**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; supports cultural programming through the Massachusetts Center for the Book; 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 library services including eBooks and audiobooks, technology, research databases, and resources from libraries across the state.

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 Vision, Mission, and Core Principles**  
**Our vision for libraries in the Commonwealth:**

Every library in Massachusetts is a thriving community hub, transforming lives through knowledge and lifelong learning.

**Our mission:**

As a state agency, the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners promotes equal access, advances innovation, and fosters resilience in libraries across the Commonwealth through funding, guidance, partnerships, and the coordination of statewide services.

**Core Principles:**

The principles below affirm who we are and who we aspire to be.

* Equity and diversity: We prioritize our work and resources in service to a more equitable world where diversity, in all its forms, is valued and leveraged for the good of all.
* Inclusivity and belonging: We support the work of libraries that create environments where people feel included, respected, and that they belong.
* Partnership: We are trusted partners, collaborators, and conveners, connecting people to ideas and to each other.
* Courageous leadership: We lead with courage, integrity, accountability, and compassion. We nurture these qualities in those we serve.
* Stewardship: We are good stewards of the public funds entrusted to us, and the well-being of the Massachusetts library community.

**Alignment with Organizational Goals**

In keeping with the MBLC’s mission, the Board conducts 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 intended to increase awareness on the part of government officials, library trustees, the general public, Friends of Libraries volunteer groups, and library staff. The Board also provides media with information about library-related topics and issues.

The 2024-2027 Statewide Strategic Communications and Public Awareness Campaign 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](https://mblc.state.ma.us/programs-and-support/lsta-grants/lsta-plan.php) and the MBLC Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

**Compliance with Funding Requirements**The MBLC uses federal funds from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for promotional outreach and awareness. Therefore, all campaigns must center around LSTA-funded websites or products and meet specific IMLS guidelines.  
MBLC Websites are as follows:

* Agency site <https://mblc.state.ma.us/index.php> (audience: librarians, library staff, library trustees, Friends groups, legislators, local officials, press
* MBLC Awarehouse <https://awarehouse.mblc.state.ma.us/> (audience: librarians, library staff)
* Consumer Portal [libraries.state.ma.us](file:///C:\Users\cbruno\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\N0IJY8KP\libraries.state.ma.us), (audience: general public)
* LSTA in Massachusetts: <https://mblclsta.com/> (audience: federal legislators)

**Main Goals for the 2024-2028 Marketing Plan**The MBLC will be working with the Public Relations (PR) Advisory Committee (comprised of representatives from school, academic, and public libraries) and a hired agency to carry out this public awareness campaign. The MBLC and the PR Committee have developed this plan but are receptive to ideas and suggestions from the hired agency. Both 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.

While there are broad goals for the marketing plan, within each goal the Public Relations (PR) Advisory Committee is interested in narrowing target audiences and developing smaller campaigns that focus on specific audiences.  
 Unique and new opportunities during the upcoming year include:

* The launch of the new consumer portal, libraries.state.ma.us, redesigned to appeal to new library users.
* Our partners, the Boston Bruins, turn 100 in 2024.
* The Massachusetts Broadband Institute’s new statewide Digital Equity Plan features libraries as anchor institutions.
* The MBLC is in the process of working on an accessibility audit of our websites with the Institute for Human Centered Design.
* 85% of public libraries are fine free, eliminating a barrier to usage.
* With so many new library directors and library staff, a survey to understand their promotional needs should be conducted.

