

2023 Annual Survey Report



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Governance.....	4
2023 Recommendations:	7
2024 Recommendations:	8
Administration.....	8
2023 Recommendations	13
2024 Recommendations	13
Bibliographic Services (BST)	14
2023 Recommendations	18
2024 Recommendations	18
Member Library Services (MLS).....	18
2023 Recommendations	23
2024 Recommendations	23
Technology Services and Infrastructure (TSI)	24
2023 Recommendations	28
2024 Recommendations	28
Conclusion.....	29

INTRODUCTION

This is the second annual survey of the Northern Lights Library System's services. The primary target of the survey remains library managers and staff, but an added emphasis was placed on library boards. An incentive was provided to complete the survey as part of a board meeting. The intent was to generate conversation between library managers and their boards on the services provided by NLLS. We hoped that conversation would heighten awareness of services and point to any deficiencies.

After the first annual survey, management proposed that,

In future years **consideration to shifting the primary audience of the survey from library managers to library boards should be given.**

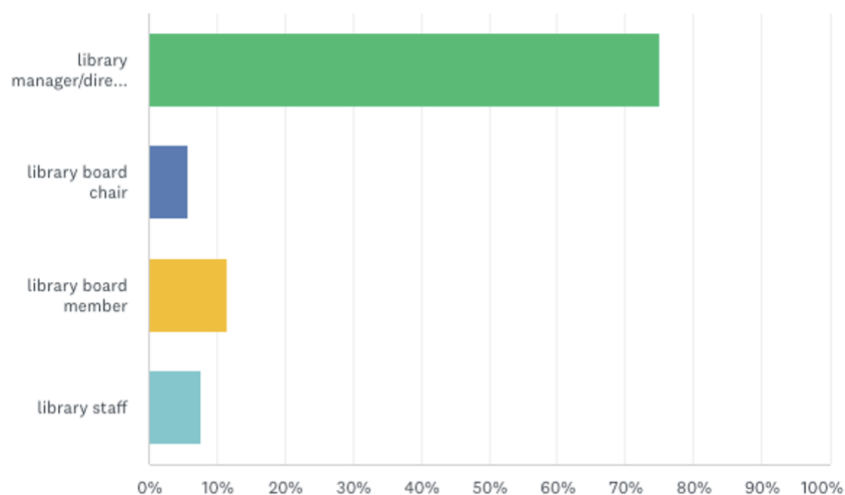
Sending the survey directly to board chairs to be completed during a board meeting, with their library manager participating, might increase the value of responses and generate excellent discussion at the local level.

Libraries completing the survey with their boards would be entered into a draw for \$500. Seventeen (17) libraries completed the survey in conjunction with their boards.

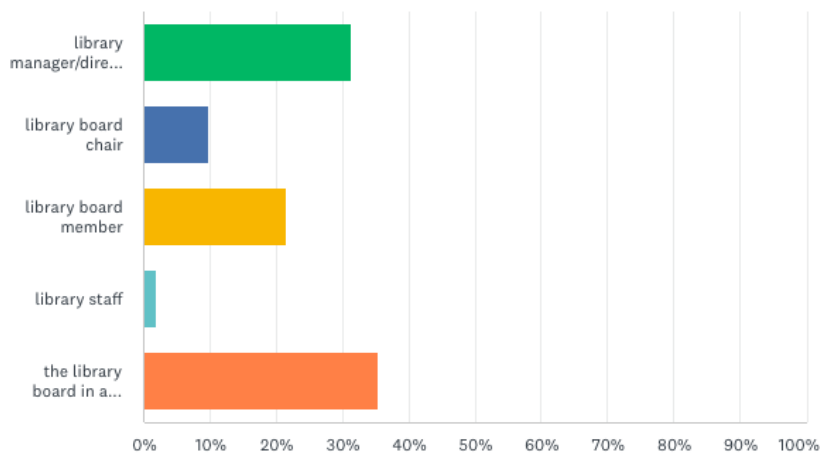
Anonymity was an option for all libraries. There was no limit on the number of times a survey could be completed and the question requesting the name of the library was not mandatory. There were fifty-six (56) responses to the survey. In 2022 there were 55 responses.

The survey was open to responses from November 15, 2023 to February 20, 2024.

2022 Survey Respondents



2023 Survey Respondents



It is possible that some of the libraries completing the survey misunderstood the parameters to be eligible for the \$500 draw. The addition of a question specifically on whether the survey was being completed as part of a board meeting may clarify the rules.

The survey comprised 5 sections: Governance, Administration, Bibliographic Services, Member Library Services (MLS), and Technology Services and Infrastructure (TSI). These are the same 5 areas reflected in our strategic plans, budget, implementation plans, and service catalogue.

