

MLS Strategic Plan 2013-2015 – A Snapshot

The Massachusetts Library System (MLS) is a state-funded, collaborative organization that serves more than 1,600 member libraries and their staffs that span all library types and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.



We will use this plan:

- To focus our energy on programs, services and innovations that align with member needs.
- To think big.
- To remain agile in an environment poised for change.
- To evaluate new initiatives, opportunities and partnerships.
- To concentrate on our goals and eliminate activities that will distract us.
- To demonstrate inclusiveness.
- To work together with libraries and our allies on a shared vision for Massachusetts libraries.
- To communicate progress.
- To know when we have achieved our goals.

Strategic Plan 2013-2015

Massachusetts Library System

Who We Are and Whom We Serve

Massachusetts Library System is a state-funded, collaborative organization that serves more than 1,600 member libraries and their staffs spanning all library types in the Commonwealth from locations in eastern and western Massachusetts.

Core Values

Our core values provide a shared understanding of our beliefs, roles and approaches.

- **Libraries are essential.** Librarians and libraries are essential contributors and partners in Massachusetts' communities. MLS helps libraries to demonstrate their value through active participation and leadership in local, state, regional and national advocacy efforts.
- **Our members represent a variety of communities and interests.** To best serve Massachusetts' libraries, MLS balances statewide service with targeted programs based on shared interests, geographies and community characteristics.
- **Our members have a voice.** MLS works hard to earn trust from the Massachusetts library community. Member engagement is a critical component of MLS core services and strategy to ensure that members feel involved in decisions.
- **We collaborate with strong allies.** MLS partners with the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, the Library for the Commonwealth, library networks and professional associations as well as with other organizations in its efforts.
- **We provide leadership to facilitate member library success.** MLS plays a leading role in bringing innovation and encouraging collaboration among members to make libraries and librarians stronger.

Core Purpose

The Massachusetts Library System, a state-supported collaborative, fosters cooperation, communication, innovation and sharing among member libraries of all types. The MLS promotes equitable access to excellent library services and resources for all who live, work or study in Massachusetts.

MLS makes libraries and librarians stronger.

Strategic Themes

We will focus on services, initiatives and partnerships and provide leadership to advance these themes:

1. Help libraries to explore innovative services and technologies.
2. Promote awareness of MLS services and programs.
3. Demonstrate evidence to prove the value that libraries and librarians bring to their communities.
4. Provide tools to connect libraries and librarians to one another and their communities.
5. Provide leadership for innovative approaches to statewide resource sharing.
6. Build skills and knowledge among librarians and library staff to empower libraries to meet today's demands and tomorrow's promises.

Core Services

The following MLS services reflect today's needs and interests. Thus, they are essential components of this strategy.

- Advising
- BiblioTemps
- Training and Professional Development
- Cooperative purchasing
- Research & development
- Resource Sharing
 - Delivery
 - Mediated Interlibrary Loan and Journal Article Document Delivery
 - MassCat
 - Online content
- Summer Library Program

Using This Plan

We will use this plan:

- To focus our energy on programs, services and innovations that align with member needs.
- To think big.
- To remain agile in an environment poised with change and opportunity.
- To evaluate new initiatives, opportunities and partnerships.
- To concentrate on our goals and eliminate activities that will distract us.
- To demonstrate inclusiveness.
- To work together with libraries and our allies on a shared vision for Massachusetts libraries.
- To communicate progress.
- To know when we have achieved our goals.

Measuring Progress

We will know we are successful when:

- Member libraries and librarians are satisfied with MLS.
- Member libraries' patrons find value in and use new and expanded content, services, and technologies.

Strategic Objectives – 2013-2015

- Play a leading role in expanding access to online content and its discovery by Massachusetts library users.
- Develop connections between member libraries and to expand their contributions to the MLS community.
- Plan and launch an MLS brand and communication plan to carry our message to all stakeholders.
- Enhance access to practical resource sharing options for Massachusetts residents.
- Explore and implement communication channels and targeted services for underserved audiences.

The Planning Process

The Massachusetts Library System Executive Board began its strategic planning process (see summary below) by appointing a strategic planning task force comprised of board members, MLS members and MLS staff and representative of library types. Its goal was to create a document that strongly reflects member needs and that provides for flexibility to meet the unknown challenges and opportunities that will surely arise in the near future. The resulting plan will be the first strategic plan of the new organization

In the first phase of the planning process, MLS worked diligently to gather input from a variety of stakeholders including members, allies and industry leaders.

MLS first administered a survey to all members to gather feedback about existing services and to gather input on new initiatives.

MLS then proceeded with a series of focus groups with members, MLS staff, MBLC, library network directors and the MLS Executive Board. An external consultant was hired to facilitate and report on the focus groups, and most were held on site at either the Marlborough or Whatley MLS offices. Finally, MLS board members and staff interviewed a number of local and national industry leaders.

The consultant prepared a summary of the input received during the first phase of the project and led separate discussions with both MLS staff and the task force to outline the core concepts for the new strategic plan. This draft plan was developed based on these discussions and member input.

The draft strategic plan is to be vetted with member libraries and organizational allies for comment. In preparation for the feedback, MLS management has prepared a series of draft objectives for the new high-level plan (see below). These draft objectives will aid members and others in their interpretations of the plan. Member forums will be held in five locations throughout the state and led by a combination of MLS staff, strategic planning task force, and board members. Once completed, the results will be compiled and will inform the development of a final draft to be approved by the Executive Board.

In the final phase of the planning process, MLS staff will develop objectives and action plans with timelines to give the plan life and begin implementation. Simultaneously, MLS will begin a marketing and branding process to align marketing and communications with the new plan.