**Increase public access to and awareness of statewide products and services**IMLS funded-statewide products and services include [LEA (Library eBooks and AudioBooks),](https://libraries.state.ma.us/pages/LEA) [statewide databases](https://libraries.state.ma.us/research/), and the [Commonwealth Catalog (ComCat](https://commonwealthcatalog.org/home?cid=massvc&lid=massvc)). New for spring 2024 is the redesigned consumer portal, <https://libraries.state.ma.us/>, which features two new services that the PR Advisory Committee would also like to promote: the new statewide events calendar and the new statewide Library of Things search page.   
Specific campaigns should be developed that target:

* new users or people who haven’t used the library in a while
* people who speak a language other than English
* seniors and veterans
* people who have a disability

**Measurement***:* Consumer portal usage statistics, Gale and ProQuest statistics, and usage statistics from LEA (Library eBooks and Audiobooks), and other campaign-specific benchmarks  
  
**Increase librarian and library staff awareness of statewide campaigns and ready-made promotional materials**In a 2020 survey of librarians, 76% of respondents said that they used some form of MBLC promotional materials in the past year**.** However, there has been a large turnover of library directors and staff since 2020 and it’s difficult to gauge how MBLC promo materials are currently being used.

* Survey librarians to find out what they need help promoting; consider ways to include licensed school library teachers
* Promote the Awarehouse
* Periodically attend network meetings
* Hold Zoom sessions that introduce the library community to new campaigns and provide opportunity for people to ask questions

**Measurement:** materials ordered and downloaded statistics, participation in statewide campaigns, Awarehouse usage statistics, and other campaign-specific benchmarks

**Increase awareness about the MBLC**   
MBLC’s publications increase awareness of the role of the MBLC and the services MBLC offers. In a 2020 survey of librarians, 75% said that they used an MBLC publication in the last year. The most used were the online weekly MBLC Service Update and the online monthly Libraries in the News. As mentioned previously, with the large turnover of library directors and staff since 2020, it’s difficult to gauge how often publications are being viewed or used.

* Explore ways to expand the reach and accessibility of MBLC publications
* Examine effectiveness of/need for MBLC publications to determine: which should be discontinued; newly developed; redeveloped; or continued as is.
* Highlight and promote staff and commissioner expertise and achievements
* Ensure Brand Guide is used by affiliates and grant recipients
* Identify and participate in appropriate events
* Continue press releases and press outreach

**Measurement:** number of publications that are moved to a more accessible online format and how often these are viewed, participation in events, and other campaign specific benchmarks

**Build a sense of value of Massachusetts libraries**  
Although library usage and funding have steadily increased over the past five years, libraries continue to struggle with the perception that they are a “nice” but not essential public service. As a result, stable library funding is a concern.   
In a 2020 survey, librarians identified the topics they would like featured in an awareness campaign. In order of popularity, they were: How libraries positively impact people’s lives; How much money people save by using the library; Libraries as places that bring diverse people together.

* A lot has changed since the 2020 survey: staff turnover, the full effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, attempts to ban books, digital inclusion, and the rise of social justice for example. A new survey should be conducted to gauge the most important topics for librarians today.
* It is estimated that between [86-88% of librarians are white](https://sr.ithaka.org/publications/changing-the-racial-demographics-of-librarians/#:~:text=While%20librarianship%20is%20currently%20estimated,percent%2C%20instead%20of%2017%20percent.). In keeping with the MBLC’s core principles, a specific awareness campaign should be developed to attract people of color to the library profession.
* Given the increase in attempts to ban books and the important role library trustees play, a campaign should be considered to recruit diverse trustees.  
    
  **Measurement*:* state aid usage statistics, waiver applicants, overall funding to libraries,** and other campaign specific benchmarks

**TARGET AUDIENCE, MESSAGE, and STRATEGY**   
Target Audience

* The MBLC’s target audiences include library staff, legislators, library trustees and friends, and people who live and work in Massachusetts. The MBLC should explore further connections with schools and licensed school librarians.
* Librarians are frontline marketers and without their buy-in and awareness, campaigns can be only marginally successful.
* State and federal legislators and local officials, provide library funding. It is important that legislators and municipal officials view libraries as a vital community resource. Legislators and municipal officials should receive ongoing information and contact, not just when it’s time to ask for funding.
* Trustees and friends are uniquely positioned to advocate for library funding. Trustees support the running of libraries and need to be aware of MBLC services and programs.
* The MBLC also provides direct services to residents through the consumer portal [Libraries.state.ma.us](file:///\\msd-fp-blc-004\BLCPUBLIC\Communications\PR%20Committee\2024-2027%20marketing%20plan\libraries.state.ma.us). 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 and determine market messages.