Overall, the survey results are positive. The services provided by NLLS are highly valued. There remains room for improvement, and we are excited to use the feedback gathered here to continue to improve.

GOVERNANCE

***Q4.** Do you know who your Board representative or Executive zone representative is?*

The NLLS board has now had several years of general stability. Respondents know who their representatives are. A small minority of members report that they are unaware of who their representative is. Year over year, this number fell from 4 to 3.

***Q5.** How confident are you that any questions or concerns you have will be heard and addressed by the Board or Executive Committee?*

73 percent of respondents indicated they were confident. Only 2 respondents (4%) reported that they were not confident. Year over year, the number of people reporting a lack of confidence or concerns about confidence fell from 21 to 13. **This is an excellent positive trend.**

***Q6.** The Board meets four times annually. Two of these meetings are online, and two are in-person. It is believed that in-person meetings lead to better discussion and engagement which lead to better overall governance. How do you feel about the meeting format?*

This was a new question in 2023. Nearly 80% of respondents indicated “There is value in the whole Board meeting in person. Meeting in person twice a year balances costs and governance needs.” 10% of respondents felt that online meetings only were sufficient. Only 2 respondents felt that all board meetings should be in person. There were 3 “other” responses. These were:

- 3 online meeting and 1 in person meeting would be a good balance.
- online meeting only and spend the in-person money for a networking session as there is value in meeting in person at least once a year

- I have no opinion on this.

Q7. How might the Board better address the needs of our libraries?

Twenty-seven respondents chose to leave an open-ended response. These can be categorized as general positive feedback, specific positive feedback, critical suggestions, and general suggestions. All the comments are represented below. However, some have been split apart to categorize them better. Where context was needed to understand the comments, they were left intact.

General positive feedback:

- The Board is doing a great job!
- We are happy with the operations so far.
- I am fairly happy with the board a whole.
- Overall our staff and board feel that the Board addresses well the needs of our libraries
- We feel our needs are being met very well. We've never had to wait for a response to a concern.
- We feel the Board is doing a good job addressing our needs.
- We are happy with the job they do!
- I think it is working well now
- my representative is doing a great job..this person who is our rep now is the best rep we have ever had..

Specific positive feedback:

- We appreciated that James came to visit us last year and will continue to do so this year. Receiving the weekly updates in James's NLLS newsletter are also nice as we get to see what other libraries are doing in the region.
- The visit by the executive director is valuable and we as a board learnt a lot of what NLLS does.
- We appreciate James' visits.

Specific critical suggestions

- more direct reports from our executive/board representative instead of James MacDonald.
- Maybe an orientation package about NLLS to add to our handbook? The board feels that while they get a lot of information reported back **there is a disconnect** in how it relates to what they are doing. The executive directors visit helped with the connection but this might help a new trustee coming in.
- I believe the size of the Board is too great to properly govern the system. I would suggest looking at a different model.
- Spend quality time doing the plan of service and getting input from libraries about what services are critical to them.
- Listen and consult with member libraries as some decisions are still being made by NLLS Staff without input from the libraries.
- In my opinion, the NLLS board is positioned from an accountability perspective to answer only to member municipalities, not libraries. This is reflected in the body of NLLS board membership, correspondence, how budget is approved, amount of sway that boards and managers wield in their recommendations, etc. The executive and NLLS board at large get their work done and are effective - we are not dominated by one municipality like Peace System, we have great balance. I just don't get the feeling that the NLLS board actually serves member libraries - they serve member councils.
- I hope that the libraries know who their representative is on the library board and executive board
- Minimizing menial tasks and paperwork with a consideration of minimally staffed libraries. It would be a benefit to support such small libraries with responsive technical assistance.

General Suggestions

- more public access to online resources (for local library board members),
- Better information on creating CRA accounts for employees.
- technical support for 3D printing services,

- ongoing communication and face-time with local boards and staff on activities, services offered and NLLS priorities for the year.
- Potential assistance for story walk developments.
- If we could receive a updated copy of the membership agreement it would be greatly appreciated. This is so we can better answer a survey of this type as a board in the future.
- More support financially.
- More support for grant applications; more funding options;
- Small towns need more focus.
- Hosting a meeting with the NLLS board and library managers to hear of ways we can better serve their respective libraries.
- Library staff and board meeting about ideas for the library
- Better stats in order to get proper funding.
- it would be nice to have the summer entertainment booked by NLLS- or at least share insight and ways to cost share.
- Advocate to government on behalf of libraries for better funding

This survey report will not attempt to address every comment. However, each comment has or will be discussed with NLLS management and the Executive Committee. Many of the suggestions here are actively being worked on. This is encouraging as it indicates that NLLS is headed in a direction that aligns with its membership.

