

# **Maine Shares**

## **An Evaluation of Maine's Five Year LSTA Plan**

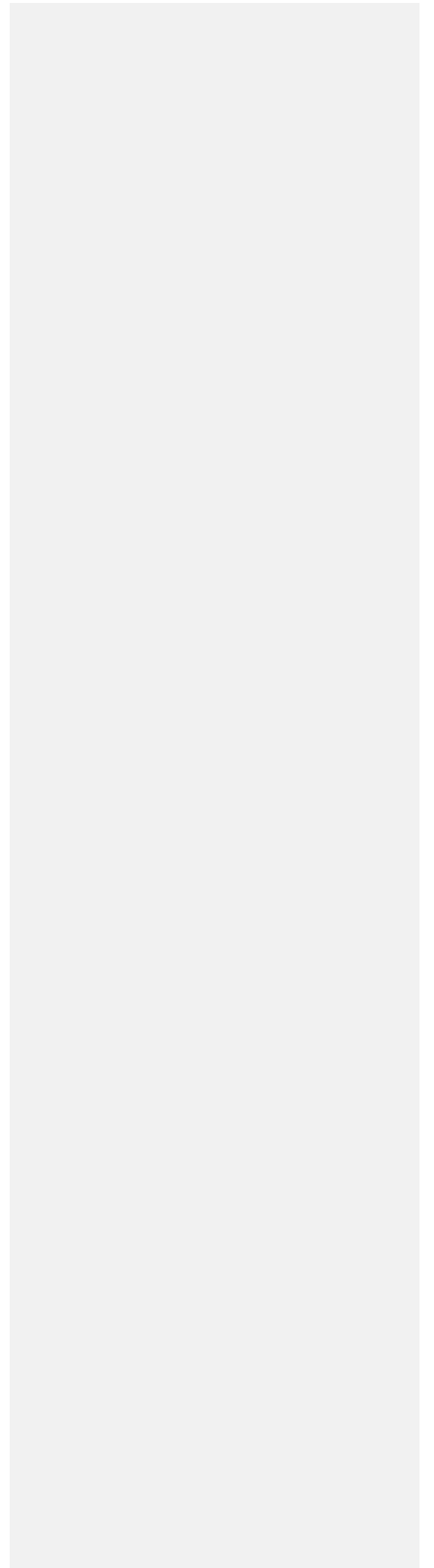
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## Executive Summary

The overall goal of the Maine State Library's Five Year LSTA Plan is that, "**Regardless of location or residency, Maine people will have full access to the Maine State Library information system.**" LSTA funds in Maine have been leveraged to share statewide resources to meet this goal for the benefit of all 1.3 million residents. The Maine State Library has used LSTA funds to support a number of programs designed to reach the goals of its five year plan. The Maine State Library has focused on the need to provide resources and access to technology and information sources to all libraries and residents in the state and has enabled libraries and residents statewide to participate in 21<sup>st</sup> century information resources, regardless of the wealth or location of the community.

The Maine State Library has deliberately guided a process providing services to residents that would cost their local communities thousands of dollars. Comments from librarians and staff involved in the evaluation process rarely failed to enumerate the cost barrier to their libraries and communities to provide these same services on their own.

Without LSTA support, Maine libraries would not be able to provide the services they do today and would be a less critical social asset to their communities. Comments from residents and librarians indicate a renewed vitality to many Maine libraries. This has resulted from the implementation of the LSTA five year plan and LSTA funds to support the plan. The sense of vitality and relevance is critical to libraries remaining an important social asset in our communities. A sense of place, of community, is important in the southern part of Maine where communities have been changing, growing and maturing for many years, as well as in central and northern Maine, more rural sections of the state that rely on a lower tax base to support their libraries and schools.

Similarly, the amount of staff development, training, the high level of continuing education and technical training, which is provided by the Maine State Library with LSTA assistance, is easily worth many hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The Maine State Library also facilitates telecommunications improvements and e-rate advice to local libraries and schools which enable them to participate in the resource sharing projects. Without adequate networks and telecommunication connections, many libraries have been unable to participate in the broader resource sharing programs.

Some of the projects discussed in the following report include:

- The Maine InfoNet Project which has created a holdings database, an integrated library system and a new state wide catalog.
- Talking Books, Large Print and Books by Mail programs targeted to expand access to populations in need of these services.
- Access to Continuing Education throughout the state to reach all geographic areas in different formats. Professional training and development for library staff through workshops, classes, ATMs, a mobile tech lab and individual coaching and consulting when needed.

The Maine State Library has successfully worked toward the achievement of the goals in the five year plan. In particular Special Services programs, Maine InfoNet including MINERVA and access to online databases, interlibrary loan and Library Development's consulting services are well positioned to provide access to services for all of Maine's residents through resource sharing of collections, network services and electronic access to information sources, and professional staff development.

### **Who Benefits?**

Though there are specific communities and populations of residents in Maine who may benefit more from a particular program than others, it is the full population of the state who have received improved and increased access to information and materials due to LSTA assisted projects. Specific populations that have benefited from LSTA assisted projects include:

- Rural residents whose libraries now have access to the Internet, online full text databases, and access to the large and unique collections of libraries throughout the state.
- Middle school and high school students who now have access in school and at home to a variety of databases
- Many retirees and seniors who rely on their library as a comfortable hub of their community, where they can learn to e-mail relatives, search the Internet and have books delivered to them quickly from other libraries
- Blind, visually impaired and physically disabled people who rely on Talking Books, Books by Mail or Large Print books as their lifeline to the world
- Librarians who receive much needed certification, skills training, technology training and guidance, and a sense of community with other Maine librarians

The following report will describe some of these programs and benefits.

