

Introduction

The State Law Library of Montana supports the legal research and information needs of Montana's judges and court staff, attorneys and legal assistants, state employees, inmates, students, and the public. Notably, *pro se* (self-representing) litigants comprise a majority of our patrons.

Our collection development policy prioritizes Montana laws, regulations, court opinions and related resources. We also collect federal laws, other state's law and regulations, "eBooks," treatises, law journals, textbooks and practice aids. We constantly update and supplement relevant materials. We also maintain and preserve significant historical materials, such as some of our English Law books which were printed as far back as the 1500s. We have served as a federal depository library since 1977, providing access to selected federal publications throughout the state.

The State Law Library contracts with major legal database providers such as Lexis Nexis, Westlaw and HeinOnline, comprising some of the most utilized resources for judges and law clerks, attorneys, and our Reference Librarian. Our most popular resources include our "Ask a Librarian" service, Montana Legislative History compilations, and our free Continuing Legal Education (CLE) programs for attorneys. We partner with the Court-Help Program to host and supervise a Self-Help Center for *pro se* litigants, which operates at capacity. Along with the Access to Justice Commission, the Self-Help Program, and other stakeholders, the State Law Library creates and posts self-help materials on our website, such as forms and *pro se* guides covering most civil legal topics in Montana.

The State Law Library works with public libraries, legal and social service providers, and other agencies to promote meaningful statewide access to our resources. For example, we are active members in the Montana Library Association, Montana Shared Catalog, interlibrary loan program, and the Access to Justice Commission. In 2020, the Montana State Library Commission honored the State Law Library with the Excellent Library Service Award.

Highlights 2019-2020

- Maintained pre-pandemic level of library services while ensuring safety and compliance with applicable guidelines.
 - FY19: Provided nearly 5,000 total services, including approximately 2,200 legal reference services, 800 general research services, and support for more than 1,600 self-help services.
 - FY20: Provided approximately 4,700 services, including nearly 3,000 legal reference services, 500 general research services, and support for more than 700 self-help services.
- Collaborated with community partners to promote timely and relevant resources on pandemic-related legal issues including end-of-life planning, eviction, and other topics.
- Implemented new tools for serving patrons remotely, including an online questionnaire to guide patrons to appropriate resources on probate matters.

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- Produced resources for self-represented litigants in a variety of formats, including short videos, “cheat sheets,” questionnaires, and brochures. Topics include Emergency Parenting Actions, Dissolution vs. Legal Separation, Best Practices for Filing, and Service of Process.
- Shortened wait-times for responses from our Ask a Librarian reference service by streamlining incoming requests and compiling resources on frequently asked questions.
- Digitized Montana legal resources for free online use including Legislative Bills 1975-1997, and for both Executive Orders and Attorney General Opinions from pre-statehood to current.
- Completed an online historical resource, *Biographies and Histories of Montana’s Justices, Judges, and Courts*.
- Updated our Montana Legislative History Research guide to reflect additional online resources.
- Provided free continuing legal education courses, including a remote program on Lawyers and Suicide attended by more than 200 Montana State Bar members.

State Law Library of Montana Strategic Plan FY20-21

VISION

Advancing equal access to justice by effectively supporting Montanans involved in court proceedings with their legal research and information needs.

MISSION

The mission of the State Law Library is to provide legal information and resources, to enhance knowledge of the law and court system, and to facilitate equal access to justice, statewide.

GOALS

1. Relevant, Accessible, & Diverse Collection

- a. Continue building a collection to meet the needs of Montana's judges and court personnel, members of the State Bar of Montana, state officers and employees, and members of the public.
 - i. Review and update collection development plan. (FY21)
 - ii. Review all potential purchases according to collection development plan and emerging needs of Montana’s courts. (Ongoing)
 - iii. Monitor usage of both print-based and eBook resources, in addition to patron tracking system, to plan purchases. (Ongoing)
 - iv. Establish plan for periodic collection inventory and weeding (FY21).
 - v. Continue building electronic repository of Legal Reference responses for frequently asked questions. (Ongoing)
- b. Continue building self-help resources.
 - i. Continue participation in the Access to Justice Commission, including the Forms, and Outreach & Education Subcommittees. (Ongoing)
 - ii. Continue collaboration with Montana Legal Services Association (MTLSA) and MontanaLawHelp.org to add and update self-help content in print and online formats. (Ongoing)