2023 Recommendations:

1. Strengthen the role of Chair of the Library Manager's Council.

Response:

- a. Established regular meetings between LMC Exec and NLLS Administration
- b. Beginning to identify changes that should be run through LMC (i.e. Polaris Permissions Groups)

2. Continue the recent practice of visiting local boards annually.

Response:

- a. We continue to work toward meetings with all boards
- 3. Continue the recently formed annual Local Board Chair's meeting.

Response:

- a. Next meeting scheduled for May
- 4. Hold Executive meetings at member library facilities.

Response:

- a. 5/6 meetings held in member libraries in 2023
- b. 5/6 meetings scheduled in member libraries in 2024
- 5. Develop clear recommendations and guidelines for municipal councils when appointing NLLS representatives.

Response:

- a. This has been developed but work needs to be done to ensure it is shared and conveniently accessible to new NLLS representatives.

2024 Recommendations:

- 1. Continue local board meetings with the Executive Director
- 2. Identify ways to facilitate interaction between NLLS reps and library managers, such as hosting in-person LMC and Board meetings simultaneously and sharing training or professional development opportunities. The first joint meeting is scheduled for May 22, 2024.
- 3. Continue advocacy efforts in conjunction with the other six regional systems.

ADMINISTRATION

***Q8.** Compared to last year, how would you rate the overall performance of Northern Lights Library System?*

The system's trajectory is positive. Forty-six percent (46%) of respondents believe that the overall performance of NLLS is better than the year before. And fifty-two percent (52%) believe we are doing

about the same. Only 1 respondent felt the system was doing worse than the year before. These numbers are nearly identical to the previous survey.

Q9. How informed do you feel about the services the system provides your library?

The responses to this question were altered somewhat from the previous year. Instead of “very informed, informed, somewhat in the dark, and generally confused,” 3 answers were provided: Informed, somewhat in the dark, and generally confused. The outcome? Once again, we had one (1) respondent indicate being generally confused. Most respondents indicated feeling informed (76%), while about 21% indicated being somewhat in the dark. With 4 choices in the previous survey, 90% of respondents chose informed or very informed. The change in question format forced respondents to be more precise in their feelings. A large majority of respondents feel informed, but there remains work to be done to educate members on the services available to them.

Q10. Northern Lights aims to balance the needs of its municipal members and partners, manage the financial trust placed in us, and assist in meeting future challenges. Please indicate all statements that reflect your experience with us:

- *I feel comfortable contributing my thoughts and ideas toward the overall direction of NLLS.*
- *I avoid reaching out to NLLS or making positive suggestions for change.*
- *NLLS takes an interest in the challenges and needs of my library.*
- *NLLS does NOT have a clear understanding of the challenges and needs of my library.*

This question provided two positive and two negative responses. Respondents could choose all, some, or none of these answers. Responses here were overwhelmingly positive. Only one (1) response indicated a belief that NLLS does not have a clear understanding of their challenges. Four (4) respondents indicated that they avoid reaching out to NLLS or making positive suggestions for change. Of those 4, they all indicated they felt informed about the system’s services.

A deeper dive into these outlying responses shows some variability in the answers. Further discussion with these libraries will be required to get to the heart of any concerns.

***Q11.** Where should the System's administration focus its energy in the coming year? Or any other thoughts?*

General positive feedback:

- Doing awesome!
- It's been working well with where it's at.
- I believe it's running good
- Keep great Communication
- "None really as it was agreed it seems to be running smoothly.
- Its already well balanced as it is.
- I think the Systems admin is doing a great job
- i really dont have any bad thoughts about the System...we get so much from them
- great that they are mindful of our short-term and long term technology situation

Comments on expansion:

- Streamlining the process for getting new library boards and libraries up and running
- Continue bringing additional municipalities on board.
- Recruiting other libraries who are not members yet.
- I think getting more entities to join northern lights because it is such a good program and it would help bring in more revenue
- Facilitating/supporting regional library partnerships / connections would be good as well.

Comments on finance:

- Keeping budget balanced without having to increase cost to libraries.
- Financial prudance. Increased avenues for feedback.

- Support for grant funding; more funding options
- More grant opportunities
- I'd like to see a push by all system directors to advocate for the recommendations in the overdue report on libraries that calls for federal funding. 2024 should be focused on controlling financial costs to give us a consistent levy cost for the next few years.

Comments on Training and Consultation Support:

- Provide assistance and support in providing informative sessions on how to access the variety of library resources available.
- The focus should be on continuing relevant training for library staff and keeping up to date with technology.
- More onsite visits to member libraries
- assisting with services that have been provided historically- ie security systems, continued hybrid training/ on zoom
- The board weren't sure if asking about partnering with education institutions for some "introductory to" classes to be offered to maybe get a connection to the youth? I would be possible or if this was a place in the survey to ask. But they are happy with what we receive from NLLS"
- Library visits. Support for Library managers.
- Looking what small library can do with the little time they have.
- Maybe more 1 on 1 meetings with just managers, not the Boards.