### **Overall report of results in achieving goals and objectives based on the 5 year plan.**

*"There is a renaissance occurring in Maine's public libraries today due to the networking taking place."* Survey Respondent

The Maine State Library created its five year plan in 1997 to implement the requirements of the new Library Services and Technology Act. The plan was discussed and approved by the Maine Library Commission and approved on March 13, 1997. The plan covers the period from October 1, 1997 to September 30, 2002. Sources used to develop the needs assessment included:

- A statewide survey of Maine residents on library attitudes and usage
- Public library annual reports and statistics
- Data pertaining to special populations

- Consultant field trips
- District plans of service
- Maine Library Association Minimum Standards for Public Library Service

The Plan was based in part on an extensive planning effort under the direction of the Maine Library Commission from 1993 to 1995. *Vision 2003*, was the result of the planning effort and has been seen as the basis for the LSTA Five Year Plan. *Vision 2003* analyzed the gap between current (1993-95) library conditions in Maine and the desired future of library services and created a collective vision of action and strategy to close the gap and provide services to all people in Maine in order to meet the challenge of the future. The Regional Library System sponsored a number of district meetings throughout the state to promote an inclusive process and then the three regional Library System's executive boards developed the final document and action plan to guide the implementation.

A brief review of Maine's rural character, geography and population will provide an important backdrop to understanding the Five Year Plan and the emphasis on specific goals and activities. Most of the information provided here is included in Maine's Five Year State Plan and form the assumptions that led to *Vision 2003* and the Five Year State Plan as well as the subsequent direction for library services in Maine.

*"In Maine, because we have so little, what little we have must be shared and what little we have to spend must be spent to help all of us."* Survey respondent

Maine is a rural state with a population density of approximately 37 residents per square mile, less than any other eastern state. Maine's 1.3 million residents live in an area that is as large as the five other New England states combined. Maine, along with Idaho, South Dakota, North Dakota, New Mexico and Oklahoma "...report between 18 and 30 percent of their state populations as "unserved<sup>1</sup>." Approximately 200,000 Maine residents live in communities with no local library service. Two factors leading to these statistics include the population distribution in cities and towns and, that of the 269 public libraries in Maine, 99% of them are "single direct service outlets" the highest percent of single governance, stand alone libraries of any state in the country<sup>2</sup>. The statistics are a function of the traditional model of library governance in Maine, in which 63% of all public libraries are Association Libraries and 36% are Municipal Libraries with no county, district or multi-jurisdictional libraries.

Additionally, among Maine's population:

- 19% serve towns of less than 1,000 residents
- 35% serve towns between 1,000 to 2,500 residents
- 22% serve towns between 2,500 to 5,000 residents
- 17% serve towns between 5,000 to 10,000 residents

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<sup>1</sup> *Fast Facts*, Recent Statistics from Library Research Services. Sept. 1998

<sup>2</sup> *Statistics in Brief*, National Center for Education Statistics, Sept. 1998

- Only 7% serve towns with over 10,000 residents

Considering this distribution of the population into small communities and the tradition of local governance of libraries, the number of unserved and underserved residents is significant. Many of the 269 public libraries in these small communities, relying strictly on local funds, face great difficulty in providing adequate library services to their community in relation to the expectations of their residents. Many of these libraries operate with limited hours, staff and in some cases with interrupted telephone and electric services.

The paradox of expectations and needs with the availability of infrastructure, funding and basic services is evident. As two librarians from small rural libraries reported in their comments on the evaluation survey they provided:

*“Most adults and children in our community are no longer interested in using print reference material. They all want to use electronic reference material.”*

*“I look forward to having our collection in the Holdings Database so our patrons and others can access them online, however...electricity here is still so erratic that digital clocks have to be reset daily, sometimes more.”*

The stated primary goal, then, that **Regardless of location or residency, Maine people will have full access to the Maine State Library information system** explains the focus on resource sharing, electronic linkages and in reaching unserved and underserved rural communities with library and information services.

Maine’s Five Year Plan and Vision 2003 emphasize that “Through the community of libraries, all people will have convenient and timely access to information for education, work and recreation.”

The main priorities are stated as:

- Create a community of strong libraries working together to achieve Vision 2003.
- Assess needs and expectations of the people of Maine and prepare libraries to respond to them.
- Strengthen the Maine State Library and its role in developing and improving library services in the state.
- Involve the people of Maine in promoting Vision 2003 and educate funding authorities regarding the services and needs of libraries.
- Define the basic level of services that should be free to all people of Maine.

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- Promote and publicize the library's role in assuring equitable access to information technology, and promote the library as a focal point for traditional library services.
  - Provide in-service training in new and emerging technology.
  - Support literacy projects for all ages.

The critical goals resulting from the planning process and guiding the five year plan are:

**Goal #1: Targeting library and information services to persons residing in unserved or underserved rural communities.**

"Currently, the quality and range of services offered by individual, academic, public, institutional and school libraries in Maine vary from excellent to inadequate. Serious inequities also exist between the rural and urban sections of the state. With the dramatic growth in the number and variety of electronic information sources, the gap between the haves and the have nots threatens to expand." (Vision 2003)

The activities to reach this goal include:

- The Maine State Library will provide Books by Mail to an additional 3,000 residents in communities that have no local libraries or libraries that are open 14 or fewer hours per week.
- The Maine Regional Library System will enable all residents direct free access to major library resources
- The Maine State Library will continue to provide interlibrary sharing of resources and maintain a high level of use.
- State aid will be provided for public libraries that are unable to offer adequate services.
- Regional resources will be strengthened to improve area collections by 15,000 items per year.
- The Maine Regional Library System will help all types of libraries improve services for local users, through consultation and advisory services.
- Video packets will be provided for local public libraries.
- Catalog cards will be provided for over 175 local public libraries.
- A union list of serials will be maintained.

**Results:**

The Maine Regional Library System has successfully penetrated the 16 counties throughout the state to provide improved collections, interlibrary loan, professional consulting and advisory services, and improved access to library services and information resources for all resident of Maine. Providing library services to the estimated 20% to 30% of underserved and unserved residents is the focus of these activities. The Maine

State Library and the three regional library systems continue to provide improved and equitable library access and services to fulfill their mission.

