

Part I:

Through this exercise it became very clear to me that not all state libraries are the same. Just comparing two neighboring states showed significant differences in how these larger bodies oversee their public libraries, as well as a wealth of other information for public consumption. Where everything is very tidy in Connecticut (CT), it appeared somewhat of a mess in Massachusetts (MA). However, after a lot of looking around, it all began to make a bit of sense. I will begin by reviewing the resources for public libraries in CT.

The Connecticut State Library really has a wealth of information their for public libraries to value from. The Division of Library Development of the CS Library oversees this body of information and services. As stated on their website, the Division “provides leadership, funding, education, and statewide services that enhance a local library's ability to deliver high-quality library service to their community.” They offer a number of programs and services to public libraries. In addition to this, they publish a number of documents to help in aiding the public library. There are publications dealing with automation and technology, physical space, emergencies, developing collection policies and job descriptions just to name a few. But the bulk of the benefits to public libraries come from a wide variety of programs and services offered. Below is a list of the major service and program areas.

Children & Youth Services: The Division provides consultation and continuing education to library staff working with children and young adults. They moderate a discussion list dealing with issues regarding children and youth services, and maintain a liaison with regional and state wide organizations such as the CT Library Association and the CT Department of Education. They also select materials for the two Library Service Centers. They maintain a list of related links to material and websites dealing with a range of topical issues from reading initiatives to youth service standards and service philosophies. These services are extremely important for both the public libraries and the patrons as they help to create, build and maintain quality collections and programs for children and young adults. These services give the overworked local librarian a place to go for help, guidance, or further training.

Connecticar: This is the statewide delivery service for library materials. It is the vital to the resource sharing among public and academic libraries in CT. Everyone benefits from this program, patrons gain access to the books they need, and libraries with limited budgets can basically increase their collection by millions of volumes.

Connecticard: Similar to the program above, Connecticard allows patrons with a valid home library card to borrow books in any library that is part of the program. State aid is distributed only to those libraries in the program, so my assumption is that most participate. This allows the patron to walk into almost any library in the state and be able to check out a book. They also can bring the book back to any library, as the Connecticar

service will deliver it to its home library. Both of these services allow patrons to have many more resources at their hands.

ICONN: The Connecticut Digital Library, ICONN is a great resource. It gives the patrons desktop access to electronic databases and information, as well as easy access to searching over 300 state catalogs all at once. People can be sitting at home or at school any time day or night and still gain access to valuable information and research tools. This is obviously a great tool for both librarians and patrons.

Consulting: The Division of Library Development consults with library staff, trustees and friends on a variety of management and policy issues that affect the library. These issues range from buildings and grounds, to library services. They are a great resource for information and advice for public libraries. This in turn allows the local libraries to become better equipped, managed and staffed and in turn providing the patrons with higher levels of service.

Continuing Education: This is very important in the technology age. The materials and services of libraries have been changing rapidly and library staff must keep up. The continuing education program helps to make that possible by offering a wide array of trainings. The trainings are not always specific to technology, but just a variety of issues that face the public libraries. This training is vital to providing good service to the patrons. Both parties win in this situation, the library staff member learns something new and enhances a skill set or knowledge base and the patron gets great service.

Gates Foundation, grants & reimbursements: The Division oversees and/or administers various grants for local libraries. Depending on the source and the grant, this money is used for technology, construction, or recovery of spent funds in statewide programs such as Connecticard.

Service Centers: These centers have a wide range of materials in varying format for loan to CT libraries. These materials range from large print books to multi-media CD-ROMs to book props for children's story hour. These centers act as "pioneers" in the library world, trying out and testing new products, collections, etc. to determine whether to recommend them to other libraries. They also provide materials, training and consultation in order to introduce these new services and programs to the community. The centers are also responsible for creating continuing education opportunities through a variety of means. An extensive collection of materials on professional development and training is also available.

Library Buildings: Consultation given in regards to applying for grants, construction plans, and following ADA guidelines for buildings. Ideally these plans would make for a more comfortable and accessible library space for both patrons and library staff.

Public Library Statistics: The Division compiles and makes available a wide array of statistics regarding public libraries in CT. These statistics serve many needs, from ensuring adequate state funding to collection comparisons. They can help a library see how they are stacking up with the rest of the system and identify strong and weak areas, thereby making services better for patrons.

Universal Service Fund: The Division provides information and guidance for libraries applying for the USF. This fund helps libraries save on a variety of telecommunication costs.

Part II:

The next step of this assignment was to not only assess the other resources of the CT State Library, but also to visit my own state library's website and see what they had to offer. The State of Massachusetts does not have the same state library structure as CT. The services offered are shared between the State Library of MA, the Boston Public Library and the MA Library and Information Network (MLIN). The MA State Library [<http://www.state.ma.us/lib/>] makes it very clear that they are there first and foremost to serve government workers. If you aren't a state worker, you can't get a library card, and you can't check out materials. You also can't access databases remotely unless you have a card. The general public is able to use the materials in house, or request them through ILL at their home institution.

