



# Strategic Plan

# 2011-2014

Metropolitan Library Service Agency

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MELSA STRATEGIC PLAN for 2011 to 2014  
Adopted June 8, 2011

MISSION

The Metropolitan Library Service Agency makes great metro public libraries better.

VISION

The Metropolitan Library Service Agency is a national leader among library collaboratives.

GOALS FOR 2011-2014

**Goal 1: Support innovative and collaborative services that are responsive to the needs of our member libraries.**

- Help member libraries deliver learning services
  - a. Workforce skills development
  - b. Lifelong learning
  - c. Ready to read/for K
  - d. Digital literacy
  - e. Student support for success (Achievement gap/highschool graduation)
- Assist member libraries in responding to community needs associated with demographic changes

**Goal 2: Leverage MELSA's size in order to strengthen collaborative purchasing power and the ability to seek out new funding opportunities.**

- Identify non-traditional venues/partnerships to strengthen funding for service priorities.
- Expand cooperative purchasing opportunities by working with traditional and non-traditional vendors in the marketplace.
- Develop new relationships with community and business partners.

**Goal 3: Create a greater understanding among stakeholders of the value of member libraries' services**

- Promote member libraries' role in learning services
  - Workforce skills development
  - Lifelong learning
  - Ready to read/for K
  - Digital literacy
  - Student support for success (Achievement gap/highschool graduation)
- Focus on civic and business leaders

**Goal 4: Improve MELSA's internal operations**

- Strengthen internal communications
- Create a coordinated program selection and development process in order to introduce new programs/services/activities.
- Develop a comprehensive evaluation tool to be used as a model for all MELSA programs.
- Link MELSA management reporting for Trustees and Advisory Board to Strategic Goals
- Review the MELSA funding allocations

***Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA)***

**Strategic Plan – Appendix A**

**Data Gathering Summary — March 18, 2011**

INTRODUCTION

The following data summary presents themes that emerged from interviews with 35 stakeholders and focus groups involving 14 MELSA staff and library trustees.

OVERALL

Input from participants emphasized MELSA's role as a hub for library collaboration that ensures more unified, transparent services for customers. The organization provides leadership in helping libraries figure out how to work together to reduce costs, learn from each other, and wrestle with complex issues. To do this, MELSA works across eight different systems with many layers of bosses and members with conflicting priorities and deals with increasing politicization of member libraries' boards—making a clear, overarching, commonly held mission/vision essential.

RESPONSES BY QUESTION

**1. What does MELSA do well?**

Respondents indicated the following as strengths (listed in order of majority to a few respondents):

- Unifies and makes seamless the patron experience and enables libraries to provide a quality base level of service throughout the area (especially important for smaller systems)
- Enables metro area libraries to do things collectively that they couldn't do alone (particularly smaller systems) by leveraging resources with cooperative purchasing, reciprocal borrowing services, and collaborative projects
- Provides and coordinates networking opportunities with other library staff in the region and facilitates inter-library communication and identification of best practices
- Has a strong, responsive staff who are good at consensus-building and working with the teams
- Acts as a voice for the whole area in terms of getting funds for libraries, marketing, and raising visibility
- Offers training for library staff and administers Legacy funds and programs

## 2. How could MELSA improve?

- Increase the PR/visibility/advocacy on the value of public libraries in modern society, what's available in the MELSA region, and individual region-wide programs (not MELSA as a brand)
- Improve communication between teams, directors, libraries, MELSA and library staff; and, also, communicate MELSA project information and materials in a more timely fashion
- Clarify MELSA's mission and refer to statutory requirements to determine requirements
- Evaluate MELSA activities and program outcomes to see if they're still relevant, reflecting the needs of library systems, and in-line with MELSA's long-term goals
- Review how RLBS monies are allocated – be more aware of issues libraries face daily and put more money into formula dollars for libraries to address them
- Provide project directors for MELSA-initiated projects and IT support to libraries to troubleshoot and take a lead on more technical projects
- Put more emphasis on literacy programs and develop more “meaty” programs addressing serious issues system-wide

