

Statewide Strategic Communications and Public Awareness Campaign

OVERVIEW

The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) is the agency of state government with the statutory authority and responsibility to organize, develop, coordinate and improve library services throughout the Commonwealth. The Board advises library trustees and municipal officials on the operation and maintenance of public libraries, including construction and renovation. It administers state and federal grant programs for libraries; promotes cooperation among all types of libraries through the Massachusetts Library System (MLS), the Library for the Commonwealth and automated library resource sharing networks; and arranges for talking book and related services for blind and disabled residents. It also works to ensure that all residents of the Commonwealth, regardless of their geographic location, have access to essential new electronic information technologies and significant electronic databases.

Massachusetts was the first state to establish an agency of state government to guide the development of library service. Founded by statute in 1890, the Board of Library Commissioners oversaw the start of 100 public libraries in its first decade of work. Today, 350 of the state's 351 cities and towns have public library services. The Board has nine volunteer members appointed by the Governor who set policy for the agency and hire the director. The agency has a staff of 23.

MBLC MISSION

The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners supports, improves, and promotes library services throughout the Commonwealth. The MBLC also strives to provide every resident of the Commonwealth with full and equal access to library information resources regardless of their geographic location, social or economic status, age, level of physical or intellectual ability or cultural background.

In keeping with the MBLC's mission, the Board conducts public awareness campaigns designed to increase residents' awareness of and access to the services and programs that public libraries offer. The Board also serves as an advocate for libraries and improved library services. To that end, it produces publications and campaigns intended to increase awareness on the part of government officials, library trustees, the general public, Friends of Libraries, and librarians. The Board also provides media with information about library issues.

ALIGNMENT WITH ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

The 2018-2020 Statewide Strategic Communications and Public Awareness Campaign builds on prior plans and efforts and will continue to further the MBLC's mission as well as meet the needs and goals outlined in the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA)/ Massachusetts Long Range Plan and the recently completed MBLC Strategic Plan.

From the [MBLC Strategic Plan](#):

- 1) Establish a strong and proactive leadership role for the MBLC in the library community to promote and support quality and accessible services and to foster statewide alignment of effort
- 2) Establishing greater clarity regarding the roles and division of responsibilities among the various entities that comprise the statewide system of support for libraries in ways that will foster greater statewide alignment of effort and investment.

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From the [LSTA Long Range Plan](#):

Goal 1 Promote learning

Objective 1: Improve users' general knowledge and skills

Project 2: Summer Reading

Goal 2: Enabling access

Objective 1: Improve users ability to discover information resources

Project 1: Statewide Resources and Programming for Patrons: databases

Project 2: Statewide Resources and Programming for Patrons: eBooks collections

Goal 4: Building the workforce

Project 1: Job and career development

Project 2: STEM

Goal 5: Developing skills

Objective 1: Improve users ability to understand and apply information that furthers personal and family competences in universal areas such as health, finances, and other life skills.

2018-2022 GOALS

The MBLC will work with the Public Relations (PR) Advisory Committee (comprised of representatives from school, academic, and public libraries) and a hired agency to carry out this plan. The PR Committee and the MBLC understand the need to be flexible in the undertaking of this plan as new needs may arise that necessitate a refocusing of efforts. The consumer website mass.gov/libraries will be at the center of the public awareness campaigns when appropriate.

The goals of the plan are as follows:

- 1) Increase public awareness of and access to the online statewide research databases and eBooks.
- 2) Promote Statewide Summer Programs for kids, teens, and adults
- 3) Increase awareness of the value of the MBLC 's leadership, programs and services
- 4) Build a sense of value of Massachusetts libraries

TARGET AUDIENCE, MESSAGE, and STRATEGY

The MBLC works with the library community; but it also provides direct services to residents through mass.gov/libraries. Narrowing such a broad target audience is a challenge. The MBLC will work with the statewide Public Relations Advisory Committee and a marketing firm to further define target audiences, determine market messages, and to identify effective strategies for reaching target markets. However, strategy development should consider the following:

- Ways to increase the ease at which users find library services online (online services as well as in-person library services and programs)
- Customization of materials for individual libraries to use locally
- Partnership development
- Ongoing feedback from library users and from the library community

- Research may be needed to assess current resident attitudes towards libraries or services

I. **Increase public awareness of and access to the online statewide research databases and eBooks.**

Strengths and Opportunities-Databases

- The major strength of the library online research databases is that no one else provides free full text online articles and reliable, vetted information, 24/7 from anywhere in Massachusetts with no library card. These are resources that one would typically have to pay for to access.
- Marketing the online research databases provides an opportunity for libraries to reclaim their “search expert” status.
- Marketing the online research databases provides an opportunity to create small campaigns that connect people to topic-specific databases such as small business, health, and financial literacy.
- “Fake news” or accessing reliable information continues to be an issue, online research databases are an answer to a timely challenge.
- Our partners the Massachusetts Library System recently completed an intense training with a small group of librarians who are creating database projects for their local libraries. The MBLC could further develop those projects for statewide use.
- This is the first time databases will be promoted in a statewide campaign.
- The consumer portal mass.gov/libraries provides easy access to the online research databases.
- The MBLC AWARE website is used as a one-stop place for librarians to find promotional materials.

