

Executive Director's Report to the MHLS Board | July 2020

1. COVID-19 Updates

a. System Services:

- i. The MHLS Staff continues to perform at a high level under challenging circumstances, helping all MHLS Member Libraries resume in-person services while restarting MHLS services that had been suspended since March. This was a heavy lift as for weeks we were contending with a lack of clarity in regards to state guidance for reopening libraries which meant we were often working with incomplete information and moving targets for reopening/restart dates. Through advocacy alongside our peers at the State Library, the New York Library Association (NYLA) and the Public Library Directors Organization of New York State (PULISDO) and with the assistance of the Empire State Development Corp, the Regional Control Rooms of the Capital District and Mid-Hudson areas and NYS Assemblyperson Didi Barrett, we were finally able to obtain guidance that applied to all types of libraries which provided them with the legal coverage they needed to reopen safely. There was considerable internal work to be done to restart system-wide holds and the delivery service but both activities went very well thanks to thoughtful planning and the hard work of the Delivery Operations Team – in concert with Valley Courier our delivery vendor – and the Technology Operations Team. It is challenging to convey just how much hard work, care, and attention to detail went into not just helping our libraries with their reopening plans but to safely reopen our own facility and the June 22 restart of delivery and holds. It was a wild ride at times that truly tested our teams and partnerships, I could not be prouder of the work done by our organization during this challenge. Our staff, board, and members have worked very well together during this moment in history by always keeping our eye on what matters most – the health and safety of system and library workers and those we serve. I'd like to thank you for your perseverance and fortitude during this difficult time and ensure that you know that the MHLS staff have risen to the occasion.
- ii. As of the week of July 6th, all member libraries are back up and running with at least curbside or contactless pick-up and a growing number are opening their doors to the public once again.
- iii. Throughout the past four months we have provided weekly briefings for member library directors. At these events we ensure directors have the latest information from New York State, whether it be changes to health and safety guidance, election procedures, or adjustments to the Open Meetings Law. We have also worked to ensure the results of a study done by the Institute of Museum & Library Services to test the transmission timeline on library materials are conveyed so that directors can make informed decisions about handling library materials. At these briefings we also have helped directors work through the myriad of considerations when it comes to managing their collection, holds, and eresources in the COVID-19 era.

b. Re-Opening MHLS

- i. For your review at the July meeting is the *MHLS COVID-19 Re-Opening Safety Plan*. This plan was reviewed and approved by the MHLS Executive Committee to expedite reopening our facility to

more staff. In addition to this written plan we recorded a safety orientation video for staff which is mandatory viewing for all staff before they return to the facility.

- ii. Linda Vittone, MHLS Financial Manager & Personnel Officer, has coordinated the mandatory daily survey of staff, required by NYS, to ensure no staff reports to the facility after being diagnosed, exposed to, or exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19.
- iii. Chris Herron, MHLS Facilities Manager & Assistant Delivery Operations Manager, has diligently created a cleaning and disinfecting protocol following CDC guidelines and provided in-person orientation to our safety and disinfecting protocols for all staff returning to the facility.
- iv. Two reusable masks have been issued to all staff working on-site or at member libraries.
- v. At this time half of our staff continue to work from home to decrease the occupancy levels in our facility. All staff working from home were interviewed by either their supervisor or myself as well as Gerry Formby, MHLS IT Operations Supervisor to ensure they have what they need to be successful in the extended work-from-home strategy we are using.
- vi. We have resumed not only delivery, holds and ILL but also are fulfilling our contractual obligations for on-site visits to our members who have tech support contracts with MHLS. On-site visits are conducted by MHLS staff during hours when the member library facility is closed to the public, and usually staff as well.
- vii. We have formed a cross-disciplinary team made up of members of our Delivery Operations Team and Tech Ops Team to routinely analyze volume and capacity of our delivery system in light of the new usage patterns driven by the restart efforts of our libraries. To the best of our ability we will be working to forecast volume to find savings in our delivery contract.

c. Finances

- i. We find ourselves with no news on further cuts to state aid after the second “measurement period” which ended June 30th. The measurement periods were described as milestone dates at which the NYS Division of Budget would adjust its revenue forecasts to better estimate cuts to state aid, however no announcements or further projections have been published.
- ii. The Governor continues to report he is waiting to see if the next federal stimulus package includes aid for states before making further cuts. There is no clear ETA For the next federal stimulus package but the sunseting of the unemployment benefits enacted to support workers impacted by the COVID-19 shutdowns on July 30th may be an indicator of when we could see action on this front.
- iii. Several times we have heard the Governor say that without federal aid for the state will cut “schools, police and local governments” by 20%.
- iv. In light of the unknown cuts and concerns about cash flow over this year and next should the state delay payments, we are being extremely conservative financially. We have continued our work to cut expenses, renegotiate with vendors, work through the hiring freeze, and pursue alternate funding sources such as applying for an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant (which we will hear the outcome of in August). In addition to this work, our Directors Association (DA) unanimously voted to provide \$65,000 from their Members Capital Fund, which is their savings account to underwrite enhancements to Sierra and Encore and prepare for future ILS migration, to the MHLS Operating Budget to combat the cuts and cash flow issues that are projected. The DA also unanimously voted to increase the Members’ Assessment which funds 24% of MHLS Operations. We are grateful for the support of the DA and respect that these are not easy decisions for them as they have their own concerns about dips in county and local revenue for their own libraries.

