

Report from the State Librarian Catherine Delneo to the Vermont Board of Libraries

January 9, 2024

Working Group On the Status of Libraries in Vermont Report Completed

The Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont issued its final report to the House and Senate Committees on Education on November 1, 2023.

Per its establishing Legislation, “The Working Group is formed with the intent of strengthening and supporting libraries of all sizes and improving library services for the public.”

The Working Group was tasked with studying and reporting on nearly every area of library services in Vermont’s public, school, and academic libraries.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Department of Libraries staff who contributed to the success of our study and report by presenting information within their subject expertise. I also want to thank Assistant State Librarians Tom McMurdo and Janette Shaffer for working with me to identify experts and schedule their presentations to the Working Group. This work was initiated by Tom McMurdo during his role as interim State Library. I appreciate Tom’s vision in organizing the meetings of the Working Group by topic and his leadership in beginning the meetings as required by the establishing statute.

The Department’s Consultants contributed significantly to the success of the report, and I greatly appreciate their help in gathering data and presenting on it to provide a framework for the Working Group’s conversations. Their good work helped the report include quantitative data that underscored the qualitative comments we received from Vermonters.

The press noticed the publication of the report, and I’ve been interviewed on two occasions by Vermont Public.

On November 8, 2023, I was joined by Christopher Kaufman, Working Group member and Executive Director of Vermont Humanities, for an on-air interview on Vermont Edition with Mikaela Lafrak. <https://www.vermontpublic.org/show/vermont-edition/2023-11-08/vermonts-state-librarian-discusses-new-report-on-status-of-libraries-from-funding-to-technology>

More recently, Vermont Public intern Anna Berg interviewed me for a piece titled “Vermont librarians are providing more social services than ever. And they need help” which aired on December 18, 2023. <https://www.vermontpublic.org/local-news/2023-12-18/vermont-librarians-are-providing-more-social-services-than-ever-and-they-need-help>

As Chair of the Working Group, I presented an overview of the report and its recommendations to the legislature in a session for library staff statewide, held on December 22, 2023. Senator Ruth Hardy, who was instrumental in the formation of the Working Group, was in attendance at this webinar and shared that she and Senator Gulick plan to introduce legislation based on the Working Group’s recommendations to the Legislature this session. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4l7FOncEjs&feature=youtu.be>

The House Committee on Education invited me to present on the report of the Working Group on the first day of the Legislative Session, December 3, 2024.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qejW7f8U14g&feature=youtu.be>

December 2023 Storm Update

No significant damage from the December 18, 2023 storm was reported to the Department by public libraries.

Moretown Elementary School reported some water intrusion in the library during the December storm, but Moretown librarian Nancy Willard was on hand to move books to higher shelves and reported that the school's insurance will cover any carpet or furnishings that need replacement.

On New Year's Day, Department of Libraries consultants April Shaw and Kevin Unrath volunteered to assist the Moretown Elementary School library in reshelving books and moving furniture back in place as the school prepared to open doors to students the next day. This "all-hands-on-deck" effort to be able to help students regain a sense of normalcy after the flooding disrupted their final week in the classroom before Winter break.

FiberConnect Grants Update

As of January 8, 2024, all but 8 of the public libraries eligible for grants associated with the decommissioning of the FiberConnect network have applied for those funds. Department staff is in the process of issuing awards to support these libraries in transitioning to local internet service providers.

Staffing Update

The Department is currently recruiting for four positions – two permanent and two limited-service positions.

We are currently interviewing candidates for our vacant Executive Staff Assistant position, which was vacated on the first of December when Gina Hruban moved to a permanent position with the office of the Secretary of State.

We are also interviewing for both limited-service positions associated with our federal capital projects program.

We are hopeful to fill these key positions and are happy to report that our recruitments have generated a lot of interest.

In the midst of this hiring activity, we recently learned that our Contracts and Grants Administrator position will be vacant soon as the staff member in that role, Lucie Fortier, has accepted an exciting promotional opportunity with the Vermont Community Broadband Board.

Many thanks to Assistant State Librarian Janette Shaffer, who has stepped in to lead these recruitments. I really appreciate Janette's help with these recruitments, which are outside her regular scope and in addition to her regular workload.

Public Library Capital Projects Update

The Department plans to open the grant application for the \$16.4M Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund to public libraries later in January.