Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont
Final Report

In May 2021, the Vermont State Legislature passed Act 66 (S.115) an act relating to making miscellaneous changes in education laws, which was signed by the Governor on June 7, 2021. This act created the Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont and charges the group with studying the statewide status of libraries and submitting a report on their studies to the House and Senate Committees on Education by November 1, 2023. The Working Group was formed with the goal of strengthening and supporting libraries of all sizes and improving library services for the public.

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Cover Image: Morristown Centennial Library's All Together Now banner
(photo courtesy of the library)

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Charge of the Working Group

In May 2021, the Vermont State Legislature passed [Act 66 (S.115)](#), an act relating to making miscellaneous changes in education laws, which was signed by Governor Scott on June 7, 2021. This act created the Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont and charges that body with studying the statewide status of libraries and submitting a report on their studies to the House and Senate Committees on Education by November 1, 2023.

From Sec. 1 WORKING GROUP ON THE STATUS OF LIBRARIES IN VERMONT; REPORT, the Act states the following:

a. Creation. There is created the Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont to study and report on the statewide status of Vermont's libraries. The Working Group is formed with the intent of strengthening and supporting libraries of all sizes and improving library services for the public.

b. Membership. The Working Group shall be composed of the following members:

1. the State Librarian;

2. the President of the Vermont Library Association or designee;

3. the Executive Director of the Vermont Humanities Council or designee;

4. three representatives of public libraries, who shall be from libraries of difference sizes and from different regions of the State, appointed by the State Librarian;

5. two representatives of public school libraries, who shall be from schools of different sizes and from different regions of the State, appointed by the Vermont School Library Association;

6. two representatives of college and university libraries, appointed by the President of the College and Special Libraries Section of the Vermont Library Association; and

7. one public library trustee, appointed by the President of the Friends and Trustees Section of the Vermont Library Association.

c. Powers and duties. The Working Group shall study:

1. library services for specific segments of the Vermont population, including senior citizens, individuals with disabilities, youths and children, immigrant and migrant communities, and people living in poverty.

2. the role that libraries play in emergency preparedness, cultural diversity and inclusion, public health and safety, community identity and resiliency, economic development, and access to public programs and services.

3. the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on library operations and services; and

4. the current overall status of Vermont libraries, which may include information related to programming, collections, facilities, technology, and staffing.

  A. Programming. The Working Group may study the types and frequency of library programs, attendance at library programs, and whether library programs are meeting community needs. The study of programming may include an assessment of public engagement and outreach surrounding library programming as well as the opportunities for nonlibrary programs and groups to access Vermont libraries.

  B. Collections. The Working Group may study the size and diversity of library holdings and assess the strengths and gaps in materials available to Vermonters. The study of collections may include an assessment of how libraries may best share resources across differing libraries and communities, whether libraries offer community-specific resources, and whether libraries maintain special collections or historical artifacts.

  C. Facilities. The Working Group may study whether library facilities and buildings could be improved with regard to energy efficiency, accessibility, flexibility, human health and safety, historic preservation, and intergenerational needs.

  D. Technology. The Working Group may study whether Vermont libraries have sufficient access to basic technological resources, cyber-security resources, high-speed Internet, electronic catalogs, interlibrary loan and other interoperable systems, and appropriate hardware and software.

  E. Staff. The Working Group may study staffing levels at Vermont libraries, whether staffing levels are sufficient to meet community needs, whether library staff compensation and benefits are sufficient, how libraries rely on volunteers, and what resources are available for workforce development and training of library staff.

d. Public input. As part of the study and report, the Working Group shall solicit feedback from the public and library users around the State. The Working Group

may examine models for library management and organization in other states, including the formation of statewide service networks.

e. Data to be used. The data used in the analysis of library services and operations may be from 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Post pandemic data may also be used to assess the status of library services and operations.

f. Consultation with the Board of Libraries. The Working Group may solicit feedback from the Board of Libraries.

g. Assistance. The Working Group shall have the administrative, technical, and legal assistance of the Department of Libraries

h. Report. On or before November 1, 2023, the Working Group shall submit a report to the House and Senate Committees on Education. The report shall contain:

    1. specific and detailed findings and proposals concerning the issues set forth in the information listed above;

    2. 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;

    3. recommendations related to the funding needs of Vermont libraries, including capital, ongoing, and special funding; and

    4. any other information or recommendations that the Working Group may deem necessary.

i. Meetings

    1. The State Librarian shall be the Chair of the Working Group.

    2. The Chair shall call the first meeting of the Working Group to occur within 45 days after the effective date of this act.

    3. A majority of the membership shall constitute a quorum.

    4. The Working Group shall cease to exist on December 1, 2023.

j. Compensation and reimbursement. Members of the Working Group shall be entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses as permitted under 32 V.S.A. § 1010 for not more than 12 meetings. These payments shall be made from monies appropriated to the Department of Libraries.

k. Appropriation. The sum of $12,000.00 is appropriated to the Department of Libraries from the General Fund in fiscal year 2022 for per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses for members of the working group.

Methodology

Established in 2021 by [Act 66 (S.115)](), the Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont was charged with studying the status of libraries in our state in order to strengthen and support libraries of all sizes, and to improve library services for the public. The Working Group was tasked with submitting a report of its findings and proposals to the House and Senate Committees on Education by November 1, 2023. Per Act 66 (S.115), the Working Group's report shall contain:

1. specific and detailed findings and proposals concerning the issues set forth in the information listed above;

2. 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;

3. recommendations related to the funding needs of Vermont libraries, including capital, ongoing, and special funding; and

4. any other information or recommendations that the Working Group may deem necessary.

The Working Group began its work on September 17, 2021, under the leadership of Assistant State Librarian for Information & Access Tom McMurdo, who at that time was serving as the Interim State Librarian. The agendas of the first three Working Group meetings comprised public comment on the topics of programming, collections, and facilities.

Catherine Delneo became Working Group Chair on February 13, 2022, when she assumed the role of State Librarian and Commissioner of the Department of Libraries. The Working Group established meetings on the 4th Friday of every other month starting Friday, September 17, 2021. Meetings were typically 5 hours in duration, with a break at midday for lunch. Each meeting of the Working Group focused on a topic specified in statute or on a specific Working Group administrative task. When necessary to address all areas of its scope, the Working Group added special meetings to its schedule.

From May 20, 2022, forward, Working Group meetings featured reports on the topic under consideration by Department of Libraries staff, a wide range of state and national experts in the field, and officials in state government. These reports were followed by

public comment, then meetings concluded with Working Group member discussion on the topic.

The Working Group convened seventeen meetings:

- Report of the Working Group - November 1, 2023

- Public Library Staffing and Salary Survey Report - September 22, 2023

- Recommendations and Working Group Report Writing - August 18, 2023

- Safety - July 28, 2023

- Library Structures and Organizations - May 26, 2023

- Intellectual Freedom - April 21, 2023 (Special Meeting)

- Social Services and Emergency Preparedness - March 24, 2023

- Inclusive Library Services - January 27, 2023

- Survey Development and Department Programming Overview - December 16, 2022

- Continuing Education - November 18, 2022

- Review of Learning and Future Plans - September 23, 2022

- Staffing - July 22, 2022

- Technology - May 20, 2022

- Facilities - March 25, 2022

- Collections - January 14, 2022

- Programming - November 12, 2021

- First Meeting - September 17, 2021

Being a public body, the Working Group adhered to open meeting law. Written comments were solicited prior to each topical meeting and were posted on the Working Group's webpages. In addition to making meeting agendas and meetings available to the public per open meeting law, the Working Group also posted full video recordings of its meetings on its webpage along with supporting documents and written comments to facilitate public participation in its work.

The Working Group received written comments from 129 individuals and organizations as well as two combined submissions from groups of school librarians and one combined submission from staff of an academic library. During its meetings, the Working Group heard oral comments from 81 individuals, reports from 12 experts, and Departmental reports on 13 topics. The Working Group commissioned a study on staffing and salaries of public libraries in Vermont to inform its recommendations. The Working Group's report was also informed by the Department's 2023 Public Library Broadband and Technology Survey Report. This extensive body of information is available to the public and the Legislature on the Working Group's webpages.

Department of Libraries staff provided written reports to the Working Group on each of the topics they presented during meetings. Individual Working Group members wrote draft summaries of the written and oral comments by Vermonters on each subject and summarized the recommendations of the Working Group for the Legislature and the Department.

These elements can all be found within this report, which Working Group members voted to approve at their meeting on October 13, 2023.

Executive Summary

Every Vermonter should have access to the benefits of a library, but the goal of equitable access to library service has yet to be met. The one constant throughline in community feedback, information shared by experts, and data on library services in Vermont shared with the Working Group is that access to library services in the state is inconsistent.

The Working Group heard that disparate levels of funding for public libraries around the state cause gross inequities in library services, including facilities, collections, and programs. The Working Group also heard that library staff and trustees around the state want to provide their communities with the best service, but that many libraries simply lack the resources to meet the needs of their communities.

In this context, shared, statewide services are key to ensuring that Vermonters have access to library materials and information. Statewide systems and programs, including Interlibrary Loan (ILL) and shared online databases, encourage resource sharing between libraries and are pivotal in increasing Vermonters' access to books and information. The Working Group shares its strong support of centralized, statewide collections and programs that provide a core set of materials for all Vermonters to access through their libraries. These resources help to equalize access across communities with different levels of library funding.

However, as the costs of printed books, electronic books, and online databases rise, it is becoming increasingly difficult for academic, public, and school libraries in Vermont to maintain adequate collections that meet the needs of the communities they serve. The costs of printed materials continue to grow while the budgets of many libraries remain level. As a result, many libraries in Vermont struggle to afford materials that meet the reading and learning needs of the public. Print resources remain essential elements of Vermont's libraries. Print materials ensure equitable access to information, as using them does not depend upon having access to the internet or computer, tablet, or phone. Printed books are also a key tool in literacy development. According to Maryanne Wolf, the director of the Center for Dyslexia, Diverse Learners, and Social Justice at the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, "Reading development begins well before any teaching. For young children, physical books are best, audio is second best, and tablet is a clear third." (https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/why-printed-books-are-better-than-screens-for-learning-to-read-q-a/2023/03)

"Books are really one of the greatest tools for the mind and should never be lost until we are assured that the same processes that were advantaged there are not being diminished by the other mediums."—Maryanne Wolf

That said, libraries are challenged to continue to provide print materials for the public while also meeting the growing demand for online resources, including eBooks and databases.

Online resources, meanwhile, can be ephemeral. Publishers used to sell libraries physical copies of books and journals, which libraries could lend and use as long as the library binding held together. Today's procurement model for libraries is one of licensing with a finite period of access to online materials. For that reason, the Working Group asks the Legislature to consider legislation to address the pricing structures that impact Vermonters' access to eBooks and eAudiobooks through their libraries and to bear in mind the rising costs of shared statewide database resources when allocating funds to support schools and libraries.

Vermont's libraries face increased worries that the very words on the page of the materials they collect for patrons and the programs they curate for their communities will be challenged or banned. While calls for book bans are thankfully few in Vermont to date, the Working Group heard from members of the community that a type of "soft censorship" is becoming common in libraries—particularly those in smaller communities. Worries about defending potential challenges to materials in the library collection increasingly impact the comfort library staff have in selecting well-written, relevant materials for their collections. High-profile challenges to library programming in the state have some library staff and trustees backing away from inclusive programming. While Vermont has, so far, faced fewer challenges to materials and programs than many other states, the feeling on the ground is that it is just a matter of time until these issues will impact Vermont libraries significantly. Libraries have long been a place where ideas and information can be shared freely, so this changing climate poses a threat to the very nature of libraries and the role they serve in the community.

Limits to the accessibility of books threaten not only Vermont's libraries, but its democracy. While library materials serve as a place where one can access facts and data, the library is also a shared repository of stories. And through these stories, we can learn about and from others and build empathy and understanding. "Marcus Aurelius insisted that to become world citizens we must not simply amass knowledge; we must also cultivate in ourselves a capacity for sympathetic imagination that will enable us to comprehend the motives and choices of people different from ourselves, seeing them not as forbiddingly alien and other, but as sharing many problems and possibilities with us" [Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998)]. Books are not just pleasure reading or an assignment for school, but are a key to understanding others, and understanding other perspectives. Books help us find commonality with others who may seem dissimilar from ourselves—and also help us to understand our differences in a way that can help us build an inclusive, democratic society together.

"…a novel could be fashioned as a raft of hope, perception and entertainment that might help keep us afloat as we tried to negotiate the snags and whirlpools that mark our nation's vacillating course toward and away from the democratic ideal."
—Ralph Ellison

The current trend toward silencing literary voices and removing materials from libraries threatens to stifle the opportunity Vermonters have to build connections with and empathy for others through reading. It also threatens to expunge some voices from the conversation entirely. Excluded voices often belong to members of traditionally marginalized and underserved groups. The removal of books due to the ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, religion, or political views of their authors results in some members of our community not being able to find representations of anyone like them reflected in the books at their library. The Working Group calls on the Legislature to consider legislation to protect the intellectual freedom and privacy of Vermonters, and to expand the privacy afforded to youth in using public libraries.

Another existential challenge faced by many of Vermont's public libraries is far more tangible: many public library buildings across the state are more than 100 years of age and in need of significant repairs and improvement. Public libraries have often not had sufficient funds to maintain and update their buildings. While some federal funds will be available to support some libraries in updating and maintaining their facilities, the overall need is likely to exceed the available funding.

Providing inclusive library spaces is a challenge that faces all types of libraries in Vermont, many of which were constructed or last renovated prior to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and do not meet modern minimum requirements for public facilities. The Working Group heard from library staff across the state that they have a desire to improve the accessibility of their facilities so that they can truly serve all Vermonters. The Working Group appreciates the efforts of the Department to secure federal grant funding for improvements to public library buildings, and calls on the Legislature, when funds are available, to consider whether ongoing funding for capital improvements in libraries—including ADA-related improvements—would be appropriate.

"The library really is a palace. It bestows nobility on people who otherwise couldn't afford a shred of it. People need to have nobility and dignity in their lives."—Eric Klinenberg

Vermont's libraries are its "palaces for the people," places where everyday people come to think, to dream, and to learn. People visit libraries together, or to see friends, but they also visit libraries so they can be alone but near others. They are a place to share ideas

and a place to connect with others in the local community and around the world. However, the Working Group heard from many community members that some behaviors in Vermont's public libraries impact people's experience when visiting public libraries. The Working Group also heard about the isolation and concerns for personal safety faced by public library staff, many of whom work alone in library buildings on evenings and weekends when nearby municipal buildings are closed—or who work in communities without local police to call on for help. The Working Group discussed the disparity in safety in different types of libraries and calls on the Legislature to amend Act 103 (S.265) to include staff of incorporated public libraries working in library buildings not owned by a municipality. The library staff who work in public library buildings owned by non-profit entities perform the same work and function as their counterparts in municipal libraries and should be afforded the same protections under law.

The Working Group also heard that the high social service needs in our state at this time sometimes impact public library services. Public libraries are one of the few indoor locations that welcome all community members to use their facilities at no cost. Public library staff in Vermont increasingly find themselves trying to fill gaps that have emerged as social service needs have grown. This is especially challenging as library staff are not trained to provide counseling and do not have clear paths of referral to meet impacted individuals' needs. The Working Group heard that library staff are increasingly concerned about the prevalence of behaviors linked with poor mental health and substance use in public libraries. While staff voiced empathy and concern for those who need supportive services, they also conveyed that behaviors associated with mental health challenges and substance use make it difficult for them to provide basic library services.

For many community members, libraries provide the only gateway to the digital age and serve as the only place where they can access the internet. The Working Group heard how important it is to provide high-speed internet access to Vermonters and heard that the connectivity currently available in libraries may not meet the needs of the community. It also heard that many library staff need support to improve their technology skills and their ability to train others to use technology—and to use technology safely as cybersecurity crimes are increasingly common. The Working Group encourages the State's Digital Equity team to help to address these concerns.

It is challenging for libraries to meet the needs of their communities with current staffing levels. The Working Group consistently heard from public libraries that they need more high-level staff to meet the information and programming needs of their communities and that they need budgets large enough to enable staff to be compensated with livable wages. The Working Group also heard that many public libraries struggle to recruit and retain qualified staff.

Due to the complexity of this topic and the number of comments and concerns raised to the Working Group by the community about low wages and low staffing levels in Vermont's public libraries, the Working Group commissioned an independent study of staffing and salaries at Vermont's public libraries for inclusion within its report to the

Legislature. The Public Library Compensation and Salary Survey Analysis is included in the Working Group's report (Appendix), and the survey findings are sobering. The survey analysis found that the compensation of many who work in public libraries is below the 2022 Vermont Livable Wage and the 2022 Rural Basic Needs Wage. Additionally, the survey highlighted that most public library staff do not receive health insurance, dental benefits, or pensions through their employers.

The Working Group heard concerns that students in Vermont's schools have less access to librarians, and that librarians are working with far fewer support staff than they did in the past. The Working Group also heard that while the state's Educational Quality Standards prescribe specific ratios of librarians to students, community members also shared that there are no enforcement mechanisms in place to ensure those ratios are met. Members of the community also shared that combining school librarian and technical positions had a negative effect upon student access to library services. They reported a need for additional support and asked the Legislature to consider reinstating a school library consultant position within state government.

The community also shared with the Working Group that limited wages and the high cost of master's degrees in library science from institutions accredited by the American Library Association are linked with lower levels of training among Vermont's librarians and library directors. The Department of Libraries' continuing education and Certificate of Public Librarianship programs emerged as vitally important to ensuring high-quality public library services in Vermont. The Working Group calls on the Legislature to alter the language of statute to require that the Department offer continuing education. The Working Group also requests that the Department be authorized in statute to issue the Certificate of Public Librarianship.

That said, the Working Group also heard that staff at all types of libraries in Vermont use limited resources to provide Vermonters with a great deal of service. Libraries across the state provide rich collections and programming to the communities they serve and provide an access point to online information and resources. Libraries find low-cost ways to provide their communities with opportunities to gather and share information and ideas. Libraries partner with other organizations to develop programs and services unique to their communities—programs that are often more than the sum of their parts. They provide the physical and electronic collections their budgets allow and participate in resource-sharing to help the individuals they serve to access materials owned by others. Vermont's libraries bring community members together in celebration and provide spaces of comfort and connection. Libraries create empathetic citizens who are well-equipped to participate in our democracy. Library staff around the state electively participate in training to increase their knowledge and skills and strive to continue that learning to the benefit of their community. They carry an optimism for the future, and a hope to improve accessibility and inclusivity of their collections and the services they provide to their communities.

Recommendations to the Legislature Related to Updating Statutes and Funding Needs of Vermont Libraries

The Working Group was charged by the Legislature (Act 66) with providing a report that shall contain: "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" and "recommendations related to the funding needs of Vermont libraries, including capital, ongoing, and special funding."

The Working Group recommends that the Legislature consider the following updates to statute and—as resources are available—funding needs to support Vermont's libraries:

Ensure principles of intellectual freedom and privacy

- Consider legislation to improve access to online resources for Vermonters by addressing the licensing structure and cost of eBooks and eAudiobooks for libraries;

- Consider legislation aimed at protecting libraries, librarians, trustees, and patrons from challenges related to materials selection and retention (see sample legislation in appendix);

- Require all Vermont libraries to have a robust materials selection policy and reconsideration procedure that protects 1st Amendment rights and also complies with the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Vermont's public accommodation law, and Vermont's Anti-Discrimination law;

- Consider legislation to expand the confidentiality of public library records to minors aged 12 and older; and

- Consider legislation that protects the privacy of Vermonters when accessing information online.

Foster more inclusive, accessible libraries

- Expand library services for Vermonters living with disabilities including Deaf and hard of hearing individuals;

- Expand library services for Vermonters living with cognitive disabilities, learning differences, and mental health disabilities;

- Increase support to Department of Libraries' collection budget to facilitate expanded statewide resource sharing of non-English language materials;

- Increase access to information and government services by providing funding for centralized translation and interpretation services at public libraries;

- Increase annual support for libraries in Vermont's correctional facilities so that they operate more efficiently and provide incarcerated individuals with more access to library resources; and

- Consider the development of a statewide books by mail services to support people with mobility disabilities or transportation challenges.

Support academic success

- Restore the School Library Consultant position to the Agency of Education or create a new position within the Department of Libraries that can lead and support the statewide implementation of AASL School Library Standards; and

- Provide funding to expand statewide research databases for the pre-K-12 grade audience.

Prioritize training for library staff

- Update statute to formalize the issuance of Certificates of Public Librarianship by the Department of Libraries; and

- Update statute to require that the Department of Libraries provide seminars, workshops, and other programs to increase the professional competence of library professionals in the state.

Build more robust shared collections at the state level

- Increase funding to provide statewide access to eBooks and eAudiobooks;

- Increase funding to maintain and expand courier services to all public libraries; and

- Consider providing authority to enable public libraries to participate in universal borrowing.

Improve public safety in libraries

- Consider existing public safety laws for educational facilities (including gun laws, drug laws, and criminal threatening laws) and whether it would be

appropriate to extend those same protections to both municipal and incorporated public libraries in the state; and

- Consider the applicability of future public safety legislation in public buildings and/or schools to both municipal and incorporated public libraries.

Maintain and improve public library facilities

- Establish ongoing funding for capital improvements of public library buildings.

Bridge the digital divide

- Leverage federal and state resources for digital equity to support training on technology and cybersecurity for public librarians; and

- Support low-cost, high-speed internet access at public libraries.

Revise statute to improve clarity around the governance of public libraries

- Clarify state statute regarding funding of public libraries, specifically which entities are responsible funding local public libraries (as public libraries are essential to the general enlightenment of citizens, and every citizen should have access to a free public library);

- Clarify the role of the library board and the municipality in municipal public libraries including authority to hire and supervise the director; and

- Clarify language in § 141. Establishment and maintenance (22 V.S.A. § 141)

Revise statute related to Department of Libraries

- Remove from state statute: "shall be the primary access point for State information, and provide advice on State information technology policy;" and

- Require the Department to develop a collection development policy that reflects diversity of race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status, and Vermont's diverse people and history.

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.

Facilities

The topic of Facilities was discussed at the Working Group meeting on Friday, March 25, 2022. The Working Group heard from 14 community members and did not hear from Department of Libraries staff. Written comments were shared with the Working Group by 23 community members.

Librarians in Vermont have employed creative strategies to maximize the use of a myriad of varied building configurations and spaces across the state. Even so, the space associated with libraries of all kinds poses challenges that cannot be addressed by individual librarians, staff, or even building owners like towns or scholastic institutions alone.

Public Library Facilities

"Today, the library building faces significant challenges when to comes to safety, accessibility, and functionality.—Dana Hart, Director, Ilsley Public Library, Middlebury

Many of the public libraries within the state are in historic buildings which have unique attributes that can be challenging to maintain. These historic buildings often need infrastructure improvements, and they require greater maintenance and upkeep than newer buildings. Infrastructure problems in historic library buildings include HVAC, ventilation, insulation, lighting, and plumbing.

The Department added questions to the 2022 Public Library Survey (PLS) to gather information about the age of Vermont's library buildings. Among the 152 public libraries that responded, the median year in which their building was constructed was 1912. Among the 119 of reporting public libraries shared that they had added to or renovated their building, the median year of those renovations was 2003. One hundred twenty-three of the libraries had "refreshed" their buildings, making improvements that did not involve major construction or renovations, with the median year for those "refreshes" being 2018. (https://libraries.vermont.gov/services/news/public-library-statistics)

When viewed county-by-county, the PLS data shows that the median age of public library buildings varies by county. For example, the median age of libraries in Orleans County is 122 years, but the median age of libraries in Windham County is 90 years. That difference in library building age could mean that libraries in some counties have more capital improvements needs than others.

Median Year Library Built By County

G... Isle 1943

Franklin 1947

Orleans 1901

Essex 1926

Lamoille 1913

Chittenden 1951

Caledonia 1890

Washington 1913

Addison 1911

Orange 1911

Rutland 1908

Windsor 1902

Bennington 1940

Windham 1933

Median Year Built
1951
1890

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Source: https://libraries.vermont.gov/services/news/public-library-statistics
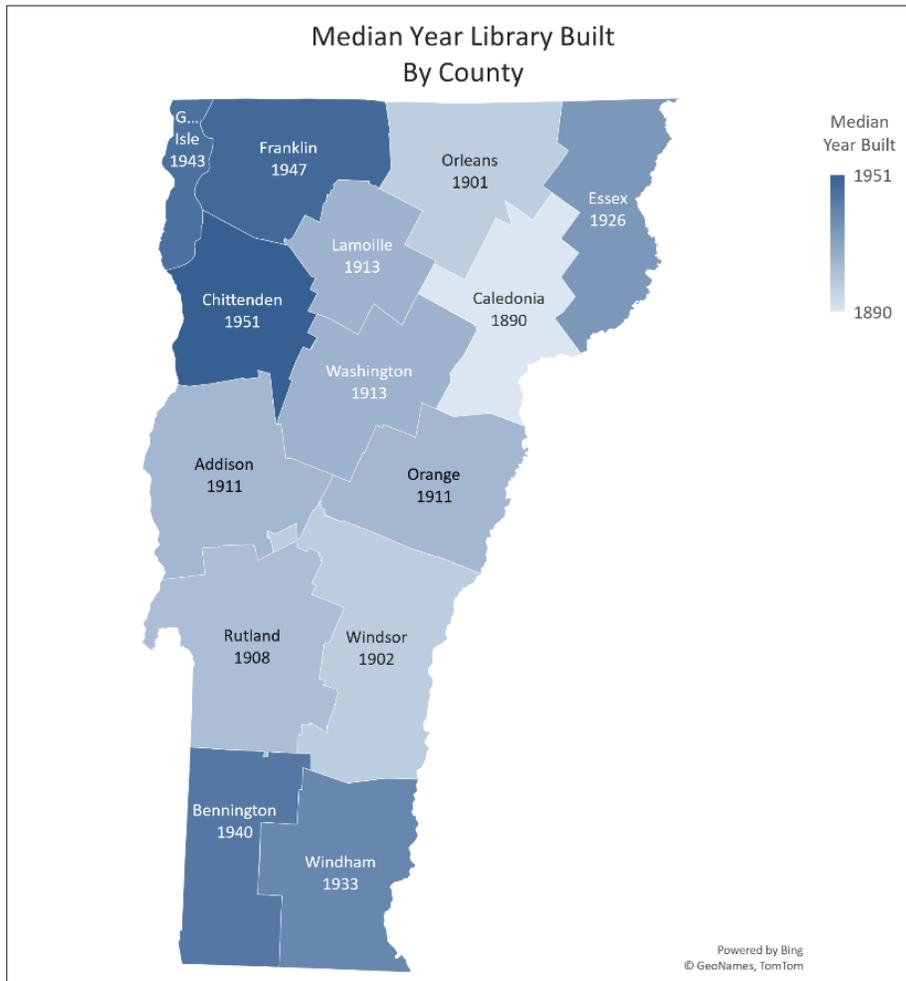
The square footage of public library buildings as reported in the 2022 PLS also varies by county. The public libraries in Chittenden County, which serve many of the state's largest municipalities, have a median square footage of 6,508—far larger than the median square footage of public libraries in Washington County, which have a median square footage of just 1,700. According to the 2022 PLS, 18 of the responding 152 public libraries rated their building as poor in terms of meeting needs and 11 rated their building as in poor condition.

Rating	How does size meet needs	How does condition meet needs
Poor	12%	7%
Fair	23%	18%
Average	25%	30%
Good	25%	28%
Excellent	15%	17%

Source: https://libraries.vermont.gov/services/news/public-library-statistics

Attempting to provide adequate resources and services within these historic buildings is daunting, particularly since outdated infrastructure often requires significant structural improvements to resolve. Linda Saarnijoki, Library Trustee of the Wilder Memorial Library in Weston shared, "Our library in Weston is in an historic and well-situated building—over 200 years old, a library for over 100 years—but lacks space: no bathroom or running water, very little space for programming, no storage, no work area for staff, limited space for resources."

To further complicate the facilities challenges faced by Vermont's public libraries, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that many public library buildings in Vermont have inadequate air circulation. Almost all public libraries in the state had to close during the winter of 2021, and most likely will again, should the state endure another pandemic. Dana Hart, Director, Ilsley Public Library, Middlebury, shared that at the Isley Library in Middlebury, "[T]he heating system does not allow for any air exchange. The only way to get fresh air in the building is to open a window (not an ideal option during Vermont winters)." The Director of the Kimball Public Library in Randolph, Amy Grasmick, also shared that the Kimball Public Library does not have a mechanical ventilation system. The experience of trying to maintain safe library spaces when faced with an airborne transmissible virus highlighted the need to replace existing heating systems in libraries with systems that circulate air so that libraries can continue operations through similar public health circumstances.

"We cannot simultaneously provide sufficient ventilation to protect community well-being by keeping windows open and adequately heat the 4,000 square foot space."—Amy Grasmick, Director, Kimball Library, Randolph

Another facilities-related concern that became apparent to the Working Group is that many historic or older structures that house libraries do not meet today's minimum standards for accessibility. To welcome and serve all members of the community, library buildings must be able to be entered and moved through easily by people who use wheelchairs and other mobility aids. Library Director Kendra Aber-Ferri of the Morristown Centennial Library shared "I think all Vermont library buildings need to offer

an accessible space because in many of our small towns, the library is the only space for people to go that is free and open to the public."

The concern that many of Vermont's public libraries are not accessible was echoed by several public librarians. Lisa Sammet, retired Director of the Jeudevine Memorial Library in Hardwick reported, "A wheelchair can't get into the building. Our lone bathroom is down a winding staircase in an unheated basement." The Jeudevine is currently undergoing a major renovation and expansion while increasing its overall space, which will address these concerns.

Barbara Ball, Director of the Windsor Library stated that while that library "does have a handicapped-accessible ramp leading to our main entrance, there is currently no way for someone who isn't fully ambulatory to access our children's room, meeting room, historical records room, or the bathroom."

Jennie Rozycki, Director of the John G. McCullough Free Library in North Bennington shared that "…persons with disabilities have indicated that they cannot take full advantage of the library due to its lack of accessibility features and feel marginalized because of this."

While the configuration of public library space may have been adequate in the past, the changing needs of the public these libraries serve require new types of spaces. Many of Vermont's libraries are located in towns with growing communities. Aurora River, Director of the Varnum Memorial Library in Jeffersonville shared, "…as our community's demographics evolve, we are in crucial need of space to house more materials that speak to a wider audience than general adult fiction and young children's picture books."

As communities grow, their small, outdated library facilities can sometimes no longer meet their needs. Some libraries have had numerous additions over time, which can result in confusing layouts and poor sightlines for staff. Hart shared that while the Ilsley Public Library does have an elevator, it does not have a handicap accessible entrance on Main Street, "forcing many community members to access the library through our side door…All [these] patrons see when they enter the library is a staircase and an elevator…For many patrons that must take the elevator to get to the main floor, there is the added stress of getting stuck: the library's elevator is over forty years old, and entrapments are a terrifyingly regular occurrence." Libraries that have had multiple additions often have spaces with limited sight lines or service on floors that staff cannot oversee easily, which can contribute to issues of safety for the public and staff in libraries.

When considering space needs, planning should consider the distinct needs of the community served and what areas are needed for different purposes including: spaces for children and teens, programming spaces, areas for group work, and adequate workspace for staff. While many older libraries were built without meeting rooms,

meeting rooms are seen as a basic feature of any new library construction. Among the libraries that responded to the 2022 PLS, 108 shared that they have a meeting room, and all those libraries reported that their meeting room is available for use by the community. These libraries reported that the median meeting room fits 30 people.

Over the past 25 years, public programming has taken on a larger role in libraries, and some libraries find that it is challenging to present programs in their existing spaces. Emily DiGiulio, Director of the Fairfax Community Library shared, "My library needs more room for programming so that we can offer programs in a separate space where presenters and participants can have a higher level of noise or physical activity." Many libraries are seeking to add meeting rooms or to expand existing meeting rooms to accommodate larger numbers of people at programs and community meetings. Some libraries are exploring the use of flexible library furnishings, including wheeled shelving, so that their small spaces can be reconfigured to accommodate programs and then be reset for library use.

Not only have changing demographics resulted in new community needs, but shifting work patterns, for both adults and children, have yielded new space needs that libraries are challenged to address. One example is that public libraries offer reliable Wi-Fi that many community members depend upon. Since the pandemic, more people are working hybrid schedules or working completely remotely and need good Wi-Fi, and so would like to work at their public library. However, there is often not enough room in Vermont's public libraries for these individuals to work.

To address the reality that their library is too small for everyone to use at once—or that it might lack air circulation—many of Vermont's libraries have boosted their Wi-Fi signals to reach outside, extending their footprint to porches and cars parked outside. The Department's 2023 Public Library Broadband and Technology Survey Report shows that of the 142 survey respondents, 139 provide Wi-Fi for the public, at least 138 provide access to Wi-Fi outside of the library building, and 97% report that Wi-Fi is available 24 hours a day.

> *"The Varnum offers the fastest Wi-Fi in the area, and we consistently have community members parked outside the building working in their cars because of lack of space within the building."—Aurora River, Director, Varnum Memorial Library*

Vermont's public libraries often have small staffing levels, which the Working Group heard makes it particularly difficult to find time to focus on the needs of facilities and infrastructure. This type of work requires a lot of project management time, including being able to identify grants and write up successful applications. As many of Vermont's public libraries also have small budgets, many of them have deferred necessary maintenance, which can even jeopardize the stability of the building.

In addition, buildings that are designated historic, especially those within an historic district, generally have increased complexity and costs associated with renovation or expansion. Communities can also become attached to library buildings that do not function well as modern public libraries. Randal Smathers, Director of the Rutland Free Library, shared "Historic preservation is both a massive cost drive if we were to renovate and a handy roadblock to folks trying to keep us from moving."

The Working Group heard from the community that there is often a lack of clarity of roles in public libraries around whether a foundation or a municipality is responsible for maintenance, improvements, and even ownership of the library building. As a result, there is often uncertainty about whose responsibility it is to perform basic maintenance and repairs of library buildings. According to 2022 PLS data, of the 152 responding libraries, 96 are owned by a municipality, 40 are owned by the library, seven are owned by another entity, seven are leased spaces, and two libraries were not sure who owned the library building. Of the 53 incorporated public libraries that responded to 2022 PLS, 11 report that their library buildings are owned by the municipality. This situation can benefit incorporated libraries but can sometimes result in confusion between the library board and the municipality about building costs and maintenance responsibilities.

When seeking to maintain or update libraries, another challenge is the rising costs associated with renovation in recent years. Several public libraries had begun planning for renovations prior to the pandemic but have had to reassess their projects considering the escalation in estimated costs. Some communities, like Hardwick, have had multiple ballot measures and long fundraising periods to attain their goal of improving their library. Sammet of the Jeudevine Library shared, "We had raised over the $1.7 M estimate. Then COVID struck and construction costs went up meteorically. Bids for our project came in at $2.42 million." Pre-pandemic estimates for the renovation of the Rutland Public Library ranged from $1.4 million for a partial renovation to up to $11.4 million for a full-building renewal. Smathers reported that this was a daunting amount of money for the library to secure before the pandemic, and that the costs would likely be even higher now. The same is true for the Ilsley Public Library renovation, which was projected to be $9.6 million before the pandemic but now has escalated in price. Hart shared that "Cost will be the single greatest barrier to achieving this goal. Given the scope of the work, the limited property footprint, and the nature of renovating a historic structure, this is going to be a major project. There are no quick fixes, and Band-Aids won't cut it."

Another challenge faced by those hoping to maintain or update a public library is the complexity of library renovations, which include many service points as well as public and staff areas. Many library directors have become de facto building project managers, which requires them to learn new skills. Grasmick shared that construction projects could also bring unwanted elements to the library workplace—including sexism. Grasmick voiced concerns that "In a female-dominated profession like libraries, working with a male dominated profession [construction] can result in an element of sexism while trying to manage these [facilities] projects."

School Libraries

School Librarians shared with the Working Group that many school libraries lack space necessary for instruction, basic programming, and resources. School libraries need both space for shelves that house collections and space for students of different ages and sizes to sit. Some school libraries in Vermont are housed in spaces that were never intended for that purpose. As a result, there is sometimes not even enough room to even fit the students being taught or gathering in the library.

> *"My library in Tinmouth is too small to have classes."*
> *—Joe Bertelloni, Tinmouth Elementary School*

Cheryl Doubleday, school librarian at the Bradford Elementary School shared that "The current library is crammed into a tiny room (smaller than most classrooms) and was obviously not intended for use as a library…. A single class of 15-20 kids has difficulty fitting in the library."

What space school libraries do have is often not flexible. School librarians recognize the need for spaces that can be dedicated for different purposes such as quiet study or group work, or spaces where students can make and learn.

Jill Abair, school librarian at U-32 High School in East Montpelier shared that "The best improvement to our library facility would be more space. Currently our space is poorly designed to meet the needs of our users…the need for flexible spaces to meet the changing needs of our learners is crucial to our success."

Like public libraries, school libraries also have problems related to accessibility. Abair shared that "My library does not have doors that are handicap accessible." School librarian Cheryl Doubleday of Bradford Elementary School shared that the school library is "… neither user friendly and NOT ADA compliant."

Because school libraries exist within and as a part of larger school facilities, school librarians are not able to independently identify sources for funding renovations or make decisions about the use of their library space.

Karen McCalla, Working Group member and school librarian at Mill River Middle and High School shared that "… many folks find that they don't have enough space, but they are also at the mercy of the school district for their space. They can't pursue grant funding without district support, and libraries/library space/funding are often lower on the priority list for many districts."

Academic Libraries

Academic libraries told the Working Group that they have identified building issues similar to those of their peers in public and school libraries. While some federal funding due to the COVID-19 pandemic did allow for the replacement of air handling equipment at the University of Vermont's Howe Library, the primary library on campus, ventilation in that building remains problematic. They reported that the most recent duct cleaning in the Howe Library was done twelve years ago. The recommendation is to clean every ten years, but it costs too much to do this regularly ($250,000 twelve years ago). The library, which receives its funding from the University, doesn't have the funds to keep up and continually contends with other high priority needs in other departments of the large campus. The result for the library is that maintenance is deferred.

Like other libraries, academic libraries are challenged by how space is configured within their buildings and the lack of flexibility. Academic users—students, faculty, researchers, and the public—have different needs today than they did twenty years ago and those needs are always evolving. There is a need to upgrade the technology in study rooms and conference rooms. Staff spacing is inadequate, as is space for consultations, group study, teaching, collections, equipment, preservation, and meeting spaces. The inflexibility of a buildings' footprints results in the inability for academic libraries to provide appropriate services and resources in an ever-changing research and instructional environment.

July 2023 Storm Impacts

The rainstorms of July 2023 took place after the Working Group's meeting dedicated to the topic of facilities but were impactful enough that mention of them is necessary in its report. During the storms, the state received significant rainfall for multiple days, which led to damage at 19 of Vermont's public libraries.

Because public libraries are typically located in municipal centers and because Vermont's municipal centers are often built close to rivers, public library buildings are at particular risk of flooding. In most cases, storm damage to public libraries was the result of flood waters and high water tables, which caused significant flooding that filled the basements of library buildings and ruined equipment essential to the buildings operations. In some cases, rainwater infiltrated buildings through roofs. Two libraries reported equipment damage due to electrical surges associated with the storms.

Many libraries impacted by the July 2023 storms reported that their basement flooding was consistent with their "normal" amount. Other public libraries were completely inundated by water that ruined systems located in their basements.

One significant lesson learned in the weeks after the July 2023 storms was that public libraries located in buildings owned by municipalities would receive a different type of public assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) than

public libraries located in buildings owned by incorporated nonprofit library entities. According to FEMA's Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide, Version 4 (FP 1-4-009-002), municipally owned public library buildings are eligible for grants from FEMA. Public library buildings owned by incorporations, however, are considered Private Nonprofit (PNP) Eligible Noncritical, Essential Social Services and, as such, must apply for low interest loans from the Small Business Administration (SBA) before they will even be considered for public assistance. It is important to note that according to statute, both types of libraries provide the same service to the public and the state treats each equally. (https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_pappg-v4-updated-links_policy_6-1-2020.pdf)

The two hardest-hit libraries in the state, the Kellog-Hubbard Library in Montpelier and the Johnson Public Library, serve as good examples of the different ways in which FEMA provides public assistance to municipally owned and non-profit-owned library buildings.

Johnson Public Library is a municipal public library located in a municipally owned building. It will receive public assistance in the form of grants through its municipality to restore its library building, which completely flooded on the basement level and had water in its main library space.

The Kellogg-Hubbard Library in Montpelier, by contrast, is an incorporated public library located in a library building owned by a non-profit entity. To be considered for public assistance, Kellogg-Hubbard must first apply for low interest SBA loans. After that, it remains unclear what outright grants of FEMA public assistance they will receive, if any, to offset their anticipated repair costs of $1.5M. As incorporated public libraries provide a public service and often have no revenue stream, taking out even low-interest SBA loans is a daunting prospect. Being in the PNP Eligible Noncritical, Essential Social Services category impacts the recovery efforts for incorporated libraries and hampers their ability to resume providing service to their communities.

Because public libraries provide community members with access to the internet, they are particularly necessary to their communities following emergencies including natural disasters. The efforts of staff at the Cabot Public Library following the July 2023 floods demonstrate the vital role that public libraries play in helping their communities recover. Despite significant flooding and damage to building systems in the basement of the municipal building in which they're housed, the Cabot Public Library supported community members in filing FEMA paperwork to document damage to their businesses, homes, and farms. Both municipal and incorporated public libraries around the state support their communities in this way, so their quick recovery after extreme weather events is vitally important to supporting the recovery of their entire community.

Conclusion

Aging and repurposed buildings with extensive maintenance and capital needs are the norm for public libraries in Vermont. School libraries are often inadequate for the students in those schools. Academic libraries have extensive maintenance needs that are outside their budgets. All three groups of libraries are using spaces that may not be well adapted for modern library uses. Safety remains a concern in older buildings with poor sightlines and isolated spaces, and the recent public health emergency shuttered libraries during the cooler months because of the lack of air circulation. There is great need for capital funds for libraries of all types in Vermont for basic improvements and deferred maintenance.

Technology

The topic of Technology was discussed at the Working Group meeting on Friday, May 20, 2022. The Working Group heard from nine community members and heard a report from Department of Libraries staff on the topic of Technology. Written comments were shared with the Working Group by 28 community members. Included in this chapter is data from the Vermont Department of Libraries' 2023 Broadband and Technology Survey.
(https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/documents/VTLIB_2023_Public_Library_Broadband_Tech_Survey.pdf)

School Libraries and Technology

The Working Group heard from school librarians that they are interested in a single automation system for all school libraries but only if migration is easy, resource sharing is less cumbersome, and consortium buying helps to decrease costs and alleviate expenses. In this context, an automation system means an integrated library system that tracks circulation of books and other materials, contains the library's catalog, records card holders, and runs reports to track data.

Budget pressure is an issue for individual schools and districts. Equity is a common concern, reflected in device access, technology support staffing and access, broadband availability, budget inequities, training and professional development for staff and students, and uneven technology deployment between schools—even those in the same district.

Public Libraries and Technology

The technology environment in Vermont's public libraries reflects broader nationwide trends. However, the state's limited population, rural geography, and numerous small institutions do make the situation a bit more nuanced.

For many years, public computers were at the forefront of public libraries' technology offerings. However, over the last decade there has been a gradual decline in public computer sessions in public libraries, punctuated by a huge drop during the pandemic. This shift likely has two related explanations: the percentage of Vermont homes with internet access has continued to increase, and at that same time more users own portable devices like laptops and tablets which they can use to connect to the internet. Many of the former public computer users are now bringing their own laptops, tablets, or phones to library buildings, where they connect with high-speed internet provided by the library.

In 2019, national Public Library Survey data from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) showed that Vermont ranked first in the number of public computers

per capita, with 8.87 public library computers for every 5,000 people but ranked last in the number of public computers per library outlet (excluding bookmobiles) with 6.27 computers per public library. Because Vermont has more libraries per capita than any other state (and a preponderance of small libraries), there are relatively few computers per library, but despite that Vermont still has more computers per capita than any other state.

Table 35. Number of public-access Internet computers per 5,000 population and per stationary outlet, by state ranking: Fiscal year 2019					
Public-access Internet computers					
State	Ranking	Per 5,000 population[1]	State	Ranking	Per stationary outlet
Total[2]	†	4.73	Total[2]	†	18.03
Vermont	1	8.87	District of Columbia	1	38.46
Nebraska	2	8.79	Florida	2	32.14
Iowa	3	8.26	Delaware	3	31.67
Wyoming	4	7.76	Maryland	4	28.47
Kansas	5	7.58	Colorado	5	26.69
Maine	6	7.46	Kentucky	6	24.41
South Dakota	7	7.29	Arizona	7	24.37
Idaho	8	7.11	Texas	8	24.04
District of Columbia	9	7.08	Georgia	9	23.93
Illinois	10	7.06	Virginia	10	22.21
Alaska	11	7.01	South Carolina	11	21.45
Rhode Island	12	6.93	Illinois	12	21.25
Indiana	13	6.71	California	13	21.22
Louisiana	14	6.38	Tennessee	14	20.83
Connecticut	15	6.36	Rhode Island	15	20.55
Michigan	16	6.35	Utah	16	20.20
Colorado	17	6.26	Ohio	17	19.82
Ohio	18	6.20	Michigan	18	19.44
New Mexico	19	5.92	North Carolina	19	19.41
Montana	20	5.86	New Jersey	20	19.38
New Hampshire	21	5.77	Indiana	21	19.31
Kentucky	22	5.60	Washington	22	19.27
Wisconsin	23	5.49	Connecticut	23	18.55
Delaware	24	5.40	New York	24	18.17
North Dakota	25	5.33	Louisiana	25	17.45
Arkansas	26	5.25	Nevada	26	17.24
Massachusetts	27	5.14	Alabama	27	16.35
Minnesota	28	5.02	Minnesota	28	15.95
New York	29	5.01	Massachusetts	29	15.27
Alabama	30	5.00	New Mexico	29	15.27
Oklahoma	31	4.95	Oklahoma	31	14.82

New Jersey	32	4.90	Idaho	32	14.38
Virginia	33	4.81	Wisconsin	33	13.95
South Carolina	34	4.66	Oregon	34	13.88
Mississippi	35	4.62	Missouri	35	13.15
Washington	36	4.53	Pennsylvania	36	12.83
Maryland	37	4.50	Arkansas	37	12.74
Tennessee	38	4.48	Mississippi	38	11.83
Georgia	39	4.43	Wyoming	39	11.80
Missouri	40	4.39	Alaska	40	11.44
Oregon	41	4.26	Hawaii	41	11.43
Florida	42	4.13	Nebraska	42	10.96
Texas	43	3.98	Kansas	43	10.45
Utah	43	3.98	Montana	44	9.90
Arizona	45	3.78	Iowa	45	9.04
West Virginia	46	3.73	North Dakota	46	8.96
North Carolina	47	3.66	West Virginia	47	8.14
Pennsylvania	48	3.21	South Dakota	48	8.00
California	49	3.00	Maine	49	7.81
Nevada	50	2.40	New Hampshire	50	6.87
Hawaii	51	2.05	Vermont	51	6.27

† Not applicable.
[1]Per 5,000 population is based on the total unduplicated population of legal service areas. The determination of the unduplicated figure is the responsibility of the state library agency and should be based on the most recent state population figures for jurisdictions in the state.

Source:
https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/fy2019_pls_tables_29_thru_43.xlsx

Vermont ranks in the middle of the pack (28th) for the number of computer uses per capita, but because there are so many total computers statewide, the uses per computer number is low (last).

Many of Vermont's libraries lack the resources to carefully track computer usage. The Department's Broadband and Technology Survey shows that 75% of the 139 public libraries that responded do not use reservation or management software on their public computers. Without that type of software, libraries are unable to easily generate annual reports of computer usage and are likely to provide estimates of computer usage, not carefully gathered data.

Table 36. Number of public-access Internet computer user sessions per capita and per computer and number of wireless sessions per capita, by state ranking: Fiscal year 2019								
Public-access Internet computer user sessions						Wireless sessions		
State	Ranking	Per capita[1]	State	Ranking	Per computer	State	Ranking	Per capita[1]
Total[2]	†	0.71	Total[2]	†	747.90	Total[2]	†	1.67
District of Columbia	1	1.34	Nevada	1	1,724.27	Massachusetts	1	6.08

State	Rank	Value	State	Rank	Value	State	Rank	Value
South Dakota	2	1.22	Hawaii	2	1,360.69	Maryland	2	4.97
Ohio	3	1.10	Georgia	3	1,148.46	Texas	3	3.99
Wyoming	4	1.08	California	4	1,018.99	Arizona	4	3.25
Connecticut	5	1.04	District of Columbia	5	944.38	Washington	5	3.10
Georgia	6	1.02	Maryland	6	920.30	North Dakota	6	3.09
Nebraska	6	1.02	Washington	7	906.05	Indiana	7	2.98
New Mexico	6	1.02	Oregon	8	884.21	New Mexico	8	2.64
Louisiana	9	0.97	Missouri	9	883.16	Illinois	9	2.57
Kansas	10	0.95	Ohio	10	882.92	Oregon	10	2.47
Idaho	11	0.93	Oklahoma	11	876.30	Kansas	11	2.23
Colorado	12	0.91	New Jersey	12	867.36	Nebraska	12	2.21
Oklahoma	13	0.87	New Mexico	13	863.48	Wisconsin	13	2.13
Alaska	14	0.86	South Dakota	14	839.66	Ohio	14	2.12
New Jersey	15	0.85	Connecticut	15	815.64	Alabama	15	1.89
Montana	16	0.84	New York	16	809.63	Oklahoma	16	1.74
Maryland	17	0.83	Utah	17	793.78	Colorado	17	1.72
Nevada	17	0.83	Arizona	18	781.20	Iowa	18	1.66
Illinois	19	0.82	Florida	19	772.05	Idaho	19	1.63
Kentucky	19	0.82	Louisiana	20	760.29	Michigan	20	1.48
Washington	19	0.82	Massachusetts	21	741.45	Arkansas	21	1.46
Iowa	22	0.81	Colorado	22	729.76	Minnesota	22	1.41
New York	22	0.81	Kentucky	23	728.62	Virginia	22	1.41
Indiana	24	0.78	South Carolina	24	719.31	Vermont	24	1.33
Missouri	24	0.78	Alabama	25	717.95	Utah	25	1.27
Massachusetts	26	0.76	Montana	26	715.68	New Jersey	26	1.21
Oregon	27	0.75	Virginia	27	712.51	California	27	1.17
Vermont	28	0.74	Tennessee	28	704.23	South Dakota	28	1.16
Alabama	29	0.72	Wyoming	29	692.75	Alaska	29	1.13
Rhode Island	29	0.72	Minnesota	30	684.27	Montana	29	1.13
Michigan	31	0.71	Pennsylvania	31	653.70	Maine	31	1.11
Minnesota	32	0.69	Idaho	32	652.24	Connecticut	32	1.10
Virginia	32	0.69	North Carolina	33	644.27	Delaware	33	1.08
South Carolina	34	0.67	Kansas	34	625.66	Kentucky	34	1.07
Florida	35	0.64	Mississippi	35	620.89	Louisiana	35	0.97
Tennessee	36	0.63	Alaska	36	609.92	New York	36	0.96
Utah	36	0.63	Illinois	37	583.38	Mississippi	37	0.86
California	38	0.61	Nebraska	38	582.08	Rhode Island	38	0.80
Wisconsin	39	0.60	Indiana	39	581.83	Pennsylvania	39	0.79
Arizona	40	0.59	Michigan	40	557.25	South Carolina	40	0.78
North Dakota	41	0.58	Texas	41	544.29	Missouri	41	0.77
Maine	42	0.57	Wisconsin	42	543.18	Tennessee	41	0.77
Mississippi	42	0.57	North Dakota	43	541.52	Wyoming	41	0.77
Hawaii	44	0.56	West Virginia	44	528.11	New Hampshire	44	0.75
Arkansas	45	0.53	Rhode Island	45	522.19	District of Columbia	45	0.74
Delaware	45	0.53	Arkansas	46	501.17	Florida	46	0.70
New Hampshire	47	0.50	Iowa	47	488.17	North Carolina	47	0.66

North Carolina	48	0.47	Delaware	48	487.55	Nevada	48	0.57
Texas	49	0.43	New Hampshire	49	433.62	Georgia	49	0.52
Pennsylvania	50	0.42	Vermont	50	415.03	Hawaii	50	0.38
West Virginia	51	0.39	Maine	51	382.59	West Virginia	51	0.11

† Not applicable.

[1]Per capita is based on the total unduplicated population of legal service areas. The determination of the unduplicated figure is the responsibility of the state library agency and should be based on the most recent state population figures for jurisdictions in the state.

[2]Total includes the 50 states and the District of Columbia but excludes outlying areas, libraries that closed or temporarily closed in FY 2019, and libraries that do not meet the FSCS Public Library Definition.