- v. On July 8th we will have successfully completed the Paycheck Protection Program stipulations which means we can apply to have the loan fully forgiven.
- vi. We continue to update our staff and member library directors on this topic.

2. ADVOCACY CALL TO ACTION:

- a. We continue to advocate with federal legislators to ensure state aid is included in the federal stimulus package and with state legislators to ensure they understand the challenge we are faced with dual unknowns of the cut level and the anticipated arrival of state aid to our organization.
- b. Please watch for calls to action from the New York Library Association and the American Library Association to aid with these advocacy efforts.

3. Racial Equity Efforts

- a. In the wake of the “I Can’t Breathe” Protests sparked by the death of George Floyd we are accelerating our attention to increase awareness and consider reforms necessary to work towards racial equity in our spheres of influence. This work had already begun as part of the MHLS’ bid to become certified under the New York Library Association’s Sustainable Library Certification Program (SLCP) but is now on the “front burner” as we consider how to continue to move forward in thoughtful ways.
- b. Using the framework found in the *Advancing Racial Equity in Public Libraries* issue brief from the Government Alliance on Race & Equity MHLS staff and our board will be charting a path forward:



ISSUE BRIEF
Advancing Racial Equity in Public Libraries

Government Alliance on Race & Equity

- c. To this end:
 - i. Ric Swierat, MHLS Board President, is convening a working group of the board to vision our governance and leadership role on this topic moving forward.
 - ii. MHLS staff is currently:
 - 1. Reviewing internal policies and procedures for inclusivity, diversity and inclusion intent and language for recommendation to our board;

2. Discussing bias in our online catalog and working to create a strategy to
 - a. improve discovery
 - b. address structural bias
 - c. elevate marginalized voices
 - d. democratize language
 3. Curating content in the digital collection, starting with the collection enhanced by Nina Acosta, MHLS Assistance ILP Operations Supervisor, "[Injustice Anywhere is a Threat to Justice Everywhere](#)"
 4. Aiding member libraries to consider staff and board recruitment and retention issues through an equity, diversity and inclusion lens.
 5. Researching regional speakers to provide professional development opportunities for our member libraries.
- iii. The MHLS Personnel and Planning Committee is recommending that our board participate in increasing our individual cultural competence by reading one of the following titles – your choice! We will convene a discussion in September around these titles.
1. [How to Be an Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi](#)
 2. [White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism by Robin Diangelo](#)
 3. [So You Want to Talk About Race by Ijeoma Oluo](#)
4. **ILS Road Map 2.0 Confirmed**: In May we convened a working group of member library leaders – DA leadership and county chairs – to develop the next iteration of our ILS Road Map. In our first Road Map, completed earlier this year, we implemented Text Messaging, Mobile Worklist, and Decision Center. Their recommendation was unanimously approved by the Directors Association at their June meeting. Therefore, the MHLS staff will be looking to implement the following services over the next 12-18 months, please click on the links to learn more about each feature:
- a. [Serials](#)
 - b. [ILL](#)
 - c. [Material Booking](#)
 - d. [Patron Images](#)
 - e. [Encore Harvesting](#)
5. **Discovery Platform Development Partner**
- a. We will be embarking on an exciting path with Innovative Interfaces Inc. (III) as a consortia development partner for their new discovery platform, Vega.
 - b. [Our current discovery platform, Encore](#), will still be the face of the MHLS online catalog during the development phase but behind the scenes MHLS Staff will be working with III to advance our system as an early adopter of the next generation discovery platform which will harness BIBFRAME (Bibliographic Framework), described by the Library of Congress as “the future of bibliographic description,” to replace the MARC standards and use linked data principles to make bibliographic data more useful both within our libraries and for the public user experience.

6. Trustee Education Series Reimagined

- a. We have redesigned the Trustee Education Series for 2020 to be offered completely online:
 - i. Trustee Essentials
 - Thursday, September 10th from 5:30-7:00pm
 - Tuesday, October 13th from 10:00-11:30am
 - ii. Core Values & Ethics or “Policies 101”
 - Thursday, September 17th from 10:00-11:30am
 - Wednesday, October 21st from 5:30-7:00pm
 - iii. Intermediate: Financial Role & Responsibilities – Wednesday, December 2nd from 5:30-7:00pm
 - iv. Advanced: Seven Habits of Highly Effective Trustees – Tuesday, December 8th from 5:30-7:00pm
 - v. New for 2020: An Introduction to the New Minimum Standards for Public Libraries – September 22nd from 5:30-7:00pm

7. Casey Conlin, MHLS Library Sustainability Coordinator

- a. In light of the hiring freeze enacted to aid with our financial planning for the coming months, MHLS Library Sustainability Coordinator Casey Conlin has been named as our state-mandated Outreach Coordinator. This means Casey is now the lead on state mandated programs such as Corrections & Jails and the Adult and Family Literacy Grant Programs. Casey’s workload has been reevaluated in light of this and we are bringing in an intern for the fall semester to ensure we continue to meet both the state’s mandates and our members’ priorities for the remainder of the year.
- b. As of last month, Casey has stepped into the role of coordinator for the American Library Association’s [Sustainability Round Table](#), a position he was elected to over a year ago. Casey is the first public library representative to hold this position which leads the fastest growing round table in the Association.

