Welcome from the MLS

We are pleased to share our draft MLS Strategic Plan for 2017-2019. The MLS Strategic Planning Committee began this process in February 2016 and has been gathering and analyzing information since then.

We now present this draft for review to you, the Massachusetts library community, and we welcome your comments and suggestions. Please join us at a Town Hall Meeting to share your thoughts and perspective; post your comments on our survey or feel free to contact us directly to make your voice heard. Click to Participate

Throughout this process we have heard three clear messages:

1. MLS must continue to find ways to work closely with its members for the library community to thrive;
2. Marketing and advocacy are vitally important to the future of libraries; and
3. Change is a continuous theme for all libraries.

These repeated concerns and issues have become the basis for MLS’ strategic goals for 2017-2019.

Five overarching themes emerged to guide our direction and actions:

1. Strengthen the Massachusetts library community;
2. Use our resources efficiently for the best sustainable outcomes;
3. Social justice is an imperative for libraries and MLS;
4. Provide opportunities for MLS staff success;
5. Align actions with the MBLC.

We’d like to thank the 17 members of the Strategic Planning Committee, the MLS staff and Executive Board, everyone from the library community who participated in meetings, online discussions, or other conversations to make this possible, and our planning consultant Abby Straus (Maverick & Boutique) for her excellent facilitation.

Sincerely,

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Executive Summary

This is a challenging time for the Massachusetts library community, and also a time of great possibility. Our complex and rapidly changing world requires us all to think and act in new ways in order to discover and implement truly innovative solutions to the problems we face. Each of us has the opportunity to grow and to develop our profession in ways that enable us to be at the forefront of positive change in the communities we serve. In his *New Librarianship Field Guide*, David Lankes calls on librarians to be “agents for ... positive change and to directly engage their communities—be these scholars, students, lawyers, residents, or bureaucrats—to use knowledge to achieve their dreams and aspirations.”

Is the journey easy? No, it isn’t. Can we get to where we want and need to be? Yes we can; this 2017-2019 strategic plan is about the role the MLS is committed to playing on our collective trip to the future.

One substantial challenge that we have faced in Massachusetts is our history with the consolidation of the regions. The process was disruptive and difficult. Trust and collaborative capacity need to be built or rebuilt in order for us to create a vibrant future together. It was with this challenge in mind that we engaged in a strategic planning process designed to hear as many stakeholder voices as possible, from all types and sizes of libraries and related organizations, and associations.

We invited everyone in the Massachusetts library community to our planning workshops across the state; the information we gathered has been instrumental in fashioning our strategic priorities and action steps.

Messages that have come across loud and clear in our community engagement activities include:

With regard to what MLS does now, delivery is of great value, as is professional development and resource sharing. We don’t recall anyone calling for any MLS service to be abandoned.

Equity and equal access for all are critically important.

Members want to really be heard. One workshop participant suggested that what MLS needs is “good sales reps.” These people’s sole interest would be to listen to members and understand their interests fully.

To ensure the success of the Massachusetts library community, it is essential for everyone to shift their thinking from a reactive focus to a “can-do” attitude that is proactive and solution oriented.

There is a need for education and tools for effective marketing and communications.

Funding is a huge challenge. There is an urgent need for effective collaboration to develop sustainable paths to the resources the community needs. These include advocacy in government...
at all levels, new and enhanced partnerships between libraries and community members, as well as, innovative partnerships with other groups such as the private sector.

The planning process has been greatly enhanced by input from our dedicated planning committee, community surveys, and interviews with national thought leaders and practitioners from other parts of the country. Combining these with the diverse input we received at the workshops, we saw three major themes emerge. These have become our strategic goals for the plan:

To help the MA library community develop a culture in which each person and organization is fully able to contribute proactively and collaboratively to their success and the success of the community at large.

To build marketing and communications capacity throughout the community, providing the tools and education for success.

To help position the community for future readiness in all areas, including funding and advocacy, professional development, and the ability to meet the emerging needs of the communities we serve.

From the outset it has been our aim to focus on real action steps that make a difference to our members and the communities they steward. To this end, each goal is accompanied by a set of strategies and a list of action items (with success measures) that we will undertake to help achieve the desired outcomes expressed by our members and other stakeholders.

One of the most important things we can do is to focus our time and attention wisely so that we leverage our resources for the highest good of our members. We have chosen action steps for the near term that we believe will achieve this while also being in alignment with the MBLC, our principal funder, which contracts with the MLS to provide services and programs to the Massachusetts library community. The community has put forward many excellent ideas for projects, all of which are included in the online documentation of the plan. While it will not be possible for the MLS to lead or oversee every project, there will certainly be ways in which we can (and will) collaborate to provide support and/or guidance as others step forward to make new things happen.