NOTE: The District of Columbia, although not a state, is included in the state rankings. Special care should be used in comparing its data to state data. Caution should be used in making comparisons with the state of Hawaii, as Hawaii reports only one public library for the entire state. Additional information on nonsampling error, response rates, and definitions may be found in Data File Documentation Public Libraries Survey: Fiscal year 2019.
SOURCE: IMLS, Public Libraries Survey, FY 2019. Data elements GPTERMS, PITUSR, WIFISESS, POPU_UND from the Public Library System Data File (PLS_AE_PUD19i) were used to produce this table.

Source:
https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/fy2019_pls_tables_29_thru_43.xlsx

Median # of Computer Sessions
PLS Data 2012-2022

Source:
https://libraries.vermont.gov/services/news/public-library-statistics
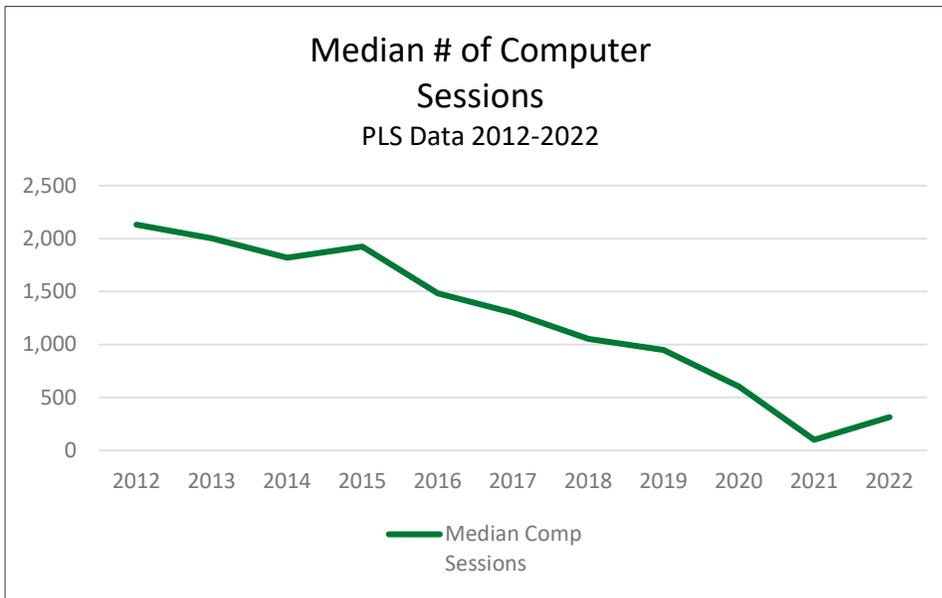
Vermonters increasingly have access to the internet in their homes and internet access has shifted from a luxury to a necessity as it is needed to submit job applications, attend classes, complete schoolwork, fill out governmental forms, and communicate with healthcare providers. However, many Vermonters continue to have limited internet access. In numerous small and rural Vermont towns, public libraries continue to be one of the few places people have access to high-speed internet connections.

While usage of public computers in libraries has decreased over the past ten years, in-library Wi-Fi usage has dramatically increased in the same timeframe. The great majority (90%) of public libraries in the state offer public Wi-Fi access. The libraries that do not provide the public with Wi-Fi access tend to be the smallest—and in some cases these libraries do not have internet access at all.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries across the state made a big push to provide Wi-Fi to support their communities when library buildings were closed to the public. By the summer of 2022, the great majority of libraries offered some level of Wi-Fi access outside their buildings and beyond the hours the libraries were open to the public. In response to the pandemic, many libraries added equipment to make the Wi-Fi signal in their parking lots and outdoor areas as strong as possible. These enhancements to the availability of Wi-Fi outside of public library buildings have improved overall access to information for the public. According to the Department's 2023 Broadband & Technology Survey, nearly all the responding public libraries provide Wi-Fi for the public and provide access to Wi-Fi outside of the library building 24 hours a day. The Working Group recommends Wi-Fi availability 24 hours a day *outside* of library buildings be required of all public libraries in future updates to the Standards.

As of 2019, Vermont ranks 24th in the number of wireless sessions per capita. However, Wi-Fi statistics are highly dependent on networking equipment, and the actual usage is likely an undercount as many of Vermont's libraries lack methods of tracking Wi-Fi usage accurately.

Median # of
WiFi Sessions
PLS Data 2012-2022

Source:
https://libraries.vermont.gov/services/news/public-library-statistics
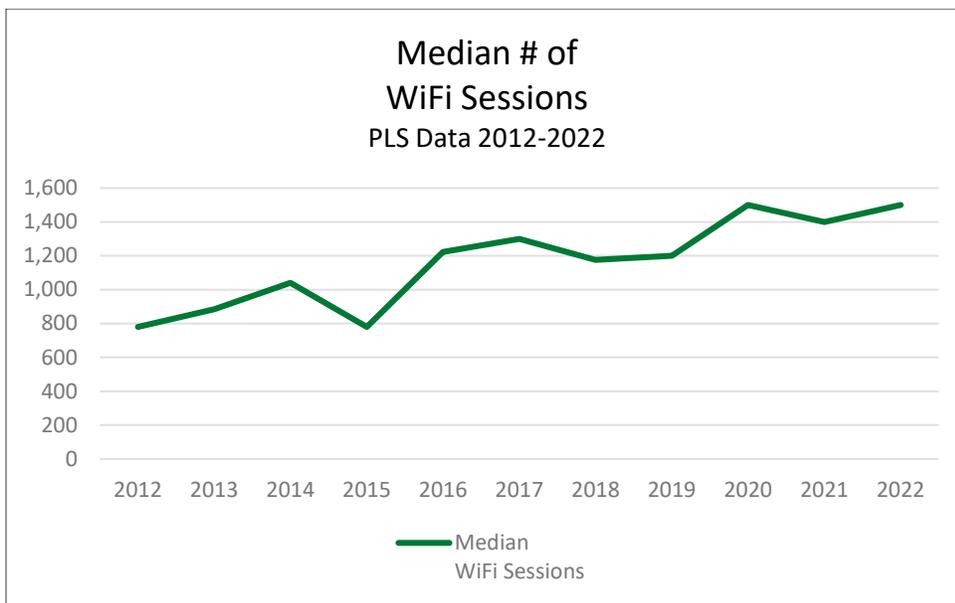
Library Catalogs / Integrated Library System (ILS)

Most libraries use an online catalog to make their collections searchable to the public and to manage the circulation of library materials. These library catalogs are also known as Integrated Library Systems (ILS). When library catalogs first became automated, libraries had to house large and expensive computer equipment or servers on-site. Now most libraries in Vermont use online ILS platforms that do not require on-site servers.

Of the 182 public libraries that have reported on their catalogs to the Department, 45% use the Koha ILS. Most libraries using Koha do so within one of the major consortia in the state: VOKAL and Catamount.

A significant number of public libraries also use LibraryWorld, Verso, and Follett. 10% of the reporting libraries use other products. Roughly 10% of Vermont's public libraries are not yet automated. Those libraries record circulation, users, and other data on simple spreadsheets or on paper.

ILS	# of Libraries
Koha – VOKAL	60
Koha – Catamount	22
Library World	28
Verso	19
Follett	10
Other	21
Unautomated	22

Internet Connectivity

While statewide data on broadband availability shows that Vermont is only a bit below the national average, the reality on the ground in public libraries is location dependent.
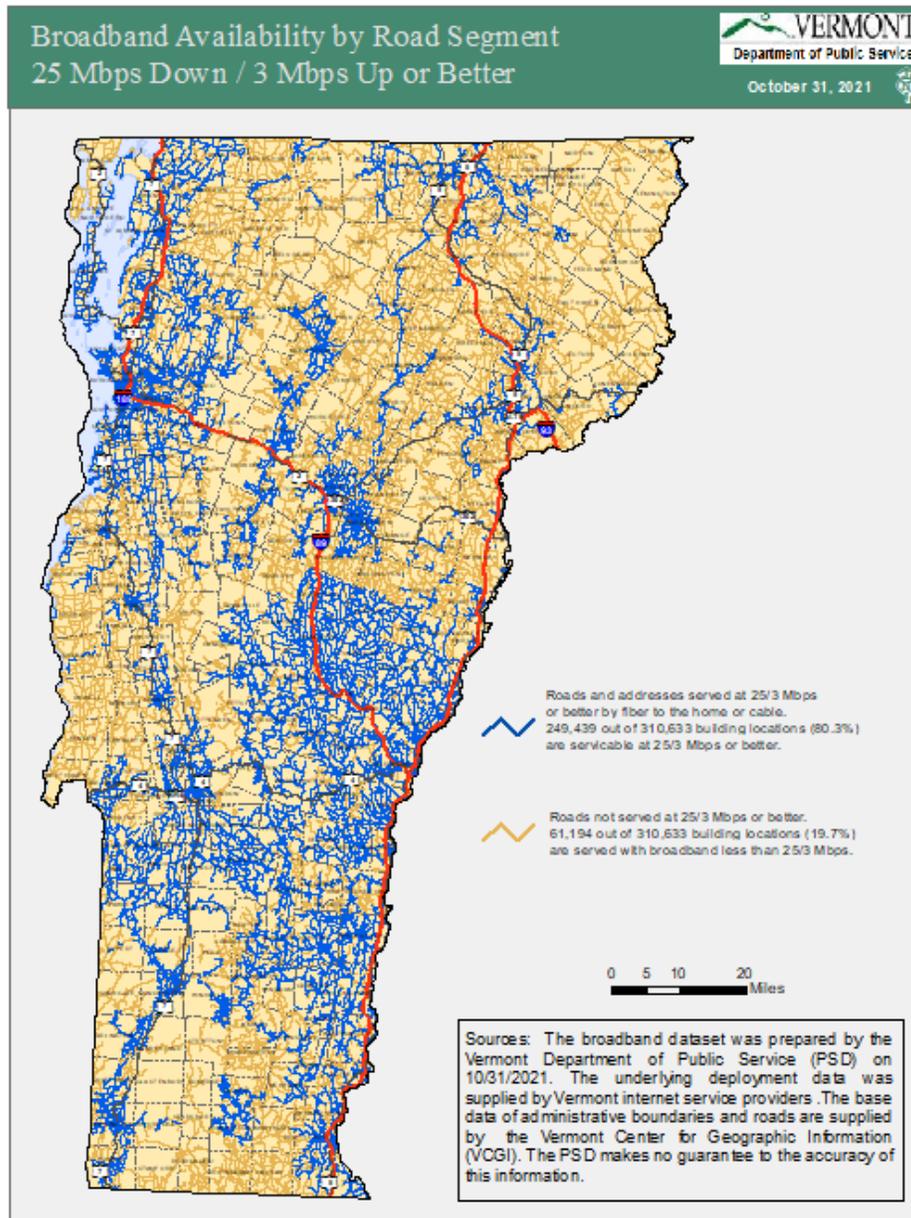
Source:
https://publicservice.vermont.gov/sites/dps/files/documents/Connectivity/BroadbandAvailability25_3_2021_110121.pdf

Despite seemingly high percentages of access, large swaths of the state continue to have low internet speeds and a limited number of internet service providers (ISPs). Though libraries often have some of the highest speed and best quality internet in a

town, many libraries in Vermont continue to have a limited number of internet service providers to choose from and few pricing options available.

Broadband by tier 2022

- > 100/100
- 100/100 < 100/20
- 100/20 < 25/3
- 25/3 < 25/3W
- 25/3W < 4/1
- < 4/1

Source: https://publicservice.vermont.gov/telecommunications-and-connectivity/broadband-high-speed-internet-availability-vermont
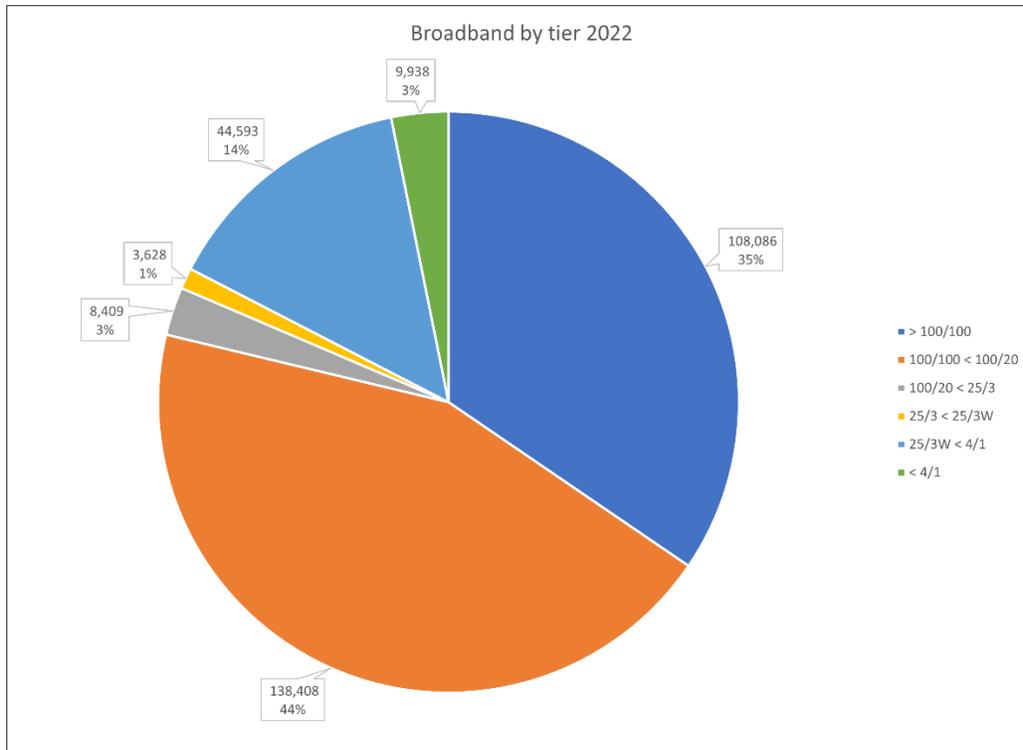
The Department's 2023 Broadband & Technology Survey showed:

> "Just as the speed of internet access at public libraries in Vermont varies widely, the costs public libraries pay their internet service providers also varies widely.
>
> However, the data reported to the Department shows that public libraries that pay more for internet service do not necessarily have quicker internet speeds. The data also shows that public libraries in communities with larger populations do not necessarily have faster internet access at their public libraries."

The FCC included bandwidth targets for schools (and school libraries) and for public libraries in its **2016 E-Rate Modernization Order**. According to the FCC, "With respect to libraries, the Order adopts as a bandwidth target the American Library Association's recommendation that all libraries that serve fewer than 50,000 people have broadband speeds of at least 100 Mbps and all libraries that serve 50,000 people or more have broadband speeds of at least 1 Gbps." (https://www.fcc.gov/general/summary-e-rate-modernization-order) Vermont has no communities with a population of greater than

50,000 people, and none of Vermont's public libraries reported having 1G or faster internet service.

For libraries serving fewer than 50,000 people, the FCC has established a goal of 100Mbps. The 2023 Broadband and Technology report shows that "only 46 of the Vermont public libraries that conducted the speed test, or 34%, had internet speeds greater than the FCC's established goal of 100 Mbps for smaller libraries."

Vermont's public libraries lag behind their peers nationally in this area. According to an in-depth national survey conducted by the American Library Association in 2020, across the nation "roughly 17% of public library locations still lacked the 25 Mbps/3 Mbps download and upload speeds recommended for consumer households." (https://www.ala.org/advocacy/sites/ala.org.advocacy/files/content/telecom/Digital_Equity_012623.pdf)

According to the report, "The internet speeds reported by 66% of Vermont's public libraries raise significant concerns about the access Vermonters have to the internet for the purposes of work, education, and telehealth services—and particularly about the internet access of Vermonters in small, rural communities."
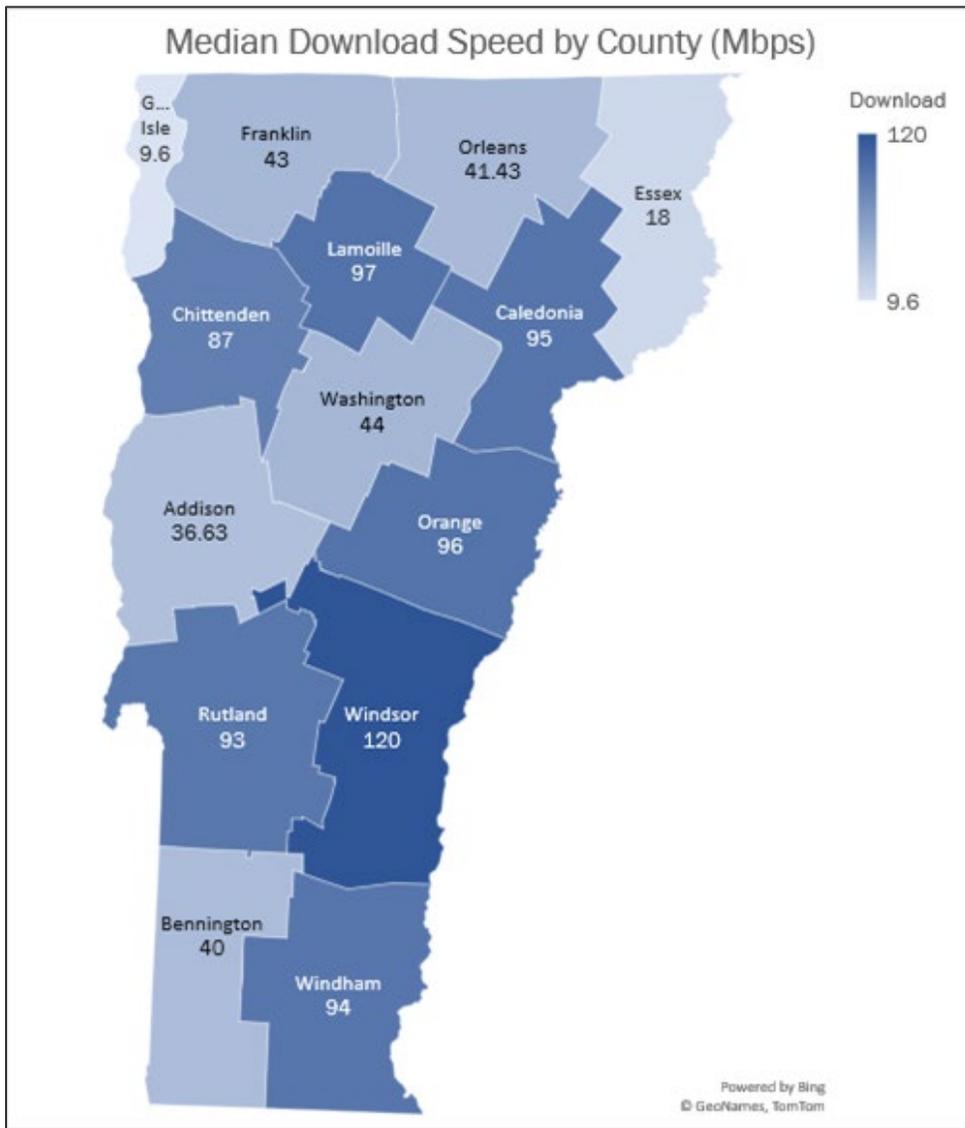
Median Download Speed by County (Mbps)

County	Median Download Speed (Mbps)
G... Isle	9.6
Franklin	43
Orleans	41.43
Essex	18
Lamoille	97
Chittenden	87
Caledonia	95
Washington	44
Addison	36.63
Orange	96
Rutland	93
Windsor	120
Bennington	40
Windham	94

Download: 120 to 9.6

Powered by Bing
© GeoNames, TomTom

Source:
https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/documents/VTLIB_2023_Public_Library_Broadband_Tech_Survey.pdf

Costs to public libraries for internet access also vary dramatically across the state. Some libraries receive free, low bandwidth internet that is generally inadequate for serving the public. Nearly all libraries pay for internet service for this reason. According to the Department's report, "Median cost by county ranges from $37 per month in Essex County to $250 per month in Bennington, Rutland, and Windham Counties."
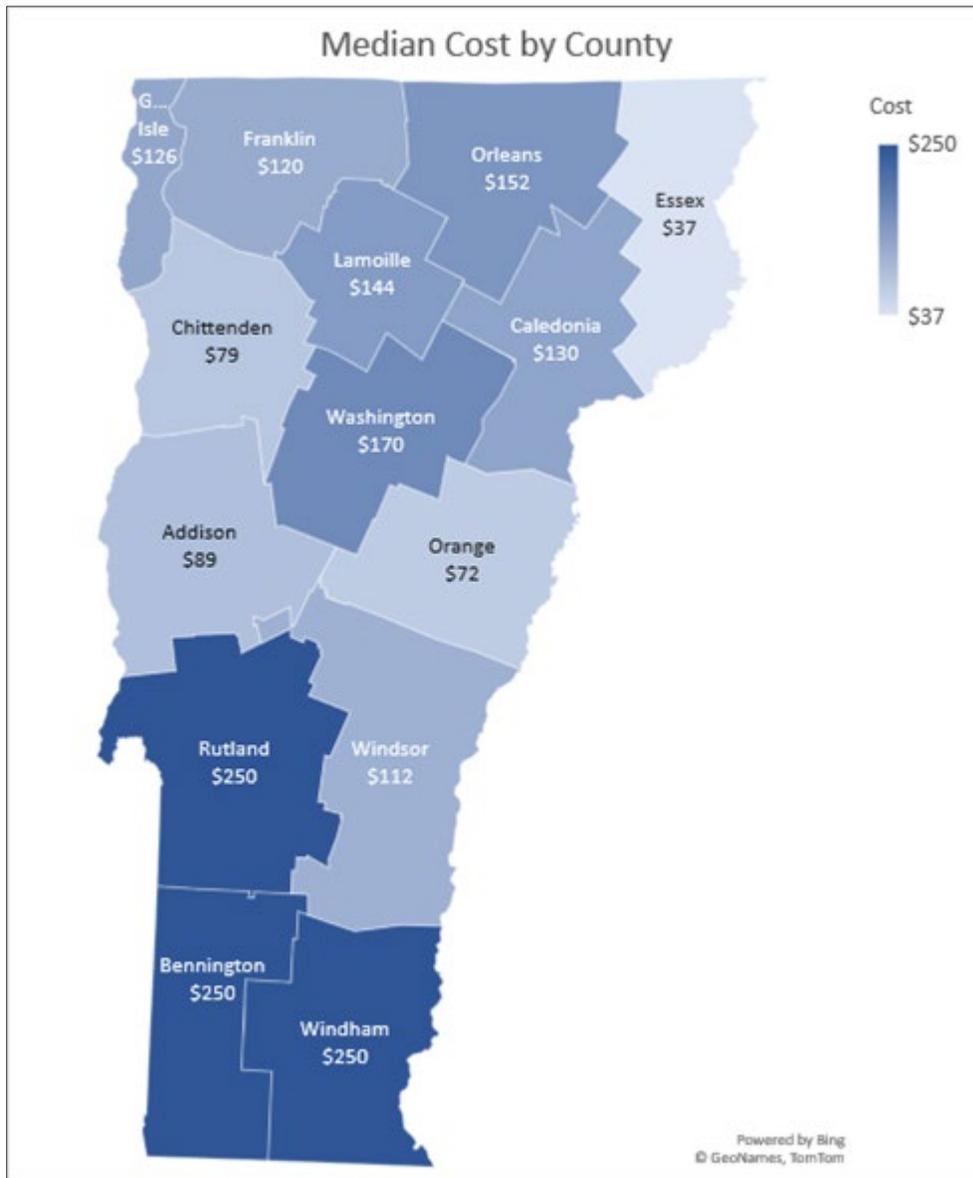
Source:
https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/documents/VTLIB_2023_Public_Library_Broadband_Tech_Survey.pdf

Public Computing

Nearly all the respondents (96%) provide in-library computers for the public. Of the responding libraries, 67% provide the public with library-owned laptops for use in the building and 27% reported that they loan library-owned laptops to patrons for home use. Just 5% reported that they loan library-owned cellular hotspots to patrons for home use.

Nearly all respondents provide public printing and 77% reported that they offer color printing. At 56% of responding libraries patrons can print from their own device using Wi-Fi printing. Library patrons can perform scanning at 83% of responding libraries and faxing at 40% of them.

Technical Support

The Working Group heard from many public library staff that they are challenged to provide public computing and staff use of computers due to limited knowledge of the systems that support these services. The library community shared the challenges of maintaining and updating computer equipment and networks and shared that while they appreciate the support that Department staff offer, they require technical support at their institutions that exceeds the scope and capacity of the Department's consultant.

The responding libraries report different strategies of obtaining technology support for their networks and library-owned devices. Fifty-five libraries (38%) reported that they pay a company or individual for technical support services. Twenty-seven libraries (18%) reported that unpaid volunteers provide them with technical support, while seven (5%) work with an employee of their town. Thirty-two of the responding libraries (22%) reported using a combination of types of technical support. Twenty-four of the responding libraries (18%) reported that they have no external technical support.

With regards to basic maintenance of computers, one key to ensuring that public computers function smoothly is to install software that prevents viruses from taking hold. In responses from public libraries to the 2023 Broadband & Technology Survey, only 48% reported using software that refreshes or resets the public computer between users. And only 48% reported having antivirus software installed on computers at their public library.

The Working Group heard from community members that they needed real-time and in-person technical support, and that they wanted better and lower-cost options for obtaining technical support. The Working Group heard that library staff require more training on technical matters so they could resolve issues that arise with their computers and networks independently. It also heard that they would appreciate increased and continual training on technology topics including train-the-trainer classes so they could provide more support and instruction to library patrons. The Working Group heard from many members of the community that it is challenging to keep current with rapidly evolving technology.

Members of the community also shared that cybersecurity is an emerging concern for libraries of all types.

Conclusion

The massive cultural shift of the last couple of decades towards technology and the internet has profoundly transformed libraries. Libraries have shifted from offering a single or a few desktop computers in a defined area to being the place where the community not only accesses the internet, but also learns everything from the basics of computing to the latest technological trends. This is true for school, academic, and public libraries.

Uneven distribution of funding, staff and user expertise, and access to high-speed internet in the library and community are fundamental problems facing libraries today. Paying more for internet service does not mean that a given library has adequate connectivity. As libraries try to accommodate users outside the building and with an expanding user base that needs higher bandwidth for online meetings and other applications, many Vermont libraries find that they simply cannot meet the needs of their communities because high speed internet is simply not available where they are.

Collections

The topic of Collections was discussed at the Working Group meeting on Friday, January 14, 2022. The Working Group heard from nine community members. Written comments were shared with the Working Group by 17 community members.

Traditionally, the primary role of libraries has been to provide people with access to information through books and other library materials. The set of materials that are owned by a library is known as its "collection." Today, library collections contain both physical and online materials. Books can still be loaned or used in person in their physical forms, but many books can now be used in online form— either as eBooks or eAudiobooks. While journals and newspapers were once collected, bound, and stored on library shelves, many of these information resources are now available online through online databases.

Longitudinal information about collection size, costs, and usage in public libraries is readily available, as public libraries institutions have long reported this data through the Public Library Survey (PLS), a national survey conducted by the Department of Libraries and reported to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). This complex data has been used to develop an overview of the status of collections in Vermont's public libraries.

Data about school and academic library collections is not reported or stored centrally, so was not available to the Working Group for its report. That said, the Working Group did hear from academic and school librarians about collections so could report on information shared by members of those communities.

Collections in Vermont Public Libraries

"Our circulating collection supports another value Middlebury residents hold dear: sustainability. Resource sharing allows many people to use a single copy of a book or item when they need it without everyone having to purchase, store, and ultimately dispose of multiple copies. As climate change becomes a greater imperative people are realizing that utilizing their local library collection allows them to purchase fewer things, thus reducing their shipping footprint, consumption, and ultimate waste."
—Dana Hart, Director, Isley Public Library, Middlebury

The 2022 fiscal year Vermont PLS data reflects that the median figures for physical collection holdings at Vermont's public libraries are as follows:

Format	Adult	Teen	Children
Print	7,887	637	5,234
Video	829	0	271
Audio	327	1	93
Non-Traditional	35	0	0

Data from the 2022 PLS Report shows that libraries that serve fewer Vermonters have smaller collection sizes and lower collections expenses. However, this data also shows that per capita, library budget expenses are inversely proportional to the size of the population served. While the overall collection budget of a larger library may be bigger, smaller libraries spend more money relative to their service area population. **Simply put, smaller libraries spend more per person on their library's collections than larger libraries.**

Population	Collection Size	Collections Expenses	Per Capita Collections Expense
Under 1,000	7,413	$3,607	$4.54
1,000-2,500	10,401	$5,422	$3.67
2,500-5,000	18,744	$13,369	$3.97
Over 5,000	35,805	$27,275	$3.04

Looking more granularly at data from the 2022 PLS Report related to just print collections shows that libraries with larger populations have higher total physical collections costs. However, the data also shows that as the service population decreases, the size of the physical collection decreases, and the number of times physical materials are checked out to the public decreases, the cost per physical checkout *increases*. On average, public libraries in Vermont that serve fewer than 1,000 people pay three times the cost per checkout of physical items that libraries serving populations of greater than 5,000 pay.

> *"It is hard to enhance small collections when you don't have enough space or money."—Lisa Sammet, former Library Director, Jeudevine Memorial Library, Hardwick*

Population	Physical Collection Size	Physical Circulation	Physical Collection Costs	Cost per Physical Checkout
Under 1,000	7,413	1,728	$2,862	$1.66
1,000-2,500	10,401	4,300	$4,617	$1.07
2,500-5,000	18,744	12,426	$10,883	$0.88
Over 5,000	35,805	37,451	$19,912	$0.53

Data from the 2022 PLS Report shows that for online resources, or eBooks and eAudiobooks, libraries with larger populations have higher online collections costs and higher online circulation costs. However, the data also shows that as the service population decreases, and the number of times online materials are checked out to the public decreases, the cost per checkout of online items *increases*. On average, public libraries in Vermont that serve fewer than 1,000 people pay more than twice the amount per checkout of online items that libraries serving populations of greater than 5,000 pay.

Population	Number of eBook / eAudiobook Checkouts	eBook & eAudiobook Collection Costs	Cost per eBook / eAudiobook Checkout
Under 1,000	443	$662	$1.49
1,000-2,500	940	$523	$0.56
2,500-5,000	3,068	$2,199	$0.72
Over 5,000	8,177	$5,454	$0.67

The Department does not have data about the median age of each library's collection or the percentage of the collection currently in circulation, both of which are helpful metrics for gauging relevance, the usage, and overall health of a library collection.

According to the national PLS data, among the 50 states and the District of Columbia, Vermont ranks:

- 4th for physical holdings, at 4.11 items per capita;

- 5th for physical video materials, at 0.39 items per capita;

- 10th for physical audio materials, with 0.2 items per capita;

- 25th for circulation of children's materials with 2.36 checkouts per capita;

- 29th for total circulation, with 7.25 checkouts per capita;

- 31st for collections expenditures, with $4.25 spent per capita; and

- 40th for online circulation, with 0.75 checkouts per capita.

Source:
https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/fy2019_pls_tables_29_thru_43.xlsx

School Library Collections

The Working Group heard from school librarians that it is challenging to meet curricular needs given the school libraries' dwindling funding. Karen McCalla, Working Group member and School Librarian at Mill River Union Middle/High School in North Clarendon shared, "The biggest challenges we face in the future are budgetary. In my 20 years at Mill River, our budget has been reduced from more than $30,000 per year to less than $5,000 per year." Small materials budgets in school libraries make it challenging for school librarians to meet the needs of the students they support. Alyson Mahony, Library Media Specialist at Doty and Rumney Schools in Worcester and Middlesex shared, "The Doty collection is small and missing many items. Although the population is small, these patrons deserve a larger collection and access to the collection year-round."

School librarians also report that students are increasingly using online resources rather than selecting print materials for research projects. McCalla shared, "We don't generally collect printed research materials (country books for our younger students, supreme court case analyses for our older students, for example) because we don't have the shelf room, and students don't turn to books first for research. However, we still have some faculty who like to require "book sources" for research projects. I'd love to have the budget and space for a more robust research collection, but even if we had it, it wouldn't get used very often."

School librarians still want to provide print materials for the students they serve and see value in having non-fiction titles in their collections. Cynthia Hughes, School Librarian at Marlboro School shared, "I also feel that we need to update our nonfiction. I realize that this is a tricky situation with so much information online now, but at my previous job the kids loved our nonfiction books."

Print materials in school libraries can be especially important in rural communities— particularly in communities where students have less access to the internet in their homes. Mahony shared, "Doty has been awarded several grants so that it has a great collection of award-winning mathematical books and books that promote justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. As a small, rural school this collection is extremely important to readers who do not have access to books at home and are far from public libraries and bookstores. Several home school students access the collection, as well as custodial staff and paraprofessionals."

Some school librarians, like Mahony, have turned to grant funding to fund their collections when their school budgets are not sufficient. They note that this practice, while it can be effective, usually takes time away from instruction.

To help with local resource sharing between school libraries, some school districts share materials between school libraries on a regular basis and leverage interlibrary loan (ILL), which the Department supports through its Collaborative Libraries Of VERmont (CLOVER) system. Rebecca Sofferman, School Librarian at Colchester Middle School wrote that, "We share resources between the schools in our district regularly, and we have a courier that goes between buildings on a daily basis. My school also participates in CLOVER (including when we need books from our public library), although this doesn't get heavy use. Any CLOVER books must be delivered through the U.S. Mail. When we need books from our public library, we used to have a courier that delivered and picked up books, but that went away during COVID, so now our district librarians have to pick up and deliver books ourselves. I am a lot less likely to offer this to students than I was previously since I don't live near the library, but I will certainly make it happen if students need something."

Academic Library Collections

Bryn Geffert, Dean of Libraries at the University of Vermont (UVM) shared that their libraries have "exceptionally strong collections in the fields one would expect of a comprehensive research university. We boast over a dozen subject specialists who aid researchers in disciplines across the humanities, social sciences, sciences, medicine, and nursing." According to Geffert, UVM is the only academic library in the state staffed by "subject specialist serving nearly all disciplines."

Vermonters may not be aware that "*All* citizens of Vermont are welcome to work with our collections in our library buildings. *All* are eligible to receive a UVM library card without charge." In addition to the materials in UVM's Howe Library, Vermonters may also access the Dana Medical Library at UVM's Larner College of Medicine. Geffert explained that "The Dana Medical Library is the only expertly staffed medical library in the state of Vermont. Given the paucity of good medical libraries in our region, we're concerned about difficulties faced by physicians, nurses, patients, and citizens at large in obtaining good medical information." The staff of the Dana Library are available to serve Vermonters directly but can also assist library staff to support them in answering questions they receive in local libraries.

In addition to the medical library, UVM has other specialized collections. It serves as a federal repository with approximately 900,000 physical items. Geffert explained that "people use the collection—and associated reference services—to examine and understand the workings of our democracy by accessing bills and legislative histories; congressional hearings, debates, and reports; presidential speeches and signing statements; publications of all the agencies of the executive branch; and decisions of the federal courts. Such free and open access to this information, along with expert help in discovering it, is essential to what it means to have a government 'of the people, by the people, and for the people.'"

UVM also has a map room with more than 200,000 sheet maps and atlases. According to Geffert, this is "the largest collection of maps in Vermont and includes several sets of unique and valuable aerial photographs of the state dating back to 1937. These photographs are frequently used by Vermonters, government agencies, and businesses to answer a variety of questions about topics such as property lines, historical locations of roads, development patterns, and logging activities."

At UVM's libraries, Vermonters can also access the Jack and Shirley Silver Special Collections, the Vermont Research Collection, the Rare Book Collection, and ScholarWorks (a collection of the scholarly and creative works of UVM faculty, staff, and students). While many of these specialized collections do not circulate, they can be accessed by the public.

Geffert articulated challenges faced by the UVM libraries as rising online subscription database fees have forced staff to make difficult decisions related to information access—some of which have the potential to impact access to information needed by clinicians in Vermont's health care settings.

Eileen Gatti, former Director of Information Access at Eliot D. Pratt Library of Goddard College shared some of the challenges academic libraries face in digitizing and conserving special collections. She shared that "The library is also in charge of archiving digital senior and masters' theses, which is time-consuming. The student theses are part of the much larger college archives, which are in danger of deterioration because we do not have the staff time, the space, or the financial resources to reorganize, rehouse, and otherwise make accessible our very crowded room full of print materials and other media. Hiring an archivist or even a part-time archive assistant would be extremely helpful, but the college is under constant financial strain and this is never seen as a priority."

During the past year, another of Vermont's schools of higher education, the Vermont State Colleges, were the focus of much media attention when it announced that it was moving to an "all-digital" library collection when they consolidated to form the Vermont State University in July 2023. (https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2023/02/16/backlash-university-says-its-library-will-be-all-digital) The announcement was not well-received by students, faculty, and the public and led to protests and national news coverage.

While many students in higher education settings do utilize online resources heavily, some prefer or even require print materials to conduct research and learn.

An Associated Press story published on February 21, 2023; highlighted equity concerns shared by some of the institution's students. One student, Gavin Bourdeau, shared concerns related to the digital divide. He shared that he has "no access to the internet where he lives and uses the books in the library to study. While the administration said the digital format will make books more accessible, Bourdeau said it will actually make them less accessible for people like him."

Devon Harding, another student, raised concerns related to inclusivity for those with disabilities. Harding is reported to have said, "My disabilities cannot be accommodated digitally. Eye strain, difficulty tracking lines, blue light effects on ocular health, struggles to focus. These are not problems a screen can help with," she told the crowd. "Furthermore, I can't afford all my textbooks without the library."

Bourdeau pointed out that online libraries do not necessarily contain all of the information and materials found in print libraries. He is quoted as having said, "There are books on these shelves that will never be digitized. These books will be lost and their knowledge will be lost with them." (https://apnews.com/article/vermont-state-government-education-5af3554ac1079d508e399ea43444cc9e)

The response of the student body, faculty, and the public demonstrates that even in today's digital age, access to print materials still matters at Vermont's institutions of higher education.

Vermont Department of Libraries Collections

The Department's Vermont State Library follows the duties and functions as outlined in Title 22 § 605-606 of the Vermont State Statutes. The State Library's collection was greatly reduced prior to its move to Barre in 2018. The State Library currently has a physical collection of 18,000 books; 5,000 government documents; and 85 serial subscriptions that focus on Vermont history, Vermont law, Vermont authors, Native Americans, library science, professional development, and youth materials. The Department also circulates sets that include multiple copies of the same book, or "book discussion sets" which are used by book clubs at public and school libraries throughout the state. Book discussion sets are the most heavily utilized resources in the State Library collection. A smaller percentage of circulation is made up of youth titles, Vermont titles, and library science materials.

Books in the Vermont State Library may also be used in-house at the Department of Libraries by appointment. Many items in the Vermont State Library's collection can also be checked out by State of Vermont Employees and members of the Legislature with their Vermont State Library cards.

These numbers include checkouts from the State Library collection via Interlibrary Loan (ILL) or borrowed directly.

The Department of Libraries' physical collections also include materials in the ABLE (Audio Braille Large-print Electronic) Library. The ABLE Library's collection consists of 10,000 large print books, 280 Braille books, and 350 accessible youth items. Vermonters who qualify for ABLE services also have access to the 111,000 talking books on demand through the National Library Service's BARD program. The ABLE library circulates large print deposit collections upon request to public libraries in

Vermont to supplement local large print book collections available for browsing by the public.

ABLE Library Circulation						
	FY18	**FY19**	**FY20**	**FY21**	**FY22**	**FY23**
Digital Talking Books	42,469	42,320	46,728	79,622	92,989	80,641
BARD eAudiobooks	12,872	12,699	13,537	13,649	14,834	16,151
BARD eBraille	673	575	782	491	781	873
Large print direct to ABLE patrons	7,299	7,564	6,400	6,227	6,937	6,257
Large print to public libraries	2,031	2,543	2,330	1,869	2,268	2,548
Large print via ILL	229	200	144	164	162	188
Total Circulation ABLE	**65,573**	**65,901**	**69,921**	**102,022**	**117,971**	**107,418**

The ABLE Library serves as the state of Vermont's National Library Service (NLS) network library. The NLS "is a free braille and talking book library service for people with temporary or permanent low vision, blindness, or a physical, perceptual, or reading disability that prevents them from using regular print materials. Through a national network of cooperating libraries, NLS circulates books and magazines in braille or audio formats, that are instantly downloadable to a personal device or delivered by mail free of charge." (https://www.loc.gov/nls/) The NLS partners with libraries in all fifty states and U.S. territories to deliver services.

The availability of talking books and braille books through the ABLE Library saves expenses for eligible Vermonters, who do not have to purchase costly audio or braille versions of books. The rich array of titles available through ABLE means that ABLE patrons have interesting and personalized reading materials at their easy disposal.

Eligible Vermonters also have access to large print books through the ABLE Library as well as through large print deposit collections at public libraries around the state. The ABLE Library makes these deposit collections available to public libraries on a rotating basis. ABLE also has an accessible youth collection, which contains combined print books/audiobooks and high contrast picture books.

Because it provides reading materials for the blind, the ABLE Library ships items at no cost through the USPS. Free movement of materials for the blind and print disabled

through the postal system lessens barriers between often marginalized groups and reading materials. ABLE Library staff provide readers' advisory services to their patrons so that they receive materials that match their reading preferences.

Consortium Pricing

Physical and online library materials are expensive, and Vermont's libraries are always looking for ways to keep costs low. One way the Department supports those efforts is by participating in the Massachusetts Higher Education Consortium (MHEC). Through MHEC, Vermont's libraries receive a discount on purchases from major national vendors of library materials. (https://libraries.vermont.gov/services/mhec-purchasing)

Legal Resources

The State Library has not added significant print legal resources since 2015 and currently meets its statutory obligation to provide State employees with access to legal resources by maintaining a contract with Thomson Reuters Westlaw. State departments pay for each user seat that has access to the Westlaw database for employees who require this resource.

The Department of Libraries meets its statutory obligation to provide Vermonters with access to legal resources and legal reference services through an annual grant of $90,000 to the Vermont Law and Graduate School, which administers the Community Legal Information Center (CLIC). Through this service, a professional law librarian provides Vermonters with access to the physical collections of the Vermont Law and Graduate School's Cornell library in Randolph, and with access to legal databases and assistance utilizing these materials by legal reference librarian. Vermonters also have access to legal self-help books from these collections via ILL.

Institutional Collections

The Department of Libraries is responsible for providing library materials to those in Vermont's correctional and psychiatric facilities. The Department's fiscal year 2024 budget includes $36,000 for collections at the state's six regional correctional facilities. The Department has begun conversations with the Department of Corrections to explore the possibility of providing access to selected collections of eBooks and eAudiobooks to those in the state's correctional facilities in the future. These materials could potentially be accessed using tablets already in use at the correctional facilities.

The Department's fiscal year 2024 budget also includes $3,000 for physical collections at the Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital (VPCH) and the River Valley Therapeutic Residence (formerly the Middlesex Therapeutic Community Residence). The Department also provides periodicals to patients at the VPCH, totaling $1,074.55. Patients at the VPCH also have tablets which can access the databases the

Department provides and the eBooks and eAudiobooks it provides through the Palace Project app. Finally, patients can access materials through ILL.

The Department provides periodicals for the residents of the Vermont Veterans' Home, totaling $539.59. The Vermont Veterans' Home has indicated to Department staff that they are not currently interested in receiving books from the Department, as they lack space to accommodate a library collection.

The Department of Libraries allocated $84,000 of Vermont's IMLS ARPA funds toward the purchase of physical materials for libraries within the State correctional and psychiatric facilities. These institutions include the Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital, the Middlesex Therapeutic Community Residence (which has since moved to the River Valley Therapeutic Residence), and six correctional facilities overseen by the Vermont Department of Corrections: Northeast Correctional Complex, Northern State Correctional Facility, Northwest State Correctional Facility, Southern State Correctional Facility, and Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility.

Resource Sharing

Many of Vermont's public library buildings are small with limited shelf-space for collections, and many of Vermont's public libraries have modest collections budgets. In this environment, resource sharing is very important as it helps keep library services affordable.

Vermont statute charges the Department of Libraries (the Department) with promoting resource sharing between Vermont's libraries. The Department does this in multiple ways:

- supporting Interlibrary Loan services (ILL);

- providing online databases for all Vermonters;

- providing a collection of eBooks and eAudiobooks for all Vermonters;

- providing access to legal materials and reference services for all Vermonters; and

- providing a circulation collection of print books to all Vermonters.

In addition to the Department of Libraries, resource-sharing consortia have evolved in Vermont including the Catamount Library Network, the Green Mountain Library Consortium, and VOKAL. Vermont's library consortia help Vermont's public libraries pool their resources in aid of improved access to library collections through library catalogs and/or by pooling resources to collectively purchase shared library materials.

Resource Sharing: CLOVER and Interlibrary Loan

The Department administers the statewide Collaborative Libraries of VERmont (CLOVER) platform, which is a key element in the state's Interlibrary Loan (ILL) program. The Department used to maintain a centralized "union catalog" and an email-based ILL system to facilitate resource sharing. It has since moved to the CLOVER platform which enables resource sharing by allowing live searches of the online catalogs of libraries across Vermont. CLOVER enables users to immediately learn whether a book is available at another library. All libraries in Vermont are provided free access so that they can place ILL requests for materials owned by other libraries in the state to meet the needs of their local library users. Statewide resource sharing through CLOVER helps keep local collection procurement costs low while ensuring libraries can provide access to books that the people in their community want to read.

In FY 2023, 232 of Vermont's libraries actively used CLOVER, including:

- 154 public libraries;

- 71 school libraries;

- six academic libraries; and

- one special library.

In FY 2023, Vermont's libraries shared 56,261 through the state's ILL network, including books, DVDs, audiobooks, articles, CDs, and musical scores.
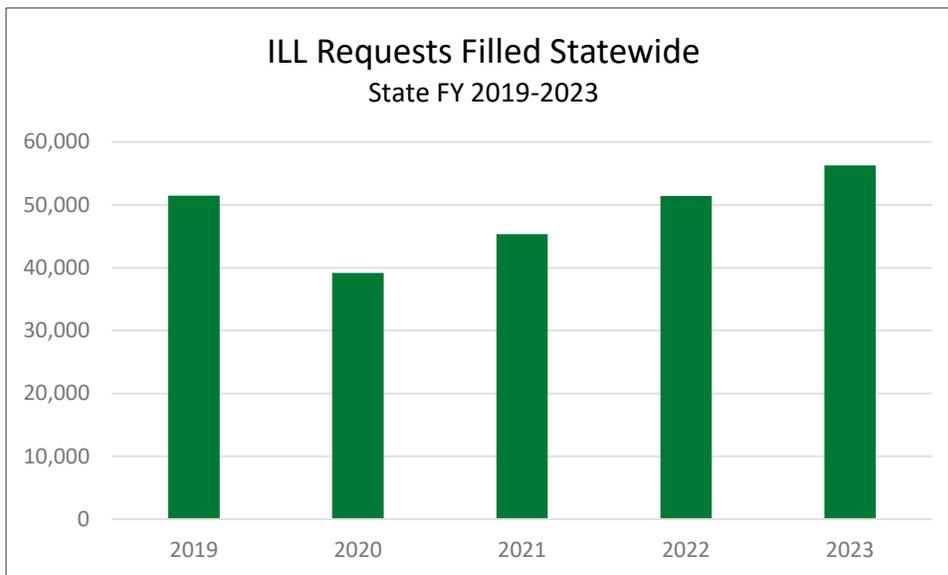
Source: Vermont Department of Libraries

At one time, the Department of Libraries filled many ILL requests directly. Materials from its six regional libraries were sent quickly by U.S. mail to libraries nearby. With the closure of the Department of Libraries' regional libraries and the downsizing of the State Library's physical collections and staff, the Department no longer had the resources to perform this service. With the closing of the regional libraries and the significant reduction of books from the State Library's collection, costs associated with ILL staffing and shipping fell more heavily onto public libraries across the state.

Where previously librarians looked first to borrow books held at the regional libraries through ILL, with that option no longer available they looked to other public libraries. Immediately, the number of requests and the costs of shipping those books fell onto already understaffed and underfunded public libraries.

ILL presents a central and critical service within the Vermont library landscape. However, Vermont's ILL structure is not without challenges. The lending library assumes the cost of purchasing and storing books, and then must provide those books to other libraries upon request. When a library is a "net lender," meaning it lends more books *to* other libraries than it borrows *from* other libraries, the cost inequity of staff time and shipping expenses can feel excessive. While the Department provides non-competitive grants to offset some ILL costs for public libraires, it does not have the resources to provide grants to offset the full costs of ILL for participating libraries, including staff time and shipping costs.

The Working Group heard from members of the library community that changes implemented years ago at the state level continue to impact the access their patrons had to library materials. Randal Smathers, Library Director at the Rutland Public Library voiced his concern that cost cuts at the state level had led to cost increases at the state's handful of large public libraries. With the closure of the Department's regional libraries, the largest public libraries stepped into the role of maintaining access to deep collections. However, these large libraries were not provided with the financial support needed to serve as book repositories for smaller libraries in their region while still providing direct service to their own local communities. Smathers explained that patrons of small libraries frequently place ILL requests for items owned by the much larger Rutland Public Library. Rutland Public Library staff must then gather the requested items their library owns and send them to other Vermont communities, which takes time every day. If a member of the Rutland Public Library comes to their library looking for a book, they may find that it has been checked out to fill an ILL request elsewhere in the state. In short, ILL can sometimes have a negative impact on the access to the community for whom the book was originally purchased. For small libraries that receive many books to meet their patrons' needs from other public libraries, ILL is a great benefit and cost savings. For net lenders, even those who believe in the general principle of sharing resources, ILL can feel like a burden.

> *"When the state decided to cut support for the central library function (interlibrary loan), it was intended to save money, but in fact it's a false economy, and just increased the spending and spread it through all of the individual libraries,"—Randal Smathers, Director, Rutland Public Library*

That said, resource sharing enables Vermont's libraries to use their limited collections budgets wisely. Librarians can purchase materials for their collections that they know will be well-used in their communities while still having access to materials that would be less popular locally through ILL. Librarians with deep subject expertise can cultivate collections on topics such as travel or cooking and share those with people throughout the state via ILL.

The Working Group heard from MaryPat Larrabee, Library Director at the St. Albans Free Library, that through coordinated collection development of nonfiction materials, libraries could develop more specialized collections in one or more topics to be shared through ILL. This approach could provide Vermonters with a wider variety of books via the ILL system but would be a large project to undertake.

> *"I have curated a large collection of travel guides, watercolor painting instruction, and all of the works of Wendell Berry. With these available via ILL, other libraries can spend their nonfiction funds on other areas creating specialized collections."—Jeannette Bair, Retired Director, Rochester Public Library*

Resource Sharing: Courier Program

After searching for a book in CLOVER, a library patron can request that book through Interlibrary Loan (ILL) and have it sent to their library for pickup. Traditionally, the movement of library books around the state—and the world—was done through the postal service. This required that libraries either pay shipping costs for each item requested through ILL or pass those costs on to the patron. At $3.00 to $5.00 per item shipped via media mail, these costs are prohibitive for both high volume lenders and small libraries with limited budgets. Due to the high mailing costs, many public libraries in Vermont were reluctant to promote ILL or placed strict limits on borrowing to control expenses.

For many years, the Department of Libraries provided Resource Sharing Grants to libraries to reduce ILL costs for libraries. The Resource Sharing Grants, as little as $50 annually for some libraries, covered just a fraction of the costs as many libraries' annual ILL mailing costs ran in the thousands of dollars.

In 2016 the Department sought to address the challenge that high shipping costs pose for public libraries by funding a pilot ILL courier program. The pilot was conducted by the Green Mountain Library Consortium (GMLC), which implemented a courier system that tested the viability of moving physical library materials directly between libraries. To support this pilot, the Department of Libraries issued grants to 60 of the 88 public libraries participating in the courier pilot program in January 2016. These grants of roughly $270 per public library totaled $16,245. The grants reduced the cost to each library of paying for a courier to stop at their library each week to pick up and deliver materials requested via ILL. The Department granted public libraries in the Catamount Consortium the full cost of their first courier stop to offset fears that the state's only user-initiated ILL network would see a substantial increase in lending.

The pilot period took place between January and June of 2016. Participating libraries set up one, two, or three stops per week and were responsible for half the cost of the first weekly stop and the full cost of the second and third stops. Most libraries elected to have one weekly stop, but some larger libraries and those with higher loan numbers elected to implement more than one stop each week.

Through this program, a courier visits libraries to pick up items that are being sent to fulfill ILL requests made by patrons of other libraries. At each stop, the courier picks up items entering the system and drops off items being returned to the lending library. The items the courier picks up go to a central warehouse where they are sorted for delivery to the requesting library. The courier then delivers items to the requesting library on its next weekly stop at that location, where the items are checked out to the patron who requested them. Finally, the courier repeats the process in reverse after the patron has read and returned the item, and the item goes back to its original owning library.