8. The Resilience Hub Project

- a. I have been working with The Boatbuilders, a new initiative that provides financial, strategic, and tactical support for the construction of “lifeboats”- projects, ideas, and resources that foster social and ecological resilience for communities in the Hudson Valley. This group is financially affiliated with The New World Foundation.
- b. They will be offering a pilot grant program to fund three “resiliency hubs” in our member libraries which will underwrite collections, programs, and indoor and outdoor learning spaces. An information session will be held on July 9th and applications from members will be due at the end of the month.

- c. We are in talks to be financially compensated for providing programmatic and promotional support to organize regional programs and other aspects of the project.

9. Town of Union Vale Contract Update:

- a. As reported in May, after consulting with the impacted libraries, on March 27th we notified cardholders in the Town of Union that during the COVID-19 Emergency access to online services will be extended despite the lack of a contract for library services with the town.
- b. As the impacted libraries have reopened, this will now be revisited. Given we left off in March with the green light from both the board and the Directors Association to enact restrictions the impacted library boards will help set the pace for the implementation of restrictions.
- c. *For more detailed information about this situation please see these [answers to Frequently Asked Questions](#) provided to Union Vale cardholders in September.*

10. Board-to-Board Visits & Talking Points

- a. As you attend member library meetings during the COVID-19 era I would ask that you please listen to the issues the boards are contending with and let me know if you hear anything you think we have not addressed.
- b. Please help us keep libraries motivated to both have residents participate in the 2020 Census and the 2020 General Election.
- c. Ensuring we are clearly communicating about our financial situation continues to be key. As news of the projected cuts comes out, I will work with the Executive Committee and Finance Committee to ensure clarity in our messaging from our board to our stakeholders is provided.

11. Executive Director's Event Participation: May 6 – July 6

- a. Columbia County Library Association
- b. MHLS Director Briefing
- c. The Resilience Hub Project
- d. MHLS Finance Committee
- e. Public Library System Directors Organization of New York State
- f. Division of Library Development Update
- g. MHLS Board Meeting
- h. Greene County Economic Development Recovery Committee
- i. State Librarian & DLD staff re: Free Direct Access Issues
- j. Dutchess County Directors Association
- k. Orientation to Stepped Reopening Plan for MHLS Member Libraries
- l. Cornell Workplace Safety Webinar
- m. Public Library System Directors Organization of New York State
- n. Columbia County Library Association: Reopening Planning
- o. MHLS Director Briefing
- p. Ulster County Library Association
- q. Valley Courier Contract Negotiation
- r. Greene County Library Association

- s. Focus Groups: The Resilience Hub Project
- t. Dutchess County Directors Association: Reopening Planning
- u. Restart Guidance for Directors Webinar
- v. MHLS Director Briefing
- w. MHLS Nominations & Elections Committee
- x. MHLS Director Briefing
- y. Putnam County Library Association
- z. Jude McGrath, Assemblymember Kevin Cahill's Chief of Staff
- aa. Greene County Library Association
- bb. Trustee Roles & Responsibilities During Restarting Library Services Webinar
- cc. System Services Advisory Committee
- dd. Central Library/Collection Development Advisory Committee
- ee. MHLS Director Briefing
- ff. Didi Barrett, NYS Assemblymember
- gg. Valley Courier Contract Negotiation
- hh. MHLS Director Briefing
- ii. Dutchess County Directors Association
- jj. MHLS Executive Committee
- kk. Public Library System Directors Organization of New York State
- ll. Division of Library Development Update
- mm. Didi Barrett, NYS Assemblymember
- nn. Columbia County Library Association
- oo. Tracie Hall, ALA Executive Director
- pp. ALA Executive Board
- qq. Greene County Library Association
- rr. NYLA Legislative Committee
- ss. MHLS Director Briefings
- tt. Center for the Future of Libraries Board Meeting
- uu. MHLS Audit Committee
- vv. Ulster County Library Association
- ww. MHLS Personnel & Planning Committee
- xx. Reimagining Libraries in the COVID-19 Era
- yy. CSEA Meeting
- zz. MHLS Director Briefing
- aaa. New Director Orientation: Courtney Wimmers, Millbrook Library
- bbb. New Director Orientation: Elizabeth Rennig, Hunter Public Library
- ccc. MHLS Director Briefing
- ddd. System Funding Meet-up