Challenges-Databases

- While the databases are online resources, it’s not easy to access all the features without some kind of instruction.
- Many Librarians are not well trained or comfortable with the databases.
- Usage of the databases is low in many public libraries.
- The misconception exists that search engines such as Google, Bing, and Yahoo provide the same information as searches on the libraries’ databases.
- There is no name/branding of databases (other than the vendor name, GALE) and there is a significant amount of library jargon inherent in explaining the databases that may make them seem too complicated or intimidating for consumers who are accustomed to the one-step Google type search.
- In the past, the MBLC has attempted to brand the databases, but struggled to come up with a name that consumers liked. Consumers wanted a name that explained what the databases are.

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- Helping people distinguish when it's appropriate to use databases instead of a quick search like Google may be challenging.

Messaging

Rather than broad campaigns that simply raise awareness that databases exist, the focus should be on creating smaller campaigns around to topic- specific databases such as small business/entrepreneurs, health, and financial literacy, early literacy, Fake news, STEM STEAM and other issues that could form part of an umbrella campaign. Target audience would be narrowed according to campaign.

Potential messages are as follows:

- When it's best to use a library database vs. a Google-type search (library databases provide full-text articles)
- Convenient, easy to use 24/7 from anywhere
- Free--Don't need a library card
- Libraries/Librarians as the research experts
- Information from a reliable, trustworthy source

Strengths and Opportunities-eBooks (and audiobooks)

- A new vendor/product as of July 1, 2018, will eventually make accessing eBooks a much simpler process than it has been in the past. However, we do not know how long it will take to develop and implement a single search.
- Many librarians are already familiar with the product.
- The new product will most likely be statewide, making it easier to promote.
- Audiobooks must be promoted in addition to eBooks or in an entirely separate campaign

Challenges-eBooks

- Many people are unaware that they can get eBooks through the library.
- The MBLC branded the previous products as the Commonwealth eBook Collections. How should the transition to the new product occur?
- Need to narrow the broad target audience

Messaging and Audience-eBooks (and audiobooks)

Consumers are unaware that libraries offer eBooks. Prior campaigns have focused on raising awareness that libraries have eBooks and explaining when to use the three different eBook products (this is no longer an issue). Digital posts were created that libraries could use to let patrons know they could easily access library eBooks. These were for a broad target audience (with the exception of the military) and the only messaging that distinguished library eBooks from eBooks from other sources was that library eBooks are FREE- this may be used to target current eBook users who are paying for them.

Again, messaging and target audience needs to be developed for audiobooks.

II. Promote Statewide Summer Programs for kids, teens, and adults

Strengths and Opportunities

- On average 400,000 children, teens, and adults participate in statewide summer reading.
- The MBLC has had a successful partnership with the Boston Bruins since 2009.
- Research shows that kids who participate in summer reading do better academically.
- There is a fully developed adult component to summer reading that could be further explored.
- Some summer themes (developed by the national Collaborative Summer Library Program-CSLP) lend themselves to partnering with local organizations. For example, in 2017 the MBLC partnered with the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum to promote the summer theme of Build a Better World while the library was celebrating President Kennedy's 100th birthday. For 2018, the theme is "Libraries Rock".
- There is an online component, ReadsInMA.org, funded by the MBLC (this is also a challenge-see below)

Challenges

- The MBLC's role in summer reading is limited to funding the online component ReadsInMA.org, promoting the program and coordinating with the Boston Bruins.
- Because Massachusetts participates in the national CSLP, we are limited to using CSLP graphics.
- While summer reading is a statewide program, not all libraries use the online registration and tracking program. Some librarians feel that it is too complicated and the MBLC and its partner the Massachusetts Library System are currently considering other alternatives.
- There are programs for children, teens, and adults which means a broad target audience.

Messages:

A main focus of the campaign should be to highlight the academic benefits of summer reading and that participation in summer reading closes the achievement gap. The MBLC has developed a social media campaign that does this, but more needs to be done to demonstrate that summer reading is continuing education for kids and teens.

Messaging that would attract adults to participate in summer reading needs to be developed.