Strategy  
An integrated approach guided by consumer needs and preferences that includes a mix of paid, shared, owned and earned media is ideal. However, strategy development should consider the following:  
1. Ways to reach underserved populations including people who may speak a language other than English  
2. Integrating videos as a promotional/awareness element  
3. An online/web-based format for MBLC publications  
4. The ability for libraries to customize campaign materials

**Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)  
From the Statewide Public Relations Advisory Committee SWOT conducted 11.16.2023**

**Strengths**

* Truly passionate about our work
* Most public libraries are fine free, removing barriers to usage.
* The Statewide PR Committee and its efforts to be representative of different perspectives and get beyond local barriers.
* Libraries are still one of the most trusted institutions.
* MBLC has knowledge of the state and political process and knows the federal perspective and where Massachusetts fits compared to other states.
* MBLC offers support (convener/collaboration as a value) to bring together libraries (and other state agencies) to make things happen in the state.
* Strong statewide network of sharing resources; training; support
* Statewide resource sharing/statewide products provided by MBLC make services more affordable for libraries (statewide databases, for example, would be difficult for schools to provide these on their own).
* Creative—the PR Committee is always coming up with new ideas and the ability for the MBLC to work with a paid advertising agency helps ensure quality and consistency.
* Strength and integrity of the people on the Board; MBLC staff; MBLC’s clear, strong policies
* MBLC is a resource for libraries that don’t have the funding or staff to run campaigns/create promotional material/materials in different languages.
* Inexpensive for what we do with the best return on tax dollars
* Curate reliable information

**Weaknesses**

* 367 public libraries that do things “their way” with huge differences between communities: population size, rural vs. urban, different local needs, and other local factors. Finding common ground or something that will work for all communities is a challenge.
* There’s two full-time MBLC communications staff for a large workload.
* Some legislators and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) have an outdated misunderstanding of what libraries do.
* Some libraries are understaffed and underfunded, leaving little time and resources for staff to engage in statewide promotional efforts--some with one or 2 staff members.
* Whether or not a there is a school librarian depends on the school system and only libraries with a licensed school library teacher have access to state-funded resources like databases, meaning state-funded resources may not actually reach all students equitably.
* Difficulty reaching non-users, new users and underserved populations
* Database marketing
* Access to accurate/timely data
* Many libraries don’t have room for community spaces.
* Community members and library staff don’t know what the MBLC does.

**Opportunities**

* eBooks and anti-book banning pending legislation/creating advocates in our communities/ Strengthen boards of trustees and friends groups
* Promote the Awarehouse with monthly email reminders/what’s new in promo; hold Zoom meetings with librarians for new campaigns; and create a way for libraries that are successful with marketing and outreach to share successes with others so that people don’t need to recreate the wheel.
* The consumer portal, [libraries.state.ma.us](file:///\\msd-fp-blc-004\BLCPUBLIC\Communications\PR%20Committee\2024-2027%20marketing%20plan\libraries.state.ma.us), has been redesigned with a focus on new users.
* To engage libraries more, target them in the same way that we set target audiences in other campaigns—a more segmented approach—not one size fits all. Consider how a campaign may differ for a small rural library vs. an urban library.
* The major strength of the databases is that no one else provides free full text online articles, 24/7 from anywhere—no library card is needed for Massachusetts residents.
* More social media only campaigns
* With school libraries, there’s no data that speaks to the scope of the potential issues. Create an accountability method to understand which schools have access to state-funded library resources/ databases and which don’t. Potentially highlighting the lack of equity when it comes to state-funded resources.
* Microsites for major programs: state aid, construction, LSTA, will increase accessibility.
* How can we use AI to our advantage?
* Leverage our power as story tellers to tell more compelling stories.
* Collaborate with state agencies especially for seniors/immigrants and other populations.
* Mass Broadband Institute’s new statewide digital equity plan—libraries are considered anchor institutes—how can we reach people who need assistance with internet the most?
* Better measurement of campaign effectiveness

