

# Montana State Library Certification Policy

Preliminary Comments/Responses/FAQ

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## **FEEDBACK FORM**

Review the contents of this draft Frequently Asked Questions document and [submit comments through this form](#).

## **Important Note**

These comments, responses, and frequently asked questions will be updated regularly. The Commission has not taken action on the draft policy proposal to implement administrative rule changes which the Commission adopted on December 10, 2025.

The responses to these questions reflect the recommendations of the Continuing Education Subcommittee as of February 24, 2026. The Commission intends to adopt a final policy at their April 2026 business meeting.

## **Comments and Responses**

Comment 1: Several commentors expressed concern that requiring the Commission to preapprove courses taken for credit would mean that librarians would miss out on valuable training that they learn about on short notice and may lose funding for training, if that training is not available for credit.

Response 1: The Commission acknowledges the importance of meeting as often as necessary to consider courses not included in the available course catalog. The Commission also noted that because a course is not in the catalog does not prohibit someone from taking the course however they will not earn credit.

Updated Response (2/24/26): The subcommittee is reviewing a proposal to consider modifying the approval process to encourage a course catalog jointly built by librarians and the Commission.

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Comment 2: Numerous commentors noted that the rule changes centralize control for continuing education with the Commission and may eliminate local selection of continuing education providers and topics.

Response 2: Certification is one of the statutory duties of the Commission. It's the Commission's intent to provide more oversight over the certification program. MSL's continuing education and certification program will cover core library concepts. Enhanced training needs for local libraries will be addressed at the local library level.

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Comment 3: Several comments asked whether courses taken at training, including the Montana Library Association Conference, would be approved for credit.

Response 3: The Commission stated that special considerations would be given to conferences. Conferences are very efficient ways to get continuing education credits and are beneficial to local government budgeting. The subcommittee will consider how the Commission should review program content and conferences.

Updated response (12/29/25): The subcommittee asked staff to connect with the staff of associations that host conferences to ask for a list of workshops and descriptions with enough time to review the list at a regular Commission meeting. MSL staff will work with conference staff to ensure the proposals have the required information.

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Comment 4: Several commenters questioned whether courses offered from external resources would be considered for credit. Examples include college courses, MSU Extension training, webinars from the Pacific Northwest Library Association, the Association of Rural and Small Libraries, vendor training from OCLC, training at events like the Montana Association of Counties Conference and from the Montana Municipal Insurance Association, LinkedIn Learning, training from other state libraries, and local training like CRP and active shooter training.

Response 4: As proposed, courses offered for continuing education credit will primarily be offered by MSL staff, however it's the Commission's intent to allow courses from outside providers to be taken for credit as well after those courses have been approved by the Commission. The Commission commented that providers like MSU Extension offer excellent training. MSL staff do not have the expertise or capacity to offer sufficient courses for certification. If a course needs to be offered by someone with expertise beyond that of MSL staff, staff will recommend courses to the Commission. MSL will maintain a catalog of excellent classes. The Commission welcomes suggestions from libraries for additional courses for the catalog.

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Comment 5: One commentor requested a guiding policy, matrix or rubric that sets criteria for the approval of continuing education courses.

Response 5: The Commission noted that the subcommittee is working to create a rubric that will be used to evaluate courses.

Updated Response (2/25/26): At this time, the subcommittee has discussed using a form to collect proposals for pre-approval. The proposals must include

- course title
- course description
- competency the course will address
- desired learning outcomes
- presenter's credentials
  - name
  - professional biography with experience and/or degree
  - association and/or organization
- number of credits
- Cost for MSL (if any)

Updated Response (02/24/26): The subcommittee recommended the following items be considered when deciding whether to approve a request for credit. Not all questions have to be answered yes for an item to be considered for approval.

- Do the learning outcomes of the course fall under one or more of the competencies outlined in the course of study?
- Does the presenter have expertise with the subject matter?
- Do the learning outcomes address the needs of multiple libraries in Montana?
- Does the learning support the library in meeting the public library standards?