Summary of Feedback

Survey Rankings

Familiarity and Importance of Core Services

Familiarity

1	Training & Professional Development
2	Online Content
3	Delivery
4	Purchasing Cooperatives
5	Summer Reading Program
6	Advisory Services
7	Mediated ILL
8	Document Delivery
9	MassCat

Importance

1	Online Content
2	Training & Professional Development
3	Delivery
4	Purchasing Cooperatives
5	Summer Reading Program
6	Advisory Services
7	Mediated ILL
8	Document Delivery
9	MassCat

Satisfaction and Importance of Core Services

Satisfaction

1	Delivery
2	Mediated ILL
3	Purchasing Cooperatives
4	Summer Reading Program
5	Online Content
6	Document Delivery
7	Advisory Services
8	MassCat
9	Training & Professional Development

Importance

1	Online Content
2	Training & Professional Development
3	Delivery
4	Purchasing Cooperatives
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Importance of New Initiatives

1	Statewide Resource Sharing Vision
2	Library Advocacy
3	Ebooks
4	Technology Platform
5	Digitization
6	Best Practices

7	Community Information Ecology
8	Technology Setup/Maintenance
9	Statewide RFID
10	Website Development
11	Weeding
12	Self Publishing

Focus Group SOAR Summary

Strengths

- Continuity of service (especially Training & Professional Development)
- MLS staff – knowledge, responsiveness, positive attitude
- Visibility of MLS at important state and national meetings
- Statewide electronic resources, existence of
- Delivery (mixed), especially Sort to Light
- Ability to bring in outside speakers for CE programs
- Youth services and summer reading program
- MassCat
- Organizational potential
- Bibliotemps – considerable interest, intrigue

Aspirations

For All

- Increased outreach – a “face” for the organization to its various member groups
- Local touch
- Opt-in electronic databases
- “The Library Cloud” – Seamless services to libraries regardless of source (MBLC, MLS, networks, ...)
- Increased transparency – who does what and why (MBLC, MLS, networks, ...)
- Help libraries demonstrate their value
- Be a connector for libraries, among themselves and with their communities
- Workshop presenters with depth of knowledge and practical experience – deliver on promises
- MLS committees represent all member library types
- Support for digitization projects – soup to nuts
- Statewide discovery system with federated search (mixed feelings)

For Academics

- Electronic resources, Training & Professional Development and services focused on academic libraries’ needs

For Networks

- Alternatives to OCLC cataloging records
- Synergy of roles and services

For Publics

- Advocacy

- Training & Professional Development
- Peer sharing

For Schools

- Textbook inventory control (ILS component)
- Peer sharing

For Specials

- Focus on resource sharing (and delivery) with special libraries unique needs in mind
- Stronger ties between MassCat and the virtual catalog

Opportunities

- Library networks' connections with their member libraries
- Training & Professional Development available in contiguous states
- Complimentary mini-grants from MBLC that compliment MLS services (e.g. barcode conversion for new MassCat members)
- Existing strong library groups (e.g. MSLA, ACRL-NEC, YAC)
- Specialized knowledge and skills among special librarians
- Digital Public Library of America
- Upcoming common Core curriculum implementation (K12)
- General interest in “demonstration projects” – the ability to be innovative and support innovation that is not necessarily statewide (and large) in scope and commitment

Results

- Delivery times are equitable and optimal
- Task-oriented and audience-based communications result in local library action
- Training & Professional Development is equitably distributed geographically
- For Networks: Track and report results by network affiliation

Focus Group Challenges and Questions

There is a need to address the following challenges and questions in MLS' strategy and/or in plan implementation.

- Challenge: Demonstrate that MLS is not just for public libraries.
- Challenge: Recognize meaningful differences among member libraries needs and build services that respond to those needs.
- Challenge: Improve awareness of MLS services, and put a “face” on the organization for member libraries.
- Question: What are the right roles for MLS in library advocacy?
- Question: How can MLS board members be more actively involved in meeting member needs?

Focus Group Roles and Audiences

To best respond to member feedback in the focus groups, there appears to be a need to consider MLS' roles and audiences as it selects its Core Services and its new initiatives.

Roles

Advocate	In the focus groups, advocacy was often discussed as an important function of MLS. In this role, MLS is active at the regional, state and national levels in important activities that impact MA libraries. MLS also helps member libraries to strengthen local advocacy efforts, to build community relationships, and to demonstrate the value they bring to their communities.
Connector	In this role, MLS leverages the collective knowledge of Massachusetts' libraries and library organizations. Participants wanted MLS (1) to be knowledgeable about what is out there and who is doing what, (2) to be a "call center" for member questions that can refer members to the right services or the right peers, and (3) to help celebrate member libraries that are being innovative or exploring new services.
Partner	MLS was often portrayed in a leadership role in significant statewide library issues, including many for which MLS has no authority. In this role, MLS leverages the advantage of its statewide position to encourage collaboration among libraries and library organizations and to facilitate dialogue on these issues.
Leader	In this role, MLS is the primary source for leadership, innovation and/or implementation of core services or new initiatives.

Audiences

Statewide	Services in this area are uniformly offered throughout the commonwealth to all member libraries.
Library type	Services in this area are customized or unique offerings to different types of libraries: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic libraries • Public libraries • School libraries • Special libraries
Library geography	Services in this area are customized or unique offerings to libraries with different geographic characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographically isolated • Urban • Small
Member interest	Services in this area are focused on shared interests or problems for a subset of member libraries.