## 3. As you look toward the future, what are the challenges or opportunities you see for MELSA?

- **Financial:**
  - There will be less money to meet greater needs – with the economic downturn, library usage has skyrocketed
  - With less funding, MELSA must prioritize and ensure the projects it funds are truly needed and add value, including the Legacy funding
- **Structure and member composition:**
  - Because of its size, Hennepin County has the capacity to deliver programs that other smaller library systems cannot. In contrast, smaller systems rely on MELSA for these programs.
  - As funding gets tighter, there will be tensions in the current structure as individual library systems look for additional resources
  - The political environment of the library world is challenging. Is it time to merge with multi-type libraries to create one big system? Or split the region which could unravel years of work toward investments in efficiency and resource sharing?
- **The current political environment**
  - There is more public hostility toward funding public programs in general
  - There is a movement to promote the idea that libraries can be run by volunteers, or that we don't even need libraries now that we have the internet
  - The Governor's seven-point plan for education is an opportunity for libraries to demonstrate their value in early childhood education and family literacy
- **Demographics:**
  - Influx of non-English speakers requires libraries to be equally useful and welcoming to all patrons
  - The population is aging and there is a split between the tactile generation (typically older folks) and the 'techy' generation in terms of what they expect in a library
  - The metro area is growing in population and spreading – this may change our definition of what the “metro” area is, and member systems' sizes will fluctuate as well

- **Technology:**
    - Libraries can help bridge the digital divide—everybody needs access to information—especially the poor
    - Globalization of information resources— we are competing with more conveniently provided (if more costly) resources
  - **PR/Advocacy:** This is the time to tell the story of libraries – how much they’re used, raise the issue of access to information for all, the economic value of investment in libraries, organize the cardholders (especially babyboomers) to contact politicians in support of library funding
- **What role should MELSA play in the future?**
- The word “**continue**” appears in many responses:
    - Continue to support member systems through cooperative purchasing and reciprocal services, delivery services, e-rate, programs, etc.
    - Continue to coordinate networking opportunities
    - Continue with current programs including Job Resources, summer reading, museum adventure, collaborative projects like measuring
    - Continue PR for all libraries on the importance of public libraries and promote the system more to county and state government as cost effective and leveraging resources
  - Clarify MELSA’s **mission:**
    - Pare down the focus to statutory requirements and mission-based cooperative services
    - Prepare for the future instead of reacting to what’s currently happening. Is MELSA here to respond to the felt needs of collective members or to determine for us what we need?
    - Develop the big-picture vision to help libraries move forward collectively.
    - Stay on top of technology trends to help libraries understand and implement them.
    - Keep on top of new developments and trends in libraries across the country.
    - As the largest regional system, MELSA has an important role in the future of libraries statewide
  - Increase **efficiencies:** Assist with funding and infrastructure to enable libraries to provide more services with less staff, more technology. Help libraries get more bang for the buck, find more ways to increase our capacity, more ways to work together.

**4. What needs could they address with services?**

- Don’t add services – do more straight pass-through of funds and/or stay focused on those services deemed valuable
- Facilitate cooperative purchasing of e-books and other popular digital content
- Create a communication network for MELSA members (like listservs).
- Look at the advance of social media/electronic media and its implications for libraries (data practices, etc.) – help members develop standard policies.
- Do more benchmarking, help figure out how we’re doing, what resources we have collectively, then map it on GIS so we can see strengths and weaknesses system-wide.
- Provide staff/assistance such as help with Legacy programs, project managers (ex: the Jobs project manager is great and “really keeps us on task.”)
- Fundraising: explore a regional tax, a sales tax, for library systems – MELSA could lobby for it and then administer it.

## **5. Do you have any other thoughts or advice?**

### **Kudos for MELSA**

- I love that MELSA exists, as financial difficulties increase it is even more important for us to collaborate and share ideas for efficiency;
- I'm a huge supporter of MELSA because I believe in collaboration; I really appreciate MELSA;
- MELSA does a great job at being flexible, open to new initiatives; coordinating library services in the metro area
- MELSA is a work in progress, but they make it better for my library and our customers
- MELSA is a superb agency— just watch out for mission creep, stick to basic support services.

### **Governance and structure**

- Not sure that non-trustee commissioners really understand what MELSA can and does do for their systems – do more outreach to them.
- The system with two boards is a bureaucratic, not a forward-moving structure, with no input from other sources. Take more leadership in addressing statewide structural issues for library systems.
- We need to revisit the distribution formula at some point – figure out where the metro area needs resources most, which areas, which resources.
- There should be an outside evaluation of MELSA as an organization – maybe one outcome of this planning process would be to set the wheels in motion for that.