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Comment 6: Several commenters noted the elimination of continuing education tracks for library trustees and staff. Commenters expressed concern that only offering a single track fails to recognize the diverse skills needed to lead, manage, and operate public libraries.

Response 6: According to Montana's public library standards, head librarians are required to be certified. The Commission encourages trustees and staff to be certified. To clarify this point, the Commission may consider using the language "certification track" rather than "Director's track" in the continuing education handbook.

Updated Response (2/25/26): At this time the subcommittee recommends having only one track. Staff and board members are currently required to take a certain number of credits in each subject area. The initial track will be similar to this model. The renewal track will give staff members the opportunity to work with their supervisors to identify courses within the course catalog that best fits the professional development needs of their staff member.

Updated response (2/24/26):

- Committee appreciated people's interest in professional development for board members and staff. They admired the desire to incentivize professional development for staff.
- They discussed ways to recognize achievement. The committee asked staff to consider ways to recognize staff and trustees. There may be a way through the MSL Learn system to recognize people who work on their professional development. The committee was also mindful of the amount of staff time this transition will take and recommends focusing first on the library director track. They will consider how to best acknowledge staff or trustee professional development at future dates.

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Comment 7: Commenters noted that without a recertification track librarians have to repeat courses to earn credits for recertification which would be a waste of time and funding.

Response 7: Commissioners noted that there will be fewer approved courses in the beginning. Commissioners also noted that the new certification requirements require fewer hours of continuing education, and the course will be of higher quality. The course catalog needs to remain relevant and flexible for the future. For example, new courses may be added after each legislative session to educate librarians about legislative changes. Additionally, more innovative or elective courses will be left up to individual libraries to consider taking.

Updated Response (2/25/26): The Commission wants the courses to be relevant.

Updated Response (2/24/26): The subcommittee will discuss questions about the initial track requirements. The renewal track gives libraries flexibility in selecting which competencies are most relevant for their needs.

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Comment 8: A couple of commentors expressed concern about a “one-sized-fits-all” approach to continuing education which may not address the unique needs of libraries that differ in size, resources and patrons’ needs.

Response 8: Commissioners noted that the educational needs addressed in foundational courses offered by MSL do not change. Examples include courses on open meeting laws, complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act, budgeting, and building relationships with library trustees.

Updated Response (2/25/26): Commissioners also noted that part of the reason behind the structure of the renewal track is to give librarians the flexibility to choose the competency areas most relevant to their positions and type of library.

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Comment 9: Currently college courses count towards certification. Recent graduates with a master's degree in library science are eligible for certification for four years. Under revised rules, a commentor raised the question, would college credits still count for credit. Another questioned whether graduates would submit their transcripts to the Commission for review.

Response 9: The Commission noted that this is a question that needs to be further considered by the subcommittee. The subcommittee should consider how much course work should be specific to Montana while not requiring librarians to repeat basic coursework like cataloging.

Updated Response (2/25/26): The subcommittee recommends that a Master of Library Science degree earned within the last 5 years can be substituted for the initial track or 20 credits of the renewal track should the individual have already earned their certification.

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Comment 10: One commentor questioned whether those currently working towards certification under the current rules would be grandfathered in.

Response 10: The Commission agreed that anyone who has started certification under the current model will be able to finish under the old system.

Updated response (2/24/26): The subcommittee clarified the language to reflect how the transition would work.

- Credits earned through June 30, 2026 follow the 2023 policy and remain valid.
- Credits earned after July 1, 2026 must follow requirements in this 2026 policy.
- Current certificates remain valid until expiration.

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Comment 11: One commentor questioned if trainings would only focus on library directors. Will training for trustees and staff still be available?

Response 11: The subcommittee recognizes the desire for training for staff and board members. While the certification program will focus on library directors, training for board members and staff will still be available.

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Comment 12: One commentor sought clarification about past/current MSL offerings still being available for credit.

Response 12: MSL webinars and recordings will go through the pre-approval process. The subcommittee believes those past recordings (as long as they are within the 5-year window) will be eligible for credit and part of the course catalog.

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