Comments on Technology Supports:

- Keeping up with technology changes and ensuring that library Managers/staff are trained in the new technology offered through NLLS
- IT supports.
- Continued emphasis and investment on the advancements of technological resources, the free library program is a great addition.

Comments on advocacy:

- Advocacy
- Fantastic work was done in advocacy in 2022-2023 and I credit NLLS for the significant bump we received in operating funding from the province.
- Social media PR campaign
- It would be nice to be kept up to date regarding advocacy in the libraries across the province.

Other Comments:

- Existing books age shouldn't matter. Bring new relevant content.
- Continued open lines of communication and allow member libraries to work without causing confusion. ei. The website for library cards for Indigenous communities project was started without consultation. At least they have asked for feedback but this money could have spent on other initiatives.
- on core services, leave the Indigenous Service outreach to local libraries entrusted by PLSB to perform their roles

The survey results are overwhelmingly positive. The system continues to be perceived well by its members. Several themes arising from the comments may help steer future decision-making. There is continued interest in expanding NLLS membership. There are two main avenues for expansion: indigenous communities and schools. We'll continue to make efforts in this area a priority. One of our strategic directions is to **“invite and welcome all Reserve and Métis Settlements in the area to participate as full members of the system.”**

The other major theme arising from the comments is the need for greater training and one-to-one consultation support. We've made significant progress in this area over the last year with an annual training plan being developed by the MLS department. Survey results in that area indicate that the training was very well received. Supporting our consultants in onsite consultation will also remain a

priority. Our commitment to the Stronger Together conference will also begin to pay dividends as the years progress.

Some clarification regarding the OROS funding and the Indigenous self-registration website may be necessary. Local libraries receive 100% of the OROS funding designated for local library support. In addition, libraries can request further funding for special projects. Several additional local library projects were approved in 2023. The Indigenous self-registration website was an initiative endorsed by our Indigenous Advisory Circle and funded from the portion of the OROS funding earmarked to support library system operations.

2023 Recommendations

1. Establish a protocol for answering the NLLS main phone line and routing member queries.
 - a. [This was completed](#), and we continue to monitor it closely.
 - b. The culture is shifting toward using Teams as the main point of contact.
2. Establish protocols to increase the timeliness of ticket responses.
 - a. This was completed, and we will continue to monitor it.
3. Communicate best practices around administrative time for library managers to local boards where necessary.
 - a. We continue to bring this up at local board meetings where it is needed.
4. Have the ED meet with a number of local library managers one-on-one throughout the year to better understand local needs and concerns.
 - a. This has been happening and continues to be a focus.

2024 Recommendations

1. Continue expanding system membership by inviting all indigenous communities to join the system, and establish connections with school districts.
2. Continue our efforts toward a robust annual training plan and work to increase one-to-one support between consultants and library staff.

3. Continue budget discussions with the LMC and budget transparency throughout the year.
Continue allocating staff resources to grant opportunities and development.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC SERVICES (BST)

Q12. *How would you rate the quality of the processing of new materials?*

The responses here indicate great satisfaction with the quality of our materials processing. No one indicated dissatisfaction. A very small number, three (3), indicated neutrality. These were all board respondents. Otherwise, respondents were slightly more weighted toward satisfied rather than very satisfied.

Q13. *We catalogue more than 25,000 items a year. We strive for consistency and findability. We regularly assess our processes to ensure we balance standards with turnaround time. Please select all that apply.*

This question was in 2 parts. The first pertained to errors in cataloging. Only three (3) respondents indicated that they often found errors in the cataloging. A majority of respondents rarely find errors.

The second part of this question referred to the turnaround time between ordering and receiving items. The answer was nearly identical to the year before. Only three (3) respondents indicated the turnaround time was too long. This is the same number as the previous year. However, the respondents do not appear to be the same. In other words, libraries experiencing delays in material deliveries seem to change from year to year. This may indicate a natural ebb and flow to materials processing that catches different libraries based on the timing of orders. Intermittent issues are naturally more difficult to diagnose and remedy than persistent bottlenecks. We remain committed to increasing our efficiency in this area. We should be generally pleased with the timeliness of our bibliographic services.

Q14. *We aim to deliver materials efficiently. We are regularly reviewing our processes and striving to balance the needs of 50 autonomous libraries. Please indicate all statements that reflect your experience with us:*

- *I feel comfortable reaching out to NLLS about delivery, cataloging or processing problems or questions.*
- *I avoid reaching out to NLLS when I notice errors or problems.*
- *I feel that many of the standards are arbitrary or unnecessary red tape.*
- *I feel that the standards for processing and delivery manage the many unique needs of libraries well.*

Again, the responses here heavily favoured the positive. One (1) respondent indicated they avoid reaching out to NLLS when they notice errors. Three (3) respondents felt that many of our standards are arbitrary or unnecessary. The numbers are nearly identical to the previous year. The Bibliographic Services department appears to remain approachable and reasonable with its standards.