The courier pilot was a great success. In the first six months of 2016, 30,584 items were moved around the state to meet the reading needs of Vermonters. According to the report following the first year of the program, among the 75 participating libraries that reported historical ILL financial data in 2016 "58% more materials are getting into the hands of Vermonters who need them. Libraries saved over $67,000 in transport costs. Reported satisfaction with the program is almost universally positive." (https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/InitiativesProjects/VTLIB_ILL_Courier_1_year_pilot_report.pdf)

The pilot report reflects that despite increasing the volume of materials moved between libraries by over 50%, participating libraries reported both significant shipping cost savings and more than 700 hours of saved staff time. Staff time was reduced because packing books for shipment and bringing them to the nearest post office takes a great deal more time than placing a book with a preprinted slip into a zipper bag for pick-up. Staff of participating libraries did not have to leave the building while the post office was open to ship packages—an important time-savings for libraries with just one or two staff members.

Importantly, items moved through the courier program often fulfill patron requests more quickly than those that are sent via USPS's book rate, which is a low priority mailing option. Items generally move between two libraries within the courier system within one week. The arrangement with GMLC continued through 2016 and 2017. During those years, GMLC contracted directly with the courier company. The Department of Libraries supported the program with grants to public libraries, purchasing specialized bags, and warehousing fees. The Department paid $88,782 for grants and warehousing costs during the time the Department partnered with GMLC for the courier Service (January 2016-February 2018).

The Department issued a request for proposals for courier services to support the program in early 2017. Since March 1, 2018, the Department has had full responsibility for administering the courier program.

With the value of the program established, more libraries joined the network. The volume of materials moving through the courier increased steadily until the pandemic in 2020. During the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries around the state and country closed their doors. Early fears that COVID-19 virus might be transmissible via library books impacted circulation of physical materials across the country. In 2020, the volume of materials moved through the courier dropped by nearly 20,000 items.

After more was learned about the transmission of the COVID-19 virus through scientific research, the public and library staff became far more comfortable checking out physical items from libraries and ILL service rebounded. In 2021, the number of items transported via the courier system began to grow and in 2023 the number of items moving through the courier surpassed pre-pandemic levels.

The number of libraries participating in the courier system has grown 53.4% (from 88 to 135) since the Department began running the program in 2018 and the number of items transported via the courier system annually has increased by 368% in that same period (from 30,584 to 143,116).

Fiscal Year	# of Courier System Libraries	# of Items Transported via the Courier	Cost Per Courier Stop	Total Cost of Courier Grants Issued by the Department
2016	88	30,584	$15.00	$16,245
2017	88	75,028	$15.00	$27,297
2018	100	83,347	$15.00	$48,360
2019	111	100,069	$20.00	$26,325
2020	120	81,386	$21.48	$36,270
2021	125	115,726	$21.48	$46,800
2022	134	122,843	$22.97	$74,074*
2023	135	143,116	$24.14	$60,563
2024	138	In progress	$26.30	$70,013
		Total items: 752,099		Total grants: $335,969

2022 numbers include additional ARPA funds provided to libraries for a second weekly courier stop.
Source: Vermont Department of Libraries

In fiscal year 2024, 138 libraries are participating in the courier system, including: 126 public libraries, 6 school libraries, 4 academic libraries, 1 community library, and 1 special library.

> *The number of libraries participating in the courier program has grown 53.4% since the Department began running the program in 2018 and the number of items transported via the courier system has increased by 90.8% in that same period.*

As the number of libraries participating in the courier program has increased, the cost to the Department to support the system has also increased. The Department continues to offer non-competitive courier grants to offset costs to all public libraries that express interest in joining the program on an annual basis.

The Department also pays warehousing fees to the courier company. This cost pays for items to be moved to a centralized location and sorted. In 2016, the warehousing fee was $500 per month. The courier program has grown to include more libraries and more books are moving between libraries each year, which has led in an increase in storage fees. In 2019, storage fees were $800 per month, and these fees will increase to $1,200 per month in April 2024. From the inception of the program in 2016 through June 2023 the Department has paid $59,400 in warehousing fees.

The Department was able to leverage American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds it was granted from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to support Vermont's libraries in COVID-19 response and recovery. Using those one-time funds, the

Department paid $1.48 for public libraries' first courier stop, which stabilized the cost of one stop at $20 from 2020 to 2023. In total, the Department allocated $29,784 of the ARPA funding it received from IMLS toward stabilizing courier program costs for participating public libraries.

The Department also supports the courier program by purchasing the standardized bins and bags used to pack and transport materials. These items are moved between locations and wear out over time, so must be replenished. The cost to the Department for these purchases since 2016 has been $40,403.

The Department also participates in this program as a lending institution. Through June 2018, the State Library and the Midstate Library each had three courier stops per week. Since moving from the Pavilion Building in Montpelier to the Vermont History Center building in Barre in June 2018, the Department has reduced to three stops per week at one location. The total cost for the State Library to participate as a lending institution since 2016 has been $28,777.32.

In total, the Department of Libraries has spent $493,762 in support of the courier program between the pilot program 2016 and June 2023.

The Department currently contracts with Priority Express on the courier program. Priority Express works with individual libraries to determine the pick-up locations and timing of courier stops. The pricing structure for April 2023 through March 2024 is:

- first weekly stop (includes one bin with a weight limit of 50 pounds): $24.14 (Department pays $1.48, reducing cost to $22.66);

- additional weekly stops (for all items up to the weight limit of fifty pounds): $24.14; and

- additional bins in one stop: $1.88 for each additional fifty pounds (no matter how many bins).

The annual cost to a library for one courier stop per week has risen slowly since 2016 period, mostly due to increased fuel prices, and the cost for the most recent contract year was $1,142.62. That cost will rise to $1,367.60 in spring 2024.

The Department estimates that in fiscal year 2023 the 135 libraries in the courier system saved a total of $345,171.61 in shipping costs—an average savings of $2,556.11 for each participating library. (These Departmental figures are based on an estimated charge of $3.32 package of not more than one pound as of July 2022 through the USPS using their Library Rate. Materials weighing more than a pound would cost even more through USPS's Library Rate.) The Department's 2023 savings estimate does not include the amount of staff time saved by using courier bags, nor the amount saved on packaging products for shipping—both of which the 2016 pilot proved were a significant savings in staff time and money for participating libraries.

So far, the courier grant program has been funded entirely with IMLS Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Grants to States funds, which are allocated to the state of Vermont and administered by the Department. In fiscal year 2023, the cost of one courier stop was $1,142.7 and the Department granted $571.35 to 106 libraries, a total of $60,563.10. In fiscal year 2024, the contracted rate per courier stop will rise to $1,367.60 and the Department will grant $650 to 110 libraries, a total of $71,500.

The Department anticipated that the cost of the courier program in future years will rise as the program grows and as gas and transportation costs rise. Depending on the contracted rates of service and the number of libraries that wish to participate in future years, the Department may need to make changes to its courier grant program based on the funds it has available. It may be necessary for the Department to reduce the percentage of the courier grant awards each participating library receives or change the eligibility requirements for these grants.

The Working Group heard from some members of the school library community that they are interested in joining the courier program but lack the resources to do so without grant funding.

Frances Binder, School Librarian at the Ruth B. Winton Memorial Library at Colchester High School shared, "We are active in CLOVER (Vermont's ILL system) both as borrowers and lenders. We find that the ILL system works quite well for us (barring pandemic-related delays these past couple of years). Our one big wish with the ILL system would be that schools could participate in the courier service. Currently we are only able to lend and borrow through the postal service which means that some libraries won't lend to us (if they only lend through the courier service). It also means that in order to borrow books from our local [public] library, I or my library assistant must make trips on our own time to pick books up and return them. While we do this willingly (anything to get books in our students' hands) this does represent a real cost in terms of personnel time and resources."

Resource Sharing: Inter-state ILL

The Department facilitates borrowing of physical materials by Vermonters from libraries outside the state. To support this work the Department has dedicated one full-time staff person as well as backup support from two other employees. This number of staff is needed as the requests must be initiated, as well as updated throughout the ILL cycle (request, ship, return, check in). This work is vital to Vermont libraries as it opens up access to resources for all Vermonters without requiring librarians to learn a second ILL system. Over the past five years, the number of items Vermont's libraries has loaned to out-of-state libraries has dropped while the number of items Vermonters have borrowed from out-of-state libraries has increased.

Fiscal Year	Loaned to Out-of-State Libraries	Borrowed from Out-of-State Libraries
2019	304	4,789
2020	171	3,686
2021	114	3,896
2022	132	4,621
2023	138	5,078

Source: Vermont Department of Libraries

While the priority when processing requests to borrow from out-of-state libraries is to request from free lenders, there are some instances where lending libraries charge a fee to borrow items. In cases where no free lender options are available, the borrowing library in Vermont is asked if they agree to pay the borrowing fee. If the library agrees to pay, the Department pays the lending library and bills the borrowing library. Of the 5,078 items borrowed from out-of-state lenders in fiscal year 2023, only 23 items were borrowed from lenders who charge a fee. These fees ranged from $5-30.

Resource Sharing: COVID Impacts

While the sharing of materials through the statewide ILL system never officially stopped due to the COVID-19 health emergency, there was a six-week closure of the courier system due to the courier service ceasing operations for this period. During this closure of the courier system, libraries statewide paused their interlibrary loan service. Most libraries in Vermont restarted courier services by October 2020.

Library circulation decreased in Vermont during the pandemic, just as it decreased across the entire nation. This happened because the public was afraid of possible fomite transmission in response to some press reports early in the pandemic that the COVID-19 virus might be transmissible on surfaces of furniture, boxes, and library books.

Nationally, the library community responded with an abundance of caution and even studied the possibility of fomite transmission via library materials through the *REALM Project* (https://www.oclc.org/realm/home.html). Many libraries quarantined books upon their return for as many as four days before checking them in. This led to a decrease in the number of times a particular book could circulate to the public in a calendar year which significantly impacted the public's access to popular titles. Additionally, the closure of library buildings during the pandemic eliminated the public's ability to browse the shelves and select items serendipitously. While libraries developed workarounds such as increasing telephone and email readers' advisory services, the pandemic had a significant impact on overall physical circulation of library materials. During the pandemic, community members turned more heavily to eBooks and eAudiobooks, which carried no risk of transmitting the virus.

Libraries in Vermont are rebounding from the impacts of COVID-19, however, since the pandemic there has continued to be an increased demand for eBooks and eAudiobooks in libraries and some libraries have not seen a full return to their in-person use, including browsing and borrowing physical collections.

Resource Sharing: Online Databases

In addition to maintaining the physical collections of the State Library, the Department currently meets its statutory obligation (22 V.S.A. § 606) by providing all Vermonters with access to online databases that cover a wide breadth of topics for children, teens, and adults. (https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/chapter/22/013)

The Department of Libraries selects databases to meet the education, vocational, and recreational needs of the public. These databases include news articles, journal articles, and eBooks.

The Department provides traditional databases such as the Vermont Online Library Gale Cengage products, which provide online access to journals and research material. As public interest in online learning has grown, the Department has also begun providing Vermonters with access to online learning platforms to meet their educational and career development needs. The Department regularly evaluates the content of each database, the usage of each database by Vermonters, and the evolving landscape of available products. The Department engages vendors through the state's regular procurement process and selects databases based that will provide Vermonters with the best resources while staying within the Department's allocated budget.

In Fiscal Year 2024, the following online resources are provided to the public by the Department:

The Vermont Online Library

The Vermont Online Library is a collection of fifty databases from Gale Cengage that is available free for all Vermonters. Resources are available for all age ranges from elementary, to college students, through adult professionals. These databases all have a host of accessibility tools built in, making them truly accessible to every Vermonter. Usage of the Vermont Online Library dropped precipitously during the pandemic in fiscal years 2020 and 2021 and has begun rebounding.

Fiscal Year	Sessions	Avg. Session Length (min)	Full Text Retrievals	Searches
2019	433,090	10.05	267,720	886,275
2020	277,653	9.76	181,716	541,055
2021	271,491	8.98	174,157	444,662
2022	353,415	11.39	203,911	503,477
2023	364,856	10.63	200,794	590,509

Source: Vermont Department of Libraries

Vermont Legal Forms

The Department added Gale LegalForms to the Vermont Online Library in late 2023. Gale Legal Forms offers a wide range of legal documents and templates for use in personal and business legal dealings. These documents and forms are tailored to and are consistent with Vermont law. Patrons can access documents for used car sales, bankruptcy, divorce, apartment rental agreements, wills, and more.

Gale Presents: Peterson's Test and Career Prep

This database offers practice exams, in-depth career assessments, college entrance tests, resumé and cover letter building tools, and more. Users can get ready for the CDL, GED, SAT, or LSAT, explore potential careers, or prepare for an upcoming interview.

LearningExpress

Resources for careers, job hunting, resumés and cover letters, high school homework support, and citizenship test resources.

Usage of LearningExpress continues to decline and the cost of providing it for the public has risen over time. In fiscal year 2023, the cost was $82.44 per session and $106 per resource accessed. Due to the high cost per use and low utilization, the Department plans to discontinue this resource.

Universal Class

Universal Class provides Vermonters with a collection of over 500 continuing education courses covering a range of professional skills and hobbies. The cost per session in fiscal year 2023 was $0.23 per lesson, and $0.23 per submission. While the resource is affordable, it has not been heavily used so the Department plans to discontinue this resource.

Udemy

Udemy provides Vermonters with a collection of over 14,000 video courses from Gale Cengage. The training topics include a range of professional skills and hobbies. The Department began providing Vermonters with this resource in 2023 because this instructional platform has great depth and breadth. The Department is hopeful that it will be better utilized than other learning platforms it has provided previously.

Resource Sharing: Database Platform Costs

Product	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26
VOL	$253,500	$286,000	$286,000	$286,000
LearningExpress*	$49,050	discontinuing		
Universal Class**	$25,000	discontinuing		
Palace Project	$20,575	$18,268	$18,681	$19,115
Palace Project content	$20,000	$20,000	$20,000	$20,000
Total	**$368,125**	**$324,268**	**$324,681**	**$325,115**
Year Over Year	5.83%	(11.91%)	0.001%	0.001%

*LearningExpress contract expires at the end of May 2024.
**Universal Class contract expires at the end of August 2024.

The Department is working to flatline costs for databases and online collections over the next three fiscal years.

In fiscal year 2022, costs for online resources provided by the Department were $347,841. The cost to the Department for databases has increased by 5.83% in 2023 to $368,125. Due to proactive reductions in costs by the Department, fiscal year 2024 costs will decline by 11.91%. Marginal increases in existing contracts in fiscal years 2025 and 2026 will lead to negligible cost increases.

However, across the country, academic and public libraries are reporting rapidly escalating database costs. The Department anticipates that database costs will continue to increase, which will likely pose a challenge given its budgetary limitations when the Department's current database contracts expire in coming years.

Resource Sharing: eBooks and eAudiobooks

The Department of Libraries has heard from the Vermont library community that libraries have difficulties meeting the growing demand for eBooks and eAudiobooks while still purchasing new physical books for their collections. The Department's print book acquisition is limited by space and budgetary constraints.

Over fiscal years 2022 and 2023, the Department had an opportunity to use $236,770 of Vermont's one-time federal IMLS ARPA to expand its eBook and eAudiobook collection. Restrictions on the IMLS ARPA funds limited the Department's selection of materials to those eBooks and eAudiobooks with perpetual licenses, so the Department focused on providing a collection of core titles with unlimited checkouts to the public. Knowing these core titles, such as the ones found on school reading lists, are in the Department's online book collection enables local libraries to spend their limited online book budgets on popular titles.

The eBooks and eAudiobooks in the Department's collection are available to Vermonters through the Vermont Palace Project, which the Department launched in January 2022. The Vermont Palace Project is an easy-to-use, content-neutral, online platform through which eBooks and eAudiobooks from many publishers and vendors can be accessed by the public at no cost.

The Department's goals for the Palace Project are to:

- provide a core collection of classic titles to all Vermonters through the Department of Libraries eBook and eAudiobook collections;

- provide a platform for local libraries to host their local eBook and Audiobook collections;

- make finding and accessing local and state eBook and eAudiobook collections easier for Vermonters;

- increase the speed with which Vermonters can access books they wish to read; and

- provide all of this at no cost to the public or local libraries.

The Palace Project platform launched in June 2022, when it began being built out, library-by-library. As of August 2023, over 110 public libraries have joined the platform. An additional 19 public libraries are scheduled for the next wave of onboarding in fiscal year 2024. Circulation has been increasing since the launch of the project and the addition of libraries and their patrons. In FY23, there were 10,282 checkouts.

Through the Palace App, the Department provides Vermonters with a core collection of more than 7,500 eBooks and eAudiobooks hand-selected for our community. In addition

to the core collection, the Palace App also provides access to over 15,700 items outside of copyright protection through the Digital Public Library of America by Lyrasis to all users. These 22,500+ titles can be provided to Vermonters in tandem with other digital content that is locally selected and procured by their public library. Individual libraries can purchase digital items specifically for their patrons from multiple vendors and then incorporate those items into the Palace App platform.

As of May 2023, the Department of Libraries eBook and eAudiobook holdings in the Palace App include 3,162 eBooks and 3,305 eAudiobooks. In addition to the 6,467 items available in English, the Department's eBook and eAudiobook collection includes 1,061 non-English titles to support libraries serving migrant worker communities, existing refugees, and new Americans in the state.

Due to the high cost of licenses for eBooks eAudiobooks, the Department is working to identify funds to continue expanding the number of eBooks and eAudiobooks in its collection. The Department was fortunate to have access to one-time ARPA funding from IMLS to build its core collection of eBooks and eAudiobooks, but has a limited collections budget to facilitate continued purchases in this area. That said, there is significant growth in the readership of eBooks and eAudiobooks in the state and nationwide, and the library community has shared that it would appreciate support for increases in the size of shared eBook and eAudiobook collections.

Impact of COVID-19 on Collection and Collection Usage in Vermont's Public Libraries

Collection usage was impacted significantly in Vermont by the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost all Vermont libraries closed for periods of weeks to months. There were many periods of time during which libraries allowed visitors for appointment-only browsing or browsing for limited or irregular hours. Some libraries adapted to providing curb-side service during this time to keep up some circulation, but in-person browsing still varied. During periods of time when libraries were unable to allow the public to enter their buildings, the public was not able to browse the collection in-person. There were also different practices surrounding quarantining materials at libraries due to concerns about fomite transmission of the virus, resulting in the removal of materials from circulation for up to a week's time after their return. Additionally, shipping delays for new material from book jobbers stopped or delayed collection growth and offerings during this time.

Vermonters who did not have access to the internet or devices in their home had less ability to go online to search for and place holds on library materials—so this group of the population was more significantly impacted by the closure of library buildings to the public. This group of Vermonters also had significantly less access to information through the open internet or paid databases.

> *"If COVID-19 drove any point home for Vermont public libraries, it's the huge challenge of meeting our communities' appetite for e-content. While my library building was closed in 2020 and into 2021, I, like many of my fellow librarians, shifted nearly all of my collection purchasing to ebooks and downloadable audio. These formats are available 24/7 for community members who have both an internet connection and a device on which to read / listen— which are obviously barriers for plenty of people. During the nearly two years since the pandemic arrived in Vermont, the digital content landscape has evolved in ways that create additional barriers, and the conditions weren't favorable to begin with."*
> *—Amy Grasmick, Director, Kimball Library, Randolph*

To address inequities in information access due to COVID-19, IMLS distributed $2.135 million dollars of ARPA grant funding to the Department of Libraries. Of that funding, the Department of Libraries leveraged $478,000 to support statewide services and resource sharing. The Department distributed $1,193,215.61 directly as non-competitive grants in two rounds—166 ($928,410.84) Public Libraries applied for round one and 139 ($264,804.77) for round two. These funds were used by municipal and incorporated public libraries around the state to purchase equipment and resources that would help them to better address ongoing space needs related to COVID-19 and to bolster their collections and resources. Because COVID-19 disproportionately impacted communities with higher equity needs, the Department encouraged libraries to spend funds in the second wave of non-competitive grants to expand their Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Collections.

In recognition of the increased need for digital resources during the pandemic, the Department also awarded funds to other organizations that help meet Vermonters' information needs including:

- $218,050 in grant funding to the Green Mountain Library Consortium for eContent; and

- $7,500 to the Catamount Library Consortium for the Aspen Discovery Layer.

Key Issues and Trends Related to Collections

The format of information—print or digital—is a topic of increasing discussion in library circles. Most libraries in Vermont provide both print and digital materials for their patrons. One advantage of eBooks is that the size and contrast of the font can easily be changed by the reader based on their individual needs, so they are more accessible than print resources.

The Vermont public has shown increasing interest in accessing books in digital format. A number of content distributors have gained prominence in the eBook and eAudiobook arena, and a consistent challenge has arisen around supporting the public in using multiple platforms to access the resources of various publishers and vendors.

The typical eBook and eAudiobook procurement model poses a challenge to the Department and to libraries statewide and nationwide. When a library purchases a physical copy of a book, that library owns that physical copy in perpetuity. There are no limits on the number of times a library may circulate a physical book in its collection, and there are no limits on the number of years a library may circulate a physical book in its collection. In contrast, publishers typically do not sell a copy of an eBook or eAudiobook to a library—they typically sell the rights to circulate that book a limited number of times to the community or for a limited number of years. Such models vary widely, with the typical model being that when a library "buys an eBook", it actually does not purchase that book but instead buys a *license* to lend that eBook to its patrons for a limited time.

As reported in a September 2022 Stateline article, when libraries purchase eBooks and eAudiobooks, "Today, it is common for e-book licenses from major publishers to expire after two years or 26 borrows, and to cost between $60 and $80 per license." (https://stateline.org/2022/09/06/librarians-and-lawmakers-push-for-greater-access-to-e-books/)

With limited funding, libraries are also challenged to fund both physical and digital collections. While some Vermonters are eager to check out books digitally, others lack the internet connectivity or personal devices to use digital resources. Other Vermonters simply prefer reading traditional books.

> *"People continue to prefer physical books, and the fact that digital natives continue to check out physical library books in high numbers indicates that this is unlikely to change in the future. Circulation of physical materials by teenagers, for example, who have had access to digital e-books their entire lives, has gone up every year for the past four years at Ilsley Public Library."*
> *—Dana Hart, Director, Isley Public Library, Middlebury*

According to the Pew Research Center, since 2019, percentage of eBook readers has increased from 25% to 30% across the country. EBooks have been shown to be more popular amongst the 18-29 age range (42% report reading eBooks). Adults with an annual income of less than $30,000 who have listened to an audiobook has increased to 22% (from 14%). A third of readers used both print and digital books in the past year. Subscriptions for digital content have become more popular, offering magazines, streaming video, music, and language learning programs. The 2022 Pew study reports that 33% of US adults have read both print and eBooks in the last twelve months, with

9% reporting reading digital books only. Overall usage of eBooks and audiobooks in the nation have increased in the last year, while print books continue to be the more popular format (https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/01/06/three-in-ten-americans-now-read-e-books/).

Licensing digital content for libraries provides additional complications to maintaining and providing digital collections. The "Big 5" Publishers: Hachette Book Group, HarperCollins, Macmillan Publishers, Penguin Random House, and Simon & Schuster set licensing models that are not sustainable for most library budgets. A two-year license for an adult title for a library can cost $50 - $120, while the single consumer can purchase a title in perpetuity for $12 - $15. (https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A709977026/GPS?u=vol_m761c&sid=bookmark-GPS&xid=81343bcd).

Libraries are faced with spending money on repurchasing content that was previously accessible in the collection.

> *"It's a complicated and volatile market, with changing prices, varying licensing models, and limited options to share even within the state."—Mary Danko, Director, Fletcher Free Library, Burlington*

Vermont's public libraries select and maintain their collections locally. Each public library board is responsible for developing its own collection development policy, which it typically does through discussion and guidance from staff. Because each Vermont public library has local control over its policies, there is variety among collection development policies in the state. Library boards are also responsible for determining their collection maintenance and materials challenge processes. Materials challenges have increased over the last two years throughout the nation and in Vermont, and this is an area that has the potential to impact the availability of print and digital resources to meet the information, vocational, and recreational needs of Vermonters.

Maintaining physical books is of particular importance in Vermont, where many community members do not have access to the internet or a way to read an eBook or listen to an eAudiobook. As Amy Grasmick, Director of the Kimball Public Library in Randolph shared with the Working Group, "There are a lot of reasons to be concerned about the transition of books from physical to digital formats. The largest professional organization in the country, the American Library Association, has been advocating for more equitable access to e-content for more than a decade, with no discernible effect. Prices continue to rise, competition is disappearing, and libraries continue to struggle to provide a diverse collection for their community members."

The ever-rising costs of online databases is another significant concern for Vermont's libraries—and particularly the Department of Libraries and Vermont's academic libraries. Bryn Geffert, Dean of Libraries at the University of Vermont shared with the Working Group that "Recently, due to budgetary constraints, the Dana Library at the University of Vermont Medical Center has had to cancel subscriptions to numerous online journals in both the sciences and health sciences. The loss of access to these resources has had, and will continue to have, a negative impact on efficiencies in obtaining clinical information within the health care setting, and timely access to literature to support grants and grant-funded research which are impactful to not just the university but to the state as well."

In recent years, many academic libraries and large public libraries nationwide have moved away from retaining bound copies of printed journals and over to online databases. Libraries have cited the lack of usage of the bound periodicals and the need to free up more space in the library for people and programs. Initially, online databases seemed to be a better way to use limited collections budgets while maintaining access to little-used journals. Scholars and researchers could access these materials as needed without necessitating that a library keep little used bound journals on the shelves of the library. Over time, however, the cost of subscriptions to online databases has escalated significantly and universities and public libraries are finding their budgets have not expanded at the same rate.

Libraries are now facing a "serials crisis" as they can no longer afford access to journal articles behind restrictive paywalls. The Association of Research Libraries is quoted as explaining that, "Scholarly communication relies in part on the ability of research libraries to purchase published works. The marketplace for scholarly publishing has developed in ways that challenge libraries' ability to acquire the works needed by their users. Commercialization of publishing in both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors has led to egregious price increases and unacceptable terms and conditions of use for some key research resources needed by the scholarly community."
(https://sites.tufts.edu/scholarlycommunication/open-access/the-serials-crisis-explained/)

Budget cuts have led to a lack of access to online materials that researchers need to do their work—and the practice of having online-only access to information needs a closer look. An overarching theme that the Working Group heard from the community is that online collections are on the rise, but print books are not going out of style any time soon. For the foreseeable future, libraries in Vermont are faced with the challenge of maintaining *both* print and online collections.

Collection Development

Selecting materials for libraries takes experience, skill, and an openness to hear and meet the needs of community members. A library has materials on all topics, and it can be challenging to select materials on topics that one has learned little about.

The Working Group heard from some library directors that they felt inexpert at selecting materials for children and teens and that they felt ill-equipped to train new youth services librarians to do this work. Some shared that they missed the hands-on access to children's materials in "materials review" meetings hosted by the Department in the past and also missed receiving curated list of recommended new youth materials. Some shared that they did not have the time, staffing, or expertise to make selections of the best new books available in each of the areas. Margaret Woodruff, Director of the Charlotte Library shared, "I looked forward to the semi-annual materials review sessions with enthusiasm and expectation. This helped to boost the quality of collections at individual libraries, and across the library community."

In her written testimony, Woodruff shared that she had read a quote from former NFL player Emmanuel Acho that described visiting a library as "like going to the airport with a passport but without a ticket." Woodruff continued "Our job is to make sure that everyone has the ticket as well as the passport. Making resources available for those who do not (yet) use the library is one key step. Collection development needs to be proactive and provide resources for all. This includes resources for community members who may not feel welcome, due to language or technology barriers. It also includes potential members of our communities such as refugees and new Americans."

Conclusion

Over the last three decades, collections at all types of libraries have undergone a radical transformation. The advent of online databases and eBooks and eAudiobooks has shifted the focus of what materials lie within the walls of the library to what combination of resources are available through a library, either in person or remotely. Many library users' primary contact with their library's collection is online. That said, the availability and use of print collections remains paramount within the library.

This change means that where there was one collection to maintain there are now three: print materials, eBooks and eAudiobooks, and online databases. The cost of maintaining collections has skyrocketed, with databases and e/eAudiobooks carrying price tags that dwarf their print counterparts.

Vermont's libraries have proven to be remarkably flexible during this period, successfully maintaining collections often with flat or declining budgets. Resource sharing through CLOVER ILL and the courier Service supported by the Department of Libraries has decreased barriers between library collections and the people of Vermont. The creativity and pluck of the library community is no more evident anywhere than in approaches to collections.

That said, rising costs of databases, online eBooks and eAudiobooks, and courier service point to a difficult future without significant increases in funding. The current state of affairs—with all of its successes and shortcomings—will be eroded by hard choices that lead to reduced availability of books and information to Vermonters.

Programming

The Working Group received written comments on programming from 11 members of the community and heard directly from eight individuals on this topic at its November 12, 2021, meeting. Written comments were shared with the Working Group by 22 community members. On December 22, 2022, the Working Group heard a report on statewide programming statistics from the Department.

Public Library Programming in Vermont

"Thoughts of libraries tend to bring to mind images of books and reading, but the trends tell another story: Circulation in public libraries is decreasing while public programs are growing in prominence,…"—Terrilyn Chun (*https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2020/01/02/get-with-programming-librarians/*)

Vermont's libraries are no longer silent public spaces where people can quietly enjoy choosing from a large repository of collectively owned books and reading in public. Increasingly, they are centers of engaged community learning that provide opportunities for learning and sharing experiences that are geared toward the interests and needs of the communities they serve. The number of programs hosted in Vermont's libraries continues to grow. Today library staff are called on to provide not just reading material and reference support, but also opportunities for community enrichment and lifelong learning.

Audience Age	Number of Programs	Number of Attendees
Birth – 5 years	5,748	54,406
6 – 11 years	2,894	42,528
12-18 years	938	7,050
Ages 19 and up	5,047	48,075
All ages	1,758	35,416
Total	17,299	205,677

Source: https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/documents/PLS_Stats_2022.xlsx

According to Public Library Survey (PLS) data, the number of programs in Vermont peaked in 2019, when public libraries offered nearly 30,000 programs to nearly 420,000 participants.

Programming Over Time at VT Public Libraries
From 2000-2022 Annual Reports
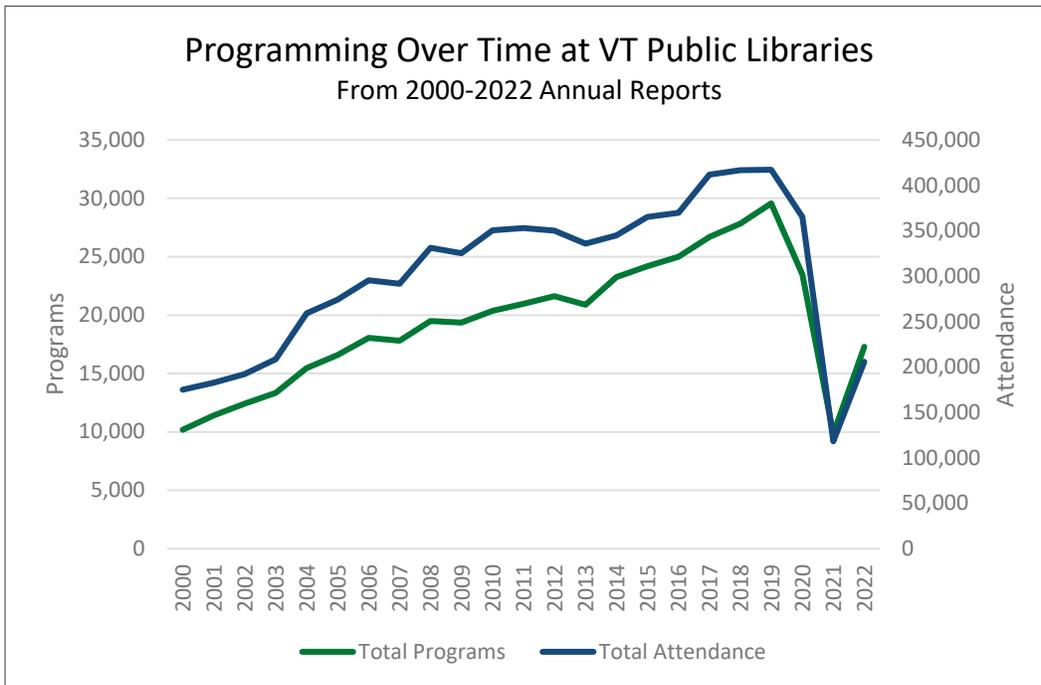
The number of programs presented by Vermont's public libraries decreased dramatically in 2020 in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to PLS data, in 2021 public programming and attendance fell even further. Programming and attendance are steadily growing now but have not rebounded to pre-pandemic numbers. Between 2019 and 2022, the number of public library programs decreased by 41% (from 29,568 to 17,299) and program attendance dropped by 51% (from 417,192 to 205,677).

According to PLS data, in 2022 the 145 reporting public libraries presented 17,299 programs which had a combined attendance of 205,677. (https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/documents/PLS_Stats_2022.xlsx)

The 2022 PLS report shows that public libraries hosted programs with more than 200,000 attendees on-site at libraries, off-site, and virtually. Most of these programs took place on-site at public library buildings.

Location	Number of Programs	Number of Attendees
On-site	12,650	135,675
Off-site	1,873	33,979
Virtual	1,862	17,105
Location not listed	914	18,918
Total	17,299	205,677

Source:
https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/documents/PLS_Stats_2022.xlsx

According to the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a "program" or "program session" is "any planned event which introduces the group attending to library services or which provides information to participants. Program sessions may cover use of the library, library services, or library tours. Program sessions may also provide cultural, recreational, or educational information. Examples of these types of program sessions include, but are not limited to, film showings, lectures, story hours, literacy programs, citizenship classes, and book discussions." (https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/2021_pls_data_file_documentation.pdf)

In addition to being fun and engaging, programming for the youngest children should support their early learning needs. Library staff who receive training in the principles of early childhood literacy can use their own learning to provide enriching educational experiences for the children who attend library programs. According to Linda Donigan, Youth Services Librarian at the Bennington Free Library, "Librarians work continuously to improve the cognitive content of our programming, as we elevate the traditional story hour into meaningful learning experiences for children." Donigan credits the training she received through the Vermont Early Literacy Initiative (VELI) with informing her work and the work of her colleagues. Donigan shared, "…we know that in order to be successful learners and communicators, young children need multiple experiences with books, frequent and interesting conversations with adults, and diverse and repeated early learning experiences. Thanks to VELI, our public library has been central in providing these learning opportunities throughout our community, even during the pandemic." The Department provides a $20,000 annual grant to Vermont Humanities to support its VELI program, which provides early literacy training to a cohort of library staff each year.

> *"Many people see how engaging and welcoming our library is to all age groups and we are a true community partner for much more than books."—Sharon Ellingwood White, former Director of Alice M. Ward Memorial Library, Canaan*

In the past, library storytime may have been seen as entertainment or as an opportunity for toddlers to socialize. Today, librarians, parents, and caregivers recognize the important role that storytime plays in preparing children for school and getting them ready to set off on a path of lifelong learning. Those who serve youth in libraries need ongoing professional development to ensure that they create programs for children that support their developmental needs.

If staffing permits, libraries should develop multiple weekly programs for young children of varying ages (babies, toddlers, and preschoolers). In addition to hosting storytime programs in the library, library staff can bring programs for children to daycares, preschools, and parks. Mary Danko, Director of the Fletcher Free Library in Burlington, shared that "When our youngest folks participate in library programming that instills a

love of reading, builds a database of broad vocabulary, and facilitates a powerful connection to reading, they also gain dozens of kindergarten readiness skills that set them up for success for their entire education."

Storytime is not just a social and learning opportunity for children, but also provides a learning opportunity for adults who support children. Danko shared that "…families learn how to better engage with their young children by learning early literacy techniques through modeling by librarians." Library programs for the youngest children give parents and caregivers the opportunity to observe the way in which trained youth-service library staff read to and engage children in picture books and can gain confidence in their ability to read to their children at home similarly. Amy Olsen, Director of the Lanpher Memorial Library, shared that their staff are "intentional about planning our programs to help children gain the skills they need before they learn to read, and also to inform the adults so that they too can use early literacy skills in their daily lives with children."

In addition to storytime programming for the youngest community members, libraries should develop programs for school-aged children. Library staff should consider the specific interests and developmental level of the intended audience when designing programs for their communities. Library programs are free to the public and provide access to ideas and places that many Vermont school children would otherwise not have the resources to visit or experience directly.

Importantly, school, and public libraries are safe spaces where all children are welcomed and treated equally. According to Bree Drapa, Director of the Westford Public Library, library programming "offers equity and a sense of belonging to groups of varying ages and economic backgrounds." When library programming reflects the diversity of our world, community members from many backgrounds feel welcome to use libraries to learn and explore.

Tween and teen library patrons have specific programming needs and interests. Teen Advisory Boards are one way that some libraries empower teens to contribute to the development of library services for their community. Libraries in Vermont report that manga, maker programs, and opportunities for STEM/STEAM learning are all popular with older youth. Libraries also note that many schools require that teens volunteer in their community, so providing teens with meaningful opportunities to serve at the library is a great way to meet their developmental needs while also meeting a curricular requirement. Public libraries provide tweens and teens with the opportunity for grade-free, self-directed learning and can provide youth a safe space to explore their world and identity independently.

Just as libraries should strive to meet the specific needs of children, they should also strive to provide programming that meets the needs and interests of adults in the community. In addition to more traditional library programs for adults, such as book clubs and speaker events, some libraries in Vermont have found that citizenship classes, language learning, technology training, computer basics, and workforce development courses have proven popular and draw a strong audience. The needs of

specific segments of the adult population should also be considered, including the needs of Vermont's growing population of adults of the age of 65 and above. The public library can fill this important need for seniors in Vermont communities. Many communities lack a senior center, so instead, seniors gather and connect with one another at libraries to maintain social interactions, keep their skills and minds sharp, and engage in community activities. The Lanpher Memorial Library in Hyde Park has found that for seniors, programs about living wills, fall prevention, music, memory, fire safety, and bird identification have proven popular as have history walks and memory-sharing sessions. The Sherburne Memorial Library in Killington noted that bone builders exercise programs, Monday movie matinees, trivia challenges, game days, and art programs for seniors have been successful. These libraries developed programming to meet the needs of seniors in their communities by listening to suggestions and thinking creatively, reinforcing the fact that libraries are no longer just about books.

> *"Public library programming combines socialization, education, and empowerment"—Karson Kiesinger, Bennington Free Library*

Today, librarians in Vermont are thinking more inclusively when developing programs. Danko shared that "Over the past year and a half, public libraries have been more assertive in ensuring that programming includes themes of equity and racial justice." Library programs should be planned with an eye to inclusion, equity, and diversity so that all community members feel welcome to take part in them.

Scheduling and location are key elements to consider when planning programs—and it is important to listen to community feedback when developing program schedules. Programs should be scheduled at times they can be attended by the community the program serves. A program that seems like a flop when held at midday on a Tuesday might draw a crowd when held on the weekend because more members of the target audience are available to attend at that time. For example, the Lanpher Library hosts Night Owl Story Time on Monday evenings at 6:00, and "started 16 years ago as a 6-week program where children were invited to come to the library in their pajamas and participate in a 'bed-time story time.' When the 6 weeks were over, the father of one of the kids said: 'Really? This is the last one?' Since he worked during the day, he liked that he was able to join in storytime with his kids in the evening. We've met almost every Monday night since."

Programs should take place at locations that are easy for the public to access. For example, when trying to connect with underserved communities who have not traditionally used their public library, library staff should consider bringing a program to a location that particular community already frequents and where they'll be most comfortable.

While many library staff have special skills and hidden talents, all library staff can benefit from training to support enhanced library programs. Trainings offered by the Department of Libraries, the Vermont Early Literacy Initiative (VELI) at VT Humanities, and the Children's Literacy Initiative (CLiF) are all valuable resources for library staff.

In addition to sharing in-house programs presented by library staff, libraries can also partner with other organizations in the community to develop and share meaningful, impactful, high-quality, and high-interest programs. Museum ABCs is an example of a successful partnership between the Bennington Museum and the Bennington Free Library. Through this program, Linda Donigan of the Bennington Free Library shared that "Children and families have explored art, objects and historical concepts in the galleries of the Museum, engaged in storytelling and fundamental literacy exercises, and created artwork based on monthly themes." Another successful partnership exists at the Lanpher Memorial Library, which partners with the Hyde Park Opera House to present "sneak peek" performances to the community. Partnerships are beneficial to both public libraries and the organizations they work with, boosting the reach and impact of both.

Vermont libraries can also leverage shared resources provided by the Department of Libraries to support their programming efforts. The Department provides all public libraries in the state the ability to screen movies for the public through a public performance license it secures for each public library. The Department also provides grants to Vermont Humanities to support it in bolstering programming offerings at public libraries including a $15,000 grant to support First Wednesdays (now named the Snapshot series) and a $15,000 grant to their Author Residency Program.

Many of Vermont's libraries find that providing access to authors and experts is a key to successful programming. An outdoor educator from Lamoille County Conservation District presents Monthly Junior Naturalist programs at the Lanpher Memorial Library.

The statewide VT Reads program sponsored by Vermont Humanities is very popular with libraries statewide, who appreciate the many supports that this program provides for host organizations including discussion guides, free discussions hosted by a trained facilitator, and copies of the book. (https://www.vermonthumanities.org/programs/book-a-program/vermont-reads/vermont-reads-2023/)

National Programming Data Comparison

Based on data reported by all states in the PLS, in 2020 Vermont ranked:

- first in the nation for the number of programs offered for adults and children, with 42.2 programs offered per 1,000 people;

- first in the nation in attendance for adult and children's programs;

- first in the nation number for number of young adult programs; and

- eighteenth in the nation in attendance for young adult programming, with 20.66 attendees per 1,000 population. (The national average is 16.74 attendees per 1,000 people.)

	Vermont	National Average
Number of programs offered for adults and children per 1,000 people	42.2	11.26
Number of attendees at adult and children's programs per 1,000 people	660.03	247.24
Number of young adult programs per 1,000 people	2.66	1.17
Number of attendees at young adult programs per 1,000 people	20.66	16.74

Source: https://www.imls.gov/pls-benchmarking-tables

The size of Vermont's population and the number of libraries per capita may contribute to how well Vermont does in number of programs offered and number of attendees. However, several states with larger populations and many local branch libraries also perform well in these areas.

Spotlight on Summer Programming

Every year, the Department of Libraries coordinates statewide summer reading programming and follows up with an annual program survey. In 2022, 135 libraries responded to the Department's summer programming survey. Of the responding public libraries, 131 offered a summer reading program. This focus on summer reading—typically offered in most public libraries around the country—is intended to help students maintain academic progress while on summer break and to foster literacy skills and a passion for lifelong learning.

Vermont's public libraries offered summer programs for patrons of all ages, as well as intergenerational programming. The types of programs varied from grab-and-go activities to on-site, off-site, and hybrid programs.

"We tripled our summer reading participation this year. In addition, our book circulation for children and youth dramatically increased this past summer as compared to pre-pandemic numbers."—Angela Ogle, Cutler Memorial Library, Plainfield

The Department receives an annual disbursement from the Smith Fund to support services and programs for youth in Vermont libraries. In recent years the Department

has made non-competitive youth summer programming grants available to every public library in Vermont. In 2023, the Department gave 154 libraries non-competitive grants of $300 to support summer programming for youth. This is the largest number of summer reading grants administered by the Department since this grant program began. Public libraries were able to use these grant funds to hire performers and purchase books and supplies to support summer programming geared toward youth.

Summer Programming Grants
FY '03 - FY '23
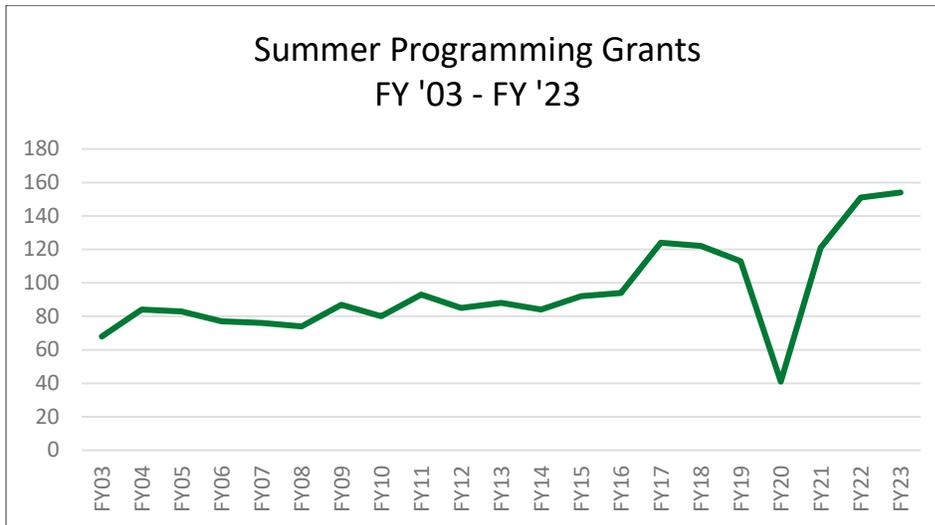
The Working Group heard from the community on the benefits of centralized programming opportunities, including participation in the Collaborative Summer Reading Program (CSLP) offered through the Department of Libraries. Participation in CSLP saves libraries time, energy, and money, as the consortium develops an annual theme and provides programming ideas, printed materials, logos, and display elements for ready use by libraries. In recent years, summer reading programs have expanded to include learning of all types— not just literacy— to help students keep their skills and passion for learning fresh all summer long.

> *"Once only about summer reading, public library summer challenge programs have expanded to include meaningful STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) activities that work to address academic summer slides in all learning areas."—Mary Danko, Fletcher Free Library, Burlington*

Libraries also reported that they benefit from traveling exhibitions, which "bring community members into the library space for wonderful connections and thought-provoking conversations" according to Fletcher Free Library Director Mary Danko. Danko reports that the Fletcher Free has hosted three traveling exhibitions in recent years including Hostile Terrain, provided by the Undocumented Migration Project (https://www.undocumentedmigrationproject.org/installation); Exploring Human Origins:

What does it mean to be Human? provided by the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History (https://humanorigins.si.edu/exhibit/exploring-human-origins-what-does-it-mean-be-human); and The 1619 Project, provided by the Hampton Museum (https://hampton.gov/3588/The-1619-Exhibit).

> *"Summer Reading highlights the good work that rural libraries do in their communities— the offering of free and accessible activities, community partnerships and happy, engaged kids is what it is all about."—Bree Drapa, Westford Public Library*

COVID and Public Library Programming

During the COVID-19 health emergency, libraries were forced to shift away from a largely on-site programming model. Initially Vermont's libraries moved to online programs and then shifted to some outdoor and hybrid programs. Currently, most libraries have shifted back to in-person programs although some still offer hybrid options for some programs.

Digital programming had some positive qualities, including that it allowed patrons to connect in real time, providing a sense of community for those who cannot meet in-person. Digital programs served to increase accessibility for patrons that have a difficult time making it to library building or faced challenges entering library buildings to attend programs. Offering digital programs during the pandemic provided communities with a sense of continuity and stability despite the challenges they were facing. Digital programming greatly extended the reach of library programs. Vermont librarians found that some of their programs even attracted audience members from other states.

Digital programming also had negative aspects. As the pandemic wore on, library patrons shared that they began to experience "Zoom fatigue". Librarians found that digital programming for children was generally less successful than programming for adults in this format.

When the weather permitted, Vermont's librarians moved library programs outdoors. Libraries used fire pits and tents to create cozy outdoor spaces to conduct programs for the public in an open-air setting. Some libraries have decided to continue to use these additional outdoor spaces to supplement their indoor spaces. That said, staffing levels must be considered by libraries that host outdoor programs as doing so often requires additional support while the librarian is outdoors presenting the program.

Libraries also created "outdoor passive programs" including Storywalks® that people could find in their community and engage with independently from library staff. These efforts were popular with communities as they promoted outdoor excursions and had placemaking benefits for their towns. However, outdoor passive programs have proven

to be time intensive and require ongoing maintenance. While some well-established activities such as Storywalks® will likely continue, libraries are entering into this type of programming less frequently now.

Libraries also developed take-and-make passive programs or kits that community members could pick-up and bring home. These received positive community feedback and enabled libraries to reach new community members. Libraries were able to connect with patrons that preferred to complete activities on their own and would typically shy away from a group craft program in a library setting. However, take-and-make passive programs proved to be more costly than in-library programs and somewhat challenging for libraries to sustain over time.

Overall, passive programs were found to be beneficial in welcoming library users who prefer learning independently over participating in library programming. The group aspect of library programming, which can be off-putting or a barrier to some community members, is eliminated by programming that is encountered outside of the library or picked up from a library. Passive programming enables program participation at a time that works for the individual.

Moving forward, many libraries are offering a mix of active and passive programming. Providing both types of programming welcomes a wider range of community members to take part in library programing as people can opt to participate based on their personal preferences and social style.

Core Competencies that Affect the Quality of Public Library Programming

The National Impact of Public Programs Assessment (an American Library Association study funded by IMLS) identified 9 core library programming competencies that affect the quality of programming: knowledge of the community, interpersonal skills, creativity, content knowledge, evaluation, financial skills, outreach and marketing, event planning, and organizational skills. (https://nilppa.org/phase-1-white-paper/what-competencies-and-training-are-required/)

Library staff need to have knowledge of their communities, including their needs and interests. With this knowledge, staff can determine how library programs might be delivered to best meet those needs and interests. Knowledge of one's community can also help library staff identify groups that have not historically been served by programming so that they can develop programming to meet the needs of these important community members.

Running successful programs requires library staff to have the interpersonal skills to communicate effectively and appropriately with all audiences served by the library.

Another skill necessary to develop and implement successful programming is creativity. Creativity in dreaming up new program ideas is as important as the ability to find solutions to meet community programming needs when serving all audiences.

Content knowledge is a core library programming competency that affects many small public libraries in Vermont having one staff member or part-time staff. A single person is unable to be a subject matter expert in everything their library strives to offer their community. For example, it is challenging to be an expert in digital literacy, early literacy, topics of interest to teens, and diversity. Libraries with multiple staff members are more likely to have a greater range of content knowledge in-house. Larger public libraries are also often able to supplement the subject area expertise of staff with programming provided by paid presenters and performers. Many of the small and rural libraries in Vermont cannot afford to hire subject matter experts, including dedicated youth services librarians.

Additionally, organizational skills like event planning, outreach and marketing, and financial management are all necessary to plan and execute successful programs. While many libraries in Vermont do great work in these areas, having all these skills and juggling all these tasks can be challenging for those with limited staff.

Finally, it is important not just to host programs, but also to evaluate the community response to those programs. To do this effectively, library staff need to have the skills to develop surveys and use qualitative statistical tools to measure program success, which they can then use to shape future programming.

Programming in School Libraries

Programming in school libraries has a slightly different meaning from programming in public libraries. In school libraries, programming differs from instruction and is additive. Unlike in public libraries, where an audience for a program must be built through outreach, publicity, and word of mouth, school libraries provide programs for a known audience: students and staff. School libraries offer professional development programming for school staff. They also offer enrichment programming for students. Student engagement in programs offered by the school library is ungraded and provides opportunities for school librarians to have a different relationship with students in that context than classroom teachers have. This is beneficial to fostering a relationship of trust and support between school librarians and the students they support.

> *"A school library is the only academic site within a school where all identities intersect. Therefore, it is a powerful site to explore justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. School libraries are containers for courageous conversations, where all stakeholders are welcome to lean into dialogues that might not be possible elsewhere."—Meg B. Allison, Teacher-Librarian at U-32 Middle and High School, East Montpelier*

In recent years, school libraries have become sites for social justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and these are frequently the focus of school library programs. According to Sarah Keener, School Librarian at Hazen Union School in Hardwick, "School library programming (and the outside programming we connect our patrons to) plays a vital role in building and maintaining cohesive, healthy and equitable communities."

School libraries often have limited budgets for programming, and it takes place on a smaller scale than at many public libraries. Additionally, school librarians reported that programming in school libraries has been negatively impacted by decisions to combine technology integration with school media specialist work into one position as they now have less time and resources to put toward programming efforts.

> *"School and public libraries have always been the center of reliable information, public discourse and community which is essential to our democratic values."—Alyson Mahony, Librarian at Doty and Rumney Elementary Schools, Worcester and Middlesex*

Best Practices to Support Library Programming

The Working Group heard that public libraries can offer rich and engaging programs when they have:

- **Adequate staffing levels to support planning, implementing, and evaluating programs**
  Libraries need staff with subject expertise to support robust, high-quality in-house public programming. Many public libraries in Vermont rely on volunteers to fill this need which can impact the quality and educational value of programs.

  Library staff need time to plan programs, time to plan and execute marketing, and time to get the program space ready. Making the time for these activities can be very challenging for library staff who must find time to plan and

present programs while still attending to the daily tasks of providing traditional public library service and staffing the reference and circulation desks.

The Working Group heard that library staff would appreciate the opportunity to dedicate more time to preparing and evaluating programs for the public.

"Thoughtful, engaging programs require substantial funding and staff time"—Dana Hart, Ilsley Public Library, Middlebury

- **A dedicated programming budget**
  The Working Group heard that public libraries in Vermont do not always have adequate resources to provide the level of programming wanted and needed by the communities they serve. The level of funding for library programs varies wildly across Vermont. Programming budgets mentioned during oral comments ranged from $0-$15,000.