Many of the evaluation survey respondents and participants in the evaluation focus groups report double digit increases in the number of interlibrary loans and increased reliance on advisory services and collections through their Regional Library System District. The Regional Library System includes the Northern Maine Library District located at the Bangor Public Library and providing services to seven northern counties, the Central Maine Library District located in the Maine State Library and providing services to seven central counties and the Southern Maine Library District in the Portland Public Library, which provides services to two southern counties. Each of the Districts serve one third of the population of the state.

Regional Services are operated through Library Development Services at the Maine State Library which receives the majority of LSTA funds in Maine. Twelve staff positions in Library Development Services are supported to provide staffing and consultants to Special Services and the District Libraries for public library assistance.

The three districts provide the following organizations and services:

- **Area Reference and Resource Centers (ARRC).** The ARRCs provide backup reference services for libraries, interlibrary loan assistance, and expanded collections to circulate through the district libraries.
- **District consultants.** The district consultant serves a generalist function in advising local libraries on a number of service and collections related issues, including long range planning, collection development, library management, building construction and public relations. Training and continuing education remain a very important part of the district consultant's responsibilities.
- **District councils.** Representatives from each member library or school meet to organize assistance to libraries for public relations, special events and to create purchasing cooperatives.

The ARRCs and the District Libraries receive high marks from participating libraries in their overall satisfaction to the services they receive. In an April 2001 survey conducted by Library Development, 86% of all libraries rated their satisfaction with ARCC services as "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied." Ninety six (96%) percent gave an overall "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" rating to their district Library services. As one librarian responded in the LSTA evaluation survey,

*"Our library has benefited extensively from expert assistance provided by district consultants and MSL staff in the areas of e-rate, technology training, continuing education, planning and meeting changing library needs. Without this assistance we would not have been able to deal with the many challenges we face, especially without*



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*the vast resources which we access daily through an efficient and prompt ILL system.”*  
Survey respondent

and

*“The district consultants help to connect our libraries. Any support given to them comes to us locally. Their meetings, workshops and assistance have been outstanding.”* Survey respondent

**Goal #2: Targeting library and information services to people having difficulty using a library.**

Every Maine resident should have equal access to library collections and information services. (Vision 2003)

- The Talking Book program will be expanded by 15% each year.
- Large Print items will be provided in all 16 counties, with 125 public libraries providing them at the local level.
- Circulate at least 60,000 large print items each year.

**Results:**

*“I don’t know how I survived before I found out about the Talking Books program.”*  
Focus group participant

In the FY year ending in June 2001, slightly more than 3000 registered Talking Book users had been served in Maine. During that year the program experienced a net loss of almost 200 users; 627 new users registered and 830 registrations lapsed or closed. Based on national estimates that 1.5% of the national population is eligible for Talking Books service, it follows that 19,500 Maine residents would qualify also. Currently, 15% of potential users in Maine are being served. Though the Talking Books program is operated with a credo of providing the best personal service to users, it will need to focus more on outreach and local partnerships to uncover the rest of the potential population that is not receiving the same benefits that current users are.

Large Print circulation at the end of FY 2000//2001 in June 2001 recorded 41,762 items circulated. Of this number, 15,566 items were circulated directly to individual users and 26,196 items circulated to users through 135 participating public libraries. Additional access for large print users has been achieved with the addition of 10 more participating libraries than was projected. The increased access has resulted in new users and increased turnover of materials in the collection, though not yet reaching the level of 60,000 items that was projected.

See more information in the next section, “In Depth Evaluation.”

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**Goal #3: Assisting libraries in accessing information through electronic networks and assisting and encouraging libraries to access information through effective use of technology.**

Addressing the LSTA goal of encouraging libraries in different areas, and encouraging different types of libraries to establish consortia and share resources.

- All eligible libraries will be connected and effectively using the network.

**Results:**

There are over 800 libraries of various types in Maine. That all eligible libraries will be connected and effectively using the InfoNet represents an ambitious goal for the Maine State Library and for InfoNet. The ability to provide multiple entry points for libraries will allow a gradual development of statewide resource sharing and electronic linkages of libraries throughout the state. The future of resource sharing and electronic linkages is inevitable in Maine, as the infrastructure and the support and willingness of state and local library funders continue to grow.

The demand by residents from all areas of the state is evident as many of the barriers have been removed during the recent Five Year Plan as the following comments state:

*“There is a flexibility to involvement with InfoNet, allowing all libraries in the state to participate – there are multiple entry points for libraries into the state wide database – the growth ahead for the next few years is large.”*

MSL staff comment

*“The most impact has come from being part of MINERVA since May 2000. Being part of a state wide database has significantly increased resources sharing access points for library users to information because the database is web based. Our library’s ILL activity has increased 33% since last year “*

Survey respondent

*“Improved ILL and tech support for MINERVA are the most obvious benefits. Now we rarely have a patron leave without the book or information they requested, or the request to get it elsewhere. Patron satisfaction is wonderful publicity for libraries. Our e-rate consultant is very valuable – she gives me peace of mind. We have also benefited from staff training. We have heard expert speakers and trainers at very little cost to our library.”*

Survey respondent

See more information in the next section, “In Depth Evaluation.”

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## In Depth Evaluation

Maine's evaluation of the Five Year Plan includes an in depth focus of the following two elements:

- Targeting library and information services to persons having difficulty using a library, and to underserved urban and rural communities. The projects involved are **Talking Books, Large Print Books** and the **Books by Mail program**.
- Assisting libraries in accessing information through electronic networks. Projects involved include the **Maine School and Library Network** and **Maine InfoNet Project**. A review of the Maine InfoNet Project is included in this report.

Selections of anecdotal evidence of the impact of the Talking Books program, Books by Mail and Large Print Books have been collected from a number of sources, including:

- Letters to the staff of Special Services at the Maine State Library
- Letters and conversations with the consultants involved in the evaluation process
- Information provided to the consultant from the staff of Special Services at the Maine State Library
- Comments and anecdotes provided by participants in a focus group involving users of Special Services and their family members

Anecdotal information appears in quotes and is used throughout this report as a backdrop to other information that is presented about these programs. The impact that the programs have on the lives of the users was discussed with them. The Talking Book, Large Print and Books by Mail focus group discussions included many blind and visually impaired participants. Also included were family members of children with multiple disabilities who use one or both of these programs. Present also were family members of homebound users, who discussed their mother or father's use of these services.