- iii. Continue providing administrative and technical support to the Montana Interdisciplinary Network of Guardianship Stakeholders (WINGS).
- c. Identify, preserve, and showcase critical and unique materials.
 - i. Review and update digitization plan and priorities. (FY21)
 - ii. Establish plan for preserving historical and unique materials. (FY22)
 - iii. Showcase historical books in display cases. (Ongoing)

2. Patron Services

- a. Enhance online resources with ongoing updates and additions to content and design.
 - i. Review and update current content for transition to new website. (FY21)
 - ii. Continue to provide public computer terminals and relevant guidance to using legal databases. (Ongoing)
 - iii. Review and update digitization plan and priorities. (FY21)
 - iv. Review and update website to provide on-demand access to all law library sponsored CLE programs and materials. (Ongoing)
- b. Ask a Librarian
 - i. Compile new and update existing boilerplate responses to popular topics. (Ongoing)
 - ii. Provide guidance and support to referring agencies and court staff for making appropriate referrals. (Ongoing)
- c. Update Montana legal research guides.
 - i. Update Montana Legal Research Guide. (FY21)
 - ii. Update Legal Research Manual for Law Clerks. (FY22)

3. Innovative Technology

- a. Apply questionnaire (“chat-bot”) application to additional topics. (Ongoing)
- b. Research other state agencies’ and law libraries’ use of new technology to enhance customer service. (Ongoing)
- c. Explore new and innovative technology available at little or no cost. (Ongoing)

4. Community Outreach & Education

- a. Increase general outreach and awareness of law library services and collection.
 - i. Produce annual report for distribution to Court Administration, Montana Supreme Court and other relevant audiences. (FY21)
 - ii. Distribute email updates regarding new books, CLE programming and other services, at a minimum quarterly basis. (Ongoing)
 - iii. Contribute articles, press releases or other updates to State Bar, Montana Library Association, and other relevant sources. (Ongoing)
- b. Contribute to the work of the Access to Justice Commission.
 - i. Continue participation in the Access to Justice Commission, including the Forms, and Outreach & Education Subcommittees. (Ongoing)
 - ii. Continue collaboration with Montana Legal Services Association (MTLSA) and MontanaLawHelp.org to add and update self-help content in print and online formats. (Ongoing)
 - iii. Continue support and supervision of Self-Help Center staff housed in the law library. (Ongoing)
- c. Reach underserved communities in a variety of formats.
 - i. Review and revise priorities and plan for reaching underserved and remote communities. (FY21)

- d. Provide continuing education opportunities for the legal community.
 - i. Review and update website to provide on-demand access to all law library sponsored CLE programs and materials. (FY21)
 - ii. Continue providing free CLE courses in coordination with the Public Law Section, MTLISA and other groups. (Ongoing)
 - iii. Continue providing (approximately) quarterly learning events for Montana Supreme Court Law Clerks, at little or no cost.
- e. Provide outreach and education opportunities for non-lawyers.
 - i. Together with WINGS, create free online training modules for persons seeking guardianship of an adult. Promote trainings and related forms to District Court Judges. (Ongoing)
 - ii. Commemorate Law Day, Banned Books Week, and historic legal observance months with themed displays, CLE programs and new materials. (Ongoing)
 - iii. Provide training and tours to other community groups as requested and when safe to do so.
 - iv. Provide training on law library resources and appropriate referrals to other state agencies. (FY21)
- f. Public Libraries
 - i. Provide training on legal research, self-help resources, and related topics during the Montana Library Association (MLA) annual conference and related events. (FY21)
 - ii. Provide training and support to public libraries through the Montana State Library Training and Lifelong Education contacts. (Ongoing)

5. Effective Management

- a. Maintain high quality collection and services within a balanced budget.
 - i. Review monthly budget reports. (Ongoing)
 - ii. Meet with Court Administration accounting staff as needed.
 - iii. Review and negotiate any new contracts as applicable.
- b. Support staff knowledge and professional growth.
 - i. Support staff training opportunities available at little or no cost and encourage staff to apply for conference scholarships.
 - ii. Encourage staff participation on legal and library-related committees, such as MLA and the Access to Justice Commission.
 - iii. Support staff membership and participation in relevant associations such as MLA and the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL).
- c. Plan for staff and patron safety.
 - i. Coordinate quarterly meetings with staff and on-campus Montana Highway Patrol. (Ongoing)
 - ii. Ensure that at least three staff members hold current certification in First Aid and CPR.
 - iii. Update Emergency Response "Pocket Plan" and Evacuation Plan when any new staff members join.
 - iv. Participate in building-wide emergency drills, including patrons, and meet as staff to discuss post-drill.
 - v. Update policies and procedures as new patron and safety challenges are encountered.