  Dedicated funding to support programming helps library staff plan and execute successful programming year-round. While some library programs can be done by library staff, many programs require at least a minimal cost to run effectively, and libraries' budgets should reflect those costs.

- **An accessible space in the library or community to hold programs (including flexible programming spaces, meeting rooms, and outdoor areas)**
  Many public libraries in Vermont report that they do not have dedicated programming spaces, so they hold programs in their primary library space. Public libraries that do have dedicated program rooms often report that these spaces are no longer adequate because of new capacity and ventilation concerns that arose during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

  Newly built libraries often opt for flexible spaces rather than dedicated program rooms that may sit unused for many hours each week. Modern library design incorporates moveable seating, tables, shelving, and even walls that can be configured to accommodate programming within the library space.

  During the height of the COVID-19 public health emergency, many libraries held programs outdoors to ensure adequate air circulation and room for social distancing. This shift to outdoor programming required that libraries purchase tents or canopies, and outdoor furniture. Many outdoor programs required access to electricity.

- **Sufficient Time to Reach Out to New Library Users**
  To increase the reach of a library, library staff must conduct outreach by

leaving the confines of their libraries and meeting people in the community. Outreach provides library staff with an opportunity to connect to people who may not regularly use the library, but who may need its services. The Working Group heard that by conducting outreach, libraries were able to reach New Americans, Veterans, and other traditionally underserved community members who then became library users. The information learned during outreach visits can help librarians identify services and collections that are necessary to better serve the entire community.

"Since we were able to present our summer reading line-up of activities in our local school system, a number of children who had never visited came to the library with caregivers and signed up for library cards. A number of these families have remained active in the fall, volunteering, attending programs, and checking out materials."—Beth Royer, Retired Director, Carpenter-Carse Library, Hinesburg

▪ **Technology to support online and hybrid programs**
During the COVID-19 public health emergency, libraries shifted away from an in-person only model of programming. Many of Vermont's libraries continue to host virtual or hybrid programs and doing so requires technology to support that activity.

▪ **Standardized metrics on programming**
While public libraries in Vermont routinely report the number of programs they hosted in a year and the number of attendees at those programs, these data points do not measure the quality or the impacts of the programming that a library offers. Nationally, there is a trend in libraries toward developing tools to better understand the impacts that library programs have on the community.

The library community continues to work toward evaluation of programming and is trying to move from simply reporting the number of programs and number of attendees toward reporting the impacts of programming. That said, this is particularly challenging in a public library context. While public libraries typically count how many people attend their programs, due to privacy laws, they specifically do not track which specific individuals attend their programs. For that reason, it would be very difficult to capture longitudinal data about how attendance at a library program impacted an individual over time. Some libraries get around this by asking library users to consent or opt in to provide this data, however maintaining this data can pose a burden on libraries given state library privacy statute.

- **School Library Programming Needs**
  The Working Group heard from the community that school libraries need adequate staffing with certified school librarians and tech integration positions. The community expressed a desire for additional support for programming in school libraries.

Conclusion

Library programs consist of events that actively engage library users of all ages for the purpose of lifelong learning and personal enrichment—examples include storytimes for young children, manga or STEM programming for teens, and book clubs for adults. Vermont libraries can pride themselves on ranking high in the number of per-capita programs they offer.

However, to be able to continue to provide high quality, inclusive programming that meets the needs of a library's community, librarians require ongoing training. VELI, STEM/STEAM resources, CLiF, and Department of Libraries trainings are all important resources for helping library staff develop meaningful and engaging programs.

To support in-person programming for different audiences and topics, libraries need a flexible space. Many libraries in Vermont lack a dedicated program space. Library programs simply take place out in the open within the library. Some libraries have explored outdoor programming to accommodate larger groups, but with the outdoor season in Vermont being relatively short, library programming continues to be limited by inadequate space.

Vermont is well above average in the US for programs offered to the people of Vermont, but continue to do so with inadequate budgets, expanding training needs, and inadequate spaces for programming. To consistently outperform peers at the national level with limited resources is a testament to the ingenuity of the Vermont library community.

Inclusive and Accessible Services

The topic of Inclusive Library Services was discussed at the Working Group meeting on Friday, January 27th, 2023. The Working Group heard from 10 community members and heard a report from Department of Libraries staff on the topic of Inclusive Library Services. The Working Group also heard from this expert on this topic: Xusana Davis, State of Vermont Executive Director of Racial Equity, Office of Racial Equity. Written comments were shared with the Working Group by 12 community members.

The Working Group was charged with studying "library services for specific segments of the Vermont population, including senior citizens, individuals with disabilities, youths and children, immigrant and migrant communities, and people living in poverty" and "the role that libraries play in emergency preparedness, cultural diversity and inclusion, public health and safety, community identity and resiliency, economic development, and access to public programs and services."

Many of these aspects of library services fall under the umbrella of either accessible services or inclusive services. The Working Group determined that it is necessary to draw a distinction between *inclusive* library services and *accessible* library services.

The term **accessible services** means library services that can be used easily by people who have physical or cognitive disabilities. According to the American Library Association, "Accessibility, however, is more than just physical access to library services. In conventional terms, accessibility generally refers to functionally equivalent access to the materials and services. In essence, this means that individuals with disabilities should be able to use and access all the same services and materials in the library as their non-disabled peers, either through alternate means or with assistance. Sometimes, accessibility can be achieved by using assistive technology devices, which are pieces of equipment that can make an otherwise inaccessible product or service accessible. Ultimately, to promote broad access for all patrons, librarians should consider the accessibility of their materials and services during the procurement and implementation process and develop a plan to maximize accessibility for all patrons." (https://www.ala.org/ala/washoff/contactwo/oitp/emailtutorials/accessibilitya/02.htm)

The term **inclusive services** means library services geared toward meeting the needs of people who are members of groups that have been traditionally underserved and/or historically marginalized. According to the ALA, "'Inclusion' means an environment in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully; are valued for their distinctive skills, experiences, and perspectives; have equal access to resources and opportunities; and can contribute fully to the organization's success.'" (https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/EDI)

In Vermont, this term includes but is not limited to those who are Black, Indigenous, People of Color, Veterans, members of the LGBTQ+ community, people living in poverty, people experiencing homelessness, people over 65 years of age, people with

physical or mental health differences, people with learning disabilities, and people born in other countries. Incarcerated individuals, people who live in the state's psychiatric facilities, New Americans, and individuals with limited English proficiency are traditionally underserved, so also fall within the umbrella of inclusive services in our state.

Throughout this report, careful consideration has been made to parse out different testimony and recommendations that specifically address these two components of inclusive services: accessibility for people with disabilities and inclusivity for people from traditionally underserved populations.

> *"Inclusive library services are holistic, spanning library policies, space, and services. Inclusive services reflect equity and accessibility for all members of the community by intentionally developing and delivering services to individuals or groups for whom accessing and using the library is difficult, limited, or minimized."—Wisconsin Library Inclusive Services Assessment Guide. (https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED599993.pdf)*

126,258 adults in Vermont have a disability*

This is equal to **24%** or **1 in 4** adults in Vermont

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey Data, 2021.
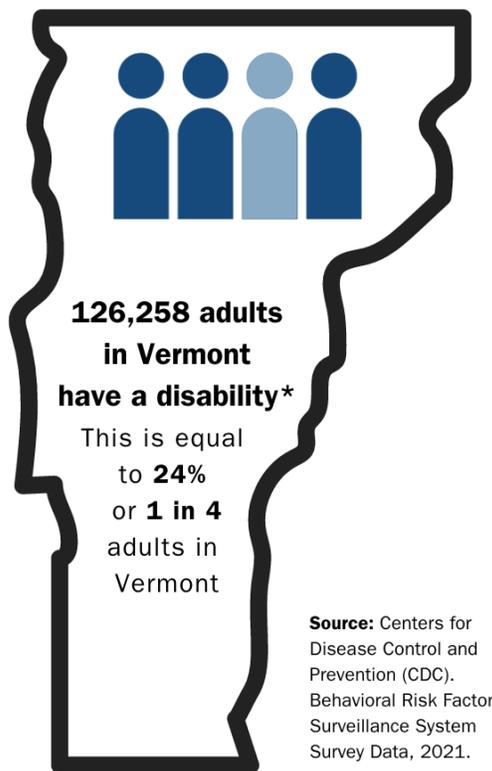
According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in Vermont, there are 126,258 adults living with a disability—or 24% of Vermont's population. Vermont's average is lower than the national average of 27%.

The CDC breaks the state's data down further into "functional disability types" as follows:

Functional Disability Type	Percentage of Vermont Adults	Percentage of Adults in the US
Mobility disability: serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs.	9%	12.1%
Cognitive disability: serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions.	12%	12.8%
Disability that affects the ability to live independently: serious difficulty doing errands alone.	6%	7.2%
Hearing disability: deafness or serious difficulty hearing.	5%	6.1%
Visual disability: blind or have serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses.	3%	4.8%
Disability that affects self-care: difficulty dressing or bathing.	3%	3.6%

In 2021, the Vermont Agency of Education reported that 13,793 students ages 5 – 21 had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). That represents approximately 17% of the 80,692 students enrolled in Vermont's public schools that year. These students had a disability that had an adverse effect on their ability to learn and were eligible for special education. Vermont's percentage of students with IEPs was higher than the national percentage of 15%.

Access to Library Collections

The Department administers the ABLE Library, which is Vermont's Library for the Blind and Print Disabled. The acronym ABLE stands for audio, braille, large print, and electronic books. The ABLE Library is part of a national library framework that serves people who are blind or have other print disabilities in collaboration with the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS), which is a division of the Library of Congress. ABLE serves any Vermonter who has a visual impairment, a physical impairment, or a reading disability that prevents them from reading standard print. Library collections include audiobooks, braille, large print, and electronic audiobooks. ABLE also offers high contrast picture books and Wonderbooks for younger patrons.

In FY23, ABLE Library patrons checked out 80,641 books and magazines on digital cartridges. They downloaded over 17,000 books and magazines through the NLS BARD app. The acronym BARD stands for braille and audio reading download. ABLE patrons checked out 6,445 large print books, and public libraries circulated over 2,500 large print books through ABLE's deposit collections. In FY23, the ABLE Library hosted or co-hosted 18 programs, and registered more than 250 new patrons for library service.
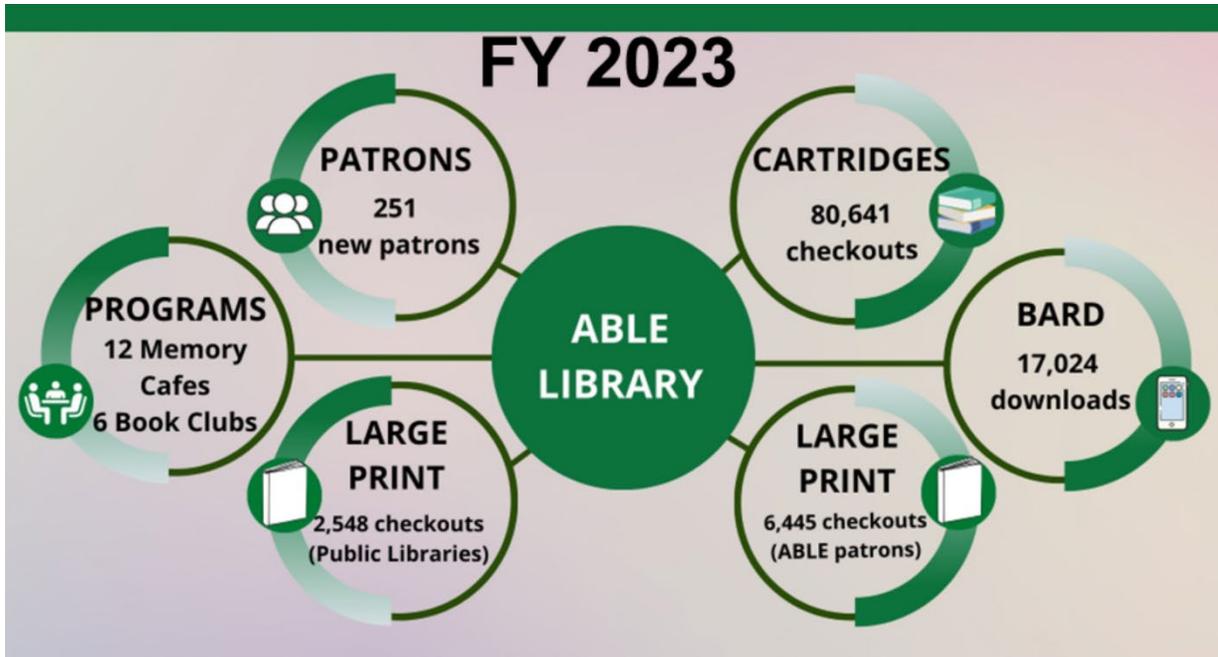
Around the country, some state and public libraries provide centralized library services to people living with disabilities, however the Department has not traditionally provided library services for Vermonters living with physical disabilities other than blindness and print disabilities. The Department's focus, like that of many state library agencies in the country, has been on service to blind and print disabled community members. There are many people with disabilities who do not qualify for ABLE Library services but who would benefit from other specialized library collections. For example, collections for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing, people with some cognitive disabilities, and people with mental health disabilities could be made available through the Department of Libraries to support Vermonters statewide. Books by mail services could be expanded throughout the state to better support people with mobility disabilities who are unable to visit their local library.

Tom Frank, the current chair of the ABLE Advisory Committee and the Vermont Board of Libraries, as well as being a legally blind Vermonter, shared that he reads more now than when he had 20/20 vision because of the ABLE Library. While he acknowledged that most Vermont libraries can meet all of their patrons' needs, "we all need to step up and ensure training is provided to library staff to recognize when a patron may be

having difficulties accessing books and other programs available to their communities. Let's make it possible that all are 'able' to read."

Access to Library Buildings

The Working Group heard from community members that many of Vermont's public libraries are not accessible to all Vermonters. Upgrades to historic and aging facilities have been made throughout recent years, but continued improvements are required to make them 100% accessible.

> *"Many of our buildings have been redesigned over the years to support better access— ramps have been added, sidewalks have been graded, bathrooms have been expanded. But I think a huge number of libraries are still lacking automatic openers for doors. In our historic buildings, this presents a big challenge. It would be nice to have some state-level resources to support this kind of access."—Abby Adams, Library Director of the Pratt Library, Shoreham*

The rural nature of Vermont presents transportation challenges that pose a barrier to library access for many. Abby Adams, Library Director at the Pratt Library, predicted that we are "going to be continuing to have conversations about lack of access due to transportation until we fix public transportation in our rural areas." Esbey Hamilton, of the Vermont Migrant Education Program, noted that one of the key barriers for migrant farmworkers and their families to access libraries is "because they don't have driver's licenses or cars and live on farms which are outside of walking or biking distance" of a library.

The Need for Accessible Library Services in Vermont

In addition to those with print disabilities, there are many other groups of people who have been traditionally underserved by libraries in Vermont and across the nation. These groups include Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, Veterans, members of the LGBTQ+ community, people living in poverty, people experiencing homelessness, people over 65 years of age, people with physical or mental health differences, people with learning disabilities, and people born in other countries.

	Percentage of Vermonters	Percentage of US Residents
Living in poverty	10.3%	11.6%
Over 65 years of age	20.6%	16.8%
Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC)	8.2%	18.9%
Veterans	5.3%	5.2%
LGBTQ+	4.4%	4.5%
Born outside of the US	4.4%	13.6%

The percentage of Vermonters living in poverty, the percentage of LGBTQ+ identifying Vermonters, and the percentage of Vermonters who are Veterans are all close to the national average.

The percentage of Vermonters over 65 years of age exceeds the national percentage by more than 4%.

The number of Vermonters who are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color or who were born outside of the United States is far lower than the national percentage, which likely leads to an even greater risk of isolation and having their unique needs for library service overlooked.

Libraries for All

The Working Group heard from Xusana Davis, the State's Executive Director for Racial Equity. Davis shared that one of the biggest challenges government entities have in reaching historically marginalized communities is trust. She encouraged the Working Group and libraries to think about how to engage our communities, considering many historical breaches of trust between members of these communities and governmental or quasi-governmental agencies, including libraries. Davis shared that stereotypes and tropes about who accesses libraries and library resources can be a barrier to use of libraries by members of these communities, as are money and time. Davis also shared that a sense of place and belonging, while it makes privileged community members feel welcome, can be an obstacle to those who are on the outside of the "in group".

The term "New Americans" refers to "immigrants, refugees, or temporary or long-term visitors" (American Library Association). It's estimated that there are over 8,000 refugees in Vermont. Vermont residents born outside of the United States, or New Americans, often face great difficulty in accessing information in Vermont, where libraries almost entirely provide materials and information in English. Many New Americans do not even seek access to library services because they face linguistic isolation. Because many New Americans did not have access to public libraries in their country of origin, they do not realize that they can visit public libraries in their new home to obtain information and participate in library programs. For that reason, the

Department created a document that explains to New Americans what a public library is and translated this document into 16 of the most spoken non-English languages in Vermont.

Speaking from direct experience as immigrant to the United States who settled in Vermont, Fletcher Free Library Commissioner Mona Tolba testified that The Fletcher Free Library in Burlington has been a tremendous and vital support for her and her daughter. Tolba shared that "What the library offers is the main backbone of support for refugees and immigrants, internet access, and assistance with technology are few of many other programs these populations need when they first arrive in Vermont. The library hosts different language learning classes including English, Arabic, French, and Spanish, a monthly cooking book club, and many youth programs that are important in building and setting them up for a positive and productive life."

Nate Eddy, the Director of the Winooski Public Library, echoed the vital role that libraries serve in a diverse community. He shared with the Working Group that in Winooski, "with nearly 15% of residents born outside of the United States and over 20 different languages spoken within our schools—the library serves a unique role as both connector and service provider for our new American, immigrant, and refugee populations." In response to the needs of the Winooski community, the Winooski Public Library offers inclusive programming, including:

- weekly English language learning classes and technology assistance in partnership with the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants;

- restorative Justice Circles in partnership with Spectrum Youth and Services;

- Arabic language learning classes and monthly bilingual storytime;

- free veggie and produce distribution to address food insecurity in partnership with the Intervale Center;

- weekly storytime visits to Thrive Afterschool and Summer Programs;

- access to a diverse collection of print materials and online resources, translated vital documents such as library card applications (Arabic, Burmese, Nepali, Somali, and Swahili);

- after-hours space availability for community members to host meetings; and

- a dedicated staff committed to promoting open and equal library access for all.

All of these services are provided despite the Winooski Public Library's significant space constraints, limited shelving and storage, and understaffing that according to Eddy "limit the full potential and position of the library within the Winooski community."

Ruth Shattuck Bernstein, Librarian of the Salisbury Free Public Library, shared that library's mission of providing equitable access to resources, and that they had partnered with Helping Overcome Poverty's Effects (HOPE) to provide free produce to anyone in their community. Moreover, Shattuck Bernstein testified, "I see libraries as great satellite locations for service agencies to provide resources to rural communities. HOPE indicated they have been looking for ways to reach more people in our community and the partnership benefited everyone and potentially serves as a model of what a central role libraries can and should play."

The Working Group heard from Esbey Hamilton of Vermont Migrant Education, who shared that their program serves 300 children and youth a year who are involved in seasonal or temporary agricultural work in Vermont in addition to 700 individuals connected with the Migrant Health Team. Many of the migrant workers and their families working in Vermont come from Mexico and Central America, speak Spanish as their native language, and have very limited English language skills.

Davis shared that libraries must couple racial equity work with age and generational equity work, and to empower community leaders from within. Davis encouraged library staff to develop services based on the needs the community expresses and to engage communities in such a way that community members feel invested in their library and empowered to share suggestions and get involved.

> *"Not having the right word can have really serious implications in people's lives. Getting it right really matters."—Xusana Davis, State of Vermont Executive Director of Racial Equity*

Hamilton provided compelling reasons for how public libraries can support Vermont's migrant population. Hamiliton testified that "our staff works to teach youth and families about the services offered at their local libraries. When it makes sense, we meet program participants at the library—we read books, we use the internet to study for the GED, we attend storytimes with new parents and their kiddos. We find that without taking people and showing them, sometimes several times, Mexican and Central American farmworkers aren't likely to visit the library or access library services on their own."

Davis observed that traditional libraries are places where people have come. But in our overly distracted world, librarians have to do more proactive outreach to remind people of what libraries can offer. Outreach must keep up with modern demands because libraries are important connection points within communities. Davis posited that libraries need to meet people where they are, but also where they want to be. During the question period, Working Group member Christopher Kaufman-Ilstrup commented that "wall-less libraries are the way of the future" and that it is important to share the reality that libraries are "just not buildings with books."

Hamilton outlined barriers to accessing library services that aren't inclusive to the migrant population, but are especially concerning due to a migrant's fears around their immigrant status and limited English:

- schedules: People can't get to the library because they work 12 hours a day, six days a week;

- lack of technology skills and quality home internet: People can't access (or even learn about) the wide range of online library services;

- high mobility: Each library is different, and even if people get into visiting their local library, when they move, they have to get a whole new library card and learn a whole new building, staff, and schedule of events; and

- library requirements of having proof of address to sign up for a library card can be very challenging for migrant workers as it is quite common for farmworkers to not have ID and to not receive mail at home.

Vermonters with limited English proficiency face challenges when trying to access books and information in Vermont's libraries. Few Vermont library staff are multilingual so most public service interactions take place in English, which can also be a barrier to library access for migrant workers, many of whom have limited English proficiency. According to the Interagency Working Group on Limited English Proficiency (LEP), in Vermont 8,541 people speak English "less than very well" in (about 1% of the state's total population). This compares with 8% of people in the U.S. who speak English "less than very well." Among those with limited English proficiency in Vermont, 18% speak French, 16% speak Spanish, 11% speak an Indic language, 8% speak Chinese, and 7% of this group speak Vietnamese. The other 40% of people with limited English proficiency speak another less-common language.

The Working Group heard from Hamilton and others that community members currently have very limited access to materials in languages other than English through Vermont's public libraries. Expanding the availability of library materials to meet the linguistic needs of the entire community is a potential area for growth for Vermont's libraries. That said, Vermont library staff have reported challenges in locating and selecting materials in languages not spoken by library staff. Sourcing these materials is often difficult as is funding additional collections.

The Working Group heard from the community that libraries need more resources to help patrons with language access needs, including translation services, interpretation services, collections in other languages, and library programs to support people with limited English proficiency.

Davis shared that People of Color are more likely to access the Internet via mobile devices and recommended that libraries take that into account when considering what formats of materials they make available for the public.

Davis also encouraged libraries to be brave about the content they provide to communities because people see libraries as institutional authorities. Davis emphasized that libraries have to be confident that the materials they are providing people in libraries are a net-positive. "Caving to the demands of angry, lying bigots is not the way to get out of this. Instead, we have to be committed to truth, committed to openness, and committed to dialogue."

A number of public library directors and patrons spoke to the importance of our public libraries of providing safe space, Wi-Fi access, and support for one of the most vulnerable populations: Vermonters experiencing homelessness.

> *"What I am here today to advocate for goes beyond service. People experiencing homelessness (and poverty) cannot only be served by a community, they must be part of a community. They need to feel welcomed and missed, they need to be represented as a part of the whole, and this cannot come with the caveat that their welcome is temporary or unfairly conditional."—Loren Polk, Library Director, Stowe Public Library*

The Working Group heard oral testimony from Martin Hahn, Executive Director of the Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness, in addition to the submitted report, Vermont's Annual Point-in-Time Count of Those Experiencing Homelessness, 2022. Significantly, the Point in Time Count in January 2022 found a 7.3% increase in persons experiencing homelessness in Vermont compared to the prior year. This comes on the heels of a significant increase from 2020 (pre-pandemic) to 2021. BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) Vermonters disproportionately experienced homelessness in 2022 compared to the general population in both Chittenden County and statewide. This point-in-time count was done while Vermont's hotel program, put into place during the COVID-19 public health emergency, was still operational. The Working Group heard concerns from library directors about the possible impacts the end of that program might bring for public libraries as many community members would likely have increased day-to-day needs for support if they lost stable housing.

Many Vermonters who live in poverty or who are experiencing homelessness only have access to the internet during their public library's open hours. Without after-hours access to the internet outside of libraries, these community members are unable to participate fully in today's largely online economy and educational system. For Vermonters who don't have access to internet in homes who live in rural communities where public libraries are open just one or two days each week and library Wi-Fi isn't accessible after hours, there is an even greater inequity in access to the internet.

Dana Hart, Director of the Ilsley Public Library in Middlebury and the Sarah Partridge Community Center in East Middlebury, shared that library policies around internet

access are, at their core, equity considerations. Hart shared that there were differences between the ways the two libraries in her community provided free Wi-Fi to the public. This inequity was fueled by misperceptions of Board members who thought that providing internet access 24/7 outside of the library would entice would-be loiterers, vandals, and teenagers. Hart wrote, "I talk about the digital divide in Vermont, and the necessity of internet access to submit homework assignments or job applications. I point out that many community members simply can't get to the library during regular business hours because they are working, and that there are far worse places for teenagers to be after dark than accessing the internet on the steps of their public library. While these conversations have been successful, the persistence of the issue over the years is cause for concern."

Hart asked, "I wonder how many other public libraries in small communities around Vermont have dealt with similar concerns when it comes to offering Wi-Fi service outside of library hours. The truth is that access to reliable, high-speed internet is absolutely essential to Vermonters, and many of them can only access it through their public library. In order to provide inclusive access to the internet, it is critical that public libraries offer the service outside of library hours."

Library patron Janet Potter from White River Junction emphasized that, "Libraries are sometimes the only or last safe place for the most vulnerable in our communities and should be treated as a critical resource for all (and funded accordingly)." Potter went on to say that libraries provide "critical and safe meeting spaces" and testified that her elderly, disabled, low-income parents consider their local public library "a lifeline."

Lisa Ehrlich from Veteran Affairs shared that Veterans "who use the library love using public libraries; they like chatting with staff, being directed to large print books, etc. The human contact component is important to them."

Christopher Kaufman Ilstrup provided testimony in his role as Executive Director of Vermont Humanities, noting that "historically, libraries have been a welcoming place for the LGBTQ+ community. There's a long history of LGBTQ+ people seeing and using libraries as safe places." Ilstrup urged the Working Group to be mindful that many members of the LGBTQ+ community in Vermont are not white, and that purposeful outreach to BIPOC and migrant populations is needed to reach individuals who belong to multiple traditionally underserved groups.

Inclusive Services for Incarcerated and Institutionalized Vermonters

One underserved group not mentioned above, but who have been historically underserved are incarcerated individuals. Over 1,300 individuals are incarcerated in the State's six regional in-state correctional facilities. The Department of Libraries has a statutory obligation to provide library materials to the people in those institutions. Last year, the Department purchased over 4,000 paperback books and distributed them to

the six in-state correctional facilities. The Department currently budgets $36,000 each year for providing library collections to the six in-state correctional facilities.

Vermonters living with mental health conditions, including those who reside in state-run mental health facilities are part of another underserved community. The Department has a statutory responsibility to provide library services to people in state-run mental health facilities. Last year, the Department purchased just under 600 books for Vermont's two mental health facilities: the Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital and the Middlesex Therapeutic Community Residence. A new residential facility, River Valley Therapeutic Residence, replacing the Middlesex location, opened in Essex in May of 2023 and per the site's Program Director, books the Department had purchased would be moved to the new site. The Department currently allocates $3,000 annually to collections for this group of Vermonters. Patients in the two state psychiatric facilities also have access to eBook and eAudiobooks from the Department, which they access using tablets.

It should be noted that many libraries across the state are striving to be more inclusive in the collections, programming, and services they provide to the public. While many gains have been made, much work remains to be done. As agreed by the Working Group in its January 2023 meeting, this is a journey we are on forever.

Conclusion

Vermont's librarians expressed a desire to increase and improve access to library services for Vermonters and are seeking resources to help them in their work. Providing library services that feel available and welcoming to all Vermonters will require libraries to overcome a history of neglect, maltreatment, and marginalization that is systemic within public libraries and academic settings. The Working Group heard from library staff that increased training on areas of racial equity, systemic injustice, and library services to traditionally neglected communities is needed to support them in this work.

The Working Group also heard from the community that many library buildings in the state are not accessible to all community members and that there are limited resources available to make necessary upgrades.

Intellectual Freedom

The topic of Intellectual Freedom was discussed at the Working Group meeting on Friday, April 21, 2023. The Working Group heard from 10 community members and heard a report from Department of Libraries staff on the topic of Statewide Collections. The Working Group also heard from these experts on this topic: John Chrastka, Executive Director and Founder, EveryLibrary; Dana Kaplan, Executive Director, Outright Vermont; Trina Magi, Co-editor of The Intellectual Freedom Manual; and Joyce McIntosh, Assistant Director, Freedom to Read Foundation. Written comments were shared with the Working Group by seven community members. John Chrastka of EveryLibrary shared draft intellectual freedom legislation with the Working Group at its meeting on Friday, September 22, 2023.

> *"Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction."—Barbara Jones, Former director, American Library Association Office for Intellectual Freedom*

Unfortunately, public and school libraries are now experiencing unprecedented attacks on intellectual freedom across the United States, with individual and collective book challenges at an all-time high. These challenges typically, but not always, target books by or about LGBTQ+ or black or brown people. While these attacks are occurring more frequently in the southern and western states, Vermont has not been immune to this national trend of activists and elected officials attempting to seize control of public and school library collections, and limit or eliminate access to needed community resources.

Anecdotally, libraries across Vermont report increasing numbers of both formal and informal book challenges, many seemingly originating in national campaigns or from national news media reports. Librarians cite the need for resources and support to educate staff, trustees, and community members; create and maintain strong intellectual freedom and anti-censorship policies; and protect community members' constitutionally guaranteed freedom to read and learn.

Public and school libraries have long been vital resources in the American democratic experiment, serving as public forums for neutral access to information from many perspectives and many communities. Public Libraries are, by definition, available to all community residents regardless of their status. Vermont libraries are subject to Vermont civil rights and anti-discrimination statutes including laws regarding non-discrimination in public accommodations:

> **Vermont Statutes about Civil Rights and Anti-Discrimination 9 VSA § 4502.** **"An owner or operator of a place of public accommodation or an agent or employee of such owner or operator shall not, because of the race, creed, color, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity of any person, refuse, withhold from, or deny to that person any of the accommodations, advantages, facilities, and privileges of the place of public accommodation."** **(https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/09/139/04502)**

Joyce McIntosh of the Freedom to Read Foundation pointed the Working Group toward federal constitutional law during her presentation to the Working Group, noting that Public and School Libraries are subject to the Constitutional protections of the First Amendment. Mackintosh noted that:

> "Only the public library is a designated or limited public forum, created by the government for the sole purpose of providing access to information. According to existing court opinion, the First Amendment protects individuals' right to 1) physically access the library; and 2) read and receive information and use the resources made generally available to the public in the library (this includes meeting rooms and display cases, when the library has decided to make those spaces available to the public). The library has the right to establish reasonable rules governing library use. A library's power to regulate patron behavior is not limited to cases of "actual disruption," but may be tied to safety, use of resources, and other reasonable concerns directed to fulfilling the library's mission. Best practice is for a public library to have content-neutral rules that apply objective standards to behavior, safety, or administrative issues that are enforced in a non-discriminatory manner. This includes our collection development policy (why we buy what we buy) and our materials reconsideration policy (protecting your right to say you what you think about an item)."

Trina Magi, Library Professor at the University of Vermont, referred the Working Group to the long-established principals in the American Library Association's (ALA) Bill of Rights, first adopted in 1939. Professor Magi notes that the core principles of the ALA Bill of Rights are to:

- provide resources of interest to all people in the library's community;

- provide access to all points of view;

- challenge censorship;

- provide equitable access; and

- protect user privacy.

Magi went on to note that the ALA Code of Ethics (https://www.ala.org/tools/ethics) urges librarians and libraries to affirm the rights and dignity of every person while ensuring free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations.

Community Feedback on Intellectual Freedom

Several individuals addressed the Working Group as representatives of marginalized community organizations or as members of communities impacted by library book challenges. These included Mia Schultz of the Rutland County NAACP, serving Vermonters of Color, and Dana Kaplan of Outright Vermont, serving LGBTQ+ youth. Working Group members Christopher Kaufman Ilstrup of Vermont Humanities and T. Elijah Hawkes of the Upper Valley Educators Institute spoke to the group from their perspective as advocates.

Most public and school library book challenges today are initiated by people or groups who want to limit or eliminate access to materials by or about People of Color or LGBTQ+ people. Dana Kaplan of Outright Vermont noted:

> "It's important that we are crystal clear: According to Minority Stress Theory, the increased risk of mental health distress faced by LGBTQ+ folks is due to the increased environmental stress of navigating a world with prejudice toward your very identity. The increased rates of depression, substance use, and suicidal ideation are not inherent OR inevitable to LGBTQ+ identities. Rather, it's the outsized amount of stigma, rejection, and exposure to structural and interpersonal discrimination that have devastating impacts on the overall physical and mental health of marginalized people, including the LGBTQ+ community."

Kaplan notes that book challenges are just one piece of a coordinated attack on marginalized communities, especially transgender youth, including efforts to limit access to gender affirming health care, deny students the right to learn about themselves at school, and hide LGBTQ+ cultural events from public view, including criminalizing the popular "Drag Queen Story Hour" activities that take place at libraries across the country including at many libraries in Vermont.

Kaplan, Shultz, and others noted that efforts are escalating to undermine intellectual freedom in libraries. The ALA data from March 2023 reveals 1,269 demands to censor library books and resources in 2022. (https://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2023/03/record-book-bans-2022) This is the highest number of attempted book bans the ALA has recorded in more than 20 years—and nearly double the 729 challenges reported in 2021. The majority of 2022 censorship attempts (58%) targeted information that is accessible to youth: books and materials in school libraries, classroom libraries or school curricula.

Kaplan noted that, although we often hear about particular titles under threat, "This is not about specific books—this is about freedom of thought and expression. These are

attempts to not just censor the content of a single book, but to erase an entire idea from the public sphere."

Justifications for Censorship and Book Challenges

The most frequent reasons cited by proponents of censorship in public and school libraries include the following:

1.   materials are age-inappropriate;

2.   materials are "obscene"; or

3.   materials promote "divisive concepts" like Critical Race Theory.

T. Elijah Hawkes of the Upper Valley Educators Institute addressed these claims in written comments to the Working Group:

> "Vermont has proficiency-based graduation requirements, which align expectations for grades K-12 [and] require learning from and about a diverse array of people and perspectives. School and district leaders, as well as librarians and teachers, should know that these expectations are in place."

Hawkes went on to share that Vermont's proficiency-based graduation requirements in social studies, grade five, expects students to 'Identify the beliefs, experiences, perspectives, and values that underlie their own and others' points of view about civic issues'" and that the state's proficiency-based graduation requirements in English Language arts require students to "Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task."

Hawkes urged

> "In addition to reminding schools of what the state already expects schools to be doing, we can prepare educators, school boards, and librarians with strategies for hearing complaints or concerns from members of the community about what we teach and what is in our book collections."

Joyce Mcntosh, of the Freedom to Read Foundation, addressed the second challenge, "obscenity" (most often used to target work by or about the LGBTQ+ community, but also other works with content relating to sexuality) by pointing to established Supreme Court precedent, called the Miller Test:

[In order for material to be considered obscene,] the material must **meet all three parts** of the legal test established by the Supreme Court in the Miller v. California decision to

be found obscene by a court of law.
(https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/413/15)

- Whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law; and

- Whether the average person, applying "contemporary community standards" would find the work as a whole appeals to the "prurient interest,"; and

- Whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.

The Miller Test standard is intentionally high and very few works in public or school libraries would meet that standard for removal. Most book challenges claiming obscenity cherry pick specific passages when making their claim but don't address the work as a whole.

Finally, opposition to "divisive concepts" is a claim that is often used to challenge books on African American culture or history, Native or Indigenous stories, or women's history. UVM Professor of Anthropology Luis Vivanco noted in his testimony that:

"Increasingly I find myself called to help defend librarians against modern-day challenges to their cultural diversity related programming and collections. These challenges overwhelmingly target works about and by BIPOC community members and others from traditionally marginalized groups. These challenges are based on pernicious and contradictory ideologies that invoke rhetorical claims of defending "intellectual freedom" as they radically reduce the range of those who are deemed eligible—authors, creators, readers, and other interested parties—to actually exercise that freedom. In higher education we see these attacks increasingly couched within broader efforts to delegitimate and eliminate Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice initiatives and offices. In numerous states, we are seeing Orwellian proposals emerge under the banner of "Intellectual Freedom and Viewpoint Diversity" that require campuswide surveys to ensure "competing ideas and perspectives" are represented in classrooms."

Efforts to eliminate resources about black and brown communities from public and school libraries, and from higher education institutions, are contrary to the ALA Bill of Rights principle that library collections should reflect multiple viewpoints and be broadly accessible to everyone in the community.

Privacy, Library Usage, and the Online Environment

The Working Group discussed the significant change that has taken place in the information seeking space during the internet age. While having privacy statutes in place to protect intellectual freedom within the physical library building was once

sufficient to ensure that citizens could enjoy unfettered access to information, it no longer suffices today.

The Working Group discussed the rise of data gathering by corporations and the monetization of data and information about individuals. The Working Group members shared concerns that as Vermonters use the internet for many of their information needs and use digital copies of books and journals from their libraries, the current environment poses a potential threat to intellectual freedom. The Working Group discussed the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) (https://oag.ca.gov/privacy/ccpa) and the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (https://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/consumers/internet-telecoms/data-protection-online-privacy/index_en.htm) as possible models for the Legislature to consider.

Recommendations of the Working Group on Intellectual Freedom

Vermont's Legislative Working Group on the Status of Libraries recommends that the legislature take the following steps to support public and school libraries across the state as they grapple with the rise in attacks on collections and intellectual freedom for library users:

- Pass legislation aimed at protecting libraries, librarians, trustees, and patrons from challenges related to materials selection and retention (see sample legislation in appendix);

- Consider including library programming, displays, and exhibitions in legislation aimed at protecting libraries, librarians, trustees, and patrons from challenges based on content;

- Require all Vermont libraries to have a robust materials selection policy and reconsideration procedure that protects 1st Amendment rights and also complies with Vermont's public accommodation law;

- Provide funding to the Vermont Department of Libraries to increase access to training and education on the principles and practice of intellectual freedom for

  - Library professionals

  - Library trustees and volunteers

  - The general public and library users

- Pass legislation to increase privacy protections for young library users by lowering the age in which public library patron records can be disclosed to those under 12 years old; and

- Pass legislation similar to that in California and the European Union that protects the privacy of library users when accessing online library resources including databases, eBooks, and other web-based information tools.

The Working Group endorses a suggested change in Vermont's Legislative Findings related to Libraries proposed by John Chrastka, Director of EveryLibrary:

> "Vermont could add a "Legislative Finding" to 13 VSA § 2802: (1) Libraries and educational institutions carry out the essential purpose of making available to all citizens, a current, balanced collection of books, reference materials, periodicals, sound recordings and audiovisual materials that reflect the cultural diversity and pluralistic nature of American society. (2) It is in the interest of the state to protect the financial resources of libraries and educational institutions from being expended in litigation and to permit these resources to be used to the greatest extent possible for fulfilling the essential purpose of libraries and educational institutions. - As proposed in Rhode Island's 2023 HB6066; inspired by Wisconsin at WSA § 944.21 8(a)"

The Working Group supported the inclusion of draft legislation shared by Chrastka at its September 22, 2023, meeting in the appendix of its report for consideration by the Vermont Legislature.

The Working Group discussed the confidentiality of the public library records of minors as it relates to intellectual freedom. Vermont's current language in statute states:

> **"§ 172. Library record confidentiality; exemptions**
> **(a) A library's patron registration records and patron transaction records shall remain confidential.**
> **(b) Unless authorized by other provisions of law, the library's officers, employees, and volunteers shall not disclose the records except:**
> **(1) with the written permission of the library patron to whom the records pertain;**
> **(2) to officers, employees, volunteers, and agents of the library to the extent necessary**
> **for library administration purposes;**
> **(3) in response to an authorized judicial order or warrant directing disclosure;**
> **(4) to custodial parents or guardians of patrons under age 16; or**
> **(5) to the custodial parents or guardians of a student, in accordance with the federal**
> **Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, by the library at the school the student attends.**
> **(c) Statistical records pertaining to the patronage, circulation activities, and use of any service or consultation the library provides, provided that they do not contain the names of patrons or any other personally identifying information, shall be exempt from the provisions of this chapter." (Added 2007, No. 129 (Adj. Sess.), § 1.) 22 V.S.A. § 172 (https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/22/004/00172)**

The Working Group inquired of the Department about the age at which the library records of youth in other states are confidential and learned that Vermont has one of the most restrictive statutes on this topic and that in many states, the library records of youth are not mentioned at all. (https://www.ala.org/advocacy/privacy/statelaws)

The Working Group discussed lowering the age in statute from 16 to 12 in alignment with health-related privacy laws for youth in Vermont.

Conclusion

While not at the same rate as other states, libraries around Vermont are starting to see efforts to limit library patrons' Intellectual Freedom in the form of book and program challenges. The Working Group heard about book challenges that are initiated by people or groups who want to limit or eliminate access to materials by or about People of Color or LGBTQ+ people. Representatives of these targeted populations, experts on the topic, and librarians throughout the state urged the Working Group to consider proposing legislation to protect Intellectual Freedom in Vermont. They further recommended that

all libraries put policies in place that directly support upholding Intellectual Freedom and that the Department support this work through ongoing training. The Working Group also considered possible changes to the confidentiality of the public library records of minors.

Library Structures and Organizations

The topic of Library Structures and Organizations was discussed at the Working Group meeting on Friday, May 26, 2023. The Working Group heard from six community members and heard reports from Department of Libraries staff on the topics of Vermont Department of Libraries History, and Vermont Statutes Relevant to Libraries. The Working Group also heard from these experts on this topic: Tom Frank, Chair, Vermont Board of Libraries; Jeremy Johannesen, Executive Director, Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA); and Michelle A. Robertson, American Library Association (ALA) Ecosystem Initiative, Assistant Professor/Program Coordinator Library Media in Education, University of Central Oklahoma. Written comments were shared with the Working Group by 16 community members.

In order to understand Vermont's library landscape, it is important to understand that there are four primary types of libraries, each with its own structure, mission, and service population. These four distinct types of libraries are:

- Public Libraries

- School Libraries

- Academic Libraries

- Special Libraries

In addition, each state has a State Library Administrative Agency (SLAA), which supports all libraries. The Working Group extended calls for comment to all members of the library community and heard primarily about public and school libraries, which make up the vast majority of libraries in the state. While the Working Group did hear from academic libraries and special libraries, there were far fewer participants providing feedback on these library types, so the report focuses less on them.

Public Libraries

> **"The General Assembly declares it to be the policy of the State of Vermont that free public libraries are essential to the general enlightenment of citizens in a democracy and that every citizen of the State of Vermont should have access to the educational, cultural, recreational, informational, and research benefits of a free public library." 22 V.S.A. § 67 (https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/22/003/00067)**
>
> **A "public library" is "any library established and maintained by a municipality or by a private association, corporation, or group to provide basic library services free of charge to all residents of a municipality or a community and which receives its annual financial support in whole or in part from public funds." 22 V.S.A. § 101 (https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/22/003/00101)**

While statute makes it clear that every Vermonter should have access to a free public library, it does not make clear the mechanism through which each Vermonter should have that access.

That said, the importance of public libraries in the minds of the General Assembly may help us to understand why our state has so many public libraries despite its relatively small population and geographic area.

Municipal and Incorporated Public Libraries

In Vermont, there are two types of governance structures for public libraries: incorporated and municipal. Both incorporated and municipal public libraries perform the same basic functions and provide the same basic services, so it can be confusing to understand the differences between them. Typically, whether a public library is municipal or incorporated depends primarily on how that public library was originally formed.

In Vermont, both municipal public libraries and incorporated libraries are tax exempt. (22 V.S.A. § 109 https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/22/003/00109)

Vermont's **municipal public libraries** were typically formed by municipalities to provide library services. It should be noted that Vermont has traditionally had "community libraries," which are municipal libraries that are housed in schools and also serve as school libraries. The number of community libraries has decreased significantly and only a few of that type of combined school/public library remain. These combined school/public community libraries fall within the municipal library category. There are also some public libraries in Vermont that are not joint public/school libraries but have the word community in their name.

Vermont's **incorporated public libraries**, on the other hand, were typically formed when an individual or family made a bequest or donation to start a public library for a community. That donation led community members to form an incorporated entity separate from the municipality that oversees the community's public library.

That said, it is possible for a public library to change its *type* over time. For example, a public library that began as an incorporated library may have become a municipal library.

> **"(a) A municipality may establish and maintain for the use of its residents public libraries.**
>
> **(b) A municipality may provide library services to the residents of other municipalities, upon terms to be agreed upon, and may annually contract with a library or library corporation to furnish library materials to its residents free of charge and may appropriate money for that purpose and may annually appropriate money for the maintenance, care, increase, and support of a library held in trust for the residents of the municipality." 22 V.S.A. § 141 (https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/22/003/00141)**

Municipal Public Libraries

Municipal public libraries operate within the context of a municipality and their library boards operate within the context of that municipality. Library trustees of municipal libraries are often appointed by the governing body of the municipality but may also be elected by the community.

Municipal public libraries have a board of trustees with no fewer than five members and no more than 15 members. Unless a municipality has established that library trustees are elected by the public, municipal library trustees are appointed by the municipality.

> **"Unless a municipality which has established or shall establish a public library votes at its annual meeting to elect a board of trustees, the governing body of the municipality shall appoint the trustees. The appointment or election of the trustees shall continue in effect until changed at an annual meeting of the municipality. The board shall consist of not less than five trustees who shall have full power to manage the public library, make bylaws, elect officers, establish a library policy and receive, control and manage property which shall come into the hands of the municipality by gift, purchase, devise or bequest for the use and benefit of the library. The board may appoint a director for the efficient administration and conduct of the library." 22 V.S.A. § 143 (https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/22/003/00143)**

Per statute, municipal library boards are responsible for managing the public library including establishing library policy and managing library property.

Statute is also clear that municipal library boards may appoint a library director. However, statute does not clearly define who *supervises* the director of a municipal library once they have been appointed by a library board. This lack of clarity in statute has led to disagreements between the boards of municipal public libraries and municipalities.

In 2002 the Vermont State Supreme Court ruled in *Hartford Board of Library Trustees v. Town of Hartford* that "To the extent that a municipal library can be considered a department of the town, it certainly is not a department over which the town manager has been given direct control." (https://law.justia.com/cases/vermont/supreme-court/2002/2002-207eo.html) Despite this Vermont Supreme Court ruling, confusion remains around this question today.

Additionally, the Working Group heard information from some library directors that their library boards functioned differently from what is outlined in statute. One director or a municipal library shared that their public library board is "advisory" and that it does not control the budget of their library or have authority to establish library policies and procedures, and that these functions are performed by the municipality. Another municipal public library director shared that their town charter gives the municipality administrator the authority to hire and supervise the library director. While the Working Group did not perform a comprehensive study of municipal charters in Vermont, it heard that some municipal charters provide for different governance structures for municipal public libraries than are outlined in statute.

Municipal public library boards are public bodies so must adhere to Vermont Open Meeting Law (1 V.S.A. §§ 310–314), statute pertaining to access to public records, (https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/01/005), and the Agency Specific Record Schedule for Municipal Library Board of Trustees (https://sos.vermont.gov/media/hfei51zdmunicipallibraries_approvedrecordschedule.pdf)

Incorporated Public Libraries

Incorporated public libraries are non-profit corporations formed to provide a community with free public library service. Incorporated libraries have governing boards of at least five people and operate independently from the municipality whose people they serve. Incorporated public libraries form in a similar way that *other* non-profit corporations form in Vermont, by drawing up documents of incorporation and filing those documents in the office of the Secretary of State.

The documents include:

- the name of the public library;

- the name of the municipality where the public library will be located; and

- the names of the members of the original board.

Incorporated public libraries are governed by state and federal laws for incorporations and must adhere to Title 11B: Nonprofit Corporations (https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/title/11b), which applies to all non-profit organizations in Vermont.

Like municipal public library boards, the boards of incorporated public libraries must have five members. However, statute also states that incorporated public library boards may have no more than 15 members. **22 V.S.A. § 104** (https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/22/003/00104)

Like municipal public library boards, the board of an incorporated public library may appoint and employ staff "***as they may deem necessary for the efficient administration and conduct of the library and all the affairs of such corporation.***" **22 V.S.A. § 108** (https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/22/003/00108) The board of an incorporated public library supervises the director of their public library.

Incorporated public library boards are not public bodies, so are *not* required by law to adhere to Vermont Open Meeting Law, the Secretary of State's Records Retention Schedules, statute pertaining to access to public records, but are encouraged by the Minimum Standards for Vermont Public Libraries to do so.

Public Library Funding

Municipalities fund their public libraries through appropriations of municipal tax dollars. Per statute, if a municipality chooses, it may contract with another town's municipal or incorporated public library to provide library services for its residents. A number of Vermont municipalities choose this route of providing their residents with library services rather than establishing and maintaining a public library for their community.

> **"A municipality establishing and maintaining a library or contracting for library services may appropriate money as necessary for suitable facilities and for the foundation of a public library and shall appropriate money annually for the maintenance, care, and increase of the library in an amount voted at its annual meeting." 22 V.S.A. § 142 (https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/22/003/00142)**

While statute gives municipalities the authority to "appropriate money as necessary for suitable facilities" and for "maintenance, care, and increase of the library," statute does *not* require municipalities to do so, nor does it specify *what level* of support municipalities must contribute toward the establishment and maintenance of a public library, and municipal funding for municipal public libraries varies significantly from town to town.

As would be expected, there is wide variation in Vermont in the total amount of municipal funding of libraries with different service populations. Libraries serving smaller populations receive less municipal funding than those serving larger populations. This correlation aligns with national data. However, the amount of support that Vermont's public libraires receive is lower across the board, with one exception: the one library serving a population category of 25,000-49,999.

The 69 reporting public libraries in Vermont that serve populations between 1,000 and 2,500 people receive municipal support at only 61% of the national average according to the 2019 PLS data.

Population	# of Public Libraries in U.S.	National Average Municipal Support	# of Public Libraries in VT	Vermont Average Municipal Support	% of National Municipal Support
25,000-49,999	996	$1,459,362	1	$2,181,176	149.46%
10,000-24,999	1,761	$690,454	12	$506,707	73.39%
5,000-9,999	1,488	$290,909	19	$264,444	90.90%
2,500-5,000	1,266	$139,725	38	$115,597	82.73%
1,000-2,500	1,467	$70,732	64	$43,378	61.33%
Less than 1,000	930	$32,003	25	$24,962	78.00%

Sources:
https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/PublicLibraries/Statistics/Report_Spreadsheets/PLS_Stats_2019.xlsx

https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/fy2019_pls_tables_7_thru_13a.xlsx

According to the 2019 PLS the average municipal support at libraries that serve the least people is far lower ($22,962) than the median municipal support at libraries with the largest service population ($2,181176).

The financial support that Vermont municipalities provide public libraries per person also varies significantly. Of the libraries that responded to the 2022 PLS, 48 receive less than $20 in municipal funding per person they provide with library services. Sixty-one libraries receive between $20 and $40 per person in municipal support, 25 receive between $40 and $60 per person, and 16 receive between $60 and $100 per person. Only four libraries receive more than $100 per person in municipal support. Surprisingly, three libraries reported that they receive *no* funding from any municipality.
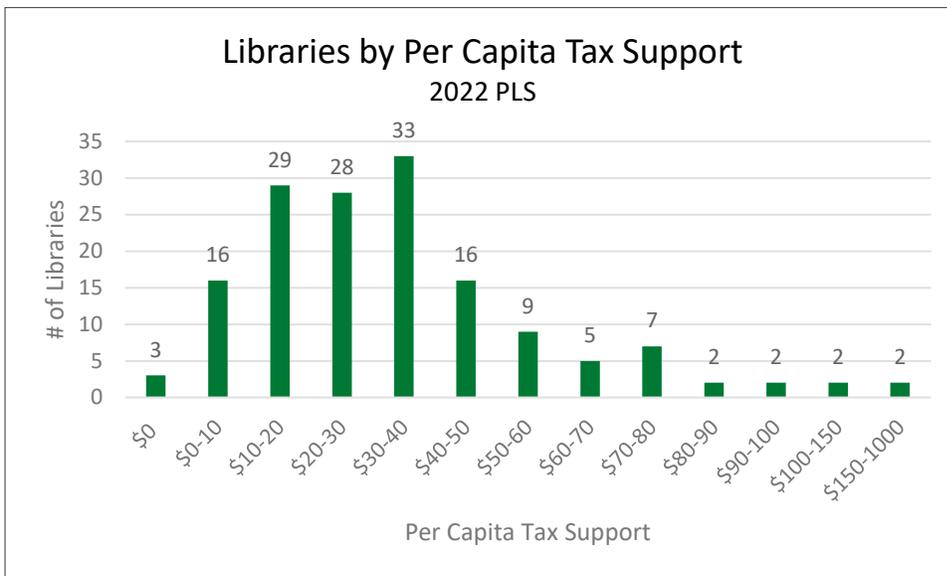
Source: VT 2022 PLS
https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/documents/PLS_Stats_2022.xlsx

In 2019, among the 50 states and Washington, D.C., Vermont was close to the national average in per capita local or municipal support for libraries, with public libraries receiving an average of $37.05. (https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/fy2019_pls_tables_7_thru_13a.xlsx) The Working Group heard that Vermont's public libraries do not receive sufficient support to meet their operational needs from the municipalities whose residents they serve. For that reason, most municipal and incorporated public libraries in Vermont raise funds through direct donation or rely on disbursements from investments.