For many of the participants, Talking Books, Large Print Books, and Books by Mail are a bright, and sometimes the brightest light in an otherwise dark day, week or month. The passion and emotion with which they discussed the joy of receiving a new package of books or tapes through the mail was at times almost overwhelming. For many, receiving the mailed package is the reason they get up in the morning. No quote or anecdote in this report can adequately describe the relationship that the participants have with the program and with the staff that serves them in the programs. It would be hard to find an example of a more synergistic connection between user/resident/patron and a library and library staff. The following comment comes close to explaining the relationship:

*"My father became totally blind the day after his 81<sup>st</sup> birthday, March of 2001. For a strong and independent man (and for us) it was devastating. We tried getting "blind" help from many agencies and the only one that responded quickly was Talking Books. My father's black world was brightened by the talking book tapes – he loves history and*

*news. And his blindness and confusion left him with the tapes in the afternoon as the one enjoyment he could look forward to. The free mailing back and forth is great also."*

Letter from Talking Book user family

However, awareness of the Maine State Library Special Services seems to be low, not only in the public's perception, but among librarians and library staff as well. Forty Percent (40%) of the respondents to the evaluation survey rated Talking Books, Large Print and Books by Mail, as a moderate to low value to their community. They apparently are not aware of the hidden unserved residents in their area who might benefit from these services. Sixty percent (60%) of the respondents, included comments to the question "How has your community benefited from LSTA supported projects?" that mention the increase in use of Large Print Books and the benefits to their communities.

Special Services needs to find a home on the Maine State Library website. Links can be created directing potential family and users of the three programs to an interactive site that describes each of the services and encourages potential users to pre-register online. Special Services also do not appear on any of the Regional Library websites and there is no visible search feature on them or the State Library site to find out information about the programs. The lack of online promotional and public relations information about Talking Books, Books by Mail and Large Print materials are barriers to use and growth.

The following table describes Special Services statistics for 1998 through 2001 and indicates the challenges and opportunities for Special Services.

Special Services Statistics 1998-2001 <sup>3</sup>				
FY July 1 to June 30				
		1998 - 1999	1999 - 2000	2000 - 2001
Talking Books	Registration	3,349	3,469	3,080
	Collection	60,488	58,215	59,899
	Circulation	118,543	126,946	118,801
Large Print	Registration	523 (389 individuals) (133 libraries)	536 (401 individuals) (134 libraries)	543 (408 individuals) (135 libraries)
	Collection	20,233	20,398	21,508
	Circulation	45,498	44,607	41,762
Books by Mail	Registration	6,377	6,666	6,895
	Collection	45,640	45,636	48,338
	Circulation	12,949	10,400	12,387

### Talking Books

After applicants are approved for eligibility, they are given a survey to determine their tastes and preferences for materials. The staff of Talking Books is highly customer oriented and takes pride in the personal attention they pay to users. The attention and care is evident in the comments of the users during the evaluation focus group. The customer service floor of Talking Books, located in the first floor of the Maine State Library, focuses on customer service and satisfaction. The staff regularly receives calls from doctors, nurses, ophthalmologists and home health care workers asking them about the service and information needed to register a user. They also routinely call users who do not call often to gauge their satisfaction with the titles they are receiving. The staff also feels that the time is right for a web based ordering system for users who depend on their computers. There are another 100 libraries throughout the state that serve as Talking Book Service Centers. These centers have spare machines to loan if a users' machine is broken as well as a limited number of titles.

As noted earlier, Talking Books is a wonderful program that is highly valued by its users and their families. It is also facing a challenge of reaching additional potential users throughout the state. Senior and retiree populations tend to increase greater in rural areas than others. There is still a large segment of potential users who are not aware of the program. In the fall of 2003, Special Services will be using a prerecorded PSA made available from the NLS. Often, Talking Books is the only source of information for residents in search of assistance, as a resident reported recently:

<sup>3</sup> Based on Fiscal Year – June 1 to July 30.

*“My husband was an avid reader before going blind one day in March, 2001. I heard about the Talking Book program. The response was immediate. For a couple of weeks it was ALL the help we could find.”*

Letter from Talking Book user family

Talking Books issues a magazine called Talking Book Topics every other month. It is available in print or cassette and provides information about new titles and information about service. A Talking Book newsletter is also published by the staff on an irregular basis and is used to inform users about changes in service and information about related community and state organizations.

Many users and participants in the focus groups and survey provided information about the effectiveness of the Talking Book program. Among the comments and information are these letters from residents:

*“Right now in an effort to understand what’s going on in the world, I’m reading the Moslem Holy book, the Koran. Before that I enjoyed Richard Holmes’s wonderful two volume biography of the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as well as two novels by Nobel Laureate V.S. Naipaul, “A House for Mr. Bispas” and “A Bend in the River.” I have been blind for over 15 years and none of these works would be available to me without the Talking Books programs and the good people at Special Services, Maine State Library. Though I read Braille, I do so slowly and laboriously and find that full length works are beyond my reach. Thus, I rely completely on Talking Books.”*

Letter from Talking Book user

*“Talking books became my access to the written word, beginning in 1964, after I had completed my sophomore year of high school at Robert W. Traip Academy in Kittery, Maine. I have been legally blind since birth; however, I was educated at public schools where I was never taught Braille. As a child, I had never experienced reading for pleasure the wonderful stories written for children. I missed out on the joy and knowledge I would have derived from reading the classic works of literature which were available in print to sighted children my age. My first Talking Books were sent to me from the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Mass. I became an avid reader of the classics and my interest in reading good fiction has remained to this day. For thirty five years Talking Books have given me access to every book in print I have wished to read. The courteous and dedicated service I have received from my regional libraries and now the Maine State Library has been greater than words can express.”*

Letter from Talking Book user

## **Books by Mail**

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*“My son has multiple handicaps – Ann picks the books for us. It is his ‘thing’, arriving with his name on it and he reads all that come to the house. Manually, the staff matches Talking Book tapes with Large Print books and mails them together to us so that he can use the book along with the tape or if he has difficulty with one he uses the other.”*

Focus group participant

Any resident who lives in a town without a library or which is open less than 14 hours a week can participate in this program. Currently, residents can register for the service by writing to the staff or calling a toll free number. Online registration is not available. The service is particularly popular with seniors; parents who home school their children and residents in rural areas without adequate local library services.