Q15. *After consultation with the Library Managers Council we made several updates to our cataloging guidelines and standards. What are your impressions of these changes?*

This was a new question to the survey. Possible responses included:

- *I like the changes and the improved clarity. I think they will improve the process.*
- *I don't think the changes go far enough. Keep iterating over them. We can do better.*
- *I do not like some or all of the changes that were made.*
- *Wait, we made changes to the cataloging standards? I didn't realize.*

A large majority of respondents approve of the recent changes to the cataloging standards. The invitation to library boards to take the survey skewed some of the results. An open-ended “other” response was provided to this question. Six (6) respondents provided a written response, and all

these responses indicated that the board did not get to this level of operational detail. That is a fair response.

Thirteen (13) respondents selected the response, “Wait, we made changes to the cataloging standards? I didn't realize.” This was a little alarming as it may have indicated a breakdown in our communication. However, eleven (11) of those were board respondents. Only two (2) indicated they were library managers. Still, this illustrates how difficult it is to communicate changes to 50 autonomous libraries with limited operational hours. Despite multiple emails outlining the changes, meetings with LMC leadership and others for direct feedback, and a robust discussion at an LMC meeting, we still missed a couple of managers.

Q16. What have we missed regarding bibliographic services? How might we improve in this service area?

We had several open-ended responses to this question. They can be categorized as general positive, cataloging specific, or comments on ordering and processing.

General Positive Comments

- I have had no problems. They are working well for us.
- We appreciate that Administration is looking at different options in this area while striving for consistency.
- We can't think of any way to improve what you're already providing.
- Generally well done. Always receptive to changes, comments, and suggestions.
- I think you do very well in this area.
- Nothing that I can see.
- We are pleased with the current services.
- I think in general, while some items might take a while to receive (longer than my patrons would like lol) I believe the team is efficient in getting the materials catalogued and sent out as quickly as they can!

Comments on Cataloguing

- Please double check items while cataloging. Our indigenous, romance, inspiration and few other genre based collections are not getting catalogued correctly. Also, some just get cataloged in a completely wrong collection.
- Mass market fiction is the genre that we often see errors in
- We feel comfortable reaching out however find it more timely to correct the errors in house and reach out to NLLS to inform.
- Standardization is good but not a blanket standard across the system as each library has their own unique needs.
- It would be nice to be able to catalogue older rare material that is not in the system
- more consultation with member libraries

Comments on Ordering and Processing

- Timeline to receive materials ordered for outside purchases (the cataloguing process for new additions for NLLS can be cumbersome and slow).
- We prefer to do our own ordering.

Some comments indicate that the bibliographic services department can increase communication with individual libraries. We should not get to a point where items are regularly going to the wrong collections.

One of the major implementation plan goals in 2024 is a complete review of our Bibliographic Services. The survey indicates that members are generally satisfied with bibliographic services but that there is room for improvement, including smoothing out turnaround times on new orders, empowering libraries to do as much cataloging work as they feel comfortable with, and increasing their understanding of cataloguing standards.

2023 Recommendations

1. Review and document current processing practices to ensure we can meet the demands of an increasing volume of orders

Response

- a. Created a new management position for this area and appointed Joanne Knysh

2024 Recommendations

1. Continue with the effort to review and document current processing practices to ensure we can meet the demands of an increasing volume of orders.
2. Continue with the Implementation Plan goal of reviewing the department for efficiencies.
3. Work with the MLS department to increase training efforts for item adds and cataloging at local libraries.

MEMBER LIBRARY SERVICES (MLS)

Q17. *Member Library Services (MLS) aims to communicate clearly on topics of interest and relevance to our libraries. Please indicate all statements that reflect your experience with us:*

- *Communication is FREQUENTLY relevant to my needs and professional interests.*
- *Communication is RARELY relevant to my needs and professional interests.*
- *I have access to information related to NLLS services and offerings.*
- *I have difficulty finding information and often don't know what is being offered*

Responses to this question mirror those given in the 2022 survey. There was a slight drop from six (6) to four (4) respondents, indicating difficulty finding information about MLS services. There remains a small cohort of libraries that struggle to find relevance in the department's communication. Given the diversity of our libraries in size and skill, this is not surprising. In all, the response to this question is very positive.