The reliance of Vermont's public libraries on donations and gifts is reflected in the national data, which shows that Vermont ranks 4th in the nation for "other" sources of funding per person. While the average amount of per capita other funding for the 50 states and Washington, D.C. is $3.22, Vermont libraries receive $7.77, more than twice

the national average.
(https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/fy2019_pls_tables_7_thru_13a.xlsx)

Population	# of Libraries	Median Municipal Support	Municipal Support % of Budget	Median Other Income	Other Income % of Budget
Incorporated - Under 1,000	3	$26,000	70.08%	$8,204	26.26%
Municipal - Under 1,000	12	$17,000	75.94%	$5,704	11.90%
Incorporated - 1,000-2,500	25	$26,200	34.47%	$21,989	51.94%
Municipal - 1,000-2,500	42	$40,719	77.29%	$5,973	12.76%
Incorporated - 2,500-5,000	13	$83,504	48.38%	$58,365	29.21%
Municipal - 2,500-5,000	21	$125,171	87.44%	$8,500	5.80%
Incorporated - Over 5,000	14	$184,210	67.70%	$79,262	28.50%
Municipal - Over 5,000	19	$492,291	91.73%	$15,392	2.42%

Source: 2022 VT PLS
https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/documents/PLS_Stats_2022.xlsx

State PLS data from 2022 shows that both municipal and incorporated public libraries in Vermont receive a significant portion of their funding from "other income"—namely through fundraising and bequests. (Note that percentages in the chart above may not add up to 100% because the percentages shown are medians and because "other income" does not include grant funding.)

According to 2022 PLS data, the 19 municipal public libraries in the state that serve populations greater than 5,000 people receive nearly all of their funding from municipalities (91.73%). By contrast, the 14 incorporated public libraries in the state receive only 67.70% of their funding from the municipalities they serve. Libraries serving all population sizes have a discrepancy between municipal funding of municipal and incorporated public libraries. This difference is least pronounced in communities where the public library serves fewer than 1,000 people and most pronounced in communities where the public library serves more than 5,000 people.

The proportion of other income for incorporated libraries is particularly large. This heavy reliance on funds outside of tax revenue points to the potential for budget shortfalls and the possibility of irregular funding for public libraries.

Typical Public Library Board Responsibilities

While *not* articulated in Statute, typical responsibilities of **both** municipal and incorporated public library boards in Vermont include:

- hiring and supervising the library director;

- reviewing and updating bylaws;

- creating, reviewing, and updating library policies;

- establishing the library budget and requesting funding from the municipality;

- stewardship of the library's financial resources;

- stewardship of the library buildings and grounds;

- meeting regularly and effectively;

- being a champion for the library; and

- ensuring compliance with funding and grant terms.

Library Systems, Cooperatives, and Consortia

Vermont public libraries are overwhelmingly stand-alone institutions, whether they function as a department within municipal government or as an even more isolated incorporated non-profit library. Vermonters often point with pride to the fact that Vermont has more libraries per capita than any other state. However, the national statistics on this point are slightly misleading due to the larger organizational structures at play in most other states. In instances where communities combine library forces, banding together to form county systems, the countywide library system often reports as one entity when completing the Public Library Survey (PLS). In the case of Hawaii, where all of the public library branches are outlets of the one state library, that overarching state system reports as one entity when completing the PLS. Vermont is unusual in that it has just a couple of libraries with branches, but its status as "having more public libraries than any other state" does not bear up under close scrutiny. Unfortunately, what this statistic may be highlighting is that Vermont's many small, independent libraries do not reap the benefits of being part of larger structures that could potentially provide greater service to the public at a lower cost. While some of Vermont's public libraries have informal collaborations such as the reciprocal borrowing agreement between the Platt Memorial (Shoreham) and Orwell libraries, the LOCAL (Libraries of Craftsbury and Albany) collaboration, or One Card (https://www.hartlandlibraryvt.org/one-card-system/), there are very few cooperative or collaborative public library entities in the state.

Library Consultant Lawrence Webster shared with the Working Group that there is an enormous amount of goodwill within Vermont libraries but that the lack of formal support structures results in the isolation of individual public libraries. Webster conveyed her belief that at a time when the democratic principles on which libraries and indeed our country are founded, are being challenged, it is more important than ever to ensure the health of our civic infrastructure—and that improved library structures could help Vermont's libraries to provide the best possible service to the most people, as required in state statute.

> *Library systems seem to work well on two fronts: first, by increasing a patron's access to collections outside their home library, and second, by consolidating certain collection management costs and efforts. Middlebury is one of very few public library systems in Vermont; we have a main branch, Ilsley Public Library, and a branch in East Middlebury, the Sarah Partridge Library. Patrons have full access to both collections, and materials travel between the two locations. We are able to reduce duplication of work by having all cataloging and book processing take place at Ilsley, and of course there is a savings in having both libraries share one catalog system. This works well for Middlebury, on a micro level."—Dana Hart, Director, Ilsley Public Library, Middlebury*

Webster shared that implementing library systems in Vermont could provide Vermonters with access to more material in more formats, equalized service across the system, more seamless requesting and delivery of material, increased options for online learning, convenient access to library locations in established service areas, and efficiencies for shared library tasks such as technology support and administrative functions.

Webster shared that the two main structures to be considered are consolidated systems, which have a more centralized decision-making system, and cooperative systems, which retain decision making at the local level. Webster shared her belief that in Vermont, where independence is highly valued and the fear of losing local control cannot be underestimated, cooperative systems would allow for all the benefits of a centralized system without the centralized decision making that would likely be considered by many to be a negative aspect of integrating systems into libraries.

That said, implementing any structures could pose challenging given the many years of independence among Vermont's many existing public libraries and the need to work cooperatively to form new governance structures and identify funds to support this shared effort.

> *"While there are services provided through my former Library System that I miss, I think the individuality and strong sense of mission that each library in Vermont carries is absolutely invaluable. I would hate to see our state forsake its defining characteristic solely for some of the services a system provides unless it has better protections in place that keep libraries truly autonomous."—Katie Male-Riordan, Director of the New Haven Community Library*

Katie Male-Riordan, Director of the New Haven Community Library, shared a perspective informed by having worked in a library system in New York and in an independent public library in Vermont. "The biggest advantage to being part of a library system meant small libraries were provided with additional, necessary support to help them work towards staying at pace with modern library services. It was also a cost-effective way to have access to some of the more expensive aspects of library service while paying a smaller fee for those services because of a collective agreement— though it should be noted a large portion of library system funding in NYS is provided for through system aid, not individual library's budgets."

Male-Riordan went on to point out that "…these advantages came at a cost. The System also tried to standardize parts of libraries' operation, including universal cards, returning borrowed titles to non-home libraries, requiring all libraries to allow transit on new titles, and accepting patron payments on fines and fees from another library. Practices like these made it difficult to understand resident and non-resident use, added labor for staff to process stacks of titles checked out from neighboring libraries and prep them for transit, inequitable access to new materials, and confusion and liability issues for accepting payment for items from a separate organization.

Though a cooperative system keeps libraries autonomous, many processes within the library are now tied within a system and are subject to system rules, making it hard for individual libraries to be dynamic to community needs."

Statewide Public Library Borrowing

The Working Group heard from several members of the community that a statewide public library card would benefit Vermonters. The idea that was shared with the Working Group is by offering borrowing privileges to all Vermonters, public libraries could better serve Vermonters.

Some public libraries in Vermont have reciprocal lending agreements to serve one another's patrons, waiving out-of-town member fees. Some of these agreements are informal in nature. Other agreements of this nature have been formally approved by library boards, which provides more stability in the relationship. This type of reciprocal agreement between neighboring communities often works well to ensure public access to collections, in-person service hours, and programming among people likely to visit libraries near their homes and workplaces in their day-to-day lives. Reciprocity between two or three public libraries in a region can help ensure that members of a region have access to library services more days and hours of the week and have access to a wider range of library materials, services, and programs.

Vermont has at least two groups of libraries that have chosen to provide reciprocal borrowing to a wide number of Vermonters: the members of the Homecard and Onecard Library systems.

The Homecard Library System is a cooperative lending program of 28 libraries in northwestern Vermont. The system has members in Grand Isle, Franklin, Chittenden, and Addison Counties. Patrons who register for Homecards can visit any member Homecard library for additional access to that library's collection.

The Onecard Library System is a cooperative lending program of 15 libraries in eastern Vermont. The system has members in Windsor, Orange, and Caledonia Counties. Patrons who register for Onecards can visit any member Onecard library for additional access to that library's collection.

Some who shared their thoughts with the Working Group were seeking an even broader network of reciprocal borrowing. Almy Landauer the Adult Services Librarian at the South Burlington Public Library, shared with the Working Group her feeling that "for all residents and especially for senior citizens, individuals with disabilities, youths and children, immigrant and migrant communities, and people living in poverty, unequivocally the best way to improve access to library services and collections is to develop and implement a state-wide library card and catalog. This is something that librarians have been talking about and requesting for many years."

If Vermont had one statewide library card, a patron who wished to borrow an item from a nearby library could drive to that library and check it out directly. This would enable the person to obtain the book very quickly and would also eliminate the costs associated with moving the book to their home library.

The Working Group heard from some community members about the desirability of county-wide networks of borrowing that exist in other states. These county-wide borrowing networks are most often the result of county-wide library systems which exist within a state governance structure with a strong county government and multiple county-wide departments and services that the public supports with tax dollars. In many states, municipalities opt to participate in county library systems, so county library services are not necessarily provided to every resident of a given county. Non-resident library card fees would likely apply to those who reside in adjacent counties or in non-resident municipalities within a county.

The models in place in different states that facilitate statewide borrowing vary. For example, the structures that underpin statewide borrowing in Pennsylvania and California differ. According to the State Library of Pennsylvania's website, the statewide library card program is a "reciprocal partnership among state-aided local libraries and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania" with a purpose "to increase the availability of library materials for Pennsylvanians who live in a municipality in which a state-aided local library is supported by facilitating direct borrowing of physical items and use of onsite services at participating libraries. The program's underlying principle is reciprocity. Each state-aided local library agrees to honor library cards from other state-aided local libraries with the understanding that borrowing privileges will be extended to its own users by other state-aided libraries." The state of Pennsylvania requires that all public libraries that receive Quality Libraries Aid from the state participate in this

program. Pennsylvania residents who live in a municipality that does not participate are not eligible for the statewide library card. Pennsylvania established this statewide card through Access Pennsylvania Statewide Library Card Program legislation (Title 24 PA. C.S.A. § 9334 (c)(1)). (https://www.statelibrary.pa.gov/Libraries/Library-Programs-and-Services/Pages/Statewide-Library-Card-Program.aspx)

By contrast, in California, there is not one library card for the entire state. Instead, libraries that participate in universal borrowing issue their institutions' card to any California resident. Universal borrowing was established in California through the California Libraries Services Act. According to this act, "A California public library may participate in universal borrowing. A public library participating in universal borrowing shall not exclude the residents of any jurisdiction maintaining a public library." (Local Public Library Services, California General Education Code Provisions, § 18731, 2016.) While participation in California's universal borrowing is widespread, it is optional, and some libraries choose not to participate. (https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&sectionNum=18731)

The suggestion of formalizing one statewide library card or universal borrowing would require further study as it might have budgetary implications at the local and state level. There are libraries in the state that receive appropriations from nearby towns with no library so that their residents may use that library. If a state card or universal borrowing were implemented in Vermont, a municipality might decide not to pay another public library for services and instead rely on that other public library to provide services for free. Library budgets might also be impacted by this model as online resources are typically priced based on the size of a library's service area, so more research into this area by the Department of Libraries would be needed.

Public Libraries Conclusion

Vermont has many independently operating public libraries, which demonstrates the importance of public libraries to Vermonters. The strength in this model is that each community is able to directly participate in the governance of its local public libraries and to contribute to its success.

However, a significant challenge faced with this model is that many of Vermont's public library staff report feeling isolated and unsupported in their work. New public library directors and staff also report significant training needs associated with learning to do their work well.

Another challenge this organizational structure poses is that each independent public library has significant overhead and administrative costs. Further, the administrative efforts of library directors and boards are duplicated many times in communities around the state.

Finally, the organizational structure of Vermont's many independently operating public libraries does not lend itself to economies of scale.

Other states' organizational structures indicate there may be benefits for public libraries in joining together into library systems and consortia. Statute does not preclude this option, and local library boards and staff are encouraged to consider if forming library systems would serve their institutions well.

The Working Group heard from the public library community that it wants to provide the best library service possible to Vermonters, and that access to collections is one very important piece of that service. Exploring simple ways to increase access to collections, including opting-in to provide reciprocal borrowing privileges such as those California has codified in statute would be one way to affect that change in Vermont.

Finally, the Working Group heard that in addition to a common desire to consolidate some aspects of their operations, Vermonters also value the independence of their public libraries and the ability to respond quickly to community needs. In other words, the Working Group heard from Vermonters that they desire *both* the freedom of independent control and the unity of shared systems.

School Libraries

There is no uniform organization of school libraries in each of Vermont's many schools. That said, each school library operates within the context of a school to support the learning of students per the established curriculum. Public schools in Vermont operate within the framework of school districts, and most of Vermont's private schools operate independently of one another.

Typically, school libraries are staffed by a "library media specialist", or, as they are commonly called in Vermont, a school librarian. Per the Vermont State Board of Education Manual of Rules and Practices Series 2000 Education Quality Standards, the number of certified school librarians a school needs is determined by the number of students at the school.

> **"The services of a certified library media specialist shall be made available to students and staff. Schools with over 300 students shall have at least one full-time library media specialist and sufficient staff to implement a program that supports literacy, information and technology standards. Schools with fewer than 300 students shall employ a library media specialist on a pro-rata basis." 2121.2. Staff (https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-state-board-rules-series-2000.pdf)**

This means that schools in Vermont that have fewer than 300 students may have less than one full-time school librarian. School librarians provide instruction and support the

instruction of other teachers and the learning of students by providing resources and research assistance. They also develop and maintain a collection of materials to support the school curriculum and for pleasure reading by students. School libraries typically have support staff who assist with checking out, checking in, and shelving materials. Support staff also ensure that the school library's physical collections are in good repair and assist with oversight of the school library, among other things.

Per the information Charles Dabritz, co-president of the Vermont School Library Association (VSLA), provided to the Working Group, "The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act provided support for establishing school libraries, and as far as we know, that was reflected in Vermont through the Department of Education (DoE) [sic] hiring a School Library Consultant sometime in the late 60's." The work of the School Library Consultant was done in coordination with the Department. The School Library Consultant partnered with Department of Libraries staff to conduct quarterly collections meetings at public and school libraries. The consultant also represented Vermont school librarians at regional, state, and national conferences, and was the voice of the school library community within state government.

Dabritz shared that, "Leda Schubert was the last School Library Consultant for the Vermont DoE and served for 17 years (1986-2003). As the Vermont School Library Consultant Leda would provide support for school librarians around library programming, weeding their collection, helping with material challenges (we were reminded that the 1990s was a period of intense pressure on banning books as well). She consulted with other state groups, such as the Vermont NEA, in the creation of summer reading programs. She advocated for school librarians to be included in the first writing of the Education Quality Standards in 1999-2000. Over time, the position was reduced from full time to part time and eventually phased out in 2003." Dabritz went on to share that, "Losing an advocate and a voice within the DoE/AoE [sic] was difficult for Vermont School Libraries. As a result, beginning around 2021 the VSLA reached out to the AoE and began meeting monthly… We continue to meet monthly during the school year to discuss issues around library advocacy and have an open line of communication with the AoE. Lisa Helm is our current contact within the AoE. While we now have a positive working relationship with the AoE we still do not have the active services that were provided by the former Library Consultant."

Recently, VSLA and the Vermont National Education Association received grant funding from the Great Public Schools Grant to launch a three-year school library mentorship program to formalize the support and mentorship new school librarians receive through VSLA. VSLA also worked with the Vermont School Board Association to address the need for updated policies around collection development, especially in a national climate where schools are seeing more challenges of materials in their libraries.

Falling enrollments and tightening school budgets have impacted staffing in school libraries in many schools. Although Vermont's Educational Quality Standards specify the requirement of school librarians in schools at a rate of 1 FTE per 300 students, this standard has often not been met. In addition to cuts to professional librarian positions,

support staff in school libraries has also been drastically reduced, with a result that the library professional often ends up doing tasks that could be left to paraprofessionals. This impacts the highly trained librarian's ability to provide much needed information literacy education, co-teaching, classroom teacher support, and collection development duties.

The Working Group heard from multiple members of the public that there are schools in Vermont that do not have a dedicated school librarian and so do not meet this educational standard.

During its November 18, 2022, meeting on the topic of Continuing Education, Working Group Member Meg Allison reminded the Working Group that Vermont schools should meet educational standards for the state and that the current standards require schools to have a School Library Media Specialist.

School Libraries Conclusion

School libraries in Vermont operate within the contexts of the state's many schools and school districts. The community shared that funding for the physical and online resources in school libraries is often insufficient to meet the curricular needs of students. School librarians also shared with the Working Group that they would appreciate additional funding for databases at the state level to support the curricular needs of students.

School librarians provide essential services to the youth they serve. Because school librarians serve a different function from classroom teachers, they often require different support systems with their school and from outside organizations. The Working Group heard from school librarians that cuts to support staff in school libraries have had a negative impact on the quality of service they can provide to students. The Working Group heard that school librarians wish to see support staffing in school libraries increased.

School librarians also shared with the Working Group that they would appreciate additional funding at the state level and hoped for the restoration of a school library consultant at either the Agency of Education or the Department of Libraries.

Associations that Support Vermont's Libraries

Vermont Library Association (VLA)

According to written testimony provided to the Working Group by Brynn Geffert, the Vermont Library Association (VLA) is an educational organization working to develop, promote, and improve library and information services and librarianship in the state of Vermont. The VLA formed in 1893 and has been a chapter of the American Library

Association (ALA) since 1956. The organization currently has more than 300 members. The organization provides library advocacy and education, as well as networking opportunities and an annual library conference. An active intellectual freedom committee provides support to libraries with material or program challenges and provides educational opportunities on the topic of intellectual freedom.

An all-volunteer organization, the Vermont Library Association has a constantly changing cast of officers and section leaders. Geffert shared that it can be challenging to ensure that important information is not lost as leadership transitions. (https://vermontlibraries.org/about)

Vermont School Library Association (VSLA)

According to testimony shared with the Working Group by Charles Dabritz, the co-President of the Vermont School Library Association, VSLA is the professional organization of Vermont's school librarians. VSLA currently has 200 members and membership costs are on a sliding scale. In Vermont's small schools, school librarians are often the only library professional in their school or district. The leadership, advocacy, mentoring, and support provided by VSLA is instrumental for many school librarians. (https://vsla.wildapricot.org/)

The American Library Association (ALA)

According to its website, the American Library Association "is the oldest and largest library association in the world. Founded on October 6, 1876, during the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, the mission of ALA is 'to provide leadership for the development, promotion and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all.'" (https://www.ala.org/aboutala/)

Vermont Consortium of Academic Libraries (VCAL)

The Vermont Consortium of Academic Libraries "supports higher education in Vermont by providing students, faculty, and staff at the state's colleges and universities with enhanced access to information resources for study, teaching, research, and scholarship." (https://vtcal.org/)

Association for Rural and Small Libraries (ARSL)

The Association for Rural and Small Libraries "builds strong communities through advocacy, professional development, and elevating the impact of rural and small

libraries." ARSL is of particular importance in Vermont, where most libraries fit the definition of rural and small. The ARSL annual conference pulls together librarians from all over the country and typically draws a contingent from Vermont. (https://www.arsl.org/)

Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)

"Representing nearly 9,000 individuals and libraries, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), the largest division of the American Library Association, develops programs, products, and services to help those working in academic and research libraries learn, innovate, and lead within the academic community. Founded in 1940, ACRL is committed to advancing learning, transforming scholarship, and creating diverse and inclusive communities." (https://www.ala.org/acrl/aboutacrl)

The Vermont Department of Libraries

To understand the work of the Vermont Department of Libraries today, it is important to understand its history, which is linked with the history of two separate organizations: the Vermont State Library and the Vermont Free Public Library Commission.

Vermont State Library History (1825-1970)

The Vermont State Library began in 1825 after Rober Pierpoint, a Councilor, introduced a resolution that that each year the council and the Governor would appoint "some suitable person" to oversee maintenance of the collection of books and public documents in the State House. Originally, the Vermont State Library was open only to Council members and the General Assembly when in session.

4.   IN COUNCIL, NOV. 17, 1825.

Resolved, the general assembly concurring herein, That it shall be the duty of the governour and council, annually, to appoint some suitable person, whose duty it shall be to take charge of, and keep in good order, all the books and publick documents, deposited in the state-house, in Montpelier; and that a suitable room in the state-house be placed under the control of such person, for a place of deposit for such books and documents: and such person, in the discharge of his duty, shall be governed by such rules and regulations as the governour and council shall, from time to time, prescribe.

[*Concurred Nov. 17, 1825.*]

Scan of document, 1825 resolution, concerning the oversight of state collection of books and documents

Some 13 years later, in 1838, Jackson A. Vail became the first State Librarian to be paid for his services. That same year the State Library became a repository for state publications and became responsible for distribution of the Vermont Reports. In 1840, the State Library became a selective federal depository—a responsibility that continues to this day.

The first appropriation for the Vermont State Library came in 1841 when the General Assembly approved one-time funds for the purchase of books (seven Bibles and two dictionaries). In 1849, the State Library first participated in the exchange of state documents with other State Libraries, which continued through the mid-2010s when most State Libraries transitioned from paper copies of documents to digital versions of documents. In 1854, the State Library received its first annual appropriation ($200) for the purchase of books by the State Librarian.

When fire destroyed the State House on January 6, 1857, State Librarian Harvey Webster removed books from the building as it was burning. While the new State House was constructed, the State Library was housed first in a private home and then in the Masonic Temple in Montpelier. In 1859, when the construction of the current State House was completed, the State Library moved back to that building and was located immediately next to the Governor's office in what is now the Cedar Creek Room. In 1886 the Annex to the State House was built to house the State Library. That same year a schedule change was approved, and the State Library began remaining open year-round, not just when the Legislature was in session.

In 1902, the first full-time State Librarian, George W. Wing, was hired. The year 1914 saw a growth in space and availability as the building at 109/111 State Street and the Supreme Court building were built. The State Library then moved to the Supreme Court building where it was open to all Vermont residents.

On November 3, 1927, some 50,000 state documents from the State Library were destroyed when Montpelier flooded.

The State Library was located at the Pavilion in Montpelier from 1914 – 2018. Immediately adjacent to the Vermont Supreme Court and just one block from the Washington County Court House, the State Library's extensive law collection was housed at this location, which was conveniently located for use by the Legislature, law professionals, and the public. Since 2018, the Department of Libraries and State Library reside at the Vermont History Center in Barre.

Vermont Free Public Library Commission (1894-1961)

The Vermont Free Public Library Commission began in 1894. The first secretary of the Commission was Miss Mary L. Titcomb, who had the idea of using a horse-drawn wagon to carry books to small libraries and farming families. The Commission denied

her proposal, and she eventually moved to Massachusetts where she implemented a similar program to great success.

On May 25, 1922, the Vermont Free Public Library Commission became the first New England State Commission to own a motorized bookmobile. Dubbed the "Alice Coolidge Bookwagon," it was given to the commission by the Vermont Federation of Women's Clubs and was named for Mrs. Omeron H. Coolidge of Rutland, the first president of the Federation and a friend of Mary Titcomb.

The Alice Coolidge Bookwagon
Source: Department files

In 1923, the Free Public Library Commission was abolished, and its duties were assigned to the Commission to the Board of Education. However, in March 1937, the Legislation approved "adequate funds" to set up a state-wide regional library service and reestablished the Free Public Library Commission. In 1937, the Free Public Library Commission established regional bookwagons with small library collections housed in local public libraries.

In 1960, the Legislature abolished the Board of Geographic Names, initially transferring those responsibilities to the State Librarian. In 1961, the Legislature changed course and transferred geographic naming responsibilities for the state to the Board of Trustees and the Free Public Library Commission. The same year, the Free Public Library Commission was renamed the Free Public Library Service, and a five-member board was established.

Vermont Department of Libraries (1970-present)

The Vermont Department of Libraries (the Department) was established on March 31, 1970, when the Vermont State Library merged with the Vermont Free Public Library

Service. While the services the Department provides have evolved over time, the Department has existed continuously since that time.

In 1971, the Department launched Vermont BookFetch, a publication of the state library catalog (with supplements from participating libraries) in local newspapers. Members of the public could review the contents of BookFetch and then request books from the Department of Libraries by mail.

BookFetch catalog
Source: Department files

In 1980, the Department of Libraries implemented its first automated collections, and in 1987, launched the Vermont Automated Library System (VALS), a union catalog. Libraries that were members of VALS submitted additions and deletions from their catalog to the Vermont Department of Libraries where Department staff updated the union catalog manually.

In 2017, the VALS system was replaced by SHAREIt, an interlibrary loan (ILL) product from the company Auto-Graphics. Branded as "CLOVER", this system enables staff at public libraries across the state to easily check whether items their patrons are interested in are available at other institutions and to learn whether those items are currently checked-in and able to be requested through ILL. The implementation of this technological solution eliminated the need for the Department to maintain one shared union catalog to support ILL.

The Department's Five Regional Libraries (1967-2018)

Between 1967 and 1972, the Vermont State Library opened five regional libraries throughout the state, each with professional librarians and paraprofessionals who served the public directly. These libraries served as de facto regional book repositories, supplementing the collections available in Vermont's many small, rural libraries. The public was able to visit the regional libraries during their open hours. Library staff from

nearby public libraries also visited the Department's Regional Libraries to gather materials to circulate to the public. Each of the regional libraries was managed by a library consultant who provided guidance and offered support to library directors and staff in the region they served. As their workplaces were embedded in Vermont's communities, the consultants were able to make regular visits to public libraries to support the directors and trustees in their day-to-day work. Some of the staff of the regional libraries worked on bookmobiles, delivering library materials from the regional library to schools and other service points in rural Vermont communities.

The Department of Libraries once had five regional library facilities. These regional library facilities opened between 1967 and 1972, starting in the southwest quadrant of the state, which was originally known as the Rutland Regional Library.

Regional Library	Opening Year	Closing Year
Midstate Regional Library (Originally called the Montpelier Regional Library)	1968	2018
Northeast Regional Library (Originally called the St Johnsbury Regional Library)	1968	2010
Northwest Regional Library (Originally called the St. Albans Regional Library)	1972	1997
Southeast Regional Library (Originally called the Brattleboro Regional Library)	1967	2000
Southwest Regional Library (Originally called Rutland Regional Library)	1967	1997

The Department began closing its regional libraries beginning in 1997 in response to significant cuts to its budget. Four of the facilities had closed their doors by 2010, and the final regional library, then known as "Midstate" closed in 2018.

In July 2018 the Vermont Department of Libraries moved its staff to one location, a space leased from the Vermont Historical Society in their building at 60 Washington Street in Barre. Through this move, the Department's shelf space was reduced by 85% and its physical collections were reduced accordingly.

The Department continues to adapt and strives to fulfill its statutory obligations using a blend of modern and traditional approaches. While the Department no longer has the resources to maintain large collections of print materials at regional libraries, it provides support for resource sharing among local libraries across the state through the courier program and facilitating in-state and inter-state interlibrary loan services. While the

State Library no longer includes the law library collections and staff, the Department now provides selected State of Vermont staff with access to a legal database to meet their information needs and provides public access to legal collections and legal reference services through a grant to the Vermont Law and Graduate School in Randolph.

Department of Libraries Staffing

Department records show that in 1971, the Department was staffed by fifty-seven (57) staff members. Department staff members were divided into three divisions: Administrative Services, Extension Services, Bibliographic & Reference, and Government and Law.
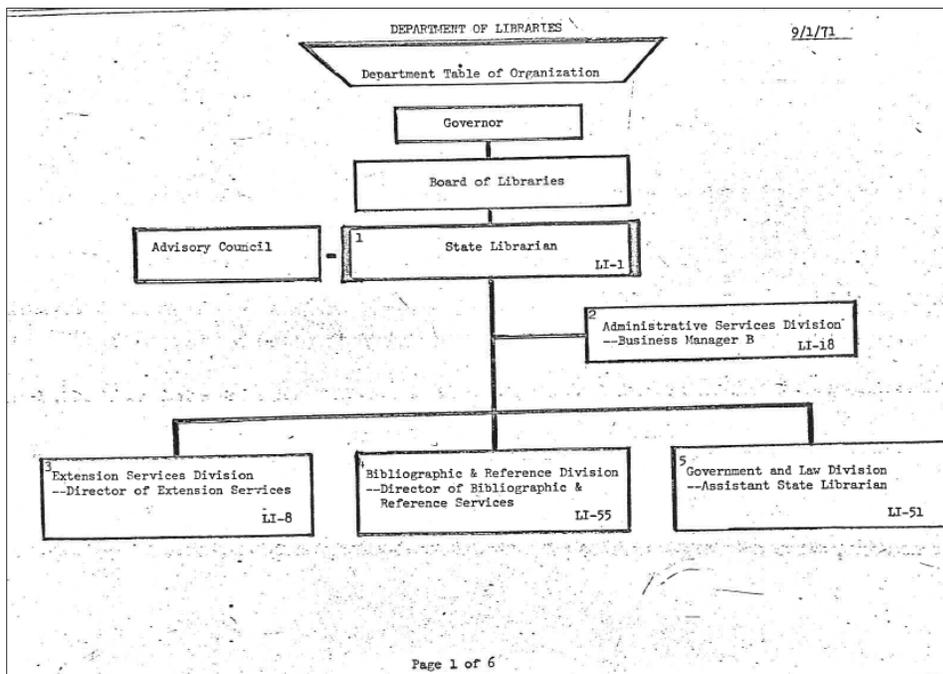
Cuts to the Department's budget led to the closure of the five regional libraries and a dramatic downsizing of its staff between 1971 and 2010. The reduction of staff through budget cuts, closure of the Department's Law Library, Department-specific Human Resources, Finance, and Information Technology staff moved to other departments of the state, and the closure of the final regional library (Midstate), reduced the Department to its current size.

NUMBER OF STAFF

1997 - Northwest Regional & Southwest Regional libraries closed.

57

38

2000 - Southeast Regional Library closed.

2010 - Northeast Regional Library closed.

26

25

2015 - Law Library closed.

22

2017 – IT position moved to Agency of Digital Services.

2018 - Midstate Regional Library closed.

19

18

1971   1997   2010   2014   2015   2016   2018

– – Number of Staff
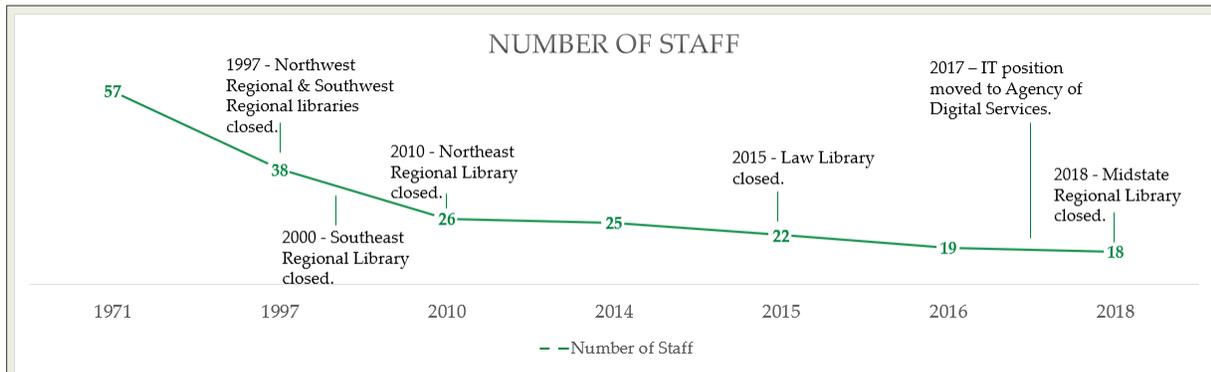
Since 2018, the Department has had 18 full-time positions organized into three work units: Information & Access, Library Advancement, and the business unit. In fiscal year 2022 the Department was authorized by the Legislature to bring on two temporary staff members to support its two federal Capital Grants programs.

Staffing at State Library Administrative Agencies (SLAAs) is variable throughout the country and to some extent staffing levels relate to the differences in the size of the population served. That said, most SLAAs with a similar population size to Vermont's have more staff than the Vermont Department of Libraries. Jeremy Johannesen, Executive Director of COSLA shared with the Working Group that "the average staffing level at the state library agencies is 49 with a mean of 39.
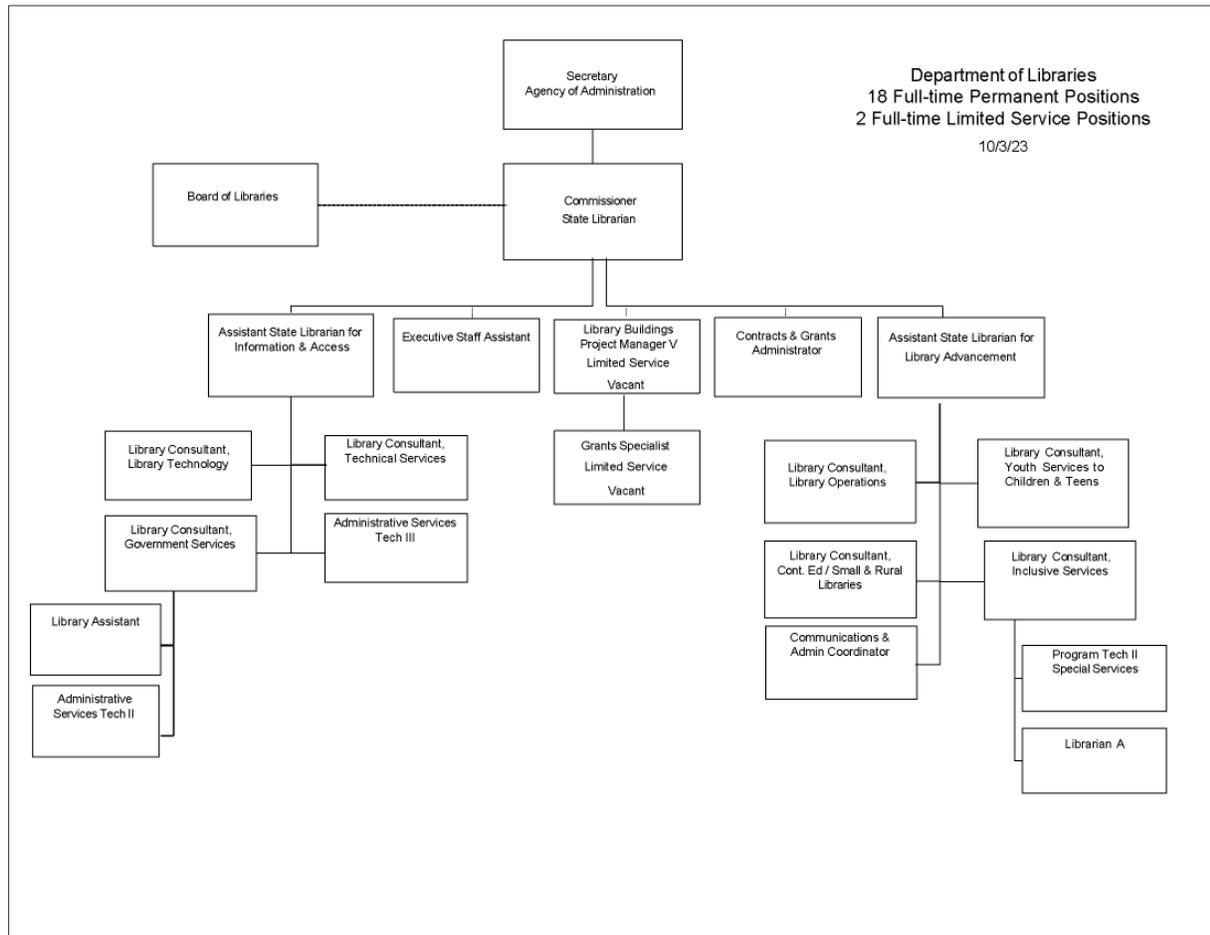
Department Budget

In fiscal year 2024, the Legislature approved a budget for the Department of Libraries of $3,600,000. Approximately two-thirds of the Department's approved budget is made up of $2,100,000 in General Funds and one-third is the state's federal award through Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Library Services Technology Act (LSTA) Grants to States program. (https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/AboutUs/Libraries%20FY24%20Budget%20Book_011923.pdf)

State Funds Budgeted to the Department of Libraries:

2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2023
$1,835,067	$2,331,998	$2,616,539	$2,746,649	$2,062,056	$2,004,119

Source: Department files

Federal funding from IMLS LSTA Grants to States program:

2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2023
$598,361	$815,233	$955,355	$912,082	$1,032,931	$1,247,111

Source: Department files and https://www.imls.gov/grants/grants-state/state-allotments

These annual allotments show that while federal funds the Department has been awarded have kept pace with inflation, state funding to the Department has not. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, $1.00 in 2000 is equal to $1.82 today. By that measure, federal funds have seen a modest increase from the 2000 amounts in 2023.

When taking into account the rate of inflation over the past twenty-three years, state funding to the Department would need to have increased by $1,335,703 in fiscal year 2023 for the Department to have the same spending power it had in 2000. A significant portion of the decreases in the Department's budget can be traced to budget cuts in fiscal years 2015 and 2016. As passed, the fiscal year 2015 general fund allotment for the Department was $2,746,649. In August 2014, a rescission cut the budget by $125,131. The Department then absorbed a $500,000 cut in fiscal year 2016, reducing the budget to $2,252,941. In total that year, the Department lost $625,131 in state funds. Changes to staffing allocations at the Department in the past decade included structural changes that led to the removal of the Department's IT Librarian position and reductions through attrition following early retirement incentives. As the size of the Department was reduced, so was the size of the support it could offer to libraries statewide.

According to IMLS data, the Department's budget has decreased by more than 10% relative to the State's total revenues since 2020. Among the states, Vermont has the sixth largest decline in relative percentage of total revenues from the state, after Ohio, Maine, Kansas, Louisianna, and Colorado.

Figure B-2. Percentage Change in State Revenue Contribution to State Library Total Revenue, FY 2000–FY 2020
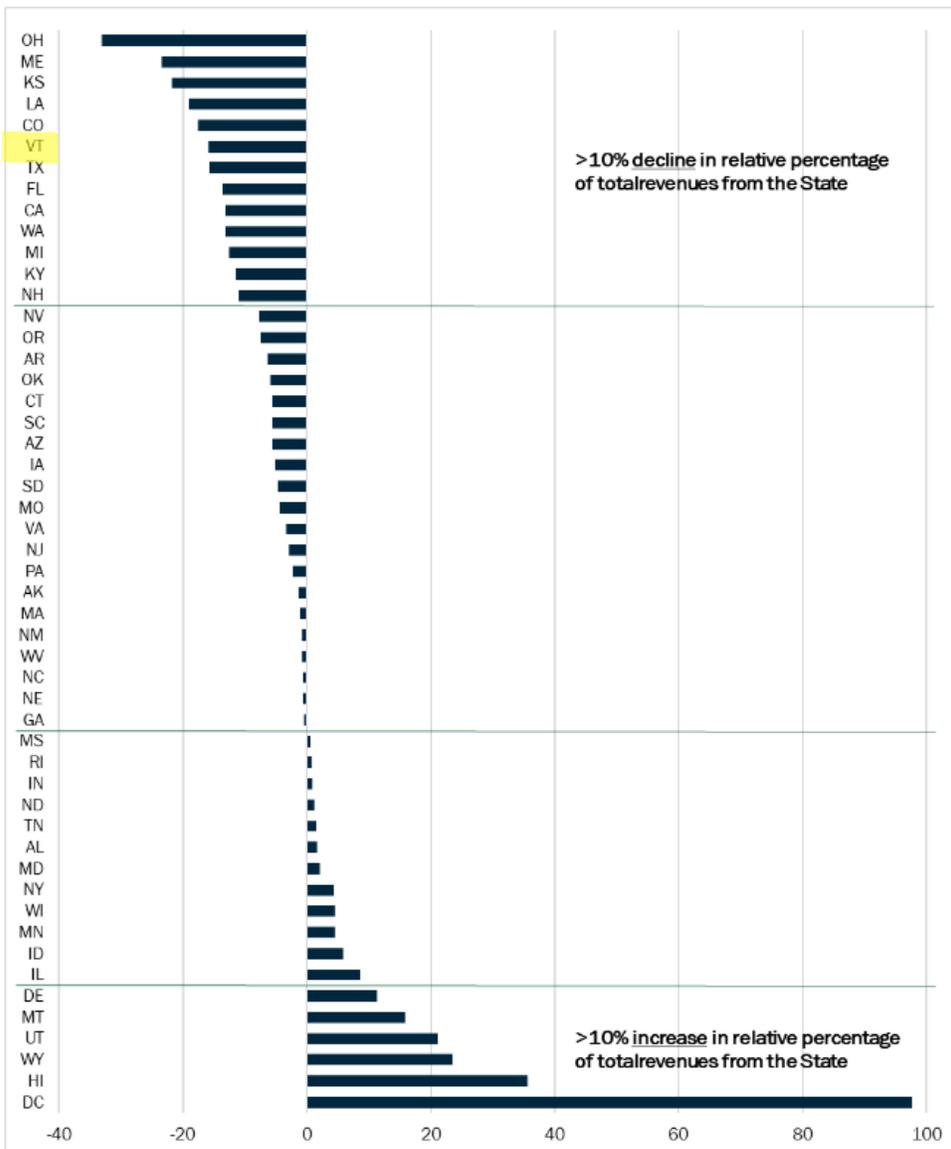
Source:
https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-12/imls_slaa_functions_roles_brief.pdf

While many SLAAs have seen decreased funding over the past 20 years, they have faced rising costs for the shared, centralized collections they provide. For example, the cost of statewide database expenditures reported by state libraries has grown from $42.2 million in 2000 to $74.04 million nationally in that time.

Figure 5. Statewide Database Expenditures by Funding Source, 2000 and 2020
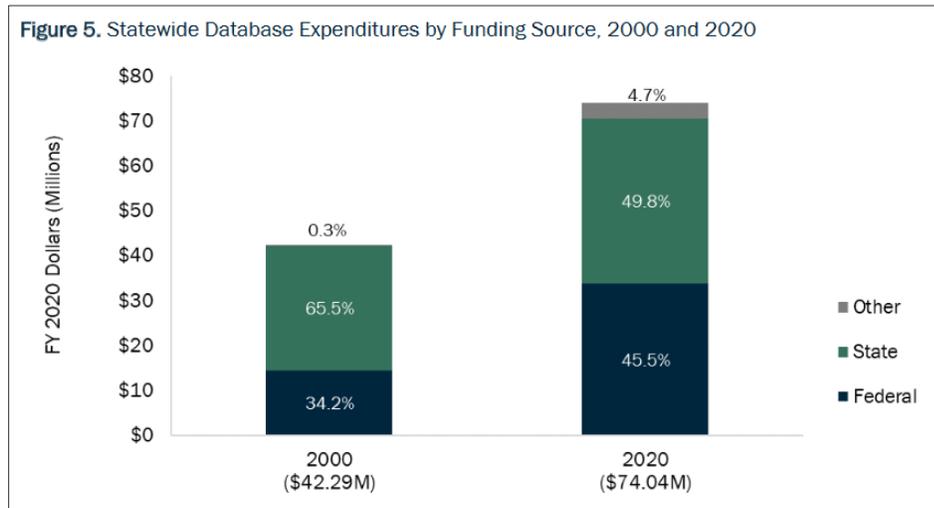
Source:
https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-12/imls_slaa_functions_roles_brief.pdf

Department Leadership

In recent years, the Department has undergone significant changes in leadership, having had four state librarians since January 2017.

The Department is supported in its work by the Vermont Board of Libraries. As Board Chair Tom Frank shared with the Working Group, the seven-member Board of Libraries serves as an advisory body to the State Librarian and works in consultation with the Agency of Administration in the appointment of the State Librarian. The Board typically meets four times a year.

In Vermont, the Board of Libraries also handles geographic naming for the state. This is a unique role: no other state has geographic naming as a responsibility falling to the Board of Libraries. Board Chair Tom Frank reports that in recent years, the Board's time has been split approximately 80% to geographic naming responsibilities and 20% to advising the State Librarian. However, Frank shared with the Working Group that by updating its Geographic Names Procedure in August 2022, the board has streamlined and clarified its process. These improvements have significantly reduced the amount of time the Board has spent on Geographic Naming in 2023 and provide the board with more time to dedicate to its primary role: advising the State Librarian.

The Functions of the Vermont Department of Libraries

The Vermont Department of Libraries is a department within the State's Agency of Administration. The Department is led by the State Librarian and Commissioner, who is

appointed by the Secretary of Administration after consultation with the Board of Libraries and with the approval of the Governor and consent of the Senate. Statute requires that the State Librarian be a professional librarian with a master's in library science from an American Library Association accredited institution.

Figure 1. Location of State Libraries within State Governments, 2020

Legend:
- Independent Agency (n=20)
- Department of State/Administration (n=10)
- Department of Education (n=13)
- Other Agency (n=8)

Source: IMLA, State library Administrative Agencies Survey, FY 2020
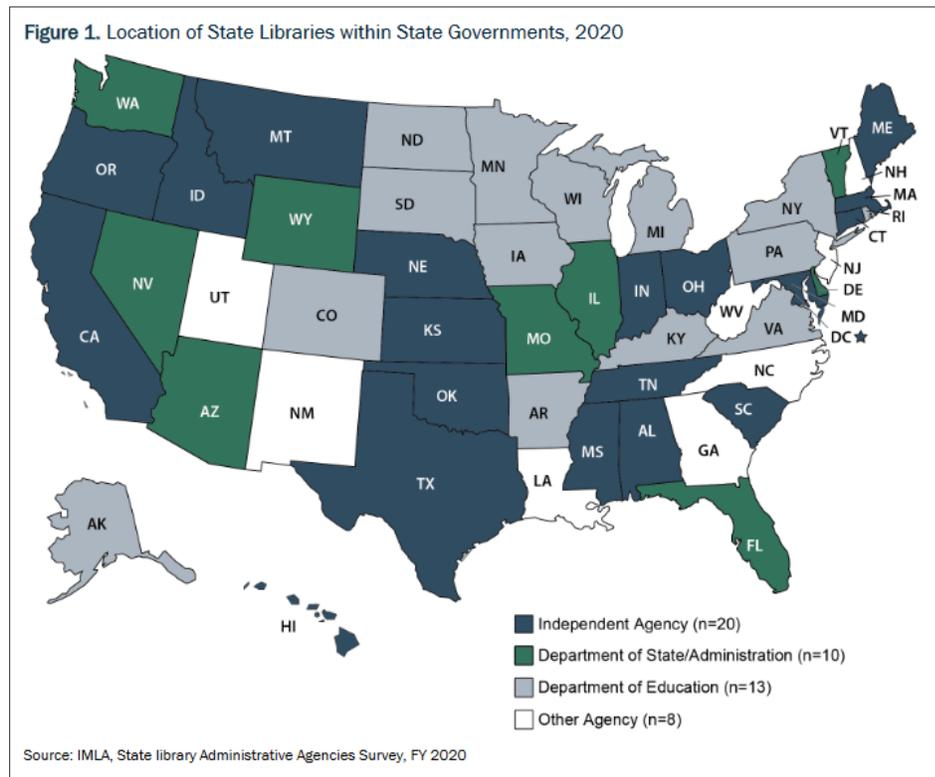
Source: https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-12/imls_slaa_functions_roles_brief.pdf

Vermont is one of ten SLAAs housed in their state's Agency of Administration: Arizona, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Missouri, Nevada, Washington, Wyoming, and the District of Columbia. Thirteen SLAAs are housed in the Agency of Education, twenty are Independent Agencies, and eight are housed in other agencies within state government.

The varied locations of the 51 SLAAs within their respective state governments are emblematic of the many differences that can been seen between the SLAAs. As Jeremy *Johannesen, t*he Executive Director of the national Chief Operating Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA), told the Working Group, "If you've seen one state library, you've seen one state library. There are absolutely no universals."

That said, according to Johannesen, one common feature of all 51 SLAAs is that they serve as the "coordinating hub for best practices in the administration of local library services."

Department of Libraries: Duties and Functions

The Department's specific role is outlined in **Chapter 13 of Title 22: Libraries, History, and Information Technology**. (https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/chapter/22/013)

The work of the Department is outlined in two sections **22 V.S.A. § 605: Duties and Functions** (https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/22/013/00605) and **22 V.S.A. § 606: Other Duties and Functions** (https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/22/013/00606).

> **Statute shows that the Department's first duty and function is to "provide, administer, and maintain:**
> **(1) A law library to serve the Supreme Court, the Attorney General, other members of the Judiciary, the legal profession, members of the Legislature, officials of State government, and the general public."**
> **22 V.S.A. § 605**
> **(https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/22/013/00605)**

The Department has not had a had a law librarian since 2015 and has not had a law library since 2018. Instead, the Department administers a contract with Westlaw through which departments and agencies provide their staff with access to legal resources.

Since 2016, the Department has met its charge of providing access to legal resources and references to the public through a grant to the Vermont Law School's Community Legal Information Center (CLIC) (https://www.vermontlaw.edu/academics/library/CLIC). Through CLIC, the public can access the collections of the Cornell Library of the Vermont Law and Graduate School in South Royalton in-person and can obtain assistance from professional law librarians from 8am to 8pm seven days a week. CLIC has a dedicated full-time law librarian, the CLIC Coordinator, who serves the public from 10:30am-4pm Monday through Friday. In addition to using these resources on-site in South Royalton, the public can call or email CLIC for answers to their legal reference questions.

The Department fulfils its responsibility to provide a collection of federal documents by serving as a partial federal repository. This means that the State Library collection includes documents and materials that are sent by the Federal Government and makes these available to the public. The nearest full federal repository in the region is in Maine. The Federal Government now publishes many of its materials online, which can be found and used by the public through the Department's online catalog.

The Department meets its obligation to provide access to information on public policy and topics pertinent to State government through the databases of the Vermont Online Library. The Department also has a modest collection of print titles on public policy matters in the State Library which can be checked out by members of the Legislature

and State of Vermont employees with their State Library Card. Members of the public can access these physical items by appointment at the Department's office in Barre, Vermont or can request to borrow them through Interlibrary Loan.

Another duty of the department is to maintain collections in support of other libraries in the state that can be used by all Vermonters.

> **"(4) A general library collection of a sufficient size and scope to reinforce and supplement the resources of local and regional libraries. All materials of the Department of Libraries shall be available for free circulation to all citizens, institutions, and organizations under regulations of the State Librarian except that the State Librarian may restrict rare or reference-type materials to one location. The Department shall arrange, classify, and catalog all materials in its custody and provide for their safekeeping and shall rebind books as needed. The Department shall provide service to other libraries in the State, schools, and individuals and may provide service by mail or book wagon or otherwise."**
> **22 V.S.A. § 605**
> **(https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/22/013/00605)**

With the closure of the regional outlets of the State Library, and the downsizing of its space to hold physical collections, the Department has turned toward meeting this statute by providing more online resources to the public, including eBooks and online journals. The Vermont Online Library (VOL) is a collection of databases that the Department provides for all Vermonters with their public, school, and academic library card. The resources are available online every hour of every day and Vermonters can access them either in the library or remotely. The Vermont Online Library provides a core collection of curated, vetted, and reliable information from a variety of newspapers, magazines, academic journals, and books providing a robust depth of information than can be found through a basic internet search. The Department contracts with vendors to provide this core set of database resources, which helps local libraries keep their costs lower. Some libraries in Vermont use their local funding to provide additional resources to the communities they serve. In addition to databases, the Department also provides all Vermonters online learning platforms through which they can learn skills related to work readiness and lifelong learning.

According to an IMLS report, "access to statewide databases expanded between 2000 and 2020… other state agencies increasingly relied on the state library's licensing of statewide databases."(https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-12/imls_slaa_functions_roles_brief.pdf) Across the country, between 2000 and 2020, SLAAs increased the databases they provided, both for the public and also for other state agencies. The Department provides all State of Vermont employees with access to the Vermont Online Library, which includes scholarly articles, news, and other publications relevant to their work. The Department also manages a contract for Westlaw that provides licenses paid by individual departments. The Department of

Libraries also provides reference services, including article retrieval and interlibrary loan, to assist state employees in locating information related to their work.