Books by Mail currently services a registered user base of approximately 7000 residents; 4000 adults and 3000 children. In the fiscal year 2000-2001 approximately 12,500 books were circulated, or 1.78 books per registered user. The collection contains 13,500 titles and 50,000 total copies available for distribution. Patrons are served in all 16 counties in the state with heavier usage recorded in Kennebec and Penobscot County and the lightest usage in Cumberland, Piscataquis and Sagadahoc Counties.

The potential user base of Books by Mail is still considered to be a population of 200,000 residents. There remains a large potential for growth in the program. As a respondent to the evaluation survey commented, *“We place a special emphasis on children’s services. Children rely on parents and caregivers to provide transportation so we have to find ways to get the resources to children when they can’t get to us or to a larger library out of town.”*

Additional comments from Books by Mail users and respondents to the survey include:

*“I started participating in the Books-by-Mail program as a young teenager. I came from a town of about 700 people, and they could not afford to have a very big library. I believe Books by Mail enriched my learning far beyond the 82 school days. For some people, world travel is a way to explore, and for others, such as me, a simple book can bring fantasies and dreams to my fingertips, and almost make them seem a reality. Now as I have entered the work force, I still enjoy receiving these books. It provides me with a night of relaxation after a stressful workload.”*

Letter

from Books by Mail user

Also,

*“Just to let you know, my wife and I (ages 80+83) very much appreciate and enjoy the Books by Mail program. At our ages, we drive very little and will not be able to make the 50 miles roundtrip to the state library. Books by Mail is a gods send.”*

Letter from Books by Mail user

A number of improvements to the Books by Mail program have been suggested by survey and focus group participants. These include suggestions to expand the promotion and publicity of the Books by Mail program. Participants said they are surprised to find out how many people they speak to are not aware of the program. Suggestions to increase awareness and use include:

- Books by Mail awareness information in every school system
- Use HealthReach, which makes home visits, to inform people
- Promote at the state wide home schooling conference and other home schooling meetings
- Notices sent to every town council and town office about the free service
- Target state officials and others to promote the service by including a comment in their speeches and presentations

Other comments about improvements include:

- The catalog and books should be available through the State Library Website
- Include more than a brief description about each book in the catalog
- Continue to create subcategories in the catalog, especially in biographies and autobiographies

**In a letter to the Special Services staff about Books by Mail Summer Reading Program:**

*“Whitney learned to read this summer!! Hurrah. She loved to read Piggie as well as the rest of the Bonsall’s books. Now she reads! Thanks a lot, you helped.”*

**Large Print Books**

*“The Large Print Book Service of the Maine State Library is quite literally a lifesaving service for my 94 year old mother-in-law, Hazel B. Haze, who reads about a book a day. This is perhaps the most meaningful activity for her when she is alone, which is much of the day. She is noticeably anxious when there is not a good supply of books for her to devour.”*  
Letter from resident

Additional libraries continue to become participants in offering Large Print collections to their residents. The demand for large print materials increase as populations age and residents try to stay informed and entertained as they cope with sight impairments. Comments from survey respondents and focus group participants reveal a very active and growing user base for large print materials. Circulation has increased, as mentioned and the collection continues to grow to meet the needs of users.

Barriers to increased service include limited shelf space in many libraries, the capacity of Books by Mail services, and the limited but growing awareness about the Large Print collections and materials that are available.

Information about the effectiveness of the Large Print service includes the following comments:

*“We make extensive use of the Large Print Collection (90 books per month) as well as InfoNet and statewide ILL. We continue to refer patrons to Talking Books Service at the state library as well as assist them in filling out applications and use of machines. Our library cannot possibly afford to buy this many titles or in all formats. We do not have a*



*large print collection or an audio book collection but the local demand far exceeds our limited resources.”* Survey respondent

*“Large Print books help meet the needs of our patrons as our collection is small.”*  
Survey respondent

*“Large Print is valuable to our community and MSL Special Services have been able to provide us with newer material s in the past five years. “*  
Survey respondent

*“I am wheelchair bound and in the house 90% of the time. The one happy time I have is reading my books. I call so often that I’ve gotten to know the people answering my request. I read a book in a day or two. My doctors are so happy I have a passion for reading; it keeps me occupied, happy and rested. I can’t go to my public library; my only outing is to the doctor. Even my mail is brought in by neighbors. I am a widow living alone, so you see how important the Large Print books are to me.”*  
Letter from resident

*“I do not drive anymore and I am a widow. I am partially blind, diabetic and have macular degeneration so I really have a need for the large print books. I would like to recommend a three week time to read the books instead of two as it is pretty hard to get three books read in that period of time. Thank you again for the needed service. I am also hard of hearing.”*  
Letter from resident

### **Maine School and Library Network**

This Network is not addressed here because a comprehensive evaluation has been carried out by the Public Utilities Commission and the MSLN Advisory Board. This evaluation has been submitted to IMLS.

### **Maine InfoNet Project**

The Maine InfoNet Project was approved and primarily funded by Maine voters through a \$4.9 million state bond issue, on June 11, 1996. Maine InfoNet is an ambitious project designed to assist libraries in accessing information through electronic networks and assist and encourage libraries to access information through effective use of technology. As mentioned, Maine InfoNet uses flexible entry points for libraries in order to generate the participation by all libraries. There are three primary components of InfoNet.