Q18. *MLS aims to respond to requests from our members in a timely and relevant manner, offering support that is based on curiosity and problem-solving. Please indicate all statements that reflect your experience with us:*

- *When I request assistance I receive a relevant response from my consultant or someone else capable of helping me.*
- *When I request assistance I don't receive a relevant response, or the response takes too long to be helpful to me.*
- *I feel confident that when I ask for help I will get what I need.*
- *I don't feel confident that I will get the help I need when I ask.*

There was a significant drop in respondents, from seven (7) to three (3), indicating, "When I request assistance, I don't receive a relevant response, or the response takes too long to be helpful to me." This is encouraging. However, there was a slight increase from three (3) to five (5) respondents indicating, "I don't feel confident that I will get the help I need when I ask." Again, the overall answer to this question is positive.

Q19. *MLS aims to build strong relationships with our member libraries that are based on mutual respect and trust. Please indicate all statements that reflect your experience with us:*

- *I feel comfortable reaching out to my assigned consultant.*
- *I avoid reaching out to my assigned consultant unless I absolutely need to.*
- *I believe that MLS takes an interest in the challenges and needs of my library.*
- *I feel that MLS hasn't taken the time to get to know me or my library.*

Again, we see a nearly identical response to this question as in 2022. There was some slight improvement: Only one (1) respondent indicated that "I feel that MLS hasn't taken the time to get to know me or my library." In 2022, four (4) respondents selected this answer. The other negative response also decreased from six (6) to four (4) respondents, indicating avoiding interactions with their consultant. This general improvement may indicate consultants slowly winning over some of their

reluctant libraries. Regardless, MLS should be very pleased with the large majority of positive responses to this and the other questions in this section.

Q20. *In 2023, MLS offered a wide range of online and in-person training opportunities, as well as participated in the 2023 Stronger Together Conference. How would you describe the impact and accessibility of the training offered this year?*

- *I was able to access relevant training that matched my needs and interests.*
- *The training was accessible but it was not particularly relevant.*
- *The training was relevant but the technology made it difficult to access.*
- *Training this year was a swing and a miss, I would like to see us do something else.*

The training opportunities offered to our libraries in 2023 appear to have been met with great enthusiasm. No respondents indicated difficulty with the technology or general discontent with the offerings. Five (5) respondents indicated they felt the training was not particularly relevant to them. Given the diversity of needs across the system, this is a remarkably low number.

The question did provide an opportunity for an open-ended “other” response. We received 6 replies in this category.

- Training was relevant, In person training opportunities were difficult to attend (based on geography), challenges in accessing the training due to limitation of library staff, wifi bandwidth, technological resource challenges and lack of quiet space (not necessarily an MLS issue per se)
- Feedback from the board is that there could be more varied training options - they often see the same options repeated year to year. Feedback from library manager is that training options were good, but making the time is sometimes difficult. Feedback regarding the Conference is to schedule the breaks (and lunch) better and to offer breakfast.
- The online training made it easier to send our staff to attend as we have a very limited budget. The conference we have made sure to add additional funds to the budget to make sure more staff can attend. It was beneficial training offered and taken by our staff. Only 1 board member attended the conference but

found a lot of value from both the Alta symposium and the conference that was shared. We are taking many suggestions to heart and are looking at board actions that perhaps we can improve on. The board was happy for the inclusion into the stronger together conference as it's really good for staff to feel supported and involved in something bigger than the library itself. Good job all around

- Training was relevant but timing doesn't work for all schedules. Recorded webinars would be helpful.

The comments are generally positive. I am happy to report that we record and make available training whenever possible. Reaching such a large group over a vast geography with a limited budget is challenging. I think we can be very pleased with the offerings and the response to them in 2023. We are very excited for the training opportunities being planned in 2024.

Q21. What have we missed regarding consulting services? How can we improve?

The open-ended responses in this section can be categorized as *general positive feedback, general suggestions, comments and questions, and specific comments or concerns.*

General Positive Feedback

- The new help desk has improved.
- So far, I am satisfied with the support from consulting services.
- Our consultant is phenomenal and has been great with both staff and board questions.
- You haven't missed anything
- It's all good
- We feel you are doing what you can realizing that Library Managers vary widely in their professional development
- Great to have joined with other library boards to be able to hold a in person conference. The in person aspect of these conferences has great value.
- We are satisfied with the current services.
- loved the training this year...i was never trained to be a manager so i need more and more...my rep is awesome we get along so well, she understands my library needs

General Suggestions, Comments, and Questions

- As board chair I receive the weekly email from James, some other board members might. What's the intended target audience and how do they get in on it?
- Maybe a weekly or monthly check in just checking if any help needed
- IT support please.
- More accessibility to training. Think more online less mileage
- We are not sure what services are available.