Current Messaging:

1. Free
2. Skill maintenance and improvement—academic benefits of summer reading
3. Fun
4. The library as a great place to visit in the summer

III. Increase awareness of the value of the MBLC's leadership, programs and services

Strengths and Opportunities

- MBLC has the statutory authority and responsibility to organize, develop, coordinate and improve library services throughout the Commonwealth.
- A new state bond authorization is needed for the MBLC's Massachusetts Public Library Construction Program. This is an opportunity to highlight the importance of this program.
- The MBLC has gone through the branding process
- The Board's publications and communications are an opportunity to convey the importance and value of libraries and the work the MBLC does to a variety of audiences including local and state officials.
- Leveraging MBLC staff expertise

Challenges

- The library community confuses the MBLC with other library agencies.
- For some services MBLC shares responsibility with another agency and the roles that each play in providing the service are not clear to the library community.
- The MBLC is not consistently recognized for the funding it provides to libraries or the statewide services it provides.
- MBLC funding has decreased 12% since 2001
- MBLC viewed as solely an administrative agency and it's difficult to increase funding in state budget lines that are administrative.

Messaging:

1. MBLC provides leadership within a statewide network of affiliates and partners by:
 - a. promoting and supporting best practice and innovation in library services
 - b. fostering and facilitating statewide collaboration, resource sharing, and alignment of effort and investment.
 2. MBLC programs and services save money.
 3. MBLC programs and services benefit local libraries, residents and communities.
 4. MBLC programs and services make equal access to library services possible.
- Target Audiences: the library community; state, local and federal policy makers

IV. Build a sense of value of Massachusetts libraries

Strengths and Opportunities

- A Pew Research Center telephone survey of 1,601 Americans ages 16 and older conducted from March 7 to April 4, 2016, finds that Americans continue to express largely positive views about the current state of their local public libraries. For instance, around three-quarters (77%) say that public libraries provide them with the resources they need. This is especially true for young people: 84% of those between the ages of 16 and 29 say this. And 66% say the closing of their local public library would have a major impact on their community. More attitudes towards libraries can be found in [Libraries 2016](#), a report by Pew Research Center.
- MBLC has run awareness campaigns (Love my Library Valentine) that the libraries like and that have been successful in connecting patrons to policy makers. There is the opportunity to conduct more of this type of awareness campaign.

Challenges

- Although library usage has steadily increased over the past ten years, libraries continue to struggle with the perception that they are a “nice” but not essential public service.
- “Everything is online, so why do we need libraries?” is a comment sometimes heard.
- The MBLC, its affiliates and libraries often do not receive the funding needed to keep pace with increased demand for library services.

Potential Messaging:

1. Librarians are research experts
2. Library programs and classes are continuing education for everyone.
3. Libraries help address a variety of local needs and issues. For example: educational equity and achievement gap, workforce development, college access, civic engagement, bridging the digital divide.

EVALUATION

The MBLC has access to statistics that it may use to evaluate the effectiveness of efforts. However, the MBLC also requires that the selected marketing firm recommend methods of evaluation and assist the MBLC in the evaluation and reporting of campaign effectiveness.

TIMELINE AND PRIORITIES

Year One-Database, eBook

Activity	Goal Alignment
Develop new messaging and campaign for eBooks and/or Audio Books	#1

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Develop messaging and campaigns for databases that focus on small business/entrepreneurship, financial literacy, health literacy (this will continue throughout the 3 year plan)	#1
Explore potential summer reading partners, develop summer media plan, create summer publications	#2
Design Agency publications	#3
Design campaign publications	#1
If necessary, make adjustments to consumer portal that increase ease of access	#1
Evaluate and make adjustments (throughout the year)	
Explore/refine messaging about the value of the MBLC	#3
Develop 'value of libraries' campaign that libraries across the state can participate in	#4

Year Two-Value of MBLC

Activity	Goal Alignment
Develop new messaging and campaign the value of the MBLC	#3
Update ready-made social media for eBooks and audio books	#1
Based on year one results, consider running ads again for eBooks and audiobooks	#1
Develop campaign for second part of database campaign	#1
Explore potential summer reading partners, develop summer media plan, create summer publications	#2
Design Agency publications	#3
Design campaign publications	#3
If necessary, make adjustments to consumer portal that increase ease of access	#1
Develop 'value of libraries' campaign that libraries across the state can	#4

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participate in	
Explore/refine messaging for 'value of libraries' campaign	#4
Evaluate and make adjustments (throughout the year)	

Year Three-Value of Libraries

Activity	Goal
Develop new messaging and campaign the 'value of libraries' campaign	#4
Update ready-made social media for eBooks and audio books	#1
Develop campaign for third part of database campaign	#1
Explore potential summer reading partners, develop summer media plan, create summer publications	#2
Design Agency publications	#3
Design campaign publications	#4
If necessary, make adjustments to consumer portal that increase ease of access	#1
Evaluate and make adjustments (throughout the year)	