### **MINERVA**

*“Minerva has exceeded my wildest expectations – I was hesitant at first – not anymore.”*  
Focus group participant

Maine Info Net Electronic Resources via Automation (MINERVA) is the state-wide shared integrated library system started by the Maine InfoNet project. MINERVA offerings include automated circulation, cataloging, acquisitions and serials and public access catalog functions. MINERVA offers these capabilities at a reasonable “shared” cost to participating libraries.

School districts have the capability to belong to MINERVA as a single site, thereby reducing costs and sharing expanded collections.

Among respondents to the evaluation survey, 89% stated that the InfoNet project was of “high value” to their library and their community. One hundred percent (100%) of survey respondents also report that electronic resources have improved.

Among the improvements that respondents in the focus group and the survey requested, include:

- *“Items like jazz CDs end up in a ‘clean up file’. We really need a cataloger working for MINERVA to help with the cataloging and records.”*
- *“We need to work hard at adding school libraries into MINERVA.”*
- *“Library Boards may be the biggest barrier to increased MINERVA participation. They don’t really understand the costs. We need a promotional piece with 10-15 things that current MINERVA members find to be great benefits.”*
- *“I would prefer hands- on or on- site training in MINERVA rather than coming into Augusta.”*

### **The Holdings Database**

Libraries not participating in a shared, integrated or Innovative compatible system can still participate in the Statewide Union Catalog by contributing their records to the Holdings Database. The Holdings Database provides an easy entry level step for many smaller libraries not yet able to participate in MINERVA or to fully automate their systems. There is no cost to libraries to add their records to the database or to search it. The collection of the local library also becomes searchable statewide and the local library staff has access to electronic interlibrary loan requesting.

### **Statewide Union Catalog**

The Maine InfoNet Statewide Catalog combines and links library collections. The catalog is available to all Maine libraries at no cost. Libraries which have not used Innovative software to automate their collections may still participate through their involvement with the Holdings Database. Collections include URSUS, MINERVA, and the Holdings Database, as well as collections of Bates, Bowdoin and Colby Colleges, the University of New England, Maine Maritime Academy, the Maine College of Art, and Portland Public Library. Interlibrary loan

lending and borrowing requests are balanced through the system to provide an equitable distribution of resources.

The following table represents the growth in the Maine InfoNet projects since their launch. The MINERVA project was begun earlier, as mentioned, since there were a number of libraries requiring immediate automation or conversion and inclusion into the project to facilitate interest by other libraries.

<b>InfoNet Participation 1999-2002</b>			
	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>
MINERVA Libraries	17 committed 8 active	34 committed 22 active	42 committed 39 Active
Holdings Database Libraries	NA	NA	11 committed 8 Active  100 possible by 2003
Statewide Union Catalog Records	NA	NA	67 libraries committed 2.8 million bibliographic records 5.5 million items*

\*Estimated universe of library items are between 10to12 million among more than 800 public, academic, school, special and institutional libraries

The information shows steady growth and acceptance of the InfoNet project, and especially of MINERVA. The Holdings Database is little more than a year old, and shows promising signs of acceptance and potential for larger participation. As MINERVA becomes more self sufficient and self perpetuating, resources will be used to accelerate the growth of the Holdings Database. As the Maine State Library leads the InfoNet efforts, it has adopted a practice of taking measured steps to ensure that current components are working well and that users are satisfied with the benefits before moving too quickly to implement other pieces.

Another significant component of the InfoNet strategy is the offering of online reference resources. The Maine State Library has made available fourteen online databases from EBSCO, including full text databases. Four additional science related databases are available through a license from the Raymond H. Fogler Library. The Maine State Library, the University of Maine Systems Libraries and the Maine Technical College System Libraries are the sponsors of the project. Maine State funding is provided for support of the databases to provide free access to all Maine schools, libraries and homes. A component of the Department of Education's Maine Learning Technology Initiative, that will provide laptops for all Maine 7 and 8 grade students over the next two years, allows for \$175,000 of Initiative funding to be spent annually on databases specifically targeted to this group of students.

Though not technically a part of the Maine InfoNet project, they have been described that way and many librarians who responded to the evaluation survey referred to them as part of InfoNet. The comments about the databases, in the surveys, were very favorable. The online reference

databases are heavily used according to some respondents and they request additional databases to be added in the future.

Additional comments from focus group participants and survey respondents include:

*“MINERVA, improved interlibrary loan and better telecommunications has helped to revive the public’s use of our library and thus their interest in better funding for us.”* Survey respondent

## Lessons Learned

The Maine State Library Five Year LSTA Plan and the Vision 2003 planning process provided a roadmap for the extension and sharing of services and creating electronic linkages among libraries in Maine. By understanding the distinct nature of the rural population of Maine, State Librarian Gary Nichols and other library leaders have been able to target funding to meet the library and information needs of the majority of residents through resource sharing programs. Library leaders have recognized that Maine’s geographical and demographic characteristics differ from most other New England states and have developed and adopted a strategy that responds to this fact.

The feedback from surveys, meetings and discussions indicate a very high degree of satisfaction and concurrence with the current programs. It is interesting to note that as small, local libraries have become more vital and critical to their community’s needs, the sophistication of the library and community increases in their ability to describe their future needs.

Examples from Maine librarians attest to the benefits of the programs and an awareness of their future needs:

*“We have a geographic and economic disadvantage in providing library services to the people of Casco, because we are a small library in a small town. CE workshops and other networking opportunities help us to better meet the demands of providing good library service, especially in small public libraries.”*

Survey respondent

*“By networking we have been able to service our patrons like we have never done before. Without the three mentioned services that LSTA supports for libraries we would not be able to service patrons the way we do now. Now, you can be a small library but very large in services provided to your community.”*

Survey respondent

*“We all have to grow in knowledge in technology because of the demands of our patrons. Patrons are coming to us everyday sharing some of the things that they have to deal with and learn in the work force. Older patrons come to us wanting to know how this technology works and asking us to teach them. Technology in libraries is a big part of the services we can provide. Without the help from LSTA many libraries would be struggling to get into this new technological world.”*

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Survey respondent

From improved interlibrary loan and MINERVA involvement to participation in professional continuing education programs throughout the state; Maine libraries, library staff and residents are entering a new era of library and information access in Maine.

