

The State Law Library of Montana’s mission is to provide legal information and resources, to enhance knowledge of the law and court system, and to facilitate equal access to justice, statewide. We meet the information needs of Montana’s judges and court staff, attorneys and legal assistants, state employees, incarcerated individuals, students, and citizens. *Pro se* (self-representing) litigants comprise a large portion of our patron base. By serving these individuals, we not only help those litigants, but we are ensuring that court clerks and judges have better process and management in their courtrooms.

We comprehensively collect, maintain, and make available Montana’s constitution, statutes, regulations, judicial opinions, and related resources. Additionally, we keep current federal laws, the laws of other states, treatises, and practice aids. The Law Library has served as a federal depository library since 1977, providing access to selected federal publications throughout the state. We have contracts with major legal database providers such as Lexis, Westlaw, and HeinOnline, comprising some of the most utilized resources for judges, law clerks, attorneys, and our librarians.

Our most popular resources are our human resources. The “Ask a Librarian” service provides expert legal reference services to patrons. As a result of staff expertise, we maintain and continue to generate a vast collection of Montana Legislative Histories. Given the difficulty of compiling a state legislative history, this service is above and beyond what most jurisdictions offer. In assisting the bar with its professional obligations, we offer free Continuing Legal Education (CLE) programs. In service of our citizenry, we partner with the Court Help Program to host a Self-Help Center and the Simplified Family Law Resolution Project. Along with the Access to Justice Commission and other stakeholders, the State Law Library creates and maintains 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. Our participation and membership in the Montana Library Association, Montana Shared Catalog, interlibrary loan program, and the Access to Justice Commission allow us to better serve the people of Montana and patrons from other jurisdictions.

Highlights from FY 2021-2022 and FY 2022-2023 *(to date)*

- Usage statistics indicate a growing demand for Law Library services as our society begins to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

FY 2021-2022: The Law Library provided **2,429 total service interactions**, including 1,316 legal reference transactions, with the bulk of the other interactions related to the Self-Help Center (321), general research (260), and legislative histories (241). While open during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Law Library had controlled access to maintain safety protocols. This resulted in lower than normal foot traffic.

FY 2022-2023 *(to date)*: The Law Library has had **3,230 total service interactions**, including 1,313 legal reference transactions, with the bulk of the other interactions related to the Self-Help Center (489), general research (484), and legislative histories (249). **This represents a 33% increase in service interactions in six months compared to the previous fiscal year.**

- As noted above, our strongest resources are our human resources. **The Law Library has undergone a dramatic change in staffing.** While challenging at times, these transitions present great opportunities. The following are positions that have been filled within the last two years: State Law Librarian (January 2023), Administrative Specialist (December 2022), Research Library Specialist (August 2022), Customer Service Specialist (June 2022), and Reference Librarian (September 2021). Our Technical Services Librarian (November 2018) has the longest tenure at the State Law Library. Additionally, there is currently an unfilled part-time position. The Law Library team represents a mixture of backgrounds, expertise, and interests. In the coming year, there will be many opportunities for team building and professional growth.
- The Law Library, in a partnership with the Montana State Library, is ecstatic to report the **successful completion of a major digitization project** that makes freely available a comprehensive collection of Montana's statutes from 1781 to the present. This collection includes the Revised Codes of Montana, the Montana Code Annotated, and the Annotations to the Montana Code Annotated. This project will aid researchers across the state, country, and world who are interested in the codification of statutes from a territory to frontier state to the present. The digitization of these codes was no small task, and they will open many doors for research and understanding in the years to come.

- In service to the bench and bar, the Law Library continues to **promote Continuing Legal Education (CLE) opportunities**. The Law Library collaborated with partner organizations to host five CLEs: Researching on Lexis (2022), Representing Afghanistan Asylum Applicants (2022), Legislative Updates Part 1 – DOT (2021), Legislative Updates Part 2 – DOJ (2021), and Legislative Updates Part 3 – DEQ (2021). The last four programs are accessible on our website.

- Our Technical Services Librarian is leading an effort to **inventory the Law Library’s holdings**. This task is nothing short of Herculean, as it requires staff members to scan every item in our collection. There are indications that our catalog is under-reporting actual holdings, and we are looking to correct these errors. An accurate catalog is a key to any library’s proper functioning.

- We are always striving to be an “outward” facing organization, and to that end, we seek out **collaborations to promote Law Library resources**. These efforts have included: hosting a table at the State Bar of Montana Association annual meeting; presenting at the Montana Education Association conference; working extensively with the Montana Legal Services Association on *pro se* forms; collaborating on a Law Day event in public libraries; and sending email newsletters to Montana lawyers.

- At the direction of the legislature in 2021, the Law Library has implemented procedures for **charging patrons for print photocopies**.

The following is the **Strategic Plan for the State Law Library of Montana (FY 2020-2021)**. This plan is provided as context for the organization’s goals in its recent past. As noted above, there has been a dramatic turnover in the Law Library’s staff, and **the new State Law Librarian will be working with the staff to brainstorm, organize, and record a Strategic Plan in the coming months**.

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, MTLSA 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.