Table 5. User Groups Covered by Statewide Database License Expenditures

User group	2000	2020	Difference: 2020–2000
Public libraries	47	48	1
Academic libraries	38	41	3
School libraries	38	42	4
Special libraries	34	36	2
Library cooperatives*	32	34	2
Other state agencies	33	43	10
Remote users	42	47	5

* The term "library cooperatives" was used in both the 2000 and 2020 SLAA surveys.

Source:
https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-12/imls_slaa_functions_roles_brief.pdf

In Vermont, many public libraries, schools, and academic institutions have had to reduce the number of databases they provide over the past two decades due to escalating database costs. This has resulted in more public, school, and academic libraries relying on the databases provided by the Department so they can put more of their local dollars towards other collections and programs. (*See Collections Chapter for more information on databases for all Vermonters*)

In recent years, the Department has begun building out its core collection of eBooks and eAudiobooks for the public, which it makes available through the Palace App. Like the Vermont Online Library collection, the Department's collection of eBooks and eAudiobooks serve as a shared statewide resource that all Vermonters can access using their public library card. If their library has not yet added its digital book collections to the Palace App, the Department will be providing Vermonters with temporary QR codes they can use to access these resources. (https://libraries.vermont.gov/find-books-and-more/ebooks-and-audiobooks/palace-project-downloadable-books-all-vermonters) (*See Collections Chapter for more information on the Department's collection of eBooks and eAudiobooks for all Vermonters*)

> **"(5) A service of advice and consultation to all libraries in the State, in order to assist them in realizing their potential. This service shall be provided at a regional level as well as at the State level. The Department may provide centralized cataloging and other related technical services to libraries in the State to the extent feasible."**
> **22 V.S.A. § 605**
> **(https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/22/013/00605)**

The Department provides a service of advice and consultation to all libraries in the State, in order to assist them in realizing their potential. The Department has a team of Library Consultants who are experts in the areas of library technology, technical services, government services, professional development, library operations, youth services, and inclusive services. The team works together to respond to inquiries and requests for support from libraries statewide. During the COVID-19 health emergency, the Department realized that it was able to most effectively serve the greatest number of libraries statewide by shifting more of its consultation services to telephone and online calls. However, Department staff do continue to connect with libraries in-person through outreach visits. The Working Group heard kudos from many library staff for the support provided by the Department's team of Consultants.

In addition to supporting the many public, school, and academic libraries around the state, the Department provides physical collections to meet the needs of those in the six state correctional facilities, the state's psychiatric facilities, and the Veteran's home as required by statute.

The Department also oversees a program that provides library service to blind Vermonters and those with physical disabilities that prevent them from using traditional print materials directly: the ABLE Library. The ABLE Library also serves those who have learning differences that make reading traditional print materials difficult, and also has a collection of large print books available. The Department is building out its collection of materials to support Vermonters' diverse access needs, including those with learning differences.

In addition to the functions specified in section 605 of this title, the Department has additional duties articulated in **22 V.S.A. § 606**. (https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/22/013/00606)

An important function of the Department is the administration of Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Grants to States funds allocated to Vermont by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) each year. Nationally, this work is performed by all 51 SLAAs. Each year, the Department grants some of the Grants to States funds for Vermont directly to libraries and library cooperatives. Nationally, 42 other SLAAs (78%) also grant funds to libraries and library cooperatives. This work is done in keeping with statute that pertains to aid to local libraries:

> **"The State Librarian may assist free public or other nonprofit libraries which formulate and implement plans for the systematic and effective coordination of libraries and library services. Grants may be made in accordance with standards of the service, consistent with the Federal Library Services and Construction Act, chapter 16 of Title 20, U.S. Code as amended." 22 V.S.A. § 634**
> **(https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/22/013/00634)**

Through its Grants to States program, the IMLS allocates a base amount to each of the SLAAs, plus a supplemental amount based on population. Funding from the IMLS Grants to States program comprises roughly one-third of the Department's total annual budget.

The funds received from the Grants to States program are intended to supplement funding from the state and local governments to support library service in the state of Vermont according to the purposes of the Library Services and Technology Act. (https://www.imls.gov/grants/grants-state/purposes-and-priorities-lsta)The Department develops and follows a five-year plan for the use of these funds, and then completes an evaluation at the end of the five-year grant period.

The Department's current Library Services and Technology Act Grants to States Five-Year Plan (2023-2027), can be found online. (https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/state-profiles/plans/vermont5yearplan.pdf)The Department's three goals for the current period of performance are:

- Strengthening Libraries

- Enhancing Access to Information

- Fostering Learning and Building Community

The Department's most recent evaluation, Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Grants to States Program Implementation Evaluation Federal Fiscal Year 2018 - Federal Fiscal Year 2022, is also available online. (https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/state-profiles/evals/vermont5yearevaluation.pdf)

Statute also empowers the Department to "prepare plans and applications to obtain federal aid monies which may be available." In Federal Fiscal Year 2020, the Department was awarded $56,384 in IMLS CARES Act Grants for Museums and Libraries program to support the role of museums and libraries in responding to the coronavirus pandemic. The Department awarded grant funds to help libraries improve connectivity and computer access for their patrons. Through this program, thirty-three libraries received a $400 micro-grant that they used for a variety of expenses including improvements to networks and purchasing exterior electrical outlets and other accommodations to support outdoor computing by the public. The Department also made bulk purchases of PPE and plexiglass shields and distributed them to public and academic libraries throughout the state.

In 2021, the Department was granted $2,135,819 in American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) funding by IMLS. Through this program, IMLS designated $200 million in pandemic response funding through the Institute of Museum and Library Services' (IMLS) Grants to States program. The Department used these funds to provide two rounds of non-competitive grants to public libraries, museum partnerships, and

statewide library consortia. The Department also used the funds to enhance existing statewide services.

Most recently, the Department has also sought and was awarded $16.4 million from the U.S. Department of Treasury and $10 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to support capital improvement projects at public libraries in our state, which it will subgrant to Vermont's public libraries. The funding from the U. S. Department of Treasury is through the American Rescue Plan Act ("ARPA") Capital Projects Funds which provides $10 billion for payments to eligible governments to carry out critical capital projects in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency. The Department will utilize $16.4 million of Vermont's Capital Project funds toward capital improvements at Vermont's public libraries that support continued or improved public access to high-speed internet to directly enable work and health monitoring. The Department will make subgrant funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development grant available for the state's small, rural public libraries to support them in repairing their library buildings, with a focus on economically depressed areas in the state.

In recognition of the importance of communication between libraries and particularly around sharing resources, statute requires the Department to promote improved communications among libraries in the State as well as cooperative use of facilities through hosting and participating in regional meetings of libraries and by hosting well-used email listservs for library staff and trustees.

Statute also enables the Department to conduct **"*seminars, workshops, and other programs to increase the professional competence of librarians in the State.*"** (https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/22/013/00606)

The Department's continuing education offerings and the Certificate of Public Librarianship program are both ways it meets the charge of conducting seminars, workshops, and other programs to increase the professional competence of librarians in the State. Nationally, 49 other State Libraries provide continuing education for library staff in their state.

According to statute, the Department **"*(8) Shall be the primary access point for State information, and provide advice on State information technology policy.*"** (https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/22/013/00606)

The Department does not serve as the primary access point for State information. Vermont 211 launched in 2005 and has served as the primary access point for telephone inquiries for information about state government for nearly two decades. Many Vermonters now access information about state services online. Agencies and Department of the State of Vermont do not interact with the Department with regards to the content they share online or the organization of that information.

The Working Group recommends that the Legislature consider repealing this portion of statute.

Direct Funding from the Department to Local Libraries

Many of Vermont's public libraries receive non-competitive grants from the Department annually for such activities as Summer Reading and the Interlibrary Loan Courier Service. They also receive support in the form of shared services including the statewide Interlibrary Loan and access to databases and electronic books through the Department. Public Libraries also received direct grants of one-time IMLS funds in response to the COVID pandemic, which were administered by the Department.

The Department has historically provided direct aid to libraries through grant programs. Most significantly, the Department issued substantial grants to public libraries around the state between 2000-2010 after receiving a grant of more than $10M from the Gates Foundation. These grants enabled many libraries to fund capital improvements.

The Department has applied for and been awarded two significant federal grants to support public libraries with capital improvements: $10 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and $16.4 million from the U.S. Department of Treasury. The Department plans to award these funds to public libraries in fiscal year 2024.

Unlike the majority of State Library Agencies across the nation, the Department does not provide annual grants to libraries from general funds, or "state aid." According to an IMLS report issued in November 2021, forty-two (42) SLAAs provide aid to public libraries on an annual basis.

At its meeting on September 22, 2023, a Working Group member brought up the topic of "State Aid" for discussion. While the IMLS State Library Administrative Agencies Survey Fiscal Year 2020 shows that 42 SLAAs provide annual "state aid" directly to eligible public libraries (https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-12/imls_slaa_functions_roles_brief.pdf), that report does not show how much aid to public libraries each state provides, whether each state provides that funding annually, or what the parameters for such aid might be.

The Working Group did not hear from experts on this topic, nor did it request that the Department research the specifics of other SLAA's direct aid to public libraries for this report. However, the Department connected with the SLAAs in New England and New York State to gather information on what "state aid" they provided to public libraries, if any.

The Department learned that, like Vermont, the New England states, New Hampshire, Maine, and Connecticut do not make direct state aid available to public libraries. It is important to note that, like the Vermont Department of Libraries, the SLAAs in these

states do support their libraries through centralized statewide programs and grants from funding sources other than the state.

New England states, Massachusetts and Rhode Island, offer varying levels of programmatic state aid as does neighboring New York.

Massachusetts disburses three state aid awards: the Library Incentive and Municipal Equalization Grants, and a Nonresident Circulation Offset to all certified public libraries (https://mblc.state.ma.us/programs-and-support/state-aid-and-aris/index.php)

Rhode Island offers Public Library Grants-in-Aid, Public Library Construction Reimbursements, and Institutional Library Grants-in-Aid, and supports the Statewide Reference Resource Center (https://mblc.state.ma.us/programs-and-support/state-aid-and-aris/index.php)

New York makes annual disbursements in the form of Library Aid, Central Library Aid, and Construction Aid. (https://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/libaid.htm)

The Working Group did not reach consensus on a recommendation related to state aid.

Vermont Department of Libraries Conclusion

Despite the many changes that have come its way, the staff of the Department of Libraries have shown resilience and a commitment to supporting the library community in the state. During the meetings of the Working Group, the community frequently called for the Department to do even more to support libraries in Vermont while simultaneously hearing positive feedback about the work that it is doing now. Community members also voiced recognition that the Department today is far smaller and has less spending power to support Vermont's libraries than it did, even 25 years ago.

The Department of Libraries has seen a consistent reduction in staffing for decades, and any replication of larger regional consolidated or cooperative systems that might be created for Vermont cannot come from the Department of Libraries as currently staffed. The Working Group understands that the Department is working to capacity and with its full budget to provide the services currently and that any new or additional services would either require additional support or cuts to existing services.

Staffing

The topic of Staffing was discussed at the Working Group meeting on Friday, July 22, 2022. The Working Group heard from nine community members and heard a report from Department of Libraries staff on the topic of Staffing. Written comments were shared with the Working Group by 15 community members.

The Working Group heard from community members about staffing levels in Vermont's school, public, and academic libraries, including feedback about staffing levels and compensation. This information is challenging to understand both within the state and also within the broader national context for two primary reasons:

1. staff of Vermont's libraries sometimes go by different titles than those performing the same work in neighboring municipalities and in other states; and

2. educational requirements for library staff in Vermont sometimes differ from the requirements to perform the same work in other states.

For these reasons, it is important to understand the roles performed by library staff in Vermont and how it fits within the national context.

National Comparison: Librarians and Media Collection Specialists

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) provides data on the compensation of librarians in a variety of library settings including annual mean wages and hourly mean wages. The BLS data refers to "media collection specialists, who prefer to be referred to as "school librarians" in Vermont. The BLS includes "public librarians" within the "Local Government, excluding schools and hospitals" grouping.

Industries with the highest levels of employment in Librarians and Media Collections Specialists:

Industry	Employment (1)	Percent of industry employment	Hourly mean wage	Annual mean wage (2)
Elementary and Secondary Schools	49,420	0.59	$ 32.38	$ 67,360
Local Government, excluding schools and hospitals (OEWS Designation)	42,540	0.79	$ 28.35	$ 58,970
Colleges, Universities, and Professional Schools	19,220	0.64	$ 33.18	$ 69,020
Web Search Portals, Libraries, Archives, and Other Information Services	7,300	4.15	$ 28.33	$ 58,920
Junior Colleges	3,900	0.62	$ 35.64	$ 74,140

Source: https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes254022.htm#st

The BLS explains that Librarians perform many tasks. Librarians "Administer and maintain libraries or collections of information, for public or private access through reference or borrowing. Work in a variety of settings, such as educational institutions, museums, and corporations, and with various types of informational materials, such as books, periodicals, recordings, films, and databases. Tasks may include acquiring, cataloging, and circulating library materials, and user services such as locating and organizing information, providing instruction on how to access information, and setting up and operating a library's media equipment." (https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes254022.htm#st)

According to BLS data from 2022, Vermont, like the rest of New England and New York, has a slightly higher ratio than average of people working as librarians compared to other professions.

Location quotient of librarians and media collections specialists, by state, May 2022

Blank areas indicate data not available.

Source: https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes254022.htm#st
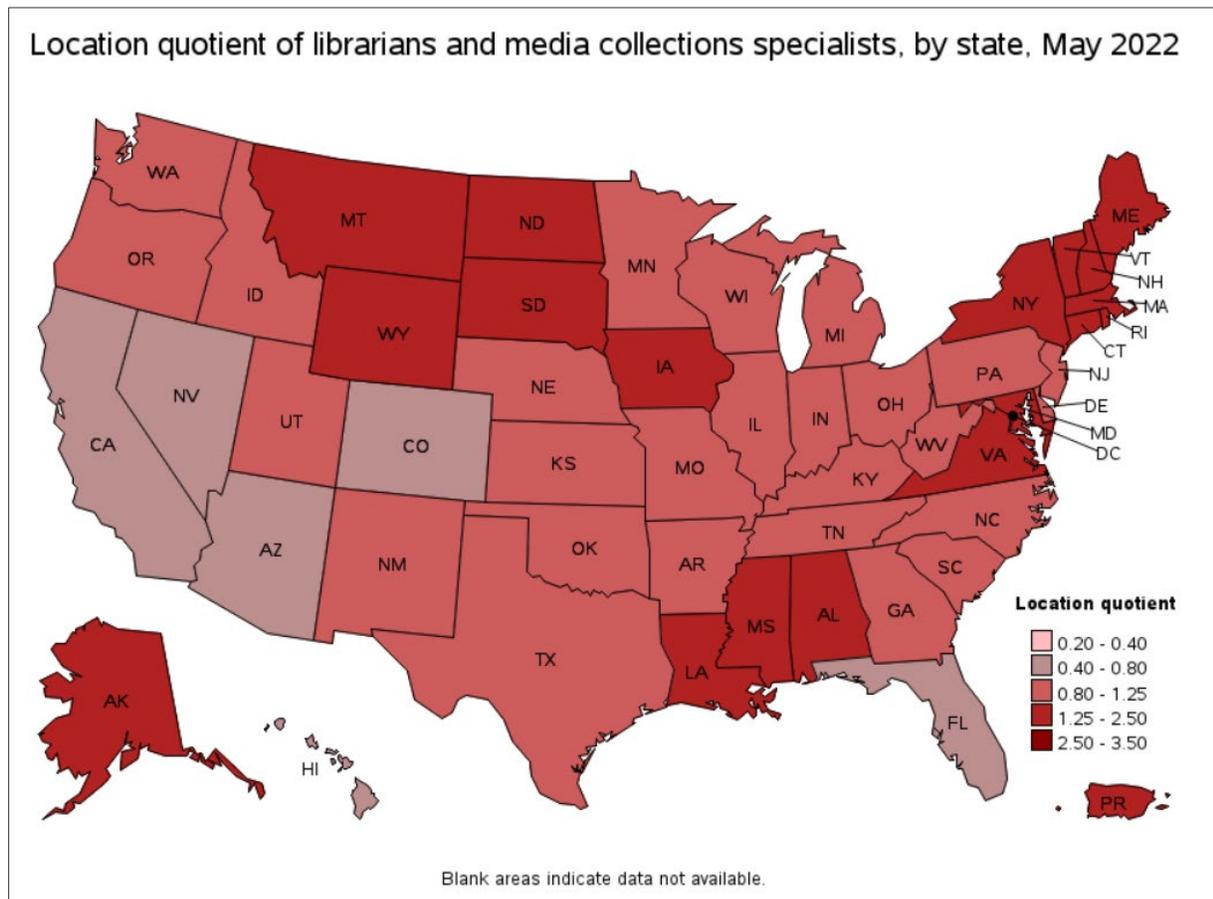
According to BLS data from 2022, the average mean wage of librarians in Vermont is between $58,980 and $67,800. However, as the Working Group heard from the community, the average wage of public librarians in Vermont is far lower than the average wage of school librarians and academic librarians in Vermont.

Annual mean wage of librarians and media collections specialists, by state, May 2022

Annual mean wage

☐ $37,100 - $54,080   ☐ $54,160 - $58,640
☐ $58,980 - $67,800   ☐ $68,240 - $89,610

Blank areas indicate data not available.

Source: https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes254022.htm#st
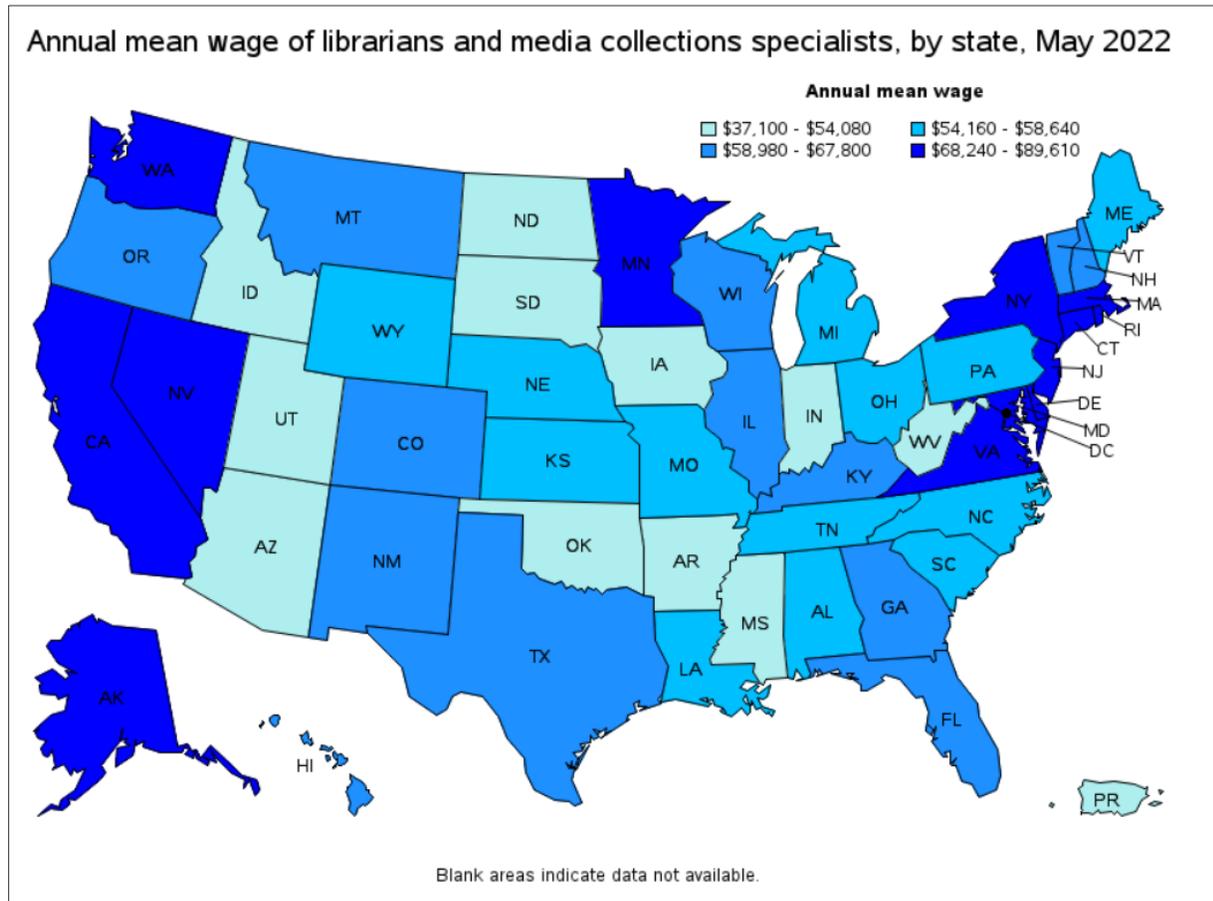
National Comparison: Library Technicians

Another key group of workers in libraries are library technicians. In Vermont, however, few staff go by this title. Instead, library staff who perform these duties are commonly called Circulation Supervisors, Circulation Staff, and Library Assistants. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Library Technicians: "Assist librarians by helping readers in the use of library catalogs, databases, and indexes to locate books and other materials; and by answering questions that require only brief consultation of standard reference. Compile records; sort and shelve books or other media; remove or repair damaged books or other media; register patrons; and check materials in and out of the circulation process. Replace materials in shelving area (stacks) or files. Includes bookmobile drivers who assist with providing services in mobile libraries."

Vermont, like New York and many New England States, ranks high in its number of library technicians when compared with other states.

Location quotient of library technicians, by state, May 2022

Blank areas indicate data not available.

Source: https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes254031.htm#st

The average annual mean wage of library technicians in Vermont is $37,350 to $43,560 annually. Like the BLS data for librarians, it is likely that this number is lower for library technicians working in public libraries than those working in school and academic libraries.

Annual mean wage of library technicians, by state, May 2022

Source: https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes254031.htm#st

Public Library Staffing National Comparison

According to the data reported nationwide through the Institute of Museum and Library Services 2019 Public Library Survey (the PLS), Vermont ranks ninth in total paid full-time equivalent staff hours with 16.33 full-time equivalent (FTE) library staff per 25,000 people. Vermont ranks second for paid FTE librarians with 10.6 librarians per 25,000 population. That said, the definition of "librarian" varies from state to state. Some states require that a person hold a master's degree in library science from an American Library Association-accredited institution (ALA-MLS) to work as a librarian, other states, like Vermont, do not require that degree in order to work in positions public libraries with the librarian title.

Percent of Libraries and Total Staff Hours

Source:
https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/fy2019_pls_tables_26_thru_27a.xlsx

According to 2019 PLS data, Vermont's libraries do not have as many staff hours per week as the national average. More than 40% of Vermont's libraries have between 4 and 39 staff hours per week, a far greater percentage than the national average, which is roughly 16%. About 25% of Vermont's libraries have 40 to 79 hours of staff hours per week as compared with a national average of 17%. However, the national PLS data set includes many large library systems with multiple buildings and many staff.

Vermont ranks 45th in the percentage of total librarian hours with an ALA-MLS, as only 31% of librarians in Vermont have earned that credential.

Table 43. Number of total paid full-time-equivalent (FTE) staff and paid FTE librarians of public libraries per 25,000 population and percentage of total FTE librarians with ALA-MLS degrees, by state ranking: Fiscal year 2019

Total paid FTE staff[1]			Paid FTE librarians			Percentage of total FTE librarians with ALA-MLS[2]		
State	Ranking	Per 25,000 population[3]	State	Ranking	Per 25,000 population[3]	State	Ranking	Percentage
Total[4]	†	11.37	Total[4]	†	4.02	Total[4]	†	66.78
Ohio	1	20.58	New Hampshire	1	10.60	District of Columbia	1	100.00
District of Columbia	2	19.13	Vermont	2	10.59	Georgia	1	100.00
Illinois	3	18.29	Iowa	3	8.30	Hawaii	3	98.88
Indiana	4	18.08	Connecticut	4	8.10	New Jersey	4	93.76
Kansas	5	17.71	Maine	5	7.46	California	5	93.41

State	Rank	Value	State	Rank	Value	State	Rank	Value
Wyoming	6	17.43	Kentucky	6	7.44	North Carolina	6	92.43
Connecticut	7	16.63	Kansas	7	7.27	Rhode Island	7	91.77
New York	8	16.59	Massachusetts	8	7.17	Virginia	8	88.68
Vermont	9	16.33	Wyoming	9	7.04	South Carolina	9	87.54
New Hampshire	10	16.24	Illinois	10	6.99	Florida	10	87.15
Colorado	11	15.57	Oklahoma	11	6.86	Washington	11	86.66
Louisiana	12	15.19	Nebraska	12	6.69	Oregon	12	82.59
Missouri	13	15.13	Louisiana	13	6.63	Arizona	13	82.43
Rhode Island	14	14.60	Indiana	14	6.26	New York	14	82.17
Iowa	15	14.53	Ohio	15	6.24	Nevada	15	81.40
Maine	16	14.45	Rhode Island	16	5.94	Ohio	16	71.61
Idaho	17	14.02	Montana	17	5.83	Pennsylvania	17	69.57
Massachusetts	18	13.95	Maryland	18	5.75	Michigan	18	69.56
Maryland	19	13.88	New York	19	5.74	Connecticut	19	69.42
Oregon	20	13.87	South Dakota	20	5.62	Colorado	20	68.43
New Jersey	21	13.44	Mississippi	21	5.60	Illinois	21	68.29
Wisconsin	22	13.34	Wisconsin	22	5.31	Texas	22	67.65
Washington	23	13.13	West Virginia	23	5.13	Massachusetts	23	67.05
Nebraska	24	13.06	North Dakota	24	5.05	Indiana	24	65.46
Kentucky	25	12.91	Alaska	25	4.90	Minnesota	25	64.66
Virginia	26	12.74	Michigan	26	4.73	Wisconsin	26	60.79
Michigan	27	12.47	New Mexico	27	4.55	Utah	27	59.85
Oklahoma	28	12.16	District of Columbia	28	4.43	Delaware	28	53.16
Alaska	29	11.94	Colorado	29	4.32	Alaska	29	53.11
New Mexico	30	11.66	New Jersey	30	4.08	Maryland	30	49.15
South Dakota	31	11.53	Alabama	31	4.01	New Mexico	31	48.61
South Carolina	32	11.35	Idaho	32	3.94	Tennessee	32	47.67
Utah	33	10.86	Minnesota	33	3.88	Idaho	33	45.32
Montana	34	10.25	Missouri	33	3.88	New Hampshire	34	45.10
Arkansas	35	10.24	Oregon	35	3.85	Alabama	35	44.53
Minnesota	36	10.13	Arkansas	36	3.55	Maine	36	44.35
Hawaii	37	9.93	Utah	37	3.44	Arkansas	37	41.45
Pennsylvania	38	9.63	Delaware	38	3.32	Kansas	38	39.06
Delaware	39	9.48	Pennsylvania	39	3.30	North Dakota	39	38.76
North Dakota	40	9.44	South Carolina	40	3.16	Louisiana	40	38.01
West Virginia	41	8.81	Hawaii	41	3.15	Missouri	41	36.01
Alabama	42	8.74	Virginia	42	3.11	Oklahoma	42	31.71
Florida	43	7.70	Washington	43	2.94	Montana	43	31.64
Tennessee	44	7.51	Texas	44	2.47	Wyoming	44	31.12
Arizona	45	7.47	Tennessee	45	2.45	Vermont	45	31.00
North Carolina	45	7.47	Florida	46	2.39	Iowa	46	30.97
California	47	7.46	California	47	2.19	Kentucky	47	29.73
Mississippi	48	7.38	Arizona	48	2.09	Nebraska	48	28.69

			North					
Nevada	49	7.08	Carolina	49	2.08	South Dakota	49	25.77
Texas	50	6.80	Nevada	50	1.86	West Virginia	50	22.45
Georgia	51	6.34	Georgia	51	1.38	Mississippi	51	18.10

† Not applicable.

[1]Paid staff were reported in FTEs. To ensure comparable data, 40 hours was set as the measure of full-time employment (for example, 60 hours per week of part-time work by employees in a staff category divided by the 40-hour measure equals 1.50 FTEs). FTE data were reported to two decimal places but rounded to one decimal place in the table.

[2]ALA-MLS: A Master's degree from a graduate library education program accredited by the American Library Association (ALA). Librarians with an ALA-MLS are also included in total librarians.

[3]Per 25,000 population is based on the total unduplicated population of legal service areas. The determination of the unduplicated figure is the responsibility of the state library agency and should be based on the most recent state population figures for jurisdictions in the state.

[4]Total includes the 50 states and the District of Columbia but excludes outlying areas, libraries that closed or temporarily closed in FY 2019, and libraries that do not meet the FSCS Public Library Definition.

NOTE: The District of Columbia, although not a state, is included in the state rankings. Special care should be used in comparing its data to state data. Caution should be used in making comparisons with the state of Hawaii, as Hawaii reports only one public library for the entire state. Additional information on nonsampling error, response rates, and definitions may be found in Data File Documentation Public Libraries Survey: Fiscal year 2019.
SOURCE: IMLS, Public Libraries Survey, FY 2019. Data elements TOTSTAFF, LIBRARIA, MASTER, POPU_UND from the Public Library System Data File (PLS_AE_PUD19i) were used to produce this table.

Table 43 Source: https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/fy2019_pls_tables_26_thru_27a.xlsx

According to the United States Census Bureau's 2022 population estimates for the largest cities in Vermont—only Burlington, which is estimated to now have 44,595 inhabitants—currently has a population greater than 25,000. South Burlington, with an estimated 20,624 inhabitants, is the next largest city in the state, followed by Colchester (17,604), Rutland (15,695), Bennington (15,312), Essex Town (15,312), Brattleboro (12,106), Essex Junction (10,917), Hartford (10,764), Milton (10,689), and Williston (10,104). The remaining communities in Vermont all have a population less than 10,000.*

When considered against the cohorts of public libraries that have a population of legal service area of 24,000 people or fewer, Vermont's percentage of librarians with an ALA-MLS compares favorably.

Percent of Staff Time for Librarians with MLS
2021 National PLS Data
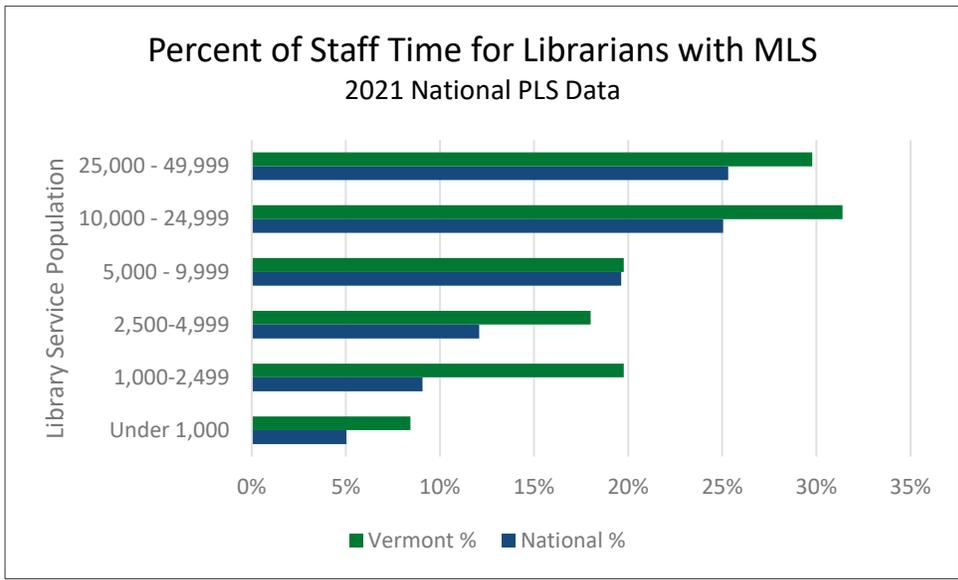
Source: https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/pls_fy2021_csv.zip

Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Incorporated Places in Vermont: April 1, 2020 to July 1, 2022
https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/tables/2020-2022/cities/totals/SUB-IP-EST2022-POP-50.xlsx

Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Minor Civil Divisions in Vermont: April 1, 2020 to July 1, 2022
https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/tables/2020-2022/mcds/totals/SUB-MCD-EST2022-POP-50.xlsx

In most other states there are library consortia or library systems. In those states, it is often the case that non-MLS librarians working at libraries that serve small, rural communities work under direct supervision or with the direct support of an ALA-MLS librarian. In Vermont, where the libraries of each municipality function autonomously, there are no direct lines of supervision or support from ALA-MLS librarians to non-MLS librarians.

In Vermont, the only source of support that many non-MLS librarians have from ALA-MLS librarians with professional training in library services is provided by peers who volunteer to mentor them and by the Consultants at the Department. This leads to an increased need for professional development and consultation among library staff in Vermont. The Working Group heard from the library community that non-MLS librarians can often feel underprepared for their work and that they greatly appreciate the advice and support provided through trainings and consultations by the Department and from peers within the county meetings.

Table 26A. Number of paid full-time-equivalent (FTE) staff in public libraries, by type of position; percentage of total librarians and total staff with ALA-MLS degrees, and number of public libraries with ALA-MLS librarians in the 50 states and the District of Columbia, by population of legal service area: Fiscal year 2019

Population of legal service area	Number of public libraries	Paid FTE staff[1]				Percentage of total FTE librarians with ALA-MLS	Percentage of total FTE staff with ALA-MLS	Number of public libraries with ALA-MLS librarians[3]
			Librarians					
		Total	Total	Librarians with ALA-MLS[2]	Other			
Total[4]	9,057	143,882.85	50,925.72	34,006.92	92,957.13	66.78	23.64	4,124
1,000,000 or more	35	19,662.80	6,036.64	5,342.19	13,626.16	88.50	27.17	35
500,000 to 999,999	57	18,803.36	5,308.71	4,325.12	13,494.65	81.47	23.00	57
250,000 to 499,999	113	16,631.36	4,988.89	3,850.27	11,642.47	77.18	23.15	112
100,000 to 249,999	367	22,839.37	6,890.99	5,286.97	15,948.38	76.72	23.15	363
50,000 to 99,999	577	18,114.87	6,237.73	4,593.89	11,877.14	73.65	25.36	559
25,000 to 49,999	996	18,095.88	6,955.02	4,652.32	11,140.86	66.89	25.71	904
10,000 to 24,999	1,761	16,710.89	7,235.78	4,093.35	9,475.11	56.57	24.50	1,254
5,000 to 9,999	1,488	6,906.15	3,374.86	1,277.42	3,531.29	37.85	18.50	577
2,500 to 4,999	1,266	3,254.82	1,897.92	383.74	1,356.90	20.22	11.79	193

1,000 to 2,499	1,467	2,149.23	1,447.03	165.74	702.20	11.45	7.71	62
Less than 1,000	930	714.12	552.15	35.91	161.97	6.50	5.03	8

[1]Paid staff were reported in FTEs. To ensure comparable data, 40 hours was set as the measure of full-time employment (for example, 60 hours per week of part-time work by employees in a staff category divided by the 40-hour measure equals 1.50 FTEs). FTE data were reported to two decimal places but rounded to one decimal place in the table. Paid staff is one of four criteria used in the Public Libraries Survey to define a public library. Some states report public libraries that do not have paid staff but meet the definition of a public library under state law

[2]ALA-MLS: A Master's degree from a graduate library education program accredited by the American Library Association (ALA). Librarians with an ALA-MLS are also included in total librarians. Nationally, 5,164 Master's degrees in library science were awarded by institutions of higher education in 2018-19 (Digest of Education Statistics, 2020, Table 323.10. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office).

[3]Libraries were counted as having an ALA-MLS librarian if they reported FTE librarians with an ALA-MLS greater than or equal to 1.

[4]Total includes the 50 states and the District of Columbia but excludes outlying areas, libraries that closed or temporarily closed in FY 2019, and libraries that do not meet the FSCS Public Library Definition.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. For item(s) with response rates below 100 percent, data for nonrespondents were imputed and are included in the table. Data were not imputed for the outlying areas. Additional information on nonsampling error, response rates, and definitions may be found in Data File Documentation Public Libraries Survey: Fiscal year 2019.

SOURCE: IMLS, Public Libraries Survey, FY 2019. Data elements TOTSTAFF, LIBRARIA, MASTER, OTHPAID, POPU_LSA from the Public Library System Data File (PLS_AE_PUD19i) were used to produce this table.

Table 26A Source: https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/fy2019_pls_tables_26_thru_27a.xlsx

School Library Staffing in Vermont

The Agency of Education maintains a data set that includes the number of school librarians and the number of support staff working in school libraries. The data reflects that:

- the number of School Librarian FTE has dropped 7.7% from 219.75 in 2008 to 202.8 in 2021; and

- the number of library support staff FTE has dropped 49.5% from 136.08 in 2008 to 68.63 in 2021.

According to information provided by Charles Dabritz, co-president of Vermont School Library Association (VSLA), to the Working Group, "While the numbers of school librarians has remained about the same over time (2008 numbers showed 220 librarians in the state) the number of library support staff has dramatically decreased. In 2008 there were 136 library support staff in the state while today there are only 68.63—an almost 50% decrease in library support."

Dabritz went on to share that "Many smaller, more rural schools tend to share a librarian. One school librarian may work at two or three schools. Other schools employ one full-time librarian. Some of the larger schools in the state have more than one full-time librarian on staff. Some of our school libraries have support staff, however many function without support staff and all duties are carried out by the school librarian." The Working Group heard that working at multiple school libraries and working without support-staff is leading to fatigue among school librarians, who shared concerns about whether these circumstances truly provide staffing "sufficient" to meet the Educational Quality Standards.
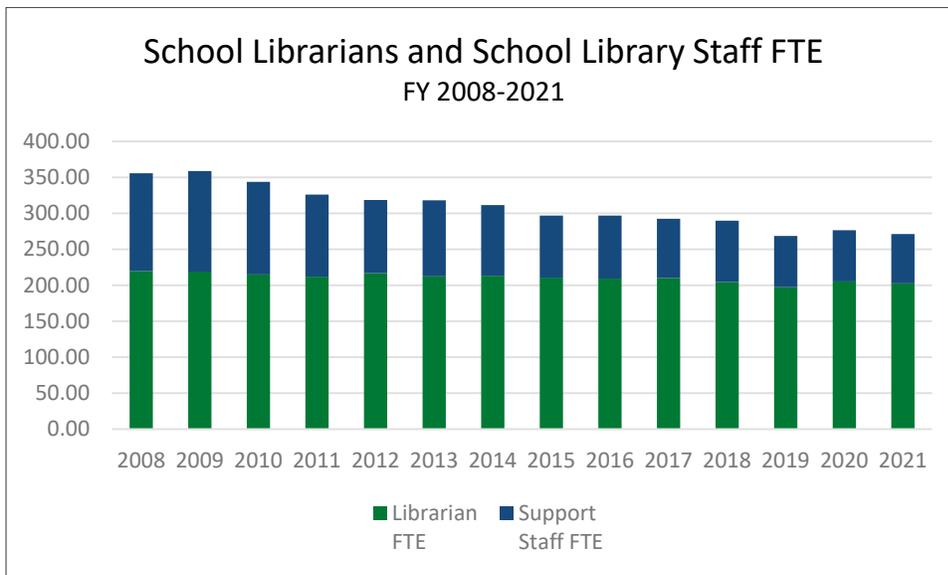
Source: VT Agency of Education Teacher and Staff FTE Report, https://education.vermont.gov/data-and-reporting/school-reports/teacher-staff-fte-report

Series 2000 Education Quality Standards (EQS) that went into effect in 2016 tie the number of school librarians to the number of students at a school:

> "The services of a certified library media specialist shall be made available to students and staff. Schools with over 300 students shall have at least one full-time library media specialist and sufficient staff to implement a program that supports literacy, information and technology standards. Schools with fewer than 300 students shall employ a library media specialist on a pro-rata basis."

The size of Vermont's student population has decreased from 84,432 students in 2017 to 80,292 students in 2023. ([Vermont Education Dashboard: Enrollment](#))

Fiscal Year	Total Students	Librarian FTE	Students per Librarian FTE	Support Staff FTE	Students per Support Staff FTE
2007-2008	90,537	219.75	412.00	136.08	665.32
2008-2009	89,148	218.88	407.29	139.90	637.23
2009-2010	87,438	215.22	406.27	128.48	680.56
2010-2011	86,129	212.12	406.04	113.91	756.11
2011-2012	85,089	216.85	392.39	101.88	835.19
2012-2013	83,985	212.57	395.09	105.71	794.48
2013-2014	86,075	213.44	403.27	97.86	879.57
2014-2015	85,359	210.63	405.26	86.30	989.10
2015-2016	84,545	209.38	403.79	87.52	966.01
2016-2017	84,446	210.31	401.53	82.09	1028.70
2017-2018	84,432	204.47	412.93	85.20	990.99
2018-2019	88,283	197.24	447.59	71.45	1235.59
2019-2020	84,728	205.43	412.44	70.96	1194.02
2020-2021	84,846	202.8	418.37	68.63	1236.28

Sources: VT Agency of Education Teacher and Staff FTE Report, https://education.vermont.gov/data-and-reporting/school-reports/teacher-staff-fte-report

Vermont Education Dashboard, https://education.vermont.gov/data-and-reporting/vermont-education-dashboard/vermont-education-dashboard-enrollment

The community of school librarians has observed the decline in the number of school librarians in the state. Peter Langella, School Librarian at the Champlain Valley Union High School in Hinesburg wrote "it's my opinion that the decrease is mostly due to an overall decrease in student enrollment."

Langella continued, "The implications for our profession are huge. And these numbers are before the pandemic. That 'and sufficient support staff' from EQS is being ignored in a big way. Half of our school library support staff FTE has been cut in a decade." Langella goes on to raise the concern that the trend of fewer school librarians and support staff in schools likely generates larger DEI concerns in the state.

> *"It is my guess that districts who educate higher percentages of low-income and rural students, as well as districts who have the highest percentages of English Language Learners, have been impacted the most heavily by this inequity."—Peter Langella, School Librarian, Champlain Valley Union High School, Hinesburg*

Langella's comments highlight the vague nature of the EQS as it relates to support staff. While an appropriate number of school librarians per 300 students is called out in the standards, the standards do not make clear how many support staff are needed to run a library of sufficient size to meet the needs that same group of students saying only "and sufficient support staff".

School Librarians shared that the decreased number of library support staff statewide has had negative impacts on school librarians, who must perform clerical functions support staff used to perform, such as repairing books and checking them in and out, in addition to their professional work as teacher librarians.

Working Group Member and U-32 High School Librarian Meg Allison shared oral testimony that further illustrated the reduction in FTE school librarians and support staff. Allison also pointed out the variability in the language of the state's EQS, which state that schools that have more than 300 students need to have at least one full-time library media specialist and sufficient staff to implement a program that supports literacy information and technology standards. Allison noted that the use of the phrase "sufficient staff" poses a gray area that is left up to interpretation that can be damaging to a library program. Allison shared that in her experience, the term has been used to varied degrees and can often be impacted by the "support of a building administrator or a superintendent or a school board or just the profound advocacy talents of an individual school librarian or library team at a district level, but it certainly isn't any standard across the board for school library support staff."

The Agency of Education maintains a data set that includes the school librarian pay and school library support staff pay. The data reflects that:

- the compensation of School Librarians has risen 27.5% from $50,177 in FY 2008 to $63,998 in 2021; and

- the compensation of library support staff has risen 46.4% from $16,859 in FY 2008 to $24,685 in 2021.

Librarians and Support Staff Pay
FY 2008-2021
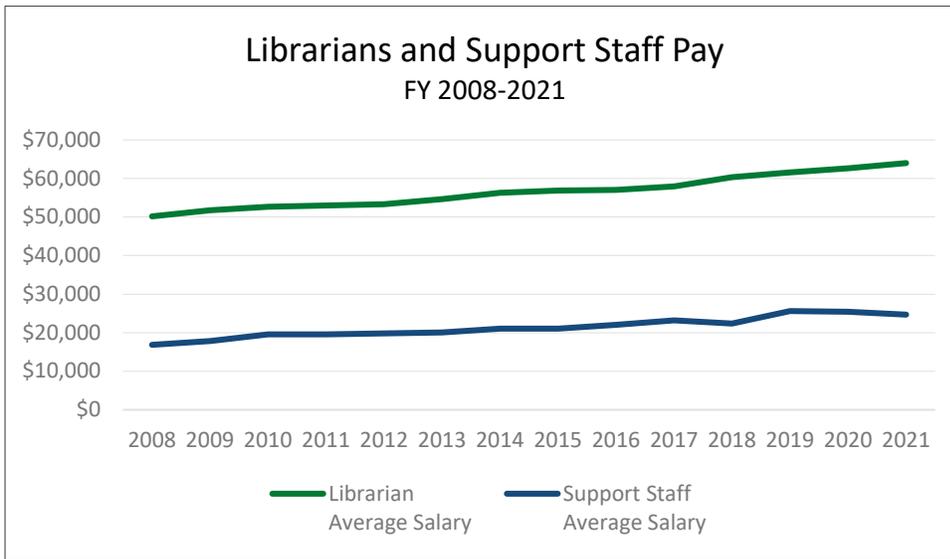
Source: VT Agency of Education Teacher and Staff FTE Report,
https://education.vermont.gov/data-and-reporting/school-reports/teacher-staff-fte-report

Academic Libraries

Staffing at academic libraries throughout the state is highly variable. Staff of every academic library that shared feedback with the Working Group emphasized that their institutions staffing levels do not meet the research and information literacy needs of the students and faculty they serve.

Vermont's academic institution positions typically require that librarians have an ALA-MLS.

Depending on budgetary differences, both staffing levels and student worker opportunities vary greatly. For academic units whose budgetary restraints do not allow them to hire student workers, paraprofessional tasks often fall to librarians, which stretches the professional staff's time and capacity. These lower staffing levels also impact general library open hours and librarian availability to assist patrons. Eileen Gatti, the former Director of Information Access at Goddard College shared with the Working Group that "We are woefully understaffed. At current staffing levels, we are able to maintain basic services for our users and strive to be responsive and flexible. Original cataloging is a challenge given the skillset of the current staff, and we collect several fairly unique items. We are doing a fairly minimal job at managing our electronic resources and don't have the time or expertise to truly maximize our discovery service or our web presence and UX [user experience]."

Recruitment, hiring, and retention are a serious concern shared in the testimony submitted by the academic library community. High cost of living, low wages, chronic understaffing, and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are major contributing factors to

academic libraries' inability to recruit and hire adequate numbers of staff. The UVM Libraries Inclusive Excellence committee noted: "This is distinctly a DEI issue because we cannot offer attractive packages to candidates. We also will eventually end up with an inequitable and less than inclusive workforce if the only candidates who can afford to take a job at UVM Libraries have additional sources of income at their disposal. We have heard it said that not finding housing in Chittenden County just means employees should live further away from UVM. Not only does this attitude make UVM's physical campus less accessible for any number of reasons (access to vehicles/public transportation, family obligations, time constraints of additional commute length) many BIPOC and LGBTQ candidates do not feel comfortable living in rural areas, outside of Chittenden County or the Burlington area."

There is a high level of concern in the testimony from academic libraries about their inability to anticipate the needs of their patrons or to be innovative with their services. The Dean's Council of UVM Libraries states: "The UVM libraries are currently not staffed at a level necessary to support work similar to that of other flagship institutions. For instance, digital collections and digital preservation needs can't be met by current staff levels and our low level of IT staffing limits our ability to be innovative."

Academic libraries do not report their staffing levels or compensation to the Department or the Agency of Education.

Public Libraries Staffing

Testimony from the staff, patrons, and trustees of public libraries offered a variety of staffing needs and concerns. Much of the testimony discussed concerns about the changing and increasing demands on public library staff and the lack of adequate staffing levels and compensation for public library staff.

Similar to the comments shared by academic libraries, public libraries also face the inability to be competitive in recruitment of qualified staff largely due to budgetary restrictions. This appears to be even more prevalent in smaller libraries, which have inherently smaller budgets.

The Director of the New Haven Community Library, Katie Male-Riordan, shared that, "When it comes to hiring staff in rural libraries—especially single-staff libraries—this means search committees often look for a hard-to-find, highly skilled candidate while some larger libraries and other industries/fields can solve the challenge with multiple hires that specifically fit one or two expertises. Job duties for a single-staff library director can include administrative tasks, collection and circulation management, readers advisory, reference & research, grant writing, fundraising, social, web, & print marketing, janitorial & building care, program coordination, volunteer recruitment, IT management & training, and community engagement. It is almost impossible to find a person with this level of skill let alone be able to compensate for the full value they may bring depending on their skill set if they do apply. As innovative and new technologies

are incorporated into a library's plan of service, the scope of what a rural library must be prepared to help with further increases. Add that many single-staff organizations continue to bulk up programming efforts with events like book clubs, story hours, maker spaces, summer reading for all ages, after school programs, and guest speakers—it becomes all too clear that for some library staff, job tasks feel more like a toppling to be read pile that will never be finished."

The Working Group heard from the community that retaining staff is increasingly difficult and that staff are sometimes leaving the library profession for careers in food service, as administrative assistants, and as childcare workers. Library directors shared the challenges of finding qualified staff to fill their vacant positions and spoke to the challenges of maintaining public service hours with fewer and fewer staff in their teams.

> *"Public librarians in the 21st century are administrators, business managers, IT professionals, social workers. These jobs are in addition to the traditional roles librarians have had: reference librarian, collection development, readers advisory, and cataloger. As our jobs have grown more complex, there has not been a consistent response from libraries regarding compensation."*
> *—Susan O'Connell, Library Director, Craftsbury Public Library*

Another concern the Working Group heard repeatedly is that public libraries rely heavily on volunteers. Directors and trustees shared that their budgets are too small to pay for enough staff to meet the existing needs of the communities they serve—let alone meet the emerging needs of those communities. Some public library staff reported that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed just how much public libraries—especially those in small and rural communities—rely on volunteers to maintain daily operations.

Abby Adams, Director of the Platt Memorial Library in Shoreham shared, "I think that volunteers get used too much in Vermont libraries, which is a direct result of lack of funding. We even still have libraries in the state that are totally run by volunteers. This represents a problem in several ways—one, there's no accountability for practice. Two, a volunteer may or may not have any training in best practices. Three, a community may be getting an inconsistent or inequitable level of library service."

Dana Hart, the Director of the Isley Public Library in Middlebury shared, "Stakeholders also must understand that libraries cannot be staffed with volunteers. Volunteers play an important role in supporting their local libraries by offering their expertise on a short-term project, or by pitching in on a one-time effort that requires many hands. But volunteers absolutely cannot replace the work of paid library personnel. Likewise, volunteers should not be used to establish and maintain new library services or hours. This can be a legal issue, if library personnel are union, but it is a bad habit to get into regardless of union status."

> *"A good rule of thumb is to ask, "If this volunteer didn't feel like coming in for a week, would we have to arrange coverage for their duties?" If the answer is yes, the library should not be relying on volunteers to carry out those duties. To do so is to misrepresent what it costs to run the library and undermine the long-term stability of library operations."—Dana Hart, Director, Isley Public Library, Middlebury*

That said, the Minimum Standards for Public Libraries indicate that "The library may be staffed entirely by volunteers." (https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/documents/Scanned1986Standards.pdf) and some libraries in the state are run exclusively by volunteers, including the Cornwall Public Library.

Laura Fetterolf, Cornwall Public Library Trustee, shared that "Cornwall is a small town of 1,207 people in the middle of Addison County. Our library is "staffed" entirely with volunteers—the seven trustees of the library. And the reason this is possible is the library is situated within the Cornwall Town Hall—so the library is open Tuesday–Friday from 9am-5pm, and the town clerk is also a library trustee. The reason we're all volunteers is that we are granted $4,000 each year from the Town of Cornwall at Town Meeting, which goes to pay for library materials. We do receive some gifts and donations, and we do run a very profitable book sale each fall, but our total budget is still somewhere around $6,000. We don't pay rent, or utilities, though we do pay for a dedicated phone line for the library's computer. When we have needed 'big ticket items' - an entire set of bookshelves for the space in the newly renovated Town Hall, or a new computer for our catalog and self-checkout, we have done a public appeal and our townspeople have been generous. But we definitely do not have the funds to pay the salary of a trained librarian."

> *"…we are granted $4,000 each year from the Town of Cornwall at Town Meeting, which goes to pay for library materials. We do receive some gifts and donations, and we do run a very profitable book sale each fall, but our total budget is still somewhere around $6,000… we definitely do not have the funds to pay the salary of a trained librarian."—Laura Fetterolf, Cornwall Public Library Trustee*

The trustees of the Cutler Memorial Library in Plainfield shared written comments with the Working Group that highlighted the challenges incorporated libraries face related to fair compensation of their staff. They wrote, "Given the smaller budgets of many incorporated libraries, many librarians of unincorporated libraries and many part-time

librarians in the state make ends meet by availing themselves of state benefits (3 Squares, heat subsidies, Medicaid). Often, when we consider raising pay, library boards have to take into consideration that doing so would make the employee lose their state benefits, putting the employee in a worse financial situation than they were before. As a board, it is incredibly challenging to offer a true benefit, one that isn't financially out of reach for the employee—particularly for a part-time librarian who would receive a pro-rated benefit.