### **Brief review of evaluation process**

The Maine State Library has used LSTA funds to improve library services to most residents of Maine. The evaluation process was charged with evaluating the achievements that were accomplished toward meeting the three goals of the five year plan.

In the fall of 2001, The Maine State Library, through the Chief Officers of State Libraries in the Northeast (COSLINE) contracted with Library Development Solutions (LDS), a library consulting firm in Princeton Junction, New Jersey to assist in the evaluation of its five year LSTA plan.

Evaluation criteria to view the overall success of LSTA funding toward these goals included:

- Awareness by libraries and citizens about benefits received from LSTA funding.
- Increases in electronic resource usage by libraries.
- The reach or population served, by various LSTA funded projects.
- The perception by the library community of LSTA funded initiatives
- What value added benefits or services have been realized by libraries in Maine.
- Level of multi type cooperation or resource sharing.

Library Development Solutions used a variety of methods to collect and analyze information concerning Maine's achievements. These included a review of Maine's Five Year LSTA plan, and supporting documents and annual reports to the IMLS, as well as the Vision 2003 plan. After identifying the projects that would receive closer analysis, Library Development Solutions scheduled visits to Maine to meet with Maine State Library staff to discuss each of the plan's components and to develop an understanding of the overall plan. Interviews were held with staff from Special Services, Reference and Information Services, Network Services and Library Development Services. Interviews were held with the Gary Nichols, State Librarian, Linda Lord, Director of Library Development, Karl Beiser, Library Systems Coordinator and Dolores Pushard, Business Manager. This group provided a focus and overview in which to view the LSTA processes in Maine.

The consultant also met with a number of library staff and residents in four focus group discussions to review information about the programs. A staff discussion included 4 staff members from Special Services. The consultant met with a group of 11 librarians from public and academic libraries to discuss the InfoNet project and specifically the MINERVA component. At least 24 residents participated in a lively discussion about Talking Book, Large Print and Books by Mail programs.

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A survey instrument was developed by Library Development Solutions to collect additional information from Maine librarians. The survey was made available on the Maine State Library Website. Recipients were able to complete the form online or to print it out and return it to LDS by mail, fax or e-mail. Fifty (50) surveys were returned to the consultant. Every survey contained extensive comments about the programs being discussed and the improvement in library and information services in Maine due to them. The survey is attached to this report. Many of the comments and suggestions are included in this report.

### Measuring Project Outcomes

For the purposes of this evaluation, we have relied on the measurements that the Maine State Library projected in its five year plan. These measurements can really be defined as outputs, i.e. statistical representations about program use and similar measurements. That these interactions with the public, or increases in library use, have the net outcome of enriching the quality of life for Maine residents and positioning Maine libraries as critical community and state assets is a result most of us will agree to. However, proving this, statistically with improvements in people's lives, is beyond the scope of this evaluation. This instead must be inferred. (However, the anecdotal information provided by Maine residents that is quoted in this evaluation is important and valid feedback for library planners). To do so after a project has begun would be an unrealistic intervention, especially given the lack of verifiable qualitative outcome measurements in most LSTA five year plans. Much of the evaluation is based on observation and anecdotal information, as the original plan intended, in using a "Tell It" format for review.

*"One of the great features of libraries is that they serve people indiscriminately. Librarians are very keen on honoring the privacy of users and asking only for information that helps them accurately negotiate a request for assistance."<sup>4</sup>*

Tracking individual user behavior and experiences from their library use to determine an improvement in their lives may at times be contradictory to the mission of most libraries; public, school and academic. Especially difficult is tracking use by traditionally underserved and unserved populations. A lack of trust in public institutions combined with a sense of authority can lead to an intimidating relationship between underserved populations and the library.

The consultants spoke with staff and received comments in the survey and focus groups to offer anecdotal accounts and information concerning the benefits to residents and their experiences. From the retiree in South China who said that "...when I was homebound after surgery, I would get health related and medical books sent to me...I would not have recovered as quickly without them," to the parent who said that "... we don't have a library near us and my children's worlds has opened up with the mailed books," and the family member who wrote from a rural area that "... I cook for an aunt who is homebound with cancer – we get a lot of cookbooks from Books by Mail."

Libraries can be required to project expected outcomes from the LSTA funds use. Libraries today expect to track and measure the results of a project and compare to their initially expected

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<sup>4</sup> Peggy Rudd. Documenting the Difference. Demonstrating the Value of Libraries through Outcome Measurement.

outcomes. Libraries today are much more comfortable keeping and tracking use statistics than they were years ago. Aside from budget preparation and considerations, statistics are used by almost all local, state and national library organizations for various purposes. Statistics are mostly used for trend analysis, comparing an individual library to others in its peer group, ranking libraries in terms of income and expenditures, and for legislative purposes to secure additional funding.

However, there is rarely an incentive for library directors to accurately track and/or evaluate their statistical results.

There are some library organizations that operate with the aid of a Long Range Plan document that targets specific improvements desired over a period of time and includes measurements to determine how well a library has met its goals. Many libraries find that by operating against a plan, the incentive to track and evaluate both statistical and anecdotal results provides a feedback process that benefits the library and the community beyond budget considerations.

In some libraries, constant monitoring and analysis of the desired outcomes creates projects that are driven by results instead of by project tasks. The projects themselves, therefore, may dig deeper into meeting community and user needs and become sustainable projects. They give birth to a community process that creates a new synergy between the library and the population being served.

Recent training by the IMLS will assist state library leaders in understanding the initial processes needed to measure outcomes of a project and focus on its value and sustainability for the residents in that state.

