding for continuous training and staffing expansion in this area is paramount.

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Managing Integrated Library Systems (ILS)

Integrated Library Systems (ILS) are intricate databases that manage patron information and our books & materials inventory. These systems underpin our lending and return processes. The expertise to manage and optimize these systems is vital to delivering seamless library services. We also use these systems to extract aggregate data to analyze how to best maintain our collections and how to best provide resources to our patrons.

Online Services and Digital Resources

Public libraries extend their reach through online services, including e-books, audiobooks, databases, and language learning platforms. The maintenance and management of these digital resources require ongoing technological expertise. This is important in several areas including the complexities of how we offer them, how we support them and how we maintain them.

Front-Facing Website: A Gateway to Services

Our websites serve as portals to the vast array of technological services we provide. These platforms cater to all age groups, offering value through engaging and informative content. Regular updates and adaptations are necessary to ensure accessibility and relevance.

The Road Ahead: Challenges and Opportunities

As we look ahead to the next decade, the challenges and opportunities posed by technology are vast for public libraries. The emergence of artificial intelligence promises to be a game-changer, necessitating preparation and adaptation. While libraries are diligently preparing for this shift, we require funding to sustain our hardware, expand our technology offerings, and provide ongoing training to our staff with technological expertise. We will need to expand our staff to be able to manage the growing demands.

In conclusion, the evolution of public libraries in the digital age is an ongoing journey. We are committed to providing equitable and accessible technological services to our community members. However, the challenges presented by this evolving landscape are significant. I write to you today to request your support in our efforts to maintain our technological infrastructure, expand our services, and equip & expand our staff with the expertise needed to navigate the complexities of the digital world.

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Thank you for your consideration.

Mary Danko
Library Director

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