In regards to the collections, the MA State Library really seems to be intended for research on legislative history, government and legal information. As a member of the general public who has viewed only their website, I would not feel overly welcomed going to the MA State Library. The CT State Library site gives the feel that there are many people ready to help you with a variety of your needs.

Unlike the CT State Library, which appears to have all of the different areas and departments housed in one building, the MA State Library does not. Like the CT State Library site, MA gives links and information about genealogical research as well as people inquiring about public records. One gets routed to the MA Archives Division, and

a number of other places to look or contact for public records. However, these places are located all around Boston which would make research challenging. Also, as you are moving from one web page to another, the style and format changes as it changes division or department within the state. It lacks the clarity and ease of use that the CT site has. The MA State Library website does give very basic information about the state, but nowhere near the amount that CT has on their site.

Returning back to what was mentioned before, each state library chooses to conduct themselves a bit differently. The MA State Library is in Boston. The Boston Public Library (BPL) is in Boston. The BPL serves as the end-all, be-all research and lending library for MA, therefore they serve the general public for many of the research needs that the CT State Library handles. Any resident of MA can get a library card for the BPL. The BPL serves as a full government depository, as well as holding many rare books, photographs, maps and special collections. It picks up where the state library leaves off in terms of collections and I would not be surprised if much of the MA State Library collection is duplicated in the BPL.

So who then looks after the public libraries? The Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC), which oversees the Massachusetts Library and Information Network (MLIN) [<http://www.mlin.org/>], takes on this task. In their mission statement they state: “The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners supports, develops, coordinates, improves and promotes library services throughout the Commonwealth.” They also strive to provide every resident with equal access to library information resources. They are the closest comparative body to that of CT’s Division of Library Development. That is not to say that they do things the same way, for they do not.

Again, organization of the website is a big hurdle. They have their “Program Fact Sheets” that list different services and programs they provide for all libraries. They do not separate public libraries out of this. Also as these are individual fact sheets, it does not always show the interconnectivity of all the programs and services. With that said, it still holds much useful information.

The MLIN site has a listing of library catalogs from all over the state, public, academic, special libraries, etc. They also have pages listing periodicals held by MA libraries, the various consortiums and their members, and a list of logins and passwords for the various public catalogs. Like CT, MA residents have access to several indexes and databases online, including Infotrac, the Boston Globe, Wilson’s Biographies Plus, and thousand of ebooks. There is also a special collections database that points you to the libraries that hold such collections.

The next section covers information “about” MA libraries. This includes most notably more library directories and “public services at-a-glance”, which is data pulled from their yearly statistics. This did not list or explain services offered by MLIN. They have a search engine for MA library homepages, which works reasonably well. Here is also contained the important list of access centers for people with disabilities. Finally, they list the different regional networks and their membership.

Next is “Internet Search Tools”. This is a page of pages listing a variety of websites. They have categories such as search engines, federal resources, other state libraries, and state web pages. They also have lists for MA government as well as the towns in the state. They also go on to list college and university homepages in MA. They also have “Health Web” which is selected online resources from the MA Health

Reference Institute. Some links similar to these live in the “related links” section of the Services to Libraries page on the CT State Library website.

It is then on to the program fact sheets. In these fact sheets you learn that the Board of Library Commissioners provide many of the same services offered in CT, they simply present them in a less straightforward way. They also don’t always give the feeling of being a consultant for the programs. With the exception of “continuing ed. and training”, the fact sheets feel more like they are listing what a library needs to do in order to receive funding to make these programs happen. They include:

- Statewide reference, referral, and document delivery through several specialized reference centers and the BPL.
- Services for the blind including the *Braille and Talking Book Library* and the *Talking Book Library*, as well as for other users with disabilities
- Library based literacy programs (funding)
- State Construction funds for public libraries
- State aid for public libraries
- Public library advisory and technical assistance program --advises library directors, boards of trustees, etc., on a variety of state laws, proposed legislation and policies.
- Data coordination and analysis (statistics)
- Regional Library Systems and the Library of Last Recourse (BPL)
- Public Library Emergency Assistance Program (funding and some training)
- Certification of librarians
- Continuing education including, introduction to fundraising, trustee orientation, grant writing, and technology issues.

There is also a range of publications available via the website. One can find the MBLC’s annual report and meeting notes, as well as a variety of statistics covering public, academic, school and special libraries. They don’t have as many “useful” publications for day-to-day operation as CT does.

In comparison, I would say that MA and CT have similar resources for public libraries, but the presentation of these resources is dramatically different given state organization. Also, I feel that MA probably has more to offer than one finds on the various websites. This could be a deterrent for some. CT has a web page that while aesthetically a bit boring, works and is usable. It guides you around and you get a real feeling for the state library system as a whole, and what services are there for both public libraries and their patrons. The structure of the state of MA makes that difficult. MLIN's page is straightforward enough, but sometimes the information found within is not. The State Libraries web page is mediocre, and the BPL's collections are astounding but they are not really an overseeing body. The structure and the sheer amount of services do seem to be greater in CT. Perhaps this isn't true, and it is simply a flawed web presence. But so far I have found that CT does their library statistics and their state statutes in a much clearer manner – so this is in keeping with the trends.