## Conclusion

LSTA funds in Maine are potentially benefiting all residents of Maine “...**regardless of location or residency.**” Library and information services in Maine have improved through the administration of LSTA funded programs by the Maine State Library, as reported by staff and residents. Residents have gained increased access to print, non print and electronic resources in many areas of the state, especially through the services of the three district libraries. Maine is a national leader in state-wide telecommunications benefits: the Maine School and Library Network, the first national network to connect every public library and school building in a state electronically at no cost to schools and libraries; Maine InfoNet, the first integrated library system in the country to include all types of libraries; the Maine Learning Technology Initiative; the Distance Learning /ATM two-way broadband video project; and the Maine Telecommunications Education Access Fund (Maine’s state e-rate program) are some examples of Maine’s vision and activity in the telecommunications arena. Additional investing in automation resources for local libraries, potential expansion or adding a fourth Library District, creation of a statewide Maine Library Card, investment to deliver and expand access to electronic resources, and a cost effective delivery service are topics that should be reviewed for the next five years. Additionally, as previously mentioned, The Maine State Library should begin to use its web site as a primary and interactive source of information for libraries and library services. As one Maine librarian responded in the evaluation survey to the next steps taken,

*“With Main InfoNet really starting to coalesce, we are prepared for a quantum leap forward in library services to Maine citizens. Interlibrary cooperation and a delivery system is the key next ingredient.”*



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## APPENDIX

### LSTA SURVEY (Instrument used to compile some of the information presented in this evaluation)

#### LSTA in Maine Where We've Been . . . Where We're Going

Library Development Solutions, a Princeton, NJ based library consulting firm, has been contracted by the Maine State Library to evaluate the impact of LSTA (Library Services and Technology Act) funding on the state's libraries during the last 5 years.

This survey is part of a project to gather data about Maine's LSTA program. We would greatly appreciate your cooperation in completing and returning the survey promptly. Your feedback will help the Maine State Library in telling the LSTA "story" to federal legislators now considering reauthorization of this important legislation and will also help in developing the next Maine LSTA five-year plan.

Maine uses LSTA funding in the following ways:

- **Statewide Library Development Services** – Encouraging and assisting in the development and improvement of local library services through research, planning, training and consultation, as well as staff and trustee training and development through CE workshops and courses. Many of the following information access and resource sharing projects are part of Library Development efforts.
- **Information Access**- Targeting library and information services to individuals with disabilities and persons having difficulty using a library, including rural populations not having access to a local library. This includes the Talking Book program through Maine's Regional Library Services to the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Large Print Services and the Books-by-Mail program for the more than 200,000 Maine residents who live in areas without a public library or one that is open less than 15 hours per week.
- **Resource Sharing and Electronic Linkages**- Establishing or enhancing electronic linkages among or between libraries – including the online Holdings Database, MINERVA, the integrated automated library system and the Maine InfoNet state wide library catalog and providing interlibrary loans statewide.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.  
Library Development Solutions

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*First, tell us about you and your library:*

**Library Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Library Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Library Contact Person Completing Survey, include name and position/title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Now, we need your opinion about LSTA funded projects.**

In the last 5 years LSTA has funded a number of statewide projects designed to improve access to print, electronic and non-print library resources, encourage greater resource sharing among all types of libraries, and develop new skills for librarians. Some of the specific projects are listed below. Please indicate next to each project its value to you and the people who use your libraries or your community by circling the number that most closely indicates the value of this service with 5 indicating “high value” and 1 indicating “low value”.

**Regional Library System: District consultants, technology consults (e-rate, InfoNet), training, planning, and continuing education.**

*Provides support for local library development through consulting services, statewide planning, continuing education and training opportunities for librarians, library assistants, trustees, staff, library administration and management training.*

1      2      3      4      5

**Interlibrary Loan:** *Provides interlibrary loans for CMLD as well as statewide. Provides grants to ARRCs (area reference and resource centers) for support of NELINET use.*

1      2      3      4      5

**InfoNet Statewide Library Catalog**

*Statewide database combining current holdings and real time information from URSUS, MINERVA, the Holdings Database, Bates, Bowdoin, Colby, Portland PL, University of NE, Maine Maritime Academy and Maine College of Art.*

1      2      3      4      5

**Talking Books, Large Print Books and Books-by-Mail (LBPH services)**

*Supports staff and materials for the Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped and the LP Books and Books-by-mail programs. Includes summer reading programs for children through these services.*

1      2      3      4      5

**Please share your opinion about how library service in Maine has improved in the last five years from LSTA funds invested in statewide projects.**

Benefit	Least <span style="float:right">Most</span>				
	1	2	3	4	5
Increased resource sharing					
Improved Inter Library Loan					
Improved family literacy					
Improved public awareness of libraries					
More continuing education materials and opportunities					
Increased electronic resources					

Improved cooperation between schools and public libraries					
Increased sharing of expertise among library staff					
Increased and improved CE workshops					

**OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS:**

How has your community/library benefited from these projects?

How has LSTA funding helped you in meeting local needs for service? Would you have been able to meet these needs without LSTA funding for the projects mentioned above?

**WHERE WE'RE GOING**

What ideas can you offer about Maine's use of LSTA funding during the next five-year period? Please keep in mind that LSTA funds can only be used for projects meeting federal eligibility requirements. Please keep LSTA's priorities in mind:

- Establishing or enhancing electronic linkages among or between libraries;
- Linking libraries electronically with educational, social or information services;
- Assisting libraries in accessing information through electronic networks;
- Encouraging libraries in different areas, and encouraging different types of libraries to establish consortia and share resources;
- Paying costs for libraries to acquire or share computer systems and telecommunications technologies; and
- Targeting library and information services to persons having difficulty using a library and to underserved urban and rural communities, including children (from birth through age 17) from families with incomes below the poverty line.

**THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THE SURVEY!**  
 Please return your completed survey by February 28 to  
 Library Development Solutions  
 64 Princeton Hightstown Road, Suite 106  
 Princeton Junction, NJ 08550

Maine Shares

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Or fax to 609-275-4784 or e-mail to [lbarger@librarydevelopment.com](mailto:lbarger@librarydevelopment.com)