

MVLS 2016 Planning Process

The MVLS 2016 Planning process began in late 2015 and was completed in the summer of 2016. The rationale for the planning process was the development of a new Plan of Service, which will be submitted to the State Education Department in October 2016. However, since the state required plan doesn't lend itself to the development of new initiatives or changes in processes, the planning process went far beyond the development of a new state plan. In essence, the planning was an activity in community engagement; the community in question being all MVLS stakeholders including member library directors, staff and trustees.

The Planning Process

The process began with outreach to member library directors and boards. MVLS Director Eric Trahan contacted all directors and board presidents, providing information on MVLS services, the planning process, and potential service enhancements. Eric requested time at member library board meetings to provide more in-depth information and to answer questions. Between November 2015 and February 2016, Eric met with 11 of the 14 member library boards.

MVLS engaged Schenectady public relations and communications firm D2 Media to assist with the community engagement aspect of plan development. Working with D2, MVLS developed a survey that was distributed to all member library directors and board members, as well as any staff members invited by their director. The survey sought input on three types of questions: rating of current MVLS services, rating of MVLS communications and rating potential expanded services. A total of 57 individuals responded: 13 member library directors, 10 member library staff and 34 member library trustees.

After the survey results were compiled, focus group listening sessions were scheduled to get more detailed input. Five sessions were held; one each in Johnstown, Canajoharie and Cobleskill and 2 in Schenectady. A total of approximately 50 individuals attended listening sessions, providing a mix of member library directors, staff and trustees. Sessions were moderated and results compiled by D2 Media

Process Results

The survey and focus group response summaries are on the MVLS website at: <http://www.mvls.info/insidemvls/reports-and-budgets/>. These results address all three aspects of the process: perceptions of MVLS communications and culture, perceptions of current MVLS Services and information on areas where respondents want more emphasis.

MVLS Communications. This is an area where different groups have very different responses. Traditionally, nearly all MVLS communication has been through member library directors, and directors universally rate communication with MVLS as good or excellent. In fact, a few directors feel there is too much communication. On the other hand, member library trustees and particularly SCPL staff report feeling out-of-the loop and rate communication as fair or poor.

Existing MVLS Services. Most respondents from all response groups put a high value on all MVLS services that are used by their library. Sometimes member library trustees don't have a clear idea of MVLS services. The services that are most valued are Automation and Computer Services, Shared Collections (especially e-resources) and Youth Services.

Services to Expand. Three services areas were clearly identified for emphasis by all respondent groups. A majority of all groups asked MVLS to place emphasis on developing shared e-resources, introducing new technology and improving advocacy and community engagement.

New Initiatives

Based on these results, MVLS is committed to expanding and changing services in the following ways:

Internal Communications. MVLS will work to improve communication with member library trustees and with SCPL staff. Initial efforts in this area may include:

- Send pertinent communications to member library board presidents in addition to directors
- Develop a periodic email newsletter for all member library trustees
- Send pertinent communications to SCPL staff in addition to the director
- Have an MVLS presence at selected internal SCPL meetings

External Communications. MVLS will experiment with ways to improve the general public perception and awareness of public libraries. It is important to note that this is in no way meant to replace individual library efforts to promote their programs and services. Rather, it is designed to raise the general public consciousness of the importance and relevance of libraries. Possible initiatives include:

- Develop general, mass media announcements: PSAs, underwriting, etc.
- Develop initiatives to celebrate & promote “calendar” celebrations - National Library Week, Library Card Signup Month, etc.
- Develop an initiative to collect and disseminate library impact stories from member libraries
- Participate in wider initiatives like the NYLA library ROI and ALA Libraries Transform and Outside the Lines projects

Service Enhancements. MVLS will continue to support and develop all services included in the official Plan of Service, and - per the responses to the survey - will particularly emphasize e-resources and technology developments.

Member Library Community Engagement & Sustainability Project. MVLS will develop a project designed to impact every member library in the following ways:

- promote community engagement and planning
- improve services based on that planning
- communicate the library’s value to the community
- plan for and work toward sustainable local funding.