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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Membership in the Maine Regional Library System

The Maine State Legislature established the Maine Regional Library System (MRLS) in 1973 (Title 27, Chapter 4 Subsections 113-117). The mission of the MRLS is to promote and improve access to library services for all Maine residents. The Maine Library Commission was authorized to create districts as part of the regional system. There are currently 3 districts, Northern, Central and Southern. Membership in the district is voluntary, free and open to all types of libraries.

Each district has an advisory council known as the district council. This council serves as an advisory body for the district, develops and evaluates the district plan of service, serves as liaison to the towns in the district, makes recommendations to the Maine Library Commission, assists in the development of a comprehensive district plan (district goals and objectives) and advises in the selection of an area reference and resource center for each district.

By law, the district councils must meet two times a year. At the spring meeting, the council elects an executive board which meets four times a year. The executive board works closely with the district consultant and serves as a communication conduit between the council and consultant. The district consultant provides consulting services to member libraries, studies the needs of the district and makes recommendations to the district council, coordinates services among all types of libraries, provides liaison between the district, other districts and the Maine State Library, encourages local initiative and commitment to regional cooperative library services, works with area reference and resource center staff in planning reference and interlibrary loan services and helps evolve a district plan of service.

The basic dynamic of district membership is simple, yet the results can be powerful. A public library agrees to certain membership requirements, including the agreement to serve all system residents equitably. In return, the library district provides a wide range of primarily state-funded services that enhance local library service. Ideally, through this relationship, all residents of the state gain improved library service, as well as the ability to use whichever library or libraries best serve their needs. Municipal libraries participate in library systems because their communities' residents benefit from this arrangement.

Cooperation vs. Competition

Competition among municipalities, counties, and other divisions of government is common. Unfortunately, that competition often leads to missed opportunities

for cooperation, resource sharing, and economies of scale through cooperative projects.

Libraries have embraced cooperation instead of competition, and local library users (and taxpayers) are the beneficiaries. In all cooperative efforts, sacrifices are sometimes required. Often these sacrifices are for the greater benefit of regional or statewide library users.

Membership Requirements for Libraries

Your library must meet these requirements to be a member of the Maine Regional Library System (MRLS):

General Membership Criteria

District membership is free to all types of libraries located within the geographic boundary of the district. Any library may join the Maine Regional Library System if it meets the following criteria:

1. Be a part of an organization or institution that has a legal basis for operation and provides information resources;
2. Have a written mission statement and service objectives;
3. Have an established funding base;
4. Be authorized to participate by its appropriate administrative authority;
5. Have established and posted hours of service;
6. Have a fixed location;
7. Have a permanent, paid (either a salary or a stipend) library director with library services training and who is responsible for the administration of library services;
8. Have an organized collection of information and material accessible for use by its designated clientele and/or the public;
9. Agree to the terms and conditions of the Maine Regional Library System membership agreement as established by the Maine Library Commission. This agreement shall include certification by each member library that it meets the minimum eligibility requirements for participation, agrees to participate in interlibrary loan activities within the state in accordance with the National Interlibrary Loan Code for the United States and agrees to provide data on the use of regional and statewide library materials and services

Public Library Membership Criteria

Public libraries seeking district membership must adhere to the Core Public Library Standards approved by the Maine Library Commission. These standards are:

1. Is a non-profit organization with a governing board or a town/municipal department
2. Writes and adheres to basic library policies

3. Has a mission statement defining the services available to the community
4. Is supported in whole or in part by public funds
5. The governing board of a non-profit library has written bylaws
6. The governing board of a non-profit library hires/appoints the library director/librarian and delegates to the director the full professional responsibility for administering and managing the library
7. The board has considered purchasing Director's and Officer's Liability and General Liability Insurance to protect themselves from potential damage claims
8. Financial record keeping provides adequate internal controls including periodic review or audit
9. Has a physical presence with the facilities necessary to support a collection, staff, and programs and complies with building, fire, safety, sanitation and other applicable federal, state and local codes and legal requirements with at least one well maintained public restroom onsite
10. Has established and posted hours of service in which the services of the staff are available to the public year round of no less than 12 hours per week and a clear external sign identifying the building as a library
11. Has telephone service and a published telephone number
12. Has a permanent, paid library (either salary or stipend) director who is responsible for the administration of library services
13. Files an annual report as required by the Maine Library Commission
14. Has a staff member who subscribes, reads and responds to either MELIBS or MEINFO
15. Supports staff continuing education
16. Measures and evaluates the effectiveness of library services in relation to the changing needs of the community
17. Endeavors to have 2 people scheduled at all times for safety purposes
18. Has at least one public access computer connected to the Internet
19. Staff compensation is based on benchmarks such as the pay scales of comparable city or school department positions
20. Has an organized collection of materials
21. Offers regularly scheduled public programming such as story times, book clubs, etc.
22. Adheres to nationally accepted professional standards for collection maintenance
23. Provides an up-to-date automated catalog utilizing the current international standard AACRII/RDA, MARC format and recognized professional standards for classification and subject organization
24. Maintains communication with community leaders, interest groups, agencies, etc. and regularly informs them of library activities

The Library Development Division of the Maine State Library monitors compliance with these requirements.

How to Be a Good District Member

Your library must respond to the needs of the residents of the service area. This can be a very difficult task, often requiring the balancing of many competing needs and interests. Your library can help the library district with this difficult task by communicating your local needs effectively and constructively and by cooperating in district planning and problem-solving activities. Your board can help by encouraging your library staff to attend district workshops and contribute their time and talents to district committees. Your board should also budget for paid staff time and travel costs for these activities.

Your board may also decide that your library should participate in shared services (such as a shared automated system) and cooperative activities (such as the sharing of summer reading program performers). Cooperation can often result in better, more cost-effective services to the public—as well as services that would not even be possible without cooperation.

You, as an individual trustee, can also benefit from attendance at district workshops and can contribute to the strength and success of the district by volunteering to serve on your library district's board.

Sources of Additional Information

- Your District Consultant
- Library Development Division staff