This plan is designed to be a “living” process that will be revisited annually, at the very least, to make sure that it continues to be aligned with the needs and interests of our members and other stakeholders. We hope that, as people engage with us around projects and programs, the community will be strengthened and inspired by what is possible when we work well together to make positive change. Everyone falls somewhere on a continuum with regard to skills, resources and points of view; and it is our desire to facilitate a robust exchange of ideas and talent that will result in raising all boats for the library community in Massachusetts.
Before we begin, however, we need your input about the plan. MLS will be holding a series of Town Hall meetings for members and stakeholders to review the plan and suggest enhancements. Please add your voice to the conversation. And we welcome your input in other forms – Click to Join the Conversation.

**Our Strategic Goals**

1. Develop & Facilitate Co-creator Culture (CcC)
2. Build Capacity for Marketing & Communications (MarCom)
3. Position the Massachusetts Library Community for Future Readiness

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**Goal 1**

**Develop and Facilitate Co-creator Culture (CcC)** in which MLS is instrumental in the development of Co-creator Culture and collaborative capacity throughout the Massachusetts library community; and the culture at MLS supports everyone in the organization in taking responsibility for, and playing a role in, our collective success.

**What is Co-creator Culture?**

In a Co-creator Culture, everyone has the power and the responsibility to design and facilitate their own success and to contribute to the success of the whole community.

Our primary focus is on what we want to create, our strengths and our assets. Together we actively explore new ways of thinking and doing that help us achieve our goals.

We are interconnected. Everyone works together to benefit the Massachusetts library community.

Expertise is distributed across the Commonwealth. No one has to go it alone.

**Strategies**

1. Engage in conversations about Co-creator Culture: what it is, why it is beneficial and how we might collectively foster CcC to benefit the Massachusetts Library Community?
2. Identify and make available practical information and easily implemented practices that support community members in developing and sustaining Co-creator Culture and building collaborative capacity statewide.
3. Build CcC practices into key MLS initiatives to fully engage members, other stakeholders, and staff in our shared success.
4. Incorporate CcC internally at MLS to achieve more robust outcomes for our members and the people they serve, as well as the MLS staff, board, committees, and leadership team.

**Action Items for Year One**

**Develop & Share Co-creator Tools and Resources**
Host implementation event to share tools and resources to bring our plan to fruition.

**Active Membership**
A co-creation team will define and promote “active membership” outlining opportunities for members to play critical roles in MLS development to strengthen MLS and the Massachusetts library community. Include a year-long listening tour to develop a set of principles for the most positive member relations.

**Statewide Collaboration**
Participate actively and employ co-creation resources to work with MBLC and other stakeholders to maximize efficiencies that benefit libraries and library users.

**How will we know we’ve achieved this goal?**

In our member libraries and the MA library community:
- There is a demonstrable shift in the community toward self-responsibility and co-creating the future on all levels.
- Regular updates from Statewide Summits and/or follow-on groups/committees.
- Member libraries and stakeholders are involved with each other and MLS in program development and problem solving.
- Best/promising practices and experiences are continually shared throughout the Community.
- The statewide/systemic perspective is a consideration when ideas are circulating.

Within MLS:
- MLS staff is actively engaged in leading change (internally and externally) and co-creating the future of the organization.
- CcC language and practices become “the way we do things around here”.
- Morale is vibrant.

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**Goal 2**
Build Capacity for Marketing & Communications (MarCom) in which member libraries have the skills to market their organizations effectively and to share their expertise with other organizations in the Massachusetts library community and members are aware of the full range of MLS services and have the capacity to derive maximum value.

Strategies

1. Help all types of libraries understand how they can use MarCom to achieve their goals, and provide marketing tools that meet their needs.
2. Offer regular, ongoing MarCom professional development events and consultation for member libraries.
3. Develop and make connections with communities of practice.
4. Connect members to share learning and promising practices with regard to MarCom.
5. Connect all MLS programs to our marketing efforts for greatest awareness of in the community.

Action Items for Year One

Focus on Professional Development for MarCom
Provide 12 professional development events on MarCom topics in year one, and facilitate information sharing among existing and newly forming communities of practice.

Launch Word of Mouth Marketing Program (WOMM)
Form small cohort of member libraries to participate in a joint program to develop WOMM programs. Share useful results and tools with the community.

MLS Marketing & Communications Boost
Co-create practical enhancements to MLS MarCom to expand awareness of programming and resources.

How will we know we’ve achieved this goal?

In our member libraries and the Massachusetts library community:
- Libraries are reaching their target markets with marketing materials/learning/interaction facilitated by the MLS.
- Members report increased confidence in their marketing skills.
- Active community participation in sharing marketing ideas.

Within MLS:
- Increased number of subscribers on email and social media.
- Measurable increases in awareness and use of MLS services.
- Member advocacy achieves sustainable funding for MLS services.
- Marketing efforts contribute to successful external fundraising efforts.
Goal 3

**Position the Massachusetts Library Community for Future Readiness** in which MLS and the membership contribute to a statewide culture of innovation and collaborates with the Massachusetts library community in preparing for a vibrant future.