**Threats**

* Libraries continue to face the misconception that search engines such as Google, provide the same information as searches on the libraries’ databases. “Who needs a library when we have the internet?” Or in general, people continue to ask, “Who needs libraries?”
* Lack of diversity in the profession
* Attempts to ban or remove books have increased dramatically and opponents of intellectual freedom are running for library and school boards.
* Confusion about who does what between the MBLC, Massachusetts Library System, and Massachusetts Library Association
* Budget cuts
* Staff turnover—the MBLC lost 20% of its staff to retirement and large number of new directors and staff members in the MA library field.
* There is no name recognition or branding of databases. Though they’re online, they can seem too complicated or intimidating for consumers who are accustomed to the one-step Google type search. Unlike our competitors there is no entry URL, accessing the databases is a multi-step process.
* There can be a long wait for popular eBooks; publishers charge libraries triple or more what a consumer pays for the same eBook and restrictive licensing.
* School libraries are overseen by DESE, not the MBLC, and school libraries are not a priority for DESE.
* School District/ local control of how they define "librarian" in order to match budget considerations without understanding a Licensed School Library Teacher is necessary for access to state funded resources
* Services like LEA (Library eBooks and Audiobooks) that already have a recognized vendor brand name that may be familiar to librarians and current users but not to new users and therefore hampers our efforts to brand the service; vendors can and do change so while a user may identify Overdrive for example, that name could change to a new vendor; BUT suggestion that the MBLC collaborate with external vendors(instead of trying to fight increasing brand/recognition(e.g. OverDrive/Libby)

**Timeline and priorities  
Year one**--Librarian survey to understand their promotional needs and get a baseline for how MBLC publications are being used.   
  
**Campaigns**:   
Each year campaigns will be developed that focus on:

* Statewide Summer Library Program (in partnership with the Boston Bruins and other potential statewide partners)
* Awareness campaign/Value of Massachusetts Libraries: Year 1: campaign to attract people of color/more diversity to the library profession. Results from the librarian survey may be used to determine awareness campaigns for years two and three.
* Targeted campaigns: Year 1: campaign for people who speak a language other than English; Year 2: campaign for new/ returning users; Year 3: seniors/veterans/people with disability (need to narrow).
* The results of the librarian survey will help determine what additional campaigns are needed.
* Campaigns may include but are not limited to: target audience determination, message development, focus group review, paid advertising, microsite, bookmarks, posters, reading lists, video, social media, sliders for the agency and portal websites, in-person library events and participation in rollout sessions with librarians.

**Evaluation**  
Evaluation of the effectiveness of the campaigns will be through the measurements mentioned with each goal. The marketing firm will also be expected to provide data especially as it pertains to paid media, the Awarehouse and any microsite created as part of a campaign.  
  
**In addition to the activities listed under each goal, the following activities will occur each year of the contract**:  
The paid agency will be expected to attend the meetings of the Statewide Public Relations Advisory Committee which occur at least quarterly, attend rollout sessions with the library community and attend MBLC communications team meetings as needed.  
**Publications** (occur annually)  
Marketing firm must be able to coordinate with printer. MBLC provides written content and some photographs; paid agency designs MBLC official publications (some may be web-based documents) including but not limited to:

* State Aid Guide for local officials
* State Aid slider
* Construction program fact sheet
* Construction map
* Construction grant round basics
* Construction design elements
* Construction slider
* Podcast social media graphics
* LSTA fact sheets for grant opportunities (10)
* LSTA Brochure
* LSTA slider
* LSTA social media graphics
* Legislative Agenda and micro-site
* Legislative materials for national library legislative day
* Annual Report
* MBLC Brochures
* Trustee Pocket Guide
* Trustee Legislative  
    
  **BUDGET**Pending approval of MBLC’s special projects budget