The state health exchange does not provide a solution, as even very high deductible plans can be costly and using town plans may also be prohibitively expensive. Library boards themselves can usually not afford to pay the premiums for small nonprofits' employer-sponsored plans, even if the plans were affordable for an employee. If librarians have to use the state health care exchange, there are subsidies, and for many, these could be helpful, but once you make too much to receive Medicaid, essentially any pay raise gets eaten up by the lessening of your health care subsidy. Even the worst plans are so expensive that you must make a great deal to break out of that cycle. When a plan with a $7,000-$8,000 per person deductible (though it covers preventive care), a plan which also may have co-insurance for things like MRIs or inpatient/outpatient hospital visits, costs one person $650/month or a family $1,800/month (without subsidies), that is a pretty profoundly broken option."

In their written comments, the Cutler Memorial Library trustees went on to call for the state to subsidize health benefits for the staff of non-profit incorporated libraries and for the Working Group to explore other creative solutions to this problem.

> *"…we are asking individuals to take on enormous workloads covering a broad range of skill sets for nominal pay and usually no benefits. That they do so is a credit to their devotion to the cause of literacy and information access, community building, food security, digital literacy, and public programming. Still, it is unconscionable of us to rely on their self-sacrifice any longer."*
> *—The Cutler Memorial Board of Trustees*

Conclusion

The Working Group consistently heard from public libraries that they need more high-level staff to meet the information and programming needs of their communities and that they need the budgets large enough to enable staff to be compensated with livable wages.

Due to the complexity of this topic and the number of comments and concerns raised to the Working Group by the community about low wages and low staffing levels in Vermont's public libraries, the Working Group commissioned an independent study of

staffing and salaries at Vermont's public libraries for inclusion within its report to the Legislature. The study, Public Library Compensation and Salary Survey Analysis—and an overview presentation—are in the Appendix of the report.

Continuing Education

The topic of Continuing Education was discussed at the Working Group meeting on Friday, November 18, 2022. The Working Group heard comments from four community members and heard reports from Department of Libraries staff on the topics of Continuing Education for Library Staff and the Department of Libraries' Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) 5-Year Plan. The Working Group also heard from the following expert on this topic: Deborah Ehler-Hansen, Coordinator of the School Library Media Studies Program and Lecturer, University of Vermont. Written comments were shared with the Working Group by five community members.

Professional Training for Librarians and Directors

In the United States, a Master's in Library Science (MLS) from a college or university program accredited by the American Library Association (ALA) is typically required to attain a professional library position. According to ALA's website, "Most employers require an ALA-accredited master's for most professional level positions, and some states require an ALA-accredited degree to work as a professional librarian in public or school libraries. ALA accreditation indicates that the program has undergone a self-evaluation process, been reviewed by peers, and meets the Standards established by the American Library Association and Committee on Accreditation." (https://www.ala.org/educationcareers/accreditedprograms)

There is some variety among accredited MLS programs in the United States in terms of the specific courses required for graduation. MLS programs have multiple tracks of study including but not limited to public, school, and research libraries; archives and special collections; law and business libraries; and information architecture. According to the ALA website, "Considerable variation exists in curricula offered by programs, including the number and types of required courses. The number of academic credit hours required by programs for a master's degree varies from 36 semester hours to 72 quarter hours.

Some programs emphasize full-time studies, while others have a larger percentage of part-time students, however, most have a time limit for completing a degree. While some programs can be completed in one calendar year with full-time attendance, many require two academic years to complete. In addition, programs requiring a thesis or practicum may require more time to complete. Course availability for a chosen area of specialization or career pathway may also impact the length of time to complete the degree." (https://www.ala.org/educationcareers/accreditedprograms/guidelines-choosing-masters-program-library-and-information-studies)

There are no colleges or universities in Vermont that offer a Master of Library and Information Science (MLS) degree in librarianship accredited by the American Library

Association. While a number of universities in the greater Vermont region offer in-person or online MLS programs, such as McGill University (Montreal), Simmons University (Boston) and Albany University at SUNY (https://www.ala.org/CFApps/lisdir/directory_pdf.cfm), the salary for librarians and library directors in Vermont libraries, especially the small ones, is often too low to justify the cost of obtaining a masters in library science, which can range in price from $23,000 to $49,000.

Per **22 V.S.A. § 606**, The Department of Libraries is authorized to "conduct seminars, workshops, and other programs to increase the professional competence of librarians in the State." For at least 25 years, the Department has provided continuing education for the staff of Vermont's libraries - including administering the program of study for the Vermont Certificate of Public Librarianship.

The Vermont Certificate of Public Librarianship

Most public libraries in Vermont do not require that library directors have a Master of in Library Science (MLS) from an ALA-accredited program. While the boards of large public libraries in Vermont often do require their directors to have an MLS, many small and medium-sized public libraries in the state do not have that requirement. Libraries that do not require that directors have an MLS typically make employment contingent on the attainment of the Vermont Certificate of Public Librarianship program (the Certificate). Completion of the Certificate program is often cited as a necessary credential in Vermont library job postings, and it has been used as a career advancement tool by staff who wish to progress in their career and become library directors in Vermont.

In the 1950s, the Certificate of Librarianship was administered by the Vermont Library Association (VLA), a professional organization for public and academic librarians as well as trustees and friends. The VLA is "an educational organization working to develop, promote, and improve library and information services and librarianship in the state of Vermont." While the VLA continues to provide continuing education opportunities for library staff, including hosting an annual conference, it no longer administers this program.
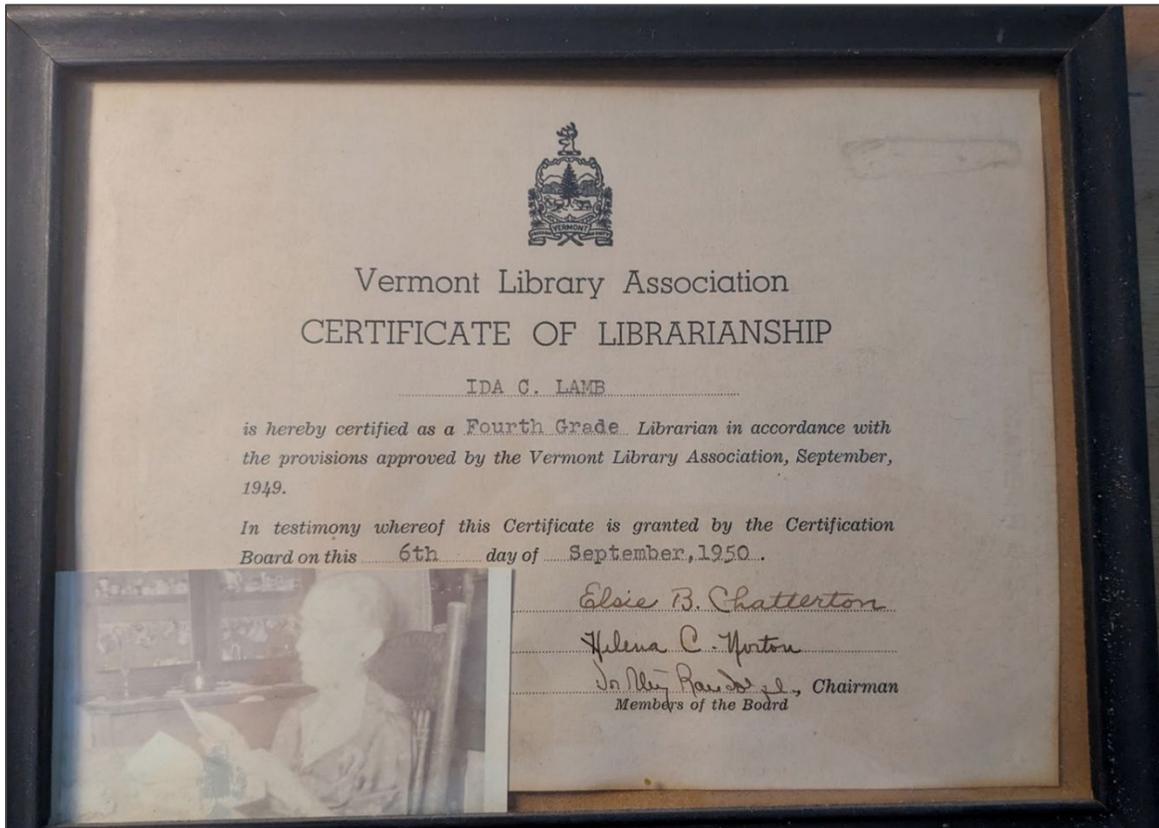
**Photo of a VLA Certificate of Librarianship, issued in 1950,
seen at Ainsworth Public Library in July 2023 (Williamstown, VT)**

Originally designed for staff without formal library training who were serving as directors of small Vermont public libraries, the Certificate program has grown to include public library support staff, library trustees, people hoping to work in Vermont libraries, and public library volunteers, as space permits. The Department has also seen enrollment from new-to-Vermont librarians with an MLS who wanted to learn about the unique characteristics of Vermont public libraries.

The Certificate program at the Department of Libraries began more than twenty-five years ago but was largely dormant between 2014 and 2018 and no certificates of completion were issued in those four years. Department records show that just 17 workshops were offered in 2016 and seven in 2017. No Certificate core courses were offered in those two years. The dormancy of the Certificate program had negative impacts on the library workforce in the state. Library boards had challenges finding staff with the necessary basic proficiency to take on library director roles. Individuals who hoped to become library directors or learn more about a career in public libraries had their aspirations put on hold. Staff who had been in the Certificate program were not able to complete the coursework quickly enough to meet the requirements of

employment. The dormancy of the Certificate program contributed to a shortage of trained library staff in the state.

The Certificate program rebooted in the spring of 2018. Since that time, each of the core courses has been offered at least once per year. Beginning in the spring of 2024, the Department will offer all core courses twice annually. Since 2018, the Certificate program has graduated an average of twenty-five people for each of the past three years. In 2023, the program has more than 150 registrants. The program attracts participants from around the state, and its current registrants hail from all fourteen of Vermont's counties. Sixty-three people enrolled in the Certificate program between January and September 2023.

It is important to note that the Vermont Department of Libraries does not have a practice of reviewing the credentials of library staff or issuing certificates to those who show proof of having earned an MLS. The Department's certification process is to administer classes, track participant progress, and provide a certificate of completion to individuals who have met the established requirements.

The Department's course of study for the Certificate program comprises 150 units and must be completed within five years. Participants are required to take four core twenty-five-unit courses:

- Basic Public Library Administration

- Cataloging

- Collection Development

- Reference

Each of the 25-unit core courses are offered in five sessions of 90 minutes. In addition to time spent in class, each of the core courses requires approximately five hours of homework. Participants are also required to take 40 units of Continuing Education elective courses and ten units of library technology courses. The formula for calculating units of non-core courses is that one contact hour equals one continuing education unit (CEU). Each non-core multi-week course or conference may earn up to 12 (CEUs).

Those who have completed the Department's Certificate program report that it provides relevant and practical learning that is directly applicable to the work they do every day in public libraries. That said, the courses provided by Department staff in the Certificate program are not as time-intensive or as rigorous as graduate-level courses at accredited institutions of higher education, and the coursework is not graded. The Certificate program provides library staff with an introductory overview of the information they need to begin their career in public librarianship. The Certificate is specific to

Vermont and is not portable to other states like an MLS from an ALA-accredited program.

There is no fee for participants in the Certificate program, which is open to people living in Vermont or associated with a Vermont library. All certificate requirements can be met through content provided online by the Department. The Department also communicates regularly with participants about other providers of applicable content.

The State Library Administrative Agencies (SLAA) of Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana, and Nebraska offer educational programs comparable to Vermont's Certificate of Public Librarianship program. Some of those states require that one staff member in each library holds a certification to be eligible for state funding. These states also offer tracks specific to library director, library staff, and youth services staff and provide multiple levels of certification. The four core topics (administration, cataloging, collection development, and reference) within the Vermont Department of Libraries' program are included in the certificate programs in these six states as well. These SLAA-run certificate programs are provided free of charge, as is the Vermont Department of Libraries' program. Fee-based certificate programs or associate degrees offered through library associations, community colleges, or universities typically cost $5,000-$8,000.

The Working Group heard that the Certificate program is of vital importance to the library community in Vermont as there is a great need for library staff and very few opportunities for professional education in the field of librarianship in the state. Many members of the community shared that the Certificate is set at the right price point: free. Community members expressed that accredited MLS programs, which are not offered in Vermont, are prohibitively expensive for librarians of small libraries—the investment necessary would never be recouped by most library professionals in the state. The community also stressed that unlike the broad-ranging content of MLS programs, all the content in the Certificate program is relevant to the day-to-day operations of a public library in Vermont and essential to learn for library directors.

Some members of the community shared concerns that there are no requirements for ongoing learning associated with the Certificate program, so some library staff's knowledge might be stale. They suggested that ongoing courses should be required to maintain certification as a librarian in the same way that teachers must continually take classes to maintain their teaching credential in the state of Vermont.

Professional Training for Library Technicians

While many people think of everyone who works in the public library as a librarian, there are many specific job roles within most libraries. Library Technicians or Library Assistants play a very important role in public libraries—one that is often different from the role a Librarian plays.

According to the American Library Association, "Library technicians help librarians acquire, prepare, and organize materials and help users to find those materials. Library technicians usually work under the supervision of a librarian, although they often work independently. Technicians in small libraries handle a range of duties. Those in large libraries usually specialize.

The work of library technicians includes but is not limited to directing library users to standard references, organizing and maintaining periodicals, preparing volumes for binding, handling interlibrary loan requests, preparing invoices, performing routine cataloguing, and coding of library materials, and retrieving information from computer databases." (https://www.ala.org/educationcareers/education/paths/assistant/tech)

Just as the work performed by a Library Technician is specialized and different from the work of a Librarian, so too are the training and education necessary to do this work well. According to ALA, "Training requirements for library technicians vary widely, ranging from a high school diploma to specialized postsecondary training. Some employers only hire individuals who have library work experience or college training related to libraries; others train inexperienced workers on the job."
(https://www.ala.org/educationcareers/education/paths/assistant/tech)

While there are completely online programs in this field, there are no Library Technician programs offered by Vermont colleges or universities. In Vermont, most library technicians are trained on the job.

Continuing Education for Library Staff

In addition to the Certificate program, the Department offers many continuing education classes to public library staff, school librarians, academic librarians, and library trustees. The scope, topics, and format of these trainings are informed by statewide and national library trends. Additionally, the Department gathers suggestions and requests for training through regular communication with the Vermont library community, including post-training evaluations.

The Department subscribes to an online learning management system called Niche Academy. This platform is used to make the content of classes offered by the Department continuously available. The platform also includes curated online content from providers throughout the country on a wide range of topics relevant to library professionals. Access to Niche Academy is free to all library staff, trustees, and volunteers throughout the state with individual logins provided by the Department.

In the past few years, the Department has funded library staff attendance at virtual national conferences and other online training provided by professional library organizations such as the American Library Association, Library Journal, and the

Association for Rural & Small Libraries. These opportunities for professional development would not otherwise have been available to many participants.

The Department regularly develops and hosts trainings for library staff across the state in collaboration with state agencies, non-profits, and other Vermont organizations that do library-adjacent work. Key partners include:

- Department of Health

- Attorney General's Office

- State Archives and Records Administration

- Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation

- Community Legal Information Center at Vermont Law and Graduate School

- Vermont Historical Society

- UVM Extension

- Vermont 211

- Inclusive Arts Vermont

- New England ADA Center

- Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity

- Northeast Organic Farming Association

The Department also facilitates networking and peer-to-peer learning and resource-sharing opportunities such as an annual Library Director's Summit, a mentoring program, and county-wide meetings of library directors. The Department also hosts regular round tables for library staff on specific topics including Small and Rural Libraries, Interlibrary Loan, and Collection Development. The informal round tables provide opportunities for peer-to-peer sharing and problem-solving and provide library staff with direct access to the Department's consultants, who are the state's experts in their fields.

From January 1 through August 31, 2023, the Department offered thirty-six workshops, which had a total attendance of 663. In that time, the Department also hosted thirty county meetings for library directors and a total of nine round tables on three topics: cataloging, interlibrary loan, and small and rural libraries. Responding to a request from the library community, the Department launched a mentorship program in 2022 and has already matched fifteen library directors with mentors.

After each training, the Department requests attendees to complete an evaluation to assess the quality and impact of the content, format, and presenter, and solicits suggestions for future training topics.

The following quotes were shared with the Department through post-training evaluations:

- "It gave me a renewed sense of purpose and dedication to my little library."

- "Tons of practical ideas, resources, and support to make it successful and tailored to our communities."

- "Excellent wealth of information and realistic solutions for a common issue among VT Libraries."

- "Thank you for the online format!"

- "It helped me feel part of something, instead of an island."

While there are many opportunities for continuing education, some library staff— particularly those who work in smaller libraries— face challenges that limit their participation. Staff that work part-time struggle to fit training into the hours they are paid to work. Some Vermont public libraries have only one paid staff member, and if that person is attending training, it can be difficult to find substitute coverage so the library can remain open to the community.

Support for continuing education from library trustees is essential to developing and sustaining a workforce of capable library professionals with strong skills. Support for continuing education varies from library to library. Some libraries encourage their staff to take classes and continually learn new skills. Other libraries, which may be understaffed and underbudgeted, offer staff fewer opportunities to participate. Chronic lack of access to or participation in continuing education could lead to undertrained library workers and lower service levels.

The Department strives to provide Vermont's library professionals with the continuing education opportunities necessary to meet the needs of the public they serve. That said, the Department is sometimes challenged to fully meet the continuing education needs of the Vermont library community due to limited staffing capacity. Continuing education costs were not called out in prior Departmental budgets, so it is not possible to evaluate changes in funding over time.

In fiscal years 2022 and 2023, the Department was able to use IMLS ARPA funding to expand the continuing education opportunities for library staff and trustees in response to the evolving learning needs of the state's libraries during the pandemic.

Continuing Education is a top priority for the Department and $28,500 has been allocated toward this effort in fiscal year 2024.

The Department's Continuing Education resources are allocated as follows:

- $15,000 for continuing education in support of services to youth (Smith Funds);

- $6,000 for book award speakers (Smith Funds);

- $2,000 for continuing education in support of access services (GF/LSTA); and

- $5,500 per year for continuing education on general topics for library directors, staff, and trustees.

In addition to bringing in paid speakers, the Department plans to continue to identify low-cost and no-cost speakers and schedule trainings presented by its team of Consultants.

The core courses for the certificate program have filled quickly and had waiting lists in recent years, so the Department will be offering these courses twice each year beginning in 2024.

At times there are requested training topics outside of the Department's areas of expertise, and the Department's budget to hire outside presenters for these is limited.

From October 2019 through June 2023, the library staff statewide have benefited from training presented by a staff member of the UVM Extension and organized by the Department. Through that partnership, library staff in Vermont had access to a trainer with expertise in human resources, strategic planning, and library finances. UVM Extension staff shared information with the library community through resource guides, collaborative workshops, and one-on-one consultations.

Between October 2019 and June 2023, UVM Extension staff taught an average of four webinars each year. Topics included: hiring, supervising, and evaluating library directors, other staff, and volunteers; retaining library staff; library budgets: creating, managing, adapting to Covid budget-wise, adapting to current economic climate, dealing with cuts and level funding, presenting and advocating for passage of the budget, endowments, and fundraising. The UVM Extension staff member taught six sessions within the Basic Public Library Administration core course of the Certificate program and offered regular open office hours to provide individual support.

The UVM Extension staff member also provided "HR Minutes" and "Budget Minutes," two newsletters specific to public libraries. These resources were hosted on a UVM Extension site and linked from the Department website. The resource pages and guides created through this partnership had 605 pageviews with 449 unique visitors. With the

retirement of the staff member from UVM Extension, these resources were removed from their webpage and moved to the Department's Niche Academy space.

These efforts were part of UVM Extension's Cultivating Health Communities Business and Community Development efforts. With the retirement of the staff member at UVM Extension who had developed the materials and provided training, this partnership was discontinued by UVM Extension.

The Department is working to find other methods of continuing this type of training, which is largely outside the expertise and purview of its staff but is needed by library directors and trustees to perform their roles and provide high-quality library services to the public.

The Department regularly gathers training needs that library directors, staff, and trustees share in regional meetings, through the library listservs, and through continuing education evaluations, and plans future continuing education offerings to meet those needs. During the April 21, 2023, meeting of the Working Group on Continuing Education, the Department heard from many members of the library community that they would appreciate training on the topic of intellectual freedom and privacy in libraries. Recognizing the importance of this topic to libraries at this time, when many libraries across the nation have been called on to respond to materials and program challenges, the Department planned a series of workshops with an expert in this field who presented three sessions of 90-minutes each between September and October 2023, and the three sessions had a combined attendance of 54. The $3,250 cost of the series was funded entirely by an Engagement Hub grant from the American Library Association.

The Working Group heard from the community that the classes offered by the Department cover a broad range of subjects and that experts are brought in to fill any gaps of knowledge. They noted that there is a wealth of knowledge throughout the state, and that they appreciate both formal and informal opportunities for learning from their peers. The community shared that the free opportunities for continuing education provided by the Department are typically their primary source of professional development and learning opportunities. The community conveyed that these learning opportunities are vitally important to maintaining and improving the quality of library services they provide to their communities.

The Working Group heard from some individuals that they miss the opportunity to attend the in-person trainings offered by the Department in the past, which they expressed enabled them to forge connections and create alliances with other librarians in the state. However, others conveyed that while they miss the human contact of in-person training, they are pleased that they no longer have to travel far distances to attend in-person trainings. Community members agreed that virtual training is easier for library staff and trustees from around the state to attend. Attending online training can

be done with fewer impacts to local library schedules, budgets, and the environment. Recordings of online trainings can be viewed when convenient, which many noted was a positive change.

The community overwhelmingly shared that it is important that the Department continue to provide free training to Vermont's library staff. While there are many opportunities provided by national or regional organizations and there are conferences that take place outside of Vermont, such as the classes offered by the American Library Association or the Association of Rural & Small Libraries (ARSL), there is usually a fee associated with these courses. The fee is a deterrent for many libraries in Vermont, which do not have sufficient resources to support training budgets for staff.

Training for Youth-Serving Librarians at Public Libraries

For youth-serving public librarians who do not have an MLS in this subject area, much of the learning occurs on the job. Library directors are not always well-versed in the principles of youth librarianship and do not necessarily have the background and skills to teach or model best practices for their staff. For these reasons, supplemental training is necessary for librarians who serve children in many of Vermont's communities.

The Working Group heard from several members of the library community that the Vermont Early Literacy Initiative (VELI) has significant benefits as it helps youth-serving librarians to improve the quality of early literacy library programming for their communities by informing their work with early childhood literacy principles. The Working Group also heard that the need for early childhood literacy training exceeds the current capacity of the VELI program. Department records show that prior to moving to Vermont Humanities, VELI had provided this training to 30 libraries annually. VELI currently provides training to ten to 15 libraries in each annual cohort.

VELI was housed in the Department of Libraries and managed by the non-profit Mother Goose which received funding from the Department. In 2021, it moved over to Vermont Humanities. VELI's work with public libraries was funded by a $20,000 annual grant from the Department prior to its move, and this amount is now granted by the Department to Vermont Humanities in support of VELI's engagement with public libraries. Vermont Humanities began discussions with the Vermont Center for the Book in the Fall of 2018 about the feasibility of merging the VCB programs with Vermont Humanities' Literacy Programs. During the first year of the pandemic, 2020, the two organizations began work to bring the best aspects of both literacy initiatives together. An official announcement in 2021 noted that Vermont Humanities was now also the Vermont Center for the Book, joining with over a dozen other Humanities Councils serving as the Library of Congress Center for the Book for their state or jurisdiction.

The Working Group heard from Wendy Martin and Johnny Flood from the Vermont Early Literacy Initiative (VELI) who described their organization's program that supports Vermont's public librarians in growing their skills as early childhood educators. VELI training emphasizes the importance of bringing the community together to support early childhood literacy. The VELI program's method is to deliver focused training to a small cohort. VELI currently provides training to a cohort of eleven public libraries and has expressed a willingness to grow the cohort size over time. The VELI model includes site visits to strategize with libraries to best suit their individual needs and to distribute books.

The Department has provided limited direct training in early childhood literacy over the past five years as it relied on VELI to conduct this training as funded by the annual grant award for this activity. The Department values both the deep, focused learning over a year in a small cohort that VELI provides and sharing information with many youth services librarians through one-time, individual training sessions on specific topics. The Department plans to incorporate training on early childhood literacy into its regular continuing education offerings as there is a clear need to share this information more widely in the state at a quicker pace to meet existing education needs in this area. However, in response to feedback heard from the Working Group that there is a greater need for early childhood literacy training among library staff statewide, the Department will begin providing early childhood literacy programs open to all library staff in fiscal year 2024.

The Department hosts an annual conference and several trainings to encourage public and school libraries in Vermont to participate in the state's youth book award programs. The three youth book award committees operate independently of the Department but with departmental support. The Department hosts the annual youth book award conference with the three youth book award committees and provides funding for the authors who speak at the event.

The Department has heard through the Working Group meetings and regional meetings that there is need for more support for youth services in libraries and has included a goal of increasing supports for youth-serving librarians by providing training at least quarterly in Fiscal Year 2024 in its State of Vermont Strategic Plan. The Department will also launch a youth services round table in Fiscal Year 2024.

The Department's Consultant for Children and Teen Services has collaborated with youth services consultants from Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine to offer free library staff training for youth services-focused library staff from across New England and across the country. These states have collaborated for the last several years to offer The New England Teen Summit and the New England Summer Summit virtual conferences. Both conferences are free to public and school librarians across New England.

Over 500 people registered, including 38 Vermont library staff, for the annual New England Teen Summit which was held via Zoom on November 18, 2022. Attendance at each of the eight hour-long sessions focusing on teen-services topics presented by organizations and library staff from across New England ranged from 25 to 188 individuals. The pre-recorded keynote by author Mike Curato had 1,665 views. All of the Teen Summit sessions were recorded and are available along with related handouts and resources.

The Department also supported youth-serving librarians by co-hosting the New England Summer Summit on March 31, 2023. Nearly 450 people registered for the summit including 73 Vermont library staff. This full-day conference had two tracks of workshops, each of which was attended by between 40 to 150 people. Sessions covered a wide range of topics related to summer reading including a session led by the Department's Consultant for Children and Teen Services and a session on inclusive summer services led by the Department's Consultant for Special Populations. All sessions were recorded and are available along with related handouts and resources.

For the last three years, the Department's Children's and Youth Services Consultant has collaborated with a colleague from the New Hampshire State Library to offer a five-week Transforming Teen Services online course. This series is geared toward library staff who work with teens in Vermont and New Hampshire. 18 Vermont Library staff participated in the 2023 cohort that was offered in March and April. The 2023 teen summit was presented with support from a grant from IMLS. Transforming Teen Services: a Train the Trainer Approach (T3) is a Nationwide initiative of the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), a division of the American Library Association, which aims to elevate teen services in libraries and other learning environments by integrating connected learning, computational thinking, and youth development to help build responsive services for and with teens.

The Working Group heard from Cassie Willner, the Program Manager of the Children's Literacy Foundation (CLiF), who shared comments emphasizing that that organization's dedication to supporting underserved children in Vermont and New Hampshire. CLiF is a nonprofit organization whose mission is "to inspire a love of reading and writing among under-resourced children up to age 12 throughout New Hampshire and Vermont." Each year, through its Rural Libraries Grant, CLiF supports twelve rural communities in Vermont and New Hampshire in advancing childhood literacy. Each site receives:

- two storytelling performances hosted by CLiF's professional presenters;

- new books for the public library;

- new books for the local elementary school library;

- a mini grant for library programming; and

- new books for children to choose and keep for themselves.

Willner informed the Working Group about other opportunities CLiF makes available, including opportunities for library staff and volunteers to become adept at writing grants to capitalize on free programs for the community and opportunities for professional development for anyone associated with the public library. Willner shared that the CLiF website is another source of free information that provides programming ideas along with videos for those seeking to improve their book sharing skills with children.

The Working Group heard community members express their appreciation for the CLiF program and the boost it provides to rural communities in Vermont.

Continuing Education for Public Library Trustees

Each public library in Vermont is governed by a library board of at least five individuals. The board is responsible for the public library and supports its overall well-being. For each public library to succeed, its trustees must be knowledgeable about their responsibilities, the role of library staff, and the legal framework within which public libraries operate in Vermont. The Department's Consultant for Operations and the Continuing Education Consultant provide trustees with materials to support their learning and conduct both live and asynchronous webinars for training and continuing education. In addition to the trustee-specific trainings, library trustees are welcome to attend many of the training classes offered by the Department to library staff. The Department has found that virtual trainings for trustees reach a wider audience than the in-person trainings it hosted pre-pandemic and plans to continue providing primarily virtual trainings for trustees.

The Department's Consultant for Operations provides direct support to public library trustees to increase their understanding of their role as library trustees including their essential duties and helps point them toward information about statutes and laws that govern public libraries. That said, the Consultant for Operations is not an attorney and does not provide any legal advice to public libraries. The Department encourages library boards to seek legal guidance with any legal matters they need to resolve on behalf of their institution.

In keeping with Title 22 of the Vermont State Statute and the Department's Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Grant Five-Year Plan (https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/state-profiles/plans/vermont5yearplan.pdf) with a goal of fostering strong and sustainable public libraries that will continue to provide essential public library services to Vermont communities for years to come, the Department offers training and support for members of boards of trustees of public libraries statewide.

In its LSTA Grant Five-Year Plan, the Vermont Department of Libraries outlines several of its goals related to supporting public library trustees. Goal 1: Strengthening Libraries includes two projects that directly shape the work of training and supporting library trustees.

Project 1.1, Staff and Leadership Development and Training states, "This project provides professional development and leadership training to library directors, library staff, and library trustees. Content is provided through in-person sessions and through both synchronous and asynchronous online training opportunities such as webinars and presentations available from a wide variety of sources." The desired outcome from Project 1.1 is that "Library directors, school librarians, public library staff, and trustees who are well-equipped to successfully fulfill their responsibilities and ensure continuity in library services. Other desired outcomes involve building a sense of community between and among library directors, library staff, and library trustees throughout the state and fostering the leadership skills necessary to position libraries as vital civic hubs."

Project 1.2, Professional Consulting Assistance states, "This project supports a variety of activities designed to improve library operations at the local level. Both personal contact and online tools are used to make school librarians, library directors, library staff, and trustees aware of best professional practices, to help them solve specific problems, and to alert the library community of grant and staff development opportunities. The professional consulting assistance is provided by Department of Libraries staff who specialize in specific topics." The desired outcome from Project 1.2 states, "Libraries that offer relevant, responsive, library services based on sound professional practices and that utilize techniques and technologies that increase efficiency and add value to end-users of libraries." In the 'Summary of Needs' section from the LSTA plan it is stated, "Consultancy support to library boards and trustees is needed to address significant variations in access to library materials and services that can be found between Vermont's municipalities."

Some examples of the resources and trainings the Department provides to trustees are a trustees' manual, recorded videos, and resources in the Trustee section of the Department's Niche Academy learning portal. The Department makes these training resources available at no cost to public libraries and their trustees.

Since July 2022, the Vermont Department of Libraries Continuing Education Program has held 14 webinars on a variety of subjects relevant to library trustees including:

- Library Safety and Security

- The Americans with Disabilities Act: What Libraries Need to Know

- Three-part budget series:

- Rafting Down the Economic Rapids

- Batten Down the Hatches: Budget Triage

- Setting Your Sails to Future Budgets

- Library Renovations: Grant Opportunities, Historic Buildings, Project Planning & Management

- Strategic Planning Series:

  - Getting Started with the Planning Process

  - Community Engagement & Data Gathering

  - Drafting Plan Content

  - Plan Implementation & Evaluation

- Creating a Transgender-Inclusive Workplace: A Legal Update

- Working Towards Anxiety-Free Annual Performance Evaluations

- When Things Aren't Going the Way You Hoped: Employee Performance Improvement

- Hiring Well and Getting Your New Employee Off to a Good Start

- Attracting Community Gifts to Library Capital Projects

- Overview of Resources for Public Library Trustees

- Resources and Funding Opportunities for Rural Libraries

The Department also facilitates information-sharing by administering the Vermont Trustees and Friends Listserv: LibTRUSTFRIEND. This listserv is designed for library trustees, Friends of the Library, and staff with interest in topics relevant to trustees and Friends. The Department also hosts a Trustee and Friends Conference to support the educational needs of trustees and connections between trustees. The Vermont Library Association has a Friends and Trustees section, which facilitates communication, information sharing, and connections among trustees. The Vermont Secretary of State, the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, and the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration. also support library trustees.

National Resources for Public Library Trustees

In addition to the resources and trainings available to trustees from within the state of Vermont, there are several national organizations that provide information to public library trustees. While national resources are not necessarily specific to trustees or the Vermont library landscape, they cover many topics of interest in public libraries and are a good source of information for trustees who wish to keep their finger on the pulse of library topics.

The American Library Association offers an annual conference for library trustees and friends called United for Libraries. United for Libraries provides a training portal for library trustees called Trustee Academy (https://www.ala.org/united/training/trustee_academy).

- The United for Libraries courses include:

- Working Effectively with the Library Director

- The Library's Budget for Trustees

- Everyday Advocacy—Why the Library Matters!

- Equity, Diversity, Inclusion: What Library Trustees Need to Know

- Vendor Negotiation That Supports Patron Privacy and Intellectual Freedom

The United for Libraries platform includes Short Takes for Trustees, Trustee Academy, or an All-Access Pass. Institutions can join the platform for an annual fee. The Department obtained a quote from United for Libraries in September 2023 and at that time pricing was as follows:

- Short Takes: $35 per public library per year, $6,400 for all public libraries in Vermont;

- Trustee Academy: $45 per public library per year and $8,300 for all public libraries in Vermont; and

- All Access: $100 per public library per year and $18,800 for all public libraries in Vermont.

Nineteen State Library Administrative Agencies provide trustees with access to some or all of these resources. (https://www.ala.org/united/stateaccess) The Vermont Department of Libraries has not traditionally provided this level of curricular support to public library trustees and does not have sufficient funding to support statewide access to these resources.

Maintaining awareness of the issues facing libraries is important for library trustees, and the Department of Libraries strives to provide trainings that support trustees in this area. For example, with the number of challenges of library materials rising steeply in recent years, continuing education to support local library boards to develop policies that will enable them to respond appropriately to book challenges in their community is a current topic of interest. Similarly, trainings to support library boards to develop and refresh all their policies are continually of interest in Vermont.

Trustees are responsible for the financial oversight of their public libraries, so trainings on financial management are also of importance—as are trainings on effective fundraising and advocacy.

Trustees are responsible for long-range planning for their libraries. For that reason, in FY 2023 the Department of Libraries supported trustees and library directors in learning best practices of strategic planning. After learning from the library community that many public libraries wanted to update their strategic plans coming out of the pandemic, the Department contracted with a vendor to offer a series of four 90-minute sessions on strategic planning for library directors and trustees. These sessions took place between October 2022 and January 2023 and the four trainings had a combined attendance of 71. In addition to the four trainings, the vendors made themselves available for group "office hours" sessions and individual consultations. The $9,300 cost of the series was funded entirely with federal Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) LSTA ARPA funding.

The community shared how important it is to them that the Department continue to offer free courses for library staff and trustees. They noted that this model supports equity and access for everyone and enables the trustees of even the smallest libraries to access the information they need to do their work well.

While the Department's consultants are qualified to provide library-specific information and training to public library trustees, these trustees may have other learning needs related to their non-profit or municipal organizations that others may be better qualified to meet. Ultimately, the responsibility for trustee training rests with each library board as each board operates independently of the Department and is a separate entity. For example, municipal library boards can obtain support from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, a "nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that was founded in 1967 with the mission of serving and strengthening Vermont local government." (https://www.vlct.org/) Incorporated library boards can obtain non-profit specific support from Common Good Vermont, a "statewide organization in Vermont dedicated to uniting and strengthening all of Vermont's mission-driven organizations. Common Good Vermont serves as the "go to" resource for our peers to share resources, gain skills, and build partnerships." (https://commongoodvt.org/) Both municipal and incorporated library trustees are supported by the Vermont Library Association, which has a Friends and Trustees Section. Vermont-specific and national organizations are well-positioned to assist with

trainings to support the learning needs of library trustees including advocacy and fundraising efforts by library boards.

School Library Training

The Working Group heard from Deborah Ehler-Hansen, coordinator and lecturer at the University of Vermont's School of Library Media Studies. This program was started by Professor Helene Lang 1978 and is housed within UVM's Department of Education. Coordinator and Lecturer, Judith Kaplan, who started as a Lecturer in 2001, led the flourishing program and transformed learning in School Libraries for PK-12 students in Vermont for almost two decades, until retiring at the end of July 2022. Deborah Ehler-Hansen took over the program as Coordinator and Lecturer in August 2022.

According to the program's website, UVM's Library Media Studies "program is designed for practicing educators who would like to add another endorsement to their educator license."

Ehler-Hansen shared with the Working Group that "The University of Vermont offers graduate educational opportunities for those interested in school library media studies to gain an educator licensure in Vermont or to acquire a graduate degree in school library media." According to the school's website, "The school library media courses are offered as six standalone courses that are aligned with the school librarian endorsement for Vermont educators, or as a strand within the Master of Education program within the College of Education and Social Services. The six school library media courses are offered in a two-year cycle, one per semester, and are delivered in a blended synchronous and asynchronous online format that is convenient for distance learners." (https://learn.uvm.edu/program/school-library-media-studies/faqs/)

The program's six required courses (https://learn.uvm.edu/program/school-library-media-studies/curriculum/) are:

- Managing and Leading School Library Media Centers

- Developing and Organizing School Library Media Center Collections

- Information Technologies for School Library Media Centers

- Information Sources and Services for School Library Media Centers

- Designing Learning in School Library Media Centers

- Children's and Young Adult Literature

Ehler-Hansen informed the Working Group that the Agency of Education identified a statewide shortage of School Librarians or "Library/Media Specialists" for the 2022-2023

School Year. (https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/2022-2023%20Teacher%20Shortage%20Areas.pdf) Ehler-Hansen shared that the UVM program for school librarians was over-enrolled for the 2022-2023 academic year and expressed a desire for UVM to expand its program to:

- accommodate more students and meet the needs of schools throughout the state;

- create a dual MLS/MEd program; and

- offer additional professional development courses for school librarians.

Ehler-Hansen shared that "in addition to coursework, candidates enrolled in the UVM School Library Studies Sequence have opportunities to extend their learning through performance tasks and projects embedded in coursework that apply theory to authentic practice in the field" including practicums and research.

Ehler-Hansen explained that "Upon successful completion of the two-year series, qualified individuals may request a Transcript Review by the Vermont Agency of Education." While designed primarily for those who already have a valid teaching credential in Vermont, there are pathways to becoming a teacher for those who come from other fields. Hansen shared that "for those seeking to change careers, the school librarian endorsement also has an option for non-educators to enter the profession through Transcript Review for Initial Certification." (https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ECLmEPwkM9n35qQBEUFTBdGsNyruSs1S/edit)

The Working Group was reminded by Meg Allison, School Librarian for U32 High School and past president of the Vermont School Library Association (VSLA), that all school librarians need to be re-licensed on a continual basis. Allison shared that credit hours for re-licensing may be obtained by attending conferences and courses that pertain to the core standards. Allison shared that whether school districts or schools pay the costs associated with school librarian's maintenance of their certifications depends upon the school district that the librarian is from, and upon what resources the district or school make available for school librarian training. Allison reported that in her capacity in the leadership of the Vermont School Library Association, she had heard from many school librarian colleagues that they must pay for their own continuing education.

The Working Group heard from Judith Kaplan, a retired school librarian who shared comments related to Mentoring Matters for School Librarians, a grant funded program sponsored by the VSLA and Vermont National Education Association (VNEA). Aimed at new school librarians that are matched up with a mentor, the program has created a wider range of learning opportunities, helped maintain credential requirements, and highlighted conferences. Currently there are forty-six mentors and sixty-eight mentees. The program results in a high level of retention for new school librarians. Kaplan also

shared that the VSLA has carried out periodic strategic planning sessions to develop goals for improving school librarians and the school librarian profession.

The continuing education needs of school librarians in Vermont are also supported by VSLA, which provides professional development and conferences for teacher librarians, including an annual conference. VSLA also connects newly hired school librarians with mentors in their field.

Conclusion

Vermonters have limited access to higher education in public librarianship due to the cost of these programs and the lack of in-state offerings. Library staff and directors frequently learn on the job, through trainings offered by the Department, and through trainings provided by library associations and associations that support boards—which makes these trainings vitally important to the continued success of public libraries in the state.

Professional development and training for library professionals must be ongoing, not one-time so that library professionals can continuously learn about new technologies and emerging trends in librarianship—and so that they can keep their skills fresh. While school librarians must take courses to maintain their professional certification, public librarians and directors have no similar requirements, which could contribute negatively to public library service in the state.

Emergency Preparedness

The topic of Emergency Preparedness was discussed at the Working Group meeting on Friday, March 24th, 2023. The Working Group heard from six community members and heard reports from Department of Libraries staff on the topics of COVID 19 Response by the Department, and COVID 19 Impacts on Libraries. The Working Group also heard from these experts on this topic: Ben Rose, Recovery and Mitigation Section Chief, Vermont Emergency Management; Rachel Onuf, Vermont State Archives and Records Administration (VSARA); and Matthew Bollerman, Sustainable Libraries Initiative. Written comments were shared with the Working Group by eight community members. The topic of the impacts of the COVID-19 public health emergency was included within the umbrella of emergency preparedness and response.

The term "emergency preparedness" means the steps one takes to make sure you and those you are responsible for are safe before, during, and after an emergency or natural disaster.

In a presentation, Ben Rose, the Recovery and Mitigation Section Chief at the Vermont Division of Emergency Management provided several useful tools for librarians to have at the ready. Rose encouraged librarians to be active participants in local emergency planning efforts. Rose also stated that all libraries should know who their local Emergency Management Director is and how to contact them. Rose went on to share resources that libraries can use to prepare for and respond to emergencies including:

- Vermont's **Hazard Mitigation Funding Programs**, which make funds available to municipalities and other organizations to help reduce or eliminate loss of life and property by taking measures to reduce the impacts of future disasters. (https://vem.vermont.gov/funding/mitigation)

- Vermont's **Municipal Energy Resiliency Program (MERP)** provides staff support, application and technical assistance, and funding to increase energy resilience, reduce energy use and operating costs, and curb greenhouse gas emissions by promoting weatherization, thermal improvements, fuel switching, renewable energy, battery storage, electric vehicle charging, and enhanced comfort in municipal buildings. Municipal public libraries should connect with their municipality to apply for these funds. (https://bgs.vermont.gov/municipal-energy-resilience-program)

- Vermont's **Department of Public Safety: Vermont Emergency Management** provides assistance to prevent, protect, mitigate, respond to, and recover from natural and man-made threats and hazards to ensure the safety of Vermonters and our visitors. (https://vem.vermont.gov/)

- **Vermont School Safety Center** offers best practices and recommendations on how to keep schools—and school libraries—safe. (https://schoolsafety.vermont.gov/)

- **State of Vermont: Agency of Education** provides weekly "field memos" that include emergency preparedness tips which school libraries may find useful. (https://education.vermont.gov/content/weekly-field-memo)

Rachel Onuf, Vermont Historical Records Director with the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration (VSARA), presented emergency resources available to support Vermont's libraries with a focus on responding to emergencies that impact library collections. Onuf is the lead of the Vermont Arts & Culture Disaster and Resilience Network (VACDaRN), which "builds relationships among people involved with arts and cultural heritage. VACDaRN provides resources and training in readiness and in how to respond in the event of an emergency to mitigate the impact of disasters and ensure that our communities recover quickly and grow more resilient." (https://vacdarn.org/)

Onuf encouraged the library community to be ready for a future with more natural disasters and predicted that mass climate migration due to climate change and extreme weather events could potentially result in people arriving at Vermont's public libraries who need "everything." Onuf emphasized the connection between disaster response and social services—specifically, there's a high potential that climate emergencies will result in a need for even more social services resources in libraries. Onuf shared information with the Working Group including the State of Vermont's contingency contract with Polygon for Document/Record Disaster Recovery, available to ALL public libraries and cultural heritage repositories (https://bgs.vermont.gov/sites/bgs/files/files/purchasing-contracting/contracts/38257%202-2w.pdf) and the State Library of Iowa's Disaster Preparedness Toolkit (https://www.statelibraryofiowa.gov/index.php/libraries/resources/disaster-preparedness-toolkit)

Onuf reiterated that emergency preparedness must be part of everyone's mindset. If libraries have an emergency plan in place, they should schedule regular trainings and know whom to contact when an emergency occurs. If libraries don't yet have a plan, they should begin creating one by seeking help from experts.

Tom McMurdo, the Assistant State Librarian for Information & Access and VACDaRN member shared information about the **Massachusetts Higher Education Cooperative** (MHEC) with the Working Group. (https://www.mhec.net/) MHEC is a multi-state purchasing group that provides services and materials for non-profits, including libraries, at a discount. MHEC maintains contracts with a variety of disaster response companies. These companies are all on the contract designated G32. Eight vendors are on this contract, including companies that do mold remediation and other disaster cleanup. The State of Vermont maintains a relationship with MHEC and registered users in Vermont

can access MHEC's contracts. Instructions for joining MHEC are on the Department of Libraries website. (https://libraries.vermont.gov/services/mhec-purchasing)

Matthew Bollerman shared information with the Working Group about the Sustainable Libraries Initiative, which empowers library leaders to advance environmentally sound, socially equitable, and economically feasible practices to intentionally address climate change and co-create thriving communities. (https://sustainablelibrariesinitiative.org/)

Impacts of COVID-19 on Library Services in Vermont

The COVID-19 public health emergency impacted public libraries significantly, as it did most other aspects of community life. The majority of Vermont's public libraries closed their doors to the public and staff in the middle of March 2020. At that time, some libraries continued providing library services to the public remotely, with library staff working remotely. Other public libraries temporarily ceased providing service to the public altogether.

As time wore on, Vermont's public libraries, like those across the country, gradually opened their library buildings for staff, then began to offer curbside pickup, and then reopened to the public. In the early days of the COVID-19 health emergency, curbside services typically focused on making physical library materials available to the public via holds pick-up.

In early May 2020, the Department conducted a one-time survey to collect information from public libraries across the state, to which 80 public libraries responded. At that time, 47 reporting libraries in Vermont were already offering curbside holds pick-up services. Another 23 public libraries indicated that they planned to begin curbside services within the month.

On June 26, 2020, the Department initiated a weekly status survey for public libraries. Sixty-seven public libraries responded to the survey the first week it was administered. Among the responding public libraries:

- 13 reported they were open to the public;

- four reported they were open by appointment;

- 49 reported their buildings were open to staff only; and

- one reported they were completely closed.

Public Library Open Status
June 26, 2020 - 67 responses

Status	Value
Open	~13
By Appointment	~4
Staff Only	~49
Closed	~1

(Horizontal bar chart with x-axis from 0 to 60)
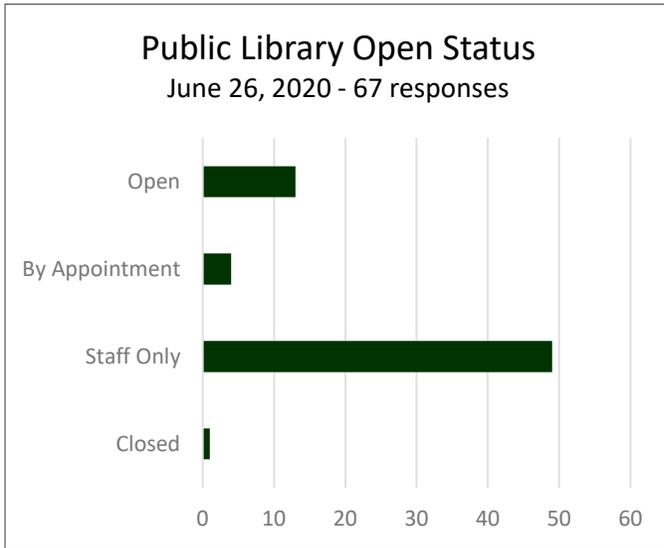
In response to the initial weekly survey of public libraries, 16% of respondents reported that library staff had been furloughed or laid off.

That survey also reflected that 79% of Vermont's public libraries shifted public programming online in response to the pandemic and were providing the public with virtual library programs including storytime.

Public Library Open Status
June-December 2020

(Line chart showing Closed, Staff Only, By Appt, and Open status from 6/30 to 12/29. Y-axis from 0 to 120.)
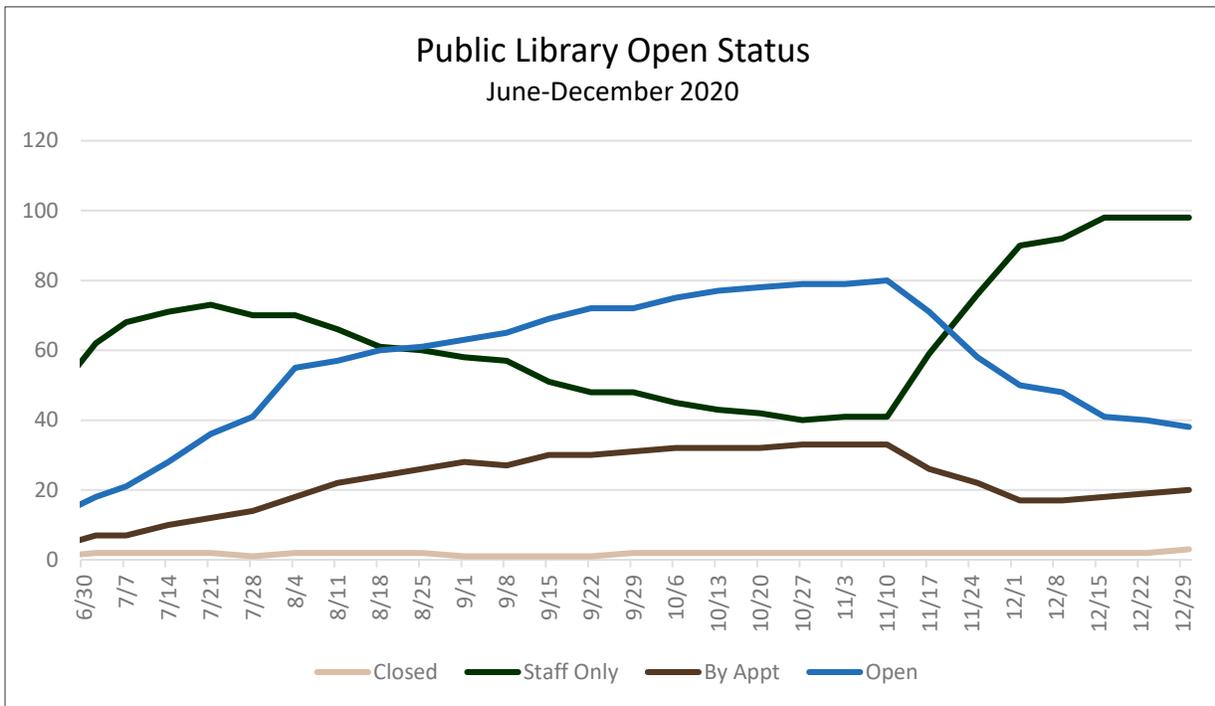
Through the weekly status surveys conducted by the Department, public libraries in Vermont reported changes in the services they provided and the usage of those services over time. Public libraries reported that physical access to library buildings

increased in the summer and early fall of 2020, but then rapidly contracted in November 2020. Public libraries reported that their decisions to close were largely related to colder weather and a lack of fresh air. Following guidance from the public health community, public libraries in Vermont had thrown their windows open, to increase the circulation of fresh air in buildings while also practicing social distancing and good hygiene. With winter came colder temperatures. Many library buildings in Vermont have heating systems with no air filtration or circulation systems. With the windows closed, those libraries were no longer able to safely welcome the public into their buildings and were forced to resume curbside service or cease public service until warmer temperatures returned.

Though the number of libraries that were physically open increased slightly through the winter and spring, the summer of 2021 marked a dramatic increase in open status.