**Strategies**

1. Engage with the Massachusetts Library Community to co-create a plan of action for future readiness that supports everyone in trying new things, R&D, testing new ideas and learning from failure as well as from success.
2. Provide a range of professional development opportunities for members.
3. Explore sustainable, diverse funding options to benefit MLS and the Massachusetts library community.
4. Continue investment in strong statewide resource sharing.
5. Provide MLS staff with opportunities for professional development related to future readiness within MLS and the library community.

**Action Items for Year One**

**Our Future Together**
Co-develop/co-host Future Readiness (FR) gatherings to share information, resources, and encourage development of communities of practice.

**Leaders for Tomorrow**
Open/initiate dialog with LIS (library and information science) educators and other interested parties to bring our perspective on library education to the forefront and to identify ways in which MLS can contribute to LIS and continuing education.

**Communities of Interest and Practice**
Create a platform/two-way communication vehicle, driven by the members:

**How will we know we’ve achieved this goal?**

**In our member libraries and the MA library community:**

- Libraries report that staff members feel better prepared to face the future after taking part in MLS-sponsored trainings and activities.
• Communities of practice are formed and sustained with member, stakeholder and MLS participation to reach libraries of all types throughout the Commonwealth.
• People are sharing their successes, failures and promising practices through various means.
• There is a demonstrable willingness to co-create/consult with others around future readiness.

The Strategic Planning Process

• Community engagement workshops
• Targeted interviews with colleagues and stakeholders
• Planning Committee input
• Community survey
• Research
• Town Halls

The Plan

• Community engagement workshops
• Targeted interviews with colleagues and stakeholders
• Planning Committee input
• Community survey
• Research
• Town Halls
• Measures of success
• Ways to participate
• Project ideas
• Resources

The best of both worlds.
The Plan aims to…

Serve the Massachusetts library community as a whole AND Serve individual libraries, their staff and communities.

Cultivate what we do well AND Innovate to stay relevant and add value.
Be visionary AND Be grounded in current reality.

Provide leadership and direction AND Invite participation.

Conserve and work with existing resources AND Develop new, sustainable funding streams, including collaborative funding.

Centralize for coordination and economies of scale AND Localize for flexibility and responsiveness.

**Massachusetts Library Community Input**

**KEEP**
- Access to authoritative information
- Books
- BiblioTemps®
- Collaboration & creativity
- Communication
- Consortia
- Databases
- Delivery
- Learning/evolving
- Librarians
- Library as community hub
- Library as a place/space
- Our humanity
- Passion for what we do
- Resource sharing
- Well educated staff

**ABANDON**
- Attitudes that don’t serve us
- Limitation of thinking and roles
- Low budget or no budget
- Negativity
- Old habits and rules
- Our frustration with Google
- Outdated technology/formats
- Siloed job descriptions
- Stereotypes
- Trying to be/do everything

**INVENT/REINVENT**
• Accessibility
• Cross-training
• Creative technology
• Service delivery everywhere
• Equity of access
• Funding/resource model
• Grassroots advocacy
• How we collaborate
• Information sharing
• Library as place
• Marketing ourselves
• Our image
• Our value proposition
• Problem solving for patrons
• Research databases
• Risk taking
• Structures for teamwork

Co-Creative Cycle of Planning and Implementation

1. **INVITE**: Who needs to be at the table? Who has information we need or a viewpoint we should consider?

2. **EXPLORE**: What’s going on in our world? What’s working well? What would we like to change? What might we invent or reinvent?

3. **PLAN**: What does success look like? What strategies will help us achieve our goals? What specific activities will make our vision a reality and how will we measure success?

4. **IMPLEMENT**: Who will do what by when? Whom might we enroll to help ensure our collective success and how might they participate?

5. **REVIEW**: How are our activities working? How might we improve what we’re doing for better results?

Walking the Talk

How do we live the plan? How did you/we live it this week/month? Make tracking this a practice at MLS with report-outs internally and to the community.
CcC is one of our competencies. Part of the job is to focus on a certain set of practices, and to share them.

**Get Involved!**

- Sign up for a town hall to make your voice heard
- Send your thoughts to the Strategic Planning Committee
  - email or call: Will Adamczyk, Chair
  - or Greg Pronevitz, Ex. Dir.
- Complete our online input form.

- [Click to for links to Participate](#)

**Next Steps**

- Town Hall meetings with membership and stakeholders
- [Click to join the conversation](#)
- Sept. 19: Executive Board approval of the Plan
- Nov. 7: Membership approval of the Plan at Annual Meeting
- Dec. 2: Implementation Conference for Staff, Board, SPC, other Committees and Stakeholders

**Resources**

Our thinking about this plan has been deeply influenced by the following publications. We highly recommend them to everyone who would like to engage in continued conversation and collaboration:


*Libraries in the Exponential Age: Moving from the Edge of Innovation to the Center of Community* by Amy Gardner for the Aspen Institute Leadership Roundtable on Library Innovation