Specific Suggestions or Concerns

- Maybe some zone board orientation. It's hard to travel from Athabasca 2+ hours but there is interest. Even something short by Zoom so we can do some sort of orientation and promote the more in depth opportunities
- Honestly one thing that would be phenomenal would be allowing or budgeting a consultant visit (or zoom) to the library board much like the executive director does once a year or every other year. It could even be grouped up with a few library boards in the area for a meet up. When you get in person you can relate challenges and get alternative solutions just by talking to other trustees and I do feel it would provide valuable information to our consultant as to areas that need work that maybe staff or board members don't see or don't know how to tackle. And she's a treasure so it's a win win. We understand we aren't their only library but it increase understanding of NLLSs services, provide valuable feedback and help the board and staff grow in unity/support and understanding.
- Ours needs to improve on communication. Sometimes emails will be responded to in a week. When she does visit, she will show her reports but won't help implement and show purpose or give guidance to improve them.
- Summer access, and confirmation of who new consultant is when it changes. Awareness of what consultants can all provide.
- Consultant refused to offer requested information.

- Some of the consultants do not have real-world experience which makes it difficult to get a response based on what has happened to other versus hypotheticals. Sometimes I am comfortable reaching out for help but sometimes the response is delayed and I go above my consultant to the manager because I feel her information/experience is worth more of my time.
- When we reach out to discuss certain issues we are often faced with a non flexible attitude. nns is a paid for service but my staff often feel like they are our boss.
- More consulting with member libraries before implementation of her projects and services.

Some of the specific comments do point to areas of improvement for our consultants. Where respondents indicated their libraries, we have had discussions with their assigned consultant. Building relationships of trust are a high priority. The suggestions for more board training opportunities and greater connections with consultants are compelling. They also mirror suggestions earlier in the survey.

2023 Recommendations

1. Produce site-visit reports that can be shared with department managers, library managers, and boards.
 - a. This has begun and we will continue to refine these reports in coming years.
2. Continue seconding library managers where appropriate.
 - a. We are working on a secondment with Myrnam library as they transition to a local board.
3. Continue to refine communication channels accessed by member library staff.
 - a. The culture continues to shift toward greater use of Microsoft Teams.
4. Adopt a philosophy of 100% accountability.
 - a. We are still working on this and take very seriously concerns about any breakdown in communication.

2024 Recommendations

1. Implement more board training opportunities (potentially by Zone).

2. Continue the Board Chairs Annual Meeting.
3. Consider increasing staff travel budget lines to increase the in-person availability of consultants at member libraries.

TECHNOLOGY SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE (TSI)

Q22. *Technology Services and Infrastructure (TSI) aims to communicate clearly on technology changes, updates, and upgrades. Please indicate all statements that reflect your experience with us:*

- *Communication is FREQUENTLY timely and helps me understand what changes are being made and why.*
- *Communication is RARELY helpful, too technical, or confusing.*
- *I have access to helpful documentation and resources which allows me to make the most of the technology in my library.*
- *I have difficulty finding information or documentation that clearly explains the technologies and software in my library.*

The answers here (at least in terms of numbers) are identical to the answers given in the previous survey. There remains a small cohort of libraries, five (5), that have difficulty finding information or documentation that clearly explains the technologies and software in their library. Some of this may be attributable to the wide range of technical abilities of library staff. Nonetheless, an increased emphasis on good documentation available in the knowledgebase is warranted.

Q23. *TSI aims to build strong relationships with our member libraries that are based on mutual respect and trust. Please indicate all statements that reflect your experience with us:*

- *I feel comfortable reaching out for technical help.*
- *I avoid reaching out for technical help unless I absolutely need to.*

- *I feel I know when it is appropriate to put in a ticket through ask@nlls.ab.ca or when I should call someone.*
- *I am generally confused or frustrated when trying to communicate with TSI.*
- *I believe TSI understands the technical needs and abilities at our library and works at the level of our understanding.*
- *I feel that TSI hasn't taken the time to get to know the technical issues at our library*

We saw a marked improvement in respondents' willingness to contact TSI when they require help. Only one (1) respondent indicated they avoid reaching out compared to last year's five (5) respondents who felt similarly. The answers to this question were resoundingly positive. Although, four (4) libraries provided at least one negative response from the list. TSI is aware of these libraries and taking steps to improve the relationship.

Q24. *TSI aims to provide the best technology experience possible, given budget constraints. Does the technology provided by NLLS (hardware, network, software) meet the needs of your staff and patrons? Select all that apply. Do not select any if none are true.*

- *The computing hardware in the library meets the needs of patrons and staff.*
- *The internet connection in the library is reliable.*
- *The internet connection is slow or unstable.*
- *I feel confident about my ability to use the various software provided by NLLS*

There was a dramatic shift in the respondents selecting "The Internet connection is slow or unstable" from the previous survey. In 2022, twenty (20) respondents indicated a slow or unstable connection. This dropped to six (6) in this survey. Much of this shift may likely be attributed to the work done to increase bandwidth across libraries. This is a promising trajectory. TSI has the list of libraries continuing to report instability and is working to identify and root out any potential local issues.