Public Library Open Status
June 2020-December 2021
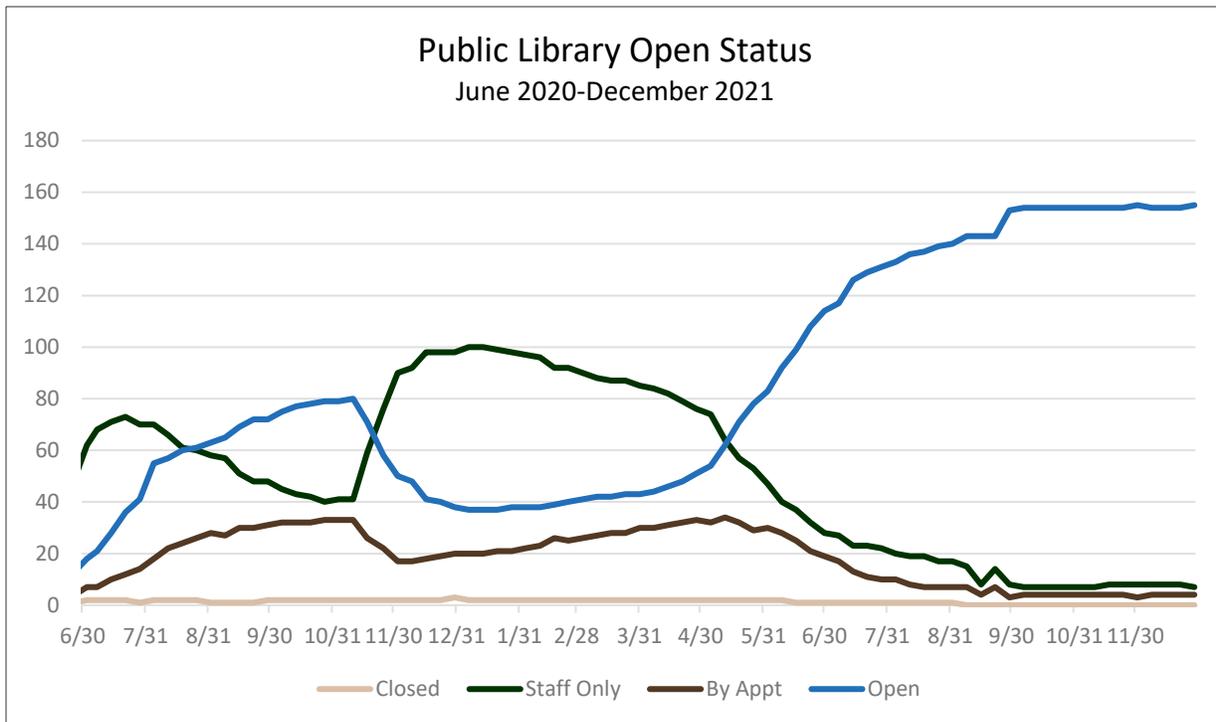
# Impact of COVID-19 on Access to Collections and Support from Library Staff

The impact of library closures resulted in a decrease in access to physical collections and browsing. It also had a negative impact on the reference support library staff were able to provide for community members. The topic is covered in more depth in the section of the report on Collections. Unsurprisingly, the statistical impact of the pandemic (especially the early pandemic) was dramatic. Data collected by the

Department shows the enormous dip in annual open hours and visitation from pre-pandemic levels during the height of the pandemic.

### Visits and Hours Open
2017-2022 Annual Reports, Median

The number of reference questions asked in Vermont's public libraries has been declining steadily in recent years, just as it has nationwide. In 2019, the decline of reference questions slowed, but then it dropped precipitously in 2020 when public libraries were forced to close due to the pandemic. The median number of reference questions has been rebounding since 2021 as life in Vermont communities and libraries has stabilized post-pandemic. That said, the median number of reference questions has not reached its pre-pandemic levels. Bolstering library staff training to support the reference needs of the communities they serve and increasing public awareness of reference services continues to be a growth area for Vermont's libraries.

Reference Questions
2017-2022 Annual Reports, Median
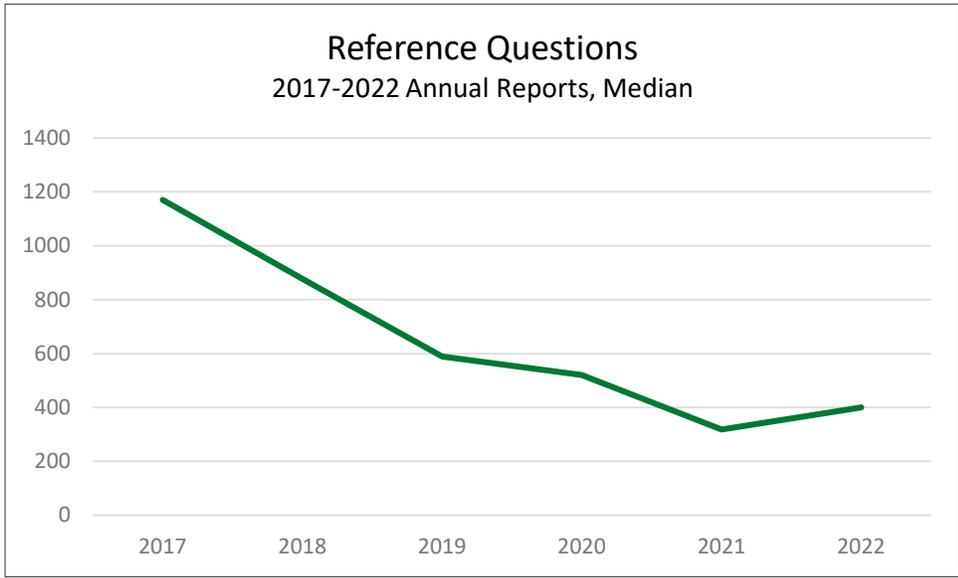
Similarly, the pandemic drove circulation of physical books and library materials down dramatically but led to a smaller uptick in electronic circulation. Data collected by the Department reflects that median circulation of physical materials at public libraries has begun rebounding since those buildings reopened to the public. The number of physical items checked out has not reached pre-pandemic levels in Vermont or across the nation. This is due in part to a shift away from checking out physical library materials toward checking out eBooks and eAudiobooks or "electronic circulation" by some members of the community.

**Physical and Electronic Circulation
of Libary Materials**
2017-2022 Annual Reports, Median
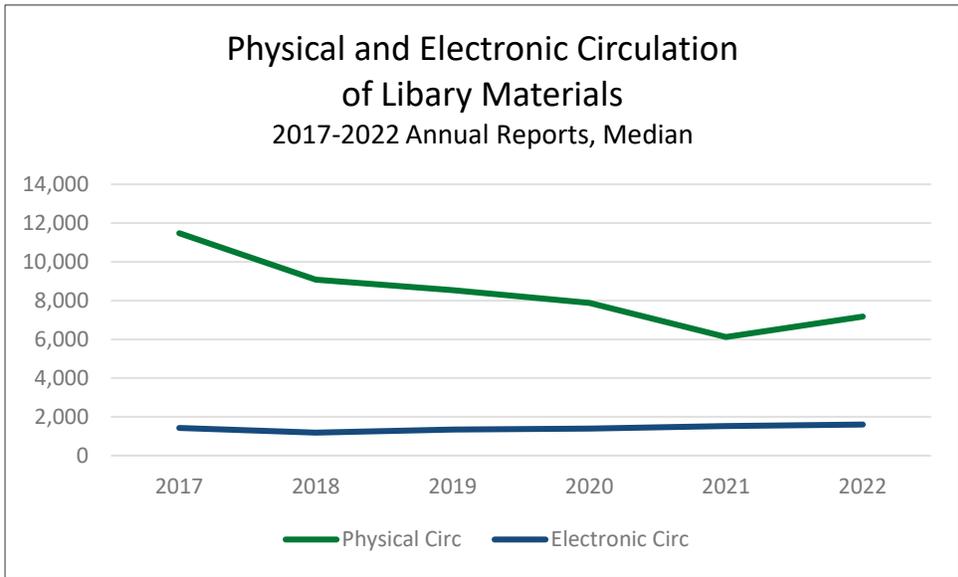
Impact of COVID-19 on Public Internet Access

The closure of public library buildings in Vermont due to the COVID-19 public health emergency resulted in a lack of internet access for many community members. This was particularly problematic because so many facets of school, work, and medical care had shifted online during the pandemic to curb the spread of disease transmission. Vermonters without homes or without access to the internet in their homes were left out of the shift to online daily functions and were at an even greater disadvantage than before the pandemic.

To address that concern, the Vermont Department of Libraries worked with the Vermont Department of Public Service to map public access to Wi-Fi. Then the State added and expanded Wi-Fi coverage to communities with the least coverage and highest need by adding new access points at libraries, schools, stores, and other community-centered locations. At the same time, Vermont's public libraries began to expand access to library Wi-Fi outside the building and/or after hours. Many libraries improved Wi-Fi signals in parking lots and other spaces outside their buildings so that community members could access the internet to attend classes, work or do schoolwork, or attend appointments with health care providers. Post-pandemic, this expansion of Wi-Fi coverage continues to have a positive impact on the lives of Vermonters as many public libraries have maintained this expanded Wi-Fi service, which increases community members' ability to access the internet even when their local public library is closed.
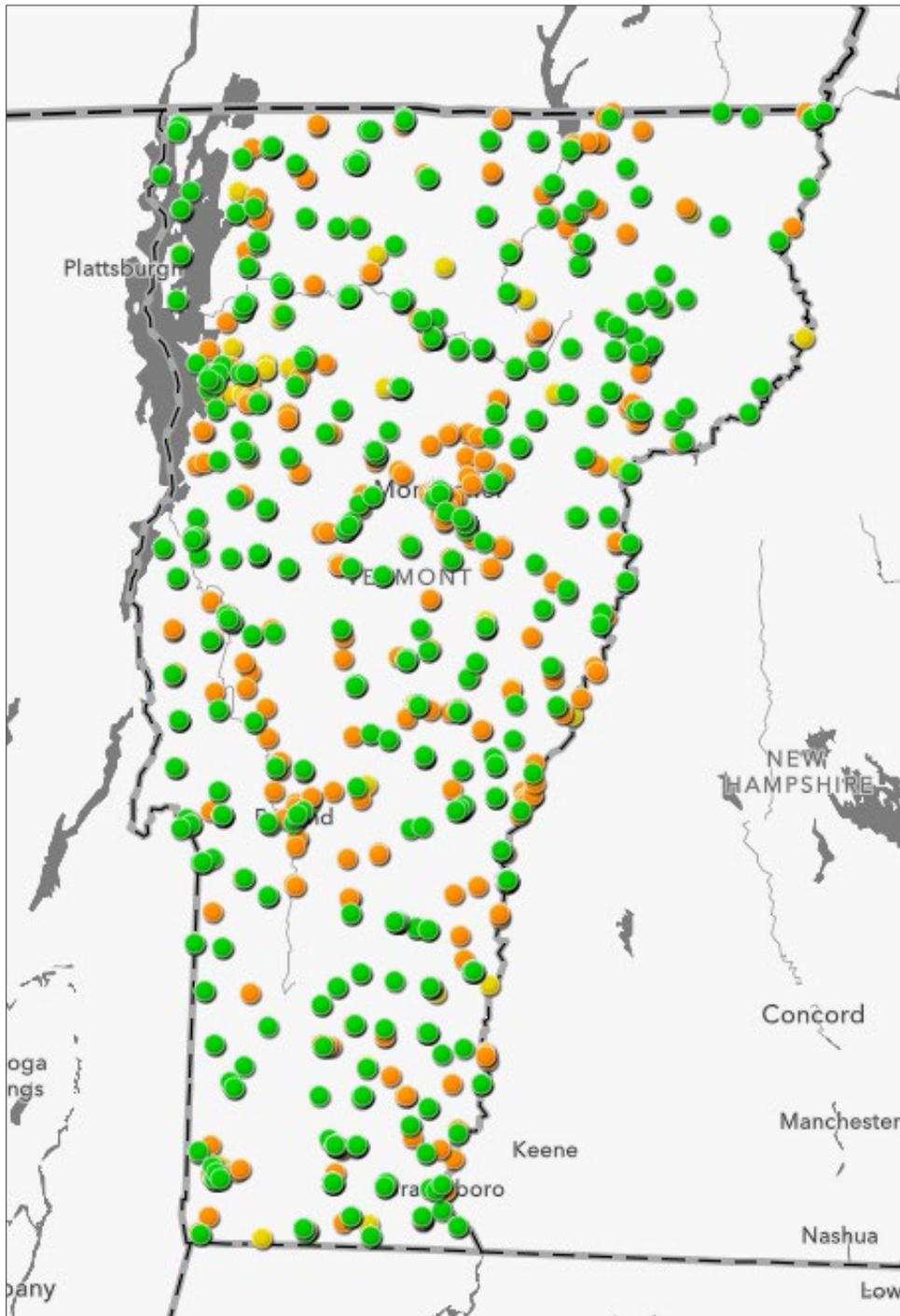
Source: Department of Public Services Wi-Fi Map (Captured 9/7/2023)
(https://vtpsd.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=c926d155167d4a558
6e8e1aca1701cfa)

The Department of Public Services Wi-Fi Map shows public libraries and other sites with public internet access in Vermont. Green dots are publicly funded sites that provide Wi-

Fi access; orange dots represent sites that provide public Wi-Fi access that were submitted by members of the public; and yellow dots are sites that provide public Wi-Fi sites with a password and were submitted by members of the public. Many of the sites reflected on this map represent the 188 public libraries in Vermont, almost all of which provide Wi-Fi access to the public.

Another way in which Vermont's public libraries changed their services was in relation to technology access. During the pandemic, at times when public libraries were not able to provide access to public computers and the internet indoors, a significant number of public libraries began to offer laptops for short-term outdoor use. By thinking creatively, public libraries were able to respond in innovative ways and continue to remain relevant to the people who need and use their services regularly.

Libraries Who Offered Outdoor Computers
June 2020 - December 2022
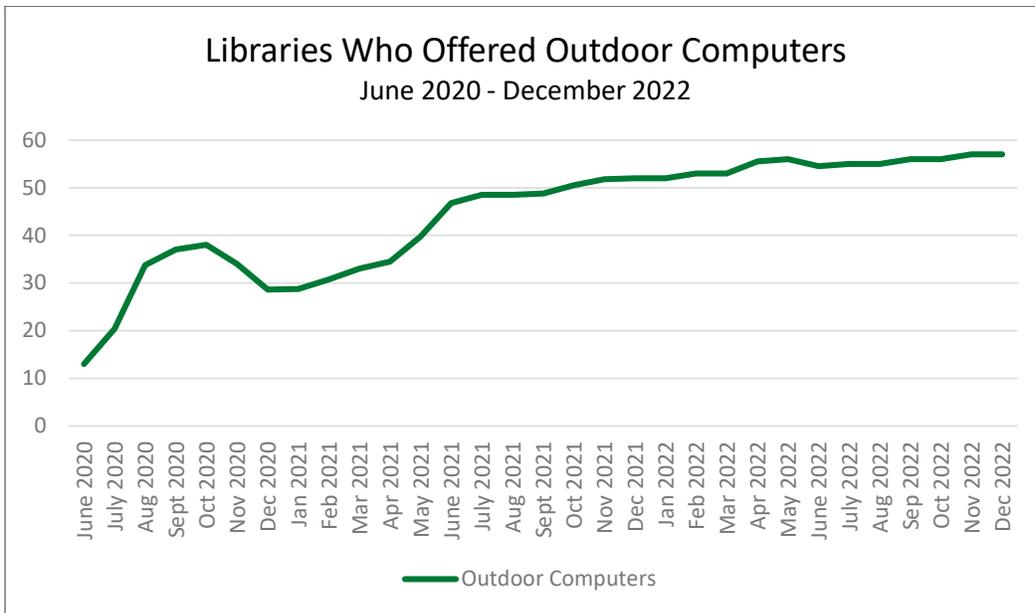
Impact of COVID-19 on Access to Library Programs

Indoor programming paused and almost completely stopped at many of Vermont's public libraries at the beginning of the pandemic. The Department began to specifically track public library programming in October 2021, when just 50% of libraries reported that they were hosting some programs for all ages. Indoor programming for adults rebounded more quickly than indoor programming for children—largely because the library community felt it was unsafe to provide indoor group programming for children who did not yet have access to COVID-19 vaccinations. The Department's weekly survey data reflects that indoor programming for all ages increased dramatically in the spring of 2022 and into 2023. The Department shifted the survey from weekly to monthly in August 2022, and discontinued it entirely in March of 2023.

**Libraries Who Offer Indoor Programming**
October 2021 - March 2023
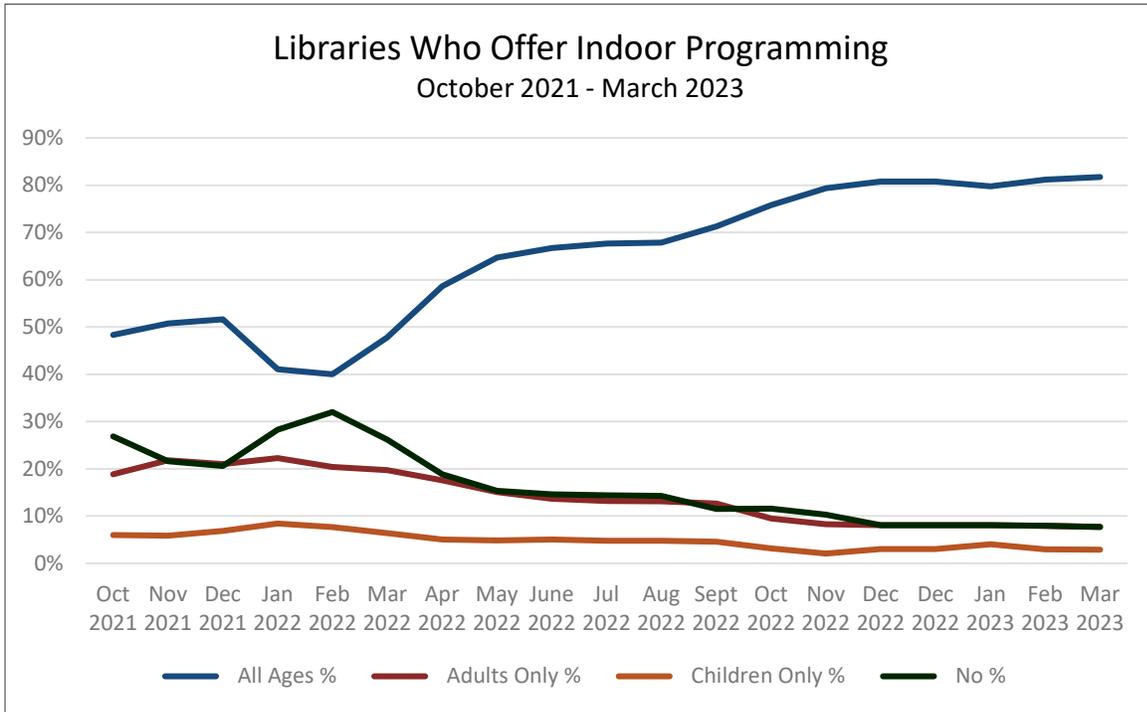
Finally, public library programming and program attendance dropped precipitously during the pandemic. Data gathered by the Department reflects that both programs and program attendance dropped in 2020 and 2021, and that both have begun to rebound but are not yet at pre-pandemic levels.

In-Person Programs and Attendance
2017-2022 Annual Reports, Median
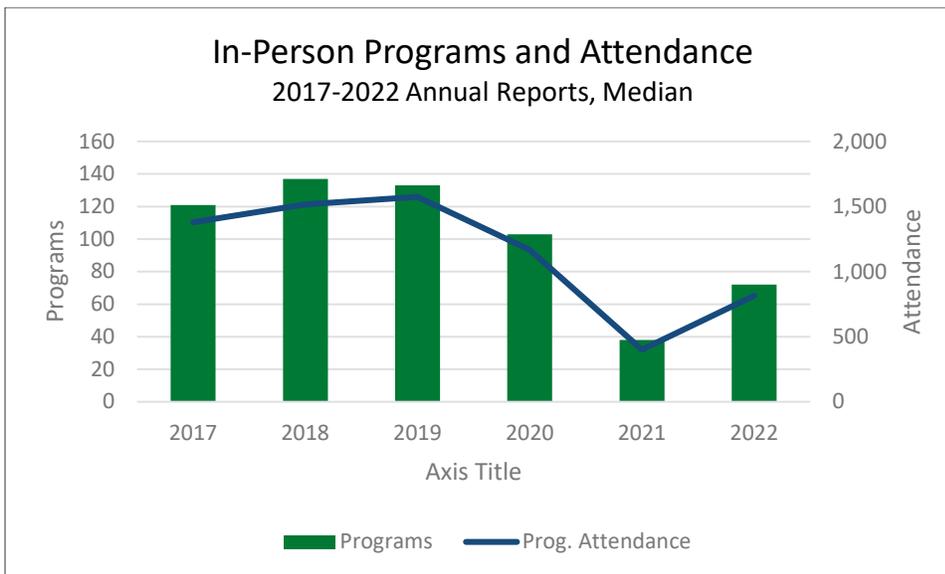
The need for sudden building closures during the pandemic forced library staff and trustees to come up with new approaches to meet the needs of the public. As public health guidance evolved over the course of the pandemic, library staff used creative approaches to ensure that community members could continue to benefit from the

social and education opportunities of public libraries. While the Department did not collect data from libraries about the number of outdoor programs, it heard from many libraries during the pandemic that they had brought their in-person programs outdoors. Many public libraries used ARPA grant funding administered by the Department during the pandemic to purchase outdoor furnishings and equipment, including tents and firepits, creating outdoor spaces for their community to convene more safely.

Department data on virtual programs and attendance at those programs reflects that virtual programming, which was not common in Vermont's public libraries prior to the pandemic, grew dramatically during the pandemic. Virtual programming decreased when Vermonters gained access to COVID-19 vaccinations and is now less prominent than it was at the height of the pandemic. That said, some public libraries do continue to offer virtual and hybrid programming, particularly during the winter months.
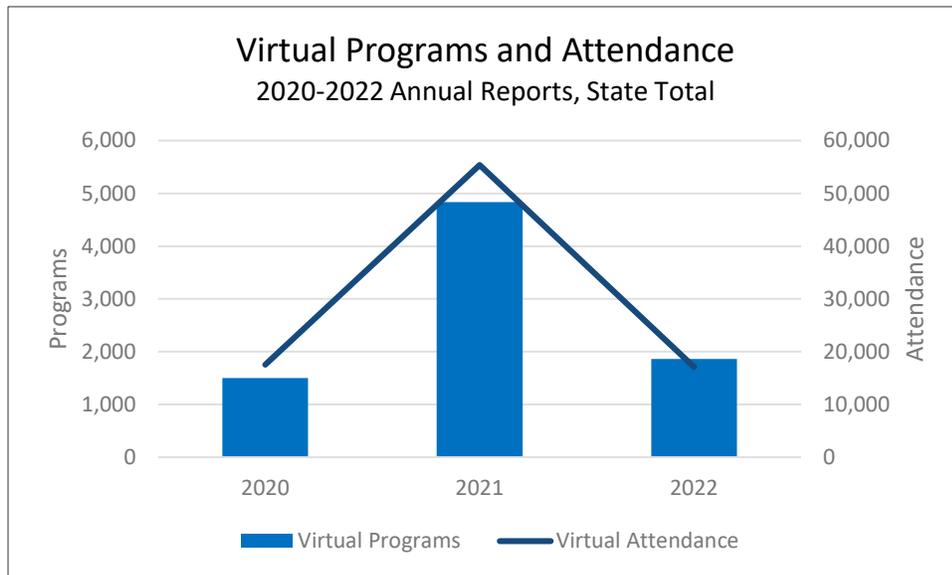
The Vermont Department of Libraries took a multi-pronged approach to responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic. During this time, the Department focused its efforts on supporting the state's public libraries and their staff by sharing vetted and reliable pandemic-related information, facilitating peer information sharing, increasing continuing education offerings, adapting information delivery modes, issuing federal grant funds to libraries and library consortia, and procuring equipment to directly support continued library service for the public.

Information Sharing

To manage the constant flow of pandemic-related updates coming from state, federal, and non-governmental organizations during the height of the pandemic, the Department developed a daily resource update that it sent out on its various listservs. These emails gathered, organized, annotated, and distributed state and federal announcements and

policy changes, learning opportunities, general library-related resources, and wellness resources.

The Department also developed a series of COVID-19 webpages that featured resources and guidance as soon as—and oftentimes before—needs emerged for libraries so library directors and trustees could quickly access the information.

The Department of Libraries regularly collects statistical data from Vermont's public libraries and publishes that information in an annual Public Library Survey. The Department occasionally collects other information from public libraries to gain insight into services and concerns across the state. As mentioned previously, one of the Department's pandemic responses was the development of a new weekly survey that gathered updates on public libraries' service levels (e.g., open, closed, curbside), restrictions (occupancy, time limits, mask requirements), and individual services (computers, programs, meeting space). The results of the survey were published weekly through August 2022, then monthly from September 2022 through March 2023, when it ceased. Local library directors and trustees used the high-level information in the weekly report along with public health information to help inform their local decisions about providing library services. The Department regularly shared a high-level summary of the report with the Agency of Administration, which provided the Administration with insight into responses to the pandemic in Vermont at the local level.

Informal Meetups and County Meetings

Starting in April of 2020, the Department moved its existing county directors' and large libraries directors' meetings fully online. These quarterly meetings with librarians from each county was an ongoing touchpoint before the pandemic started, but the bulk of the discussion in the 18 months after the start of the pandemic turned to COVID-related topics including quarantining books, mask and vaccine regulations, distancing and closure requirements, outdoor programming, virtual programming, staffing, and HR issues caused by the public health situation.

To be able to support the Vermont library staff consistently during this rapidly evolving situation, we started offering initially weekly—then bi-weekly—casual meetups that allowed the Department to provide updates to library staff and provided a forum for idea exchanges and networking.

Continuing Education for Library Staff and Trustees

Prior to the pandemic, many of the Department's continuing education courses were offered in-person. After the start of the pandemic, the Department moved its continuing education efforts entirely online. The Department shifted its library staff training resources to support library staff in attending a number of virtual trainings and national conferences, including LibraryWorks and PCI Webinars, the American Library Association's (ALA) Annual Conference and Library Director Crash Course, and the

Association of Rural & Small Libraries conference. The Department continued offering its Certificate of Public Librarianship program courses but moved these online. Additionally, the Department provided numerous COVID-related webinars on topics including air quality, ventilation systems, distanced library programming, budget and staff planning during a national health crisis, and human resources topics related to state and national health mandates. The Department found that it is able to provide more training opportunities to more participants by offering continuing education online, which has continued to inform how it provides training moving forward.

While the Department and Working Group heard from some members of the community that library trustees will only participate in trainings in-person or at their own library, the Department discovered during the pandemic that trustees from around the state are willing and able to engage in trainings online. For example, after years of offering only in-person training for library trustees, during the pandemic the Department shifted its annual conference for library trustees entirely online. The 2020 conference for library trustees was a free 5-day online program offering synchronous sessions on strategic planning, library policies, budget, board development, library marketing, and a town hall with the State Librarian. The content included a pre-recorded keynote, facilitated listserv discussions, and trivia. This online conference drew twice the number of enrollees of in-person conferences in previous years. Subsequent online conferences for trustees have been similarly successful. Providing this conference online enabled the Department to expand its reach and to provide training to many trustees with very little outlay of funds. The Department was able to focus its limited resources on paying presenters rather than paying for venue rental costs and meals for conference attendees. The Department heard from some trustees that they were pleased to be able to attend the conference, because it was hosted online and required no travel. Many trustees who work full-time reported that they appreciated being able to attend the live sessions, view videos of the sessions at their own convenience, and participate in asynchronous listserv discussions—so the reach of this opportunity was far broader than in-person trainings had been. In this case, changes brought about in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency helped the Department to use its resources more effectively and reach a wider statewide audience.

The trustee trainings offered by the Department online continue to have better attendance than in-person trainings did. Online training enables Consultants from the Department to schedule their time effectively as they no longer spend as many hours driving to libraries around the state to conduct trainings for individual boards of five people. The time saved enables the Consultants to develop more responsive trainings and deliver these trainings to a greater number of trustees. The Consultants do still visit public libraries on occasion to meet with library staff and trustees in-person.

Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) CARES Grant Purchases

In April of 2020, the Department received $56,384 in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) grant funds through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to support Vermont libraries in responding to the COVID-19 public health emergency. The Department used these funds to purchase plexiglass desktop shields and personal protective equipment for distribution to 118 public and academic libraries throughout the state.

The Department leveraged $10,000 in CARES funding to add a free streaming movie option to the discounted public performance licenses it has offered to Vermont schools for the past 10 years. This enabled teachers in Vermont to assign movies to students for discussion and flipped classroom activities, popular educational methods during the remote schooling days of the pandemic. Vermont public schools serve over 83,000 students. The Department was able to continue this service using subsequent ARPA funds from the Institute for Museum and Library Services through the end of the ARPA grant period in September 30, 2022. The service proved so important to Vermont schools, that the Agency of Education agreed to support the service for an additional two years (through the end of the '23/'24 school year) using federal ARPA Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSR) state set-aside funds. Over the last three years combined, the Vermont school movie portal had 60,228 total portal views. In looking at this program broken down per year, years one and two were right around 18,700 and 18,800 views respectively, with year three—in September 2023— already at 22,722 views.

Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) ARPA Grant

In April of 2021, the Department received $2,135,819.00 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding through IMLS. This funding was intended to help communities respond "directly and immediately to the pandemic, as well as to related economic and community needs through equitable approaches." The Department used this funding to award grants to public libraries, state library consortia, and the Vermont Historical Society. The Department also made purchases to directly support libraries in operating safely during the pandemic. Complete details can be found on the Department's website. (https://libraries.vermont.gov/ARPA2021) The following are examples of IMLS ARPA grant awards made by the Department:

- **Grants to Public Libraries**
  To support continued public library services to the public during the pandemic period, the Department issued $1,193,215.61 to Vermont's public libraries in two rounds of non-competitive grants. These grant awards to public libraries supported the purchase of collections, equipment, and supplies in response

to emergent needs. These included equity diversity and inclusion collections, indoor furniture for COVID-response (including dividers and movable tables), outdoor furniture and place-making items to extend the use of outdoor library spaces, and items that promoted safer building environments (including air purifiers). The Department awarded formula grants based on population served, with a minimum of $2,000 for the first round and a minimum $500 for the second round. For round one, 166 Public Libraries applied and $928,410.84 in grant funds were awarded; and for round two, the Department had 139 applicants and $264,804.77 in funds were awarded.

- **Access Grant to the Green Mountain Library Consortium**
  The Green Mountain Library Consortium (GMLC) comprises 160 member-libraries and provides access to e-resources including eBooks and eAudiobooks. The Department awarded $218,050 to GMLC to help them reduce wait times for eBooks and eAudiobooks. Demand for these resources on GMLC's ListenUpVermont (LUV) eBook and eAudiobook platform increased as a direct result from the pandemic, and this grant helped expand access to these resources for many Vermonters.

- **Personal Protective Equipment**
  The Department procured clear masks and air quality meters and distributed these to public and school libraries to support safe operations during the pandemic.

The added support during the pandemic was necessary not just for libraries, but the communities they serve. As Carolyn Picazio, Director of the Kellogg Hubbard Library testified "libraries are crucial during emergencies. They provide comfortable temperatures (heat/cool), power to charge your devices, a place to attend your work Zoom meeting, and internet/Wi-Fi so that you can check to see if your home power/heat has been restored. Kellogg Hubbard has distributed hundreds of rapid antigen tests and masks." Sharon Ellingwood White, former Director of the Alice M. Ward Memorial Library in Cannan, and Catherine Goldsmith of the Starksboro Public Library brought vaccine clinics to their public library communities, who otherwise would have had to drive over an hour to access this necessary medical service. Furthermore, White shared that "it is often through our library that contacts are made to the rest of our community in the area of public health…We are recognized as a partner with knowledge and integrity."

Three years after the dawn of the COVID pandemic, many library staff in Vermont have incorporated a "pivot mentality" into their everyday lives and try to be ready to change course quickly in response to challenges that arise as they provide library services. Library staff rely on accurate resources and timely communication to facilitate those shifts.

Conclusion

Much like businesses and other public facing entities, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted library service in significant ways. Vermont's public libraries acted on the best available evidence in light of the conditions in their communities and viability of their library buildings to provide services. As vital anchor institutions in towns and communities, library directors and employees reacted accordingly by opening the doors as quickly as was allowable under health guidelines. When having the doors open was not possible, innovative library services emerged, including curbside pickup, outdoor programs, and limited browsing. Wi-Fi was extended and left on at libraries to provide this service to people outside the building.

The Department of Libraries' role sharing information expanded. Online meetings, classes, and consultations took the place of formerly in-person meetings. The Department leveraged federal funds to provide safety equipment to libraries. The expansion of movie streaming licenses provided a crucial resource for schools struggling to get back to learning.

Significant lessons from the pandemic have informed the library community in the case of another such health emergency. Of course, the pandemic occurred concurrently with the increased impacts of climate change. Recent flooding in Vermont has only underscored the information presented to the Working Group from State of Vermont emergency managers and VACDaRN, the cultural facilities emergency group in Vermont. Communications, including who to call and how to proceed during a flood or other climate-related emergency is at the core of any emergency preparedness plan for libraries. A forward-looking philosophy of mitigation, resilience, and readiness must be a high priority for all Vermont libraries.

Safety

The topic of Safety was discussed at the Working Group meeting on Friday, July 28, 2023. The Working Group heard reports from Department of Libraries staff on the topics of Safety in Libraries and Report Writing. Written comments were shared with the Working Group by one community member.

In March and April 2023, the House and Senate Committees on Education asked the Working Group Chair to testify on miscellaneous Senate Bill 133, An act relating to miscellaneous changes to education law, and specifically on language in the bill that would add the topic of gun safety in libraries to the charge of the Working Group. The Department had also heard from Vermont library staff at a "Large Libraries" meeting that they wanted the topic of public and staff safety in libraries to be considered by the Working Group. Through dialog with the committees, the Working Group chair agreed to add the topic of "Safety in Libraries" to the scope of the Working Group. The Working Group scheduled a meeting on this topic on July 28, 2023, and put out a call for written comments in advance of that meeting.

While the Working Group received written comments on safety from one person following its July 28, 2023, meeting, no library directors, trustees, or members of the public provided written comments to the Working Group specifically on safety in libraries in advance of the meeting, nor did anyone attend the meeting to share oral comments. The lack of written or oral comments was unusual as the Working Group followed its regular practices for soliciting feedback on this topic.

During the meeting, the Working Group learned general information that Department staff share with library directors, staff, and trustees on the topic of safety through its continuing education program. This information includes safety tips specific to one-person libraries often found in Vermont's small, rural communities; books and web resources on safety in libraries; and safety trainings provided by the Department and other continuing education platforms for librarians (including the Public Library Association, Library Journal, Library 2.0, and the University of Wisconsin's iSchool Continuing Education program).

Department staff shared general safety tips for library staff in buildings of all sizes including:

- Be aware of who is in the building at all times.

- Create sightlines throughout the building as much as possible.

- Never allow yourself to be trapped. Have more than one way to get out from behind the desk or out of your desk, your office, and the building.

- Never count money out in public.

- Lock away staff valuables— never leave them where they can be seen by the public.

- Share the library key only as needed and be aware of who has a key to the library building.

- Establish code words shared with other staff that let them know you need help.

- Document every incident that takes place in your library.

- Seek training to understand warning signs and potentially problematic behaviors, how to de-escalate situations, and tips for talking with people when they're agitated or upset.

Department staff shared safety tips for staff of small and one-person libraries including:

- Never work alone during the library's open hours.

  o Recruit a list of volunteers.

  o Schedule a volunteer to be at the library whenever just one staff member is scheduled to open the library to the public.

  o Have back-ups available.

  o Have one trustee assigned to each day as a back-up.

- Keep the door locked if you are working alone before or after hours.

- Establish contact with nearby businesses that are open for support when the library is open.

- Establish a list of trustees or other local people you can call for support if needed.

- Take Self-Defense Training.

- Engage a security expert to do a safety evaluation at your library and provide staff education.

- Consider adding security cameras outside your building and develop a clear policy around their location, usage, and viewing and disposing of footage.

- Consider installing a building alarm system.

- Install outdoor lighting to make evening building exits safer.

- Install a panic button that alerts a security company or the local police. Consider carrying the panic button with you.

The Department has created a webpage with these tips, lists of books and online materials, and training resources on this important topic for library staff and trustees.

(https://libraries.vermont.gov/services/public-libraries) under Safety Resources for Public Libraries)

During the July 28, 2023, meeting, Working Group members observed that when talking about safety in libraries at prior meetings, some members of the community have demonstrated a degree of trauma response. Working Group members hypothesized that sharing this type of experience in a public setting or a public meeting might have felt too personal for many members of the community. Given the lack of specific comments from the public on the topic of safety in libraries, the Working Group kept its consideration general and focused on broad topics of safety and on recommendations to improve safety for the public and library staff.

Safety incidents in libraries are handled locally by library staff, library boards, school administrators, and local law enforcement. The Department does not generally receive reports of safety incidents in libraries in Vermont, nor does statute require it to do so.

While there are some individuals and companies that provide training on the topic of safety in libraries, it is challenging to find experts either at the state or national level on this topic who use evidence-based methods to develop their training materials.

Both trainers and library staff frequently conflate medical issues and safety issues, and some of the information shared in prior Working Group meetings has blurred that line as well. For example, when a person is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, they might threaten library staff, which would be a safety incident. However, a person who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol who is not threatening others would be best categorized as a medical situation in the library. That said, medical situations can be disruptive to library service. Medical situations involving mental health and substance use incidents can be challenging for library staff to respond to and do have the potential to escalate— but not all mental health situations are safety issues. The Working Group and the Department have heard from library staff that additional training on responding to mental health concerns that arise in their buildings and on de-escalating situations would be helpful.

The Working Group heard accounts from library staff at other meetings of situations in which they had felt unsafe due to a delay in response from local or state police to calls from the library about people who were having mental health emergencies in the building or on library grounds. In one situation described to the Working Group, it was not until a member of the public who was experiencing significant mental health distress and disrupting library service began disrobing that the local police responded. Library staff expressed feelings of being on the front lines of the mental health and drug

challenges faced by the community but were not treated as partners in this work by other community organizations and law enforcement.

During the meeting on July 28, 2023, the Working Group Chair Catherine Delneo shared, "The topic of safety in libraries is very important to me. I feel that all members of the public should feel safe and welcome in libraries. I feel that all library staff deserve a respectful, peaceful, and safe working environment. Like all of you, I recognize that these desires I have are aspirational. Like you, I acknowledge that librarians have long been challenged to ensure public safety and that the trustees have long been challenged to ensure staff safety in libraries. My sense is that this concern is particularly challenging in a public library environment on a day-to-day basis, but school and academic library environments also have the potential for significant and often more extreme safety challenges—including gun violence."

Small libraries in Vermont, many of which are rural, face particular safety challenges. These libraries often serve small communities and have limited hours. Staffing levels at these libraries are frequently very low and they are sometimes served by just one paid staff member who serves as the library director. Vermont's rural and small library directors have shared concerns about working in buildings by themselves, particularly in the evening and at night. They report to Department staff that they feel isolated and are concerned that the police would not be able to respond quickly if there was a security incident.

> *"As somebody that worked in a small library for almost 19 years alone, a three-story building, alone, luck has a lot to do with it. State Police are over a mountain away. You're on your own out there and I think that's something that needs to be heard."*
> *—Jeannette Bair, Retired Director, Rochester Public Library*

Written comments received following the meeting from Catherine Goldsmith, Director of the Starksboro Public Library highlighted the challenges of working in a small, rural library alone. Goldsmith acknowledged that it would be best "to eliminate this practice, but it isn't always possible." Goldsmith pointed out that library staff should practice good judgement and think about personal safety when deciding which tasks to do while alone in a library. She wrote, "We try not to climb ladders, counters and bookshelves while we are alone, especially when setting up for programs on off hours... We've all probably heard stories about those accidents." For both personal safety and for emergency responses to incidents in a small, rural libraries, Goldsmith recommended the use of a panic button.

Goldsmith related a story of a safety incident that took place "Many years ago, while I was working in Chittenden County, a librarian in a neighboring library was knocked unconscious by a person with mental health issues who had hid from her while she

closed the building for the night. It can happen anywhere." Goldsmith shared that, "What concerned me in that instance is that her board wanted to keep the incident a secret."

Most large libraries in Vermont are located in urban and suburban communities. At the Large Libraries meetings hosted by the Department, library directors frequently discuss concerns about patron behavior that makes it challenging for them to maintain regular public service— including drug use, drug overdoses, and mental health challenges that pose a safety threat to library staff and patrons. They regularly share accounts of patrons whose social service needs have gone unmet and who then tip into threatening and dangerous behavior in a public library.

Challenging behaviors in libraries of all sizes seem to ratchet up a notch when a weapon is—or might be—present. A person sleeping on the grass outside a public library would not feel like a safety and security matter. However, a person sleeping on the grass with a hatchet next to them, as Fletcher Free Library Director Mary Danko described in her written testimony, caused the day to take a "concerning turn."

People who don't work in libraries are often surprised to learn of how fraught conversations about everyday things can become at the library. Working Group member Jeannette Bair shared an experience from her time as the Director of the Rochester Public Library in which a person who was upset about an overdue fine threatened to go home, get a gun, and then return to the library. Overdue fines seem relatively small, and not a matter for concern for many people in the community—but for others, the library has just asked them to pay another bill that they didn't plan on and simply cannot afford. When an upset patron unleashes anger toward a library staff member, the tone of the entire library changes. What had seemed like a safe place to learn has suddenly turned into an unsafe place where other people's behavior is unpredictable and frightening.

Vermont's public library staff are sharing anecdotes with Department staff that seem to reflect an increase in the number of times they need to call the police to support them in making sure their library spaces are safe. Increasingly, public librarians in Vermont are expressing concerns for the safety of their patrons, staff, and program presenters. Safety concerns around public library programming are increasing as public libraries strive to expand the diversity of the programs they provide for the community. In June 2023, Vermont poet Toussaint St. Negritude said he was "distraught and concerned for his safety after being targeted by protesters at a queer poetry reading he hosted at Lyndonville's public library." (https://vtdigger.org/2023/06/14/after-being-accosted-by-protestors-at-a-queer-poetry-reading-a-vermont-artist-fears-for-his-safety)

With the politicization of book bans and protests at public programs, library staff across the country have found themselves at the center of a culture war. As tension rises around the selection of books and scheduling of programs for the public, library staff across the country are increasingly concerned about being harassed or even physically hurt. Even though there have not been book challenges that have escalated dramatically in Vermont, watching this play out on the national stage is taking a toll on Vermont's library staff and leading them to feel less safe in their libraries. "Amid all the

skirmishes over individual book titles and challenge policies, it's easy to miss the toll it's taking on librarians, kids, and the country…. countless other librarians around the nation who are also feeling the heat are also quitting in droves, leaving libraries short-staffed. It's all driving up the human, civic, and financial costs embroiled in the battle over books." (https://www.npr.org/2023/08/11/1192034923/the-plot-thickens-the-battle-over-books-comes-at-a-cost)

The Working Group discussed Vermont's laws around criminal threatening (13 V.S.A. § 1702 https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/13/039/01702) that were amended during the 2022 Legislative Session and now offer more protection to the staff of municipal public libraries, school libraries, and academic libraries.

> "d) A person who violates subsection (a) of this section by making a threat that places any person in reasonable apprehension that death, serious bodily injury, or sexual assault will occur at a public or private school; postsecondary education institution; place of worship; polling place during election activities; the Vermont State House; or any federal, State, or municipal building shall be imprisoned not more than two years or fined not more than $2,000.00, or both."

The amendment does not apply, however to the staff of incorporated public libraries, which make up roughly one-third of public libraries in Vermont, because they are typically not housed in "municipal buildings."

Conclusion

Safety presents particular challenges in a state that has isolated rural libraries and urban libraries. The preponderance of libraries that are staffed by one or two people in areas not easily served by police puts library workers in a vulnerable position. And while all libraries increasingly find themselves on the front lines of social services, urban libraries regularly encounter members of the public experiencing crises. The increase in homelessness, the opioid epidemic, and the threat of violence due to the politicization of book bans and library programs are all readily visible at libraries in Vermont.

Older buildings with poor sightlines and isolated areas can be potential dangers for both library visitors and staff alike. Mitigation of risk in libraries can be difficult, as library workers are not trained safety professionals. Experience with safety can vary among library workers and even when best practices are followed incidents still occur.

Legal protections have been granted to library staff working in municipal buildings, but their peers working in non-municipal buildings are not extended the same protections.

Social Services

The topic of Social Services was discussed at the Working Group meeting on Friday, March 24th, 2023. The Working Group heard from four community members. Written comments were shared with the Working Group by three community members.

Defining "Social Services"

The term "social services" has no strict, legal definition. Rather, "social services" is a vernacular expression that typically encompasses a range of activities focused on addressing unmet social needs, most often—but not exclusively—for economically and socially disadvantaged residents. Areas such as food and housing insecurity, addiction, harm reduction, domestic violence, physical and mental health, child welfare, economic well-being, and employment fall under this umbrella. In Vermont, a diverse array of community groups, including local, regional, statewide, and national non-profit organizations, and multiple state government agencies all work to provide services to mitigate the impacts of these needs on Vermonters.

For this report, the use of the term "social services" reflects the understanding outlined above: social services are activities undertaken to address economic, physical, psychological, and material needs of residents that are not otherwise being met.

Social Services and Vermont Public Libraries

All Vermont public libraries—rural, urban, and suburban—serve as points of contact for Vermonters in need of social services. Community testimony on the topic highlights the demands placed on library staff as a result, and the necessity for libraries to receive greater support to address these needs.

Vermont statute identifies no role for public libraries to provide social services. As expressed in 22 V.S.A. § 67, libraries are "essential to the general enlightenment of citizens in a democracy" and cites where Vermonters "should have access to the educational, cultural, recreational, informational, and research benefits" public libraries provide. The statute also highlights the role of libraries as "Community centers" that "may serve as forums and exhibition areas for the exchange of ideas that encourage the growth of artistic, educational, literary, and scientific knowledge as well as the intercultural understanding of the Vermont citizenry." State statute defines the role of libraries as focused on information, edification, and recreation.

Vermont library community members Barbara Ball (Director, Windsor Public Library), Wendy Hysko (Director, Brownell Library, Essex Junction), Margaret Woodruf (Director, Charlotte Public Library), Carolyn Picazio (Co-Director, Kellogg-Hubbard), Sharon Ellingwood White (former Director, Alice M. Ward Memorial Library, Canaan), Cindy

Weber (retired Director, Stowe Free Library), Catherine Goldsmith (Director, Starksboro Public Library), and Randal Smathers (Director, Rutland Free Public Library), testified that within the scope of their statutory charge, Vermont libraries do provide "informational" support to patrons to identify and access social services through online resources and by directing patrons to materials and organizations that provide aid. However, the testimony submitted to the Working Group also identifies ways in which library staff across Vermont find themselves addressing a range of social service needs beyond those that can be satisfied by providing access to, and assistance accessing information.

In her testimony, Picazio of the Kellogg-Hubbard Library in Montpelier stated the following: "because we are a free, public space we are often called upon to act as de-facto social workers, and responding to issues with people in crisis, or who may be using controlled substances, is becoming an increasing part of what we do." Cindy Weber articulated that public libraries are "the third place (beyond work and home) where communities gather for quiet reflection, learning, and socializing." Picazio identified what many others stated or implied: that because public libraries are that third place or "free, public space," they serve their communities in a wide—and sometimes unexpected—variety of ways.

As expressed in community testimony, in recent years libraries have come to act as sites for food distribution (Ward, Woodruff), warming and/or cooling shelters (Ball, Picazio, Weber, White), vaccine clinics (Goldsmith, White), and COVID test distribution (Ball). Testimony framed these extended community responsibilities as sometimes-challenging points of pride for library staff, and as representative of the deep integration of libraries in their communities, which is a natural extension of what libraries do for the localities they serve.

However, Picazio said, because public libraries are open, public gathering places, public library staff have direct, daily contact with people in need and, often, in acute crisis. Community member testimony emphasizes the difficulty and demands placed on staff and patrons by librarians serving on the front lines of social services as untrained, "de-facto social workers" (Picazio). Testimony repeatedly identified the human impacts of three, often overlapping, factors at the core of the challenges faced by library staff: housing insecurity, mental illness, and active addiction (Ball, Hysko, Picazio, Smathers, Weber). Of course, for urban libraries in the United States and Vermont these issues are nothing new, but testimony presented to the Working Group demonstrates how rural communities, and therefore their libraries, increasingly feel the impact of acute need as well (Ball, Weber). In addition to the three factors identified above, testimony also addressed the role public libraries have come to serve as sites for after school childcare and the disruptions caused by unsupervised youth (Ball, Hysko).

Homelessness, Mental Illness, and Addiction

Certainly not all unhoused Vermonters suffer from addiction and mental illness, nor are all those suffering from addiction or mental illness homeless. However, these factors, independently or in combination, cause widespread impacts on libraries. The housing crisis in Vermont, in conjunction with Vermont's overtaxed, often geographically limited network of social service providers, means that not all those in need can find assistance. Public libraries, as safe, warm, free spaces, often become a refuge for those without homes. Weber and Smathers outline the challenges their institutions face in response to the needs of their unhoused patrons who suffer with mental illness. Testimony from Hysko echoed much of what Weber and Smathers shared and also described the strong local support system available to the Brownell Library and the training opportunities open to the staff, highlighting the great variation in resources across Vermont.

Weber provided an overview of both the limited resources for social support in rural Lamoille County and the impact of these limitations on the Stowe Free Library. In it she presents examples of difficult staff/patron and patron/patron interactions and stresses the divide between what librarians are equipped to do and the needs that frequently confront the staff: "We're well equipped to run a library. We're not well equipped to run social service things for individuals. I don't think that should be on us anymore. I don't think that should be the onus of librarians."

Smathers presented a parallel set of challenges that emerge in urban Rutland related to patron behavior, in particular the difficulty library staff have faced in obtaining support from local mental health agencies and their resulting reliance on the Rutland Police Department to assist when the behavior of patrons in crisis escalates. "We need support. We need people to take this seriously. Either Mary Danko or I are going to have someone die in our library because we don't have support. This is broken."

Fletcher Free Library Director Mary Danko wrote "today's librarians and library staff find themselves dealing with adrenaline-rushing situations that demand nuanced thinking around patron behavior, including mental health and substance abuse issues. Libraries cannot function as day shelters or social service providers, and we can't be constantly worried about potential overdoses or health hazards like needles in the library."

> *"I want to emphasize that we are dedicated to providing compassionate and supportive service to our community. However, the impact of these challenging situations on our staff's mental health, morale, and well-being cannot be overlooked."*
> *—Mary Danko, Fletcher Free Library, Burlington*

Vermont resident Laura Massell shared in written comments to the Working Group that the state should "establish safe injection sites apart from each town's local library so that libraries can remain the safe, welcoming, free information-sharing spaces entire communities need and deserve."

Massell also highlighted the need for "local government and state support for training for mental health stress mitigation and support for library staff who face increasing responsibilities and exposure to the devastating and relentless plight of opiate addiction."

Smathers emphasized the importance of interagency communication when responding to people in crisis at the public library, and how on those occasions where communication ran smoothly it resulted in positive outcomes for both patrons and staff:

> "The other occasion— recently— was how the system should work. A longtime, emotionally troubled, user arrived wailing loudly, sobbing about how her life was useless— and hoping to print out a train ticket. Unable to work with her because of the level of her distress, we called the police, who referred us to Rutland Mental Health, who referred us to the crisis intervention team. Their staffer arrived promptly and between us we were able to calm the user down— and print her train ticket! What worked? Communication, communication, communication..."

In somewhat of a contrast, Hysko discussed both the challenges the Brownell Library in Essex Junction faces as a library in Chittenden County, and the broader network of support available to libraries in that county to support the needs of community members using the library who are in crisis.

Regarding the regional disparities in social service coverage and outside support available to libraries, Hysko stated, "the layout of Vermont libraries is very unique with the number of rural locations we have. We're really fortunate here in Essex Junction to have a police department for one thing…" as well as describing the emphasis the Essex Police Department places on de-escalation and community policing. Hysko also described Brownell's access to Howard Center social workers through the Essex Police, the impact of services provided by the Essex Community Justice Center and the training opportunities that have been available to Brownell staff. Although still overwhelmed by the needs they encounter, Hysko reported that Brownell staff are, for a range of reasons, much better supported.

Conclusion

The Working Group heard that Vermont librarians care deeply about the communities they serve and feel that individuals in crisis should receive the help they need. Vermont librarians are also straining under the demands placed upon them to serve as frontline social service providers, particularly to patrons in acute crisis. Caught between a desire

to help others and the limitations of their ability to do so, they request support to address community needs they are poorly equipped to resolve.

> *"It's very emotional. Very hard when you want to solve everybody's problems, when you want to give resources, when you want to help, but there is nothing you can do. And then you feel for your own safety and the safety of your staff."—Cindy Weber, former director, Stowe Free Library*

In response to the written and oral comments it heard from the community, the Working Group acknowledges the following:

- Broader demands on social services have a direct relationship to increased pressure on libraries to provide services and support,

- The emergence of libraries as de-facto social service providers is outside the training and scope of work of the majority of staff members in Vermont libraries and is extraordinarily challenging for them to address,

- Unresolved social service issues can easily become public safety matters,

- Vermont's rural communities have limited access to social services when compared to our urban and suburban areas, and

- Libraries are challenged when serving as de facto after school childcare.

The Working Group calls upon state and local governments to recognize that Vermont's libraries are increasingly an integral part of our social safety net, serving as frontline sites for social service intervention in our communities. Libraries need support to address these demands in the form of clear lines of communication within municipalities, dedicated staffing, opportunities for training and crisis intervention support from outside partners.

Gratitude

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