Approximately 50% of respondents indicated that they felt confident in their ability to use the software provided by NLLS. This data is skewed by the number of board participants this year. However, it does indicate a potential need for continued training in software provided by NLLS.

Q25. *In 2023 we rolled out Deepfreeze on all public computers, we updated Office licences to 2021, we upgraded bandwidth and took the caps off of wireless internet, we purchased new Fortinet equipment and installed lock boxes at many sites. It has been a busy year. How do you feel about the pace of change.*

- *We could go faster still.*
- *This is about as fast as I can go.*
- *It is too much. We need more time between projects.*

This was a new question in 2023. We were pleasantly surprised by the response. Based on anecdotal evidence, we anticipated a number of libraries would report that the many changes rolled out over the past year were too much to handle. However, only one (1) respondent indicated that the pace of change was too quick. Fifteen (15) indicated that we could go faster. The remainder indicated that the pace was at their limit. This gives us great confidence to continue at our measured pace of change. We are excited to continue this work for our libraries.

This question also included an open-ended “other” response. Of the six (6) respondents who chose to provide a response, they universally praised the improvements and the speed of change.

Q26. *What have we missed regarding Technology Services? How can we improve?*

The open-ended responses can be categorized as general positive feedback, comments on timeliness, and general improvement comments.

General positive feedback

- Doing a good job!!

- It's all good. I have great responses from them when needed
- Good as is.
- You're great! Thank you!
- Good staff, approachable and patient
- We are satisfied
- Staying up to date with technology is much appreciated.
- appreciate the work done in the past year to improve network services, like the approach of the IT team
- The service from this department is exemplary
- We are very happy with the services provided and the improvements. (YAY Deepfreeze)
- ITS guys are awesome. they explain things in my language not tech language.

Comments on timeliness

- The turn around time in solving IT issues could be little faster.
- We feel that TSI has gone backwards by having changes need to be submitted by a ticket; then we have to wait for the turnaround. Sometimes there are changes that need to be made quickly such as public notices or changed library hours. More trust needs to be given to the libraries, controls are too tight. It's also apparent that the resources are not sufficient in order to be able to respond to matters in a timely fashion.

General improvement comments

- Deepfreeze has come with a few issues (slowed down our computers - software may not be well suited to "aging" hardware), give access to Roblox,
- Just general comments: We have had quite a few upgrades recently and we understand it's improving the system but it's hard to understand from a board perspective what we are being tied to, what is our responsibility going forward and what the impact to the library is. The explanation from the NLLS board member can be limited at times due to IT discussions being very high level (NLLS board member voiced this.)There is a lack of understanding to service/staff if we do/do not proceed with a partnered request (like the

recent cabling upgrade request) which makes it challenging to make a business case to present to our municipal partners if we don't have the funds to proceed. Also IT terminology is confusing, can it be share in plain language for us simple folk? 😊

- Faster internet, though not explicitly a NLLS issue. Infrastructure doesn't support it, yet.
- More consultation with member libraries.

The TSI team can be proud of their continued gains in customer service. There remains work to do. In some cases, that work is general education on what libraries can do for themselves and the accessibility of TSI assistance. We continue to refine our processes for taking and responding to issues.

2023 Recommendations

1. Monitor recent improvements to bandwidth and pursue options for increasing network stability and performance (continue with the network enhancement plan).
 - a. This continues.
2. Pursue endpoint standardization and simplify our complex computing environment.
 - a. This continues to get better.
3. Slow down the pace of improvements to allow member libraries to adjust to changes.
 - a. It appears from this survey we've hit on the right pace for improvements.
4. Work with the MLS team to provide appropriate training on new technologies.
 - a. This continues – we are currently working through Polaris permissions training.

2024 Recommendations

1. To ensure there are no local issues at play, zero in on the libraries continuing to have slow or unstable Internet connections.
2. Work to improve documentation and asynchronous help for the use of NLLS-provided software.
3. Continue to monitor turnaround times for tickets and ensure appropriate procedures are in place for detecting and responding to critical issues.

CONCLUSION

The survey instrument had some marked improvements over the year before. We expanded the survey to include more board representation. Some consideration to splitting the survey into two, one for library staff and one for library boards, might be given. Alternatively, marking some questions as operational may help. Some of the questions were too operational for the board. Nonetheless, we believe it did the job of encouraging discussion about NLLS services between library staff and board members.

NLLS is doing well. There were incremental gains in positive ratings throughout the survey. Very few respondents chose to participate anonymously. We appreciate our members' willingness to give pointed feedback. In many cases we can follow up directly on issues with individual libraries. With 61 participating municipalities and 50 libraries the needs and abilities of our members are diverse. Meeting that diversity of needs is challenging. However, this survey has provided a number of ways we can improve.