

Frequently Asked Questions

What is CommonShelf?

CommonShelf is a shared statewide digital collection that anyone in Massachusetts can use to get eBooks and audiobooks. It's powered by Lyrasis' Palace app.

Does CommonShelf take the place of Overdrive/Libby?

No, it does not take the place of Overdrive/Libby (LEA). People can use both.
MBLC funding continues to support Overdrive/Libby (LEA); MBLC and MLS funding supports CommonShelf/Palace with Boston Public Library in their role as Library for the Commonwealth taking the lead in statewide piloting.

Do we give up control of our vendor relationships? Does our current OverDrive collection go away?

No. Your existing local and Network OverDrive content stays yours and stays visible to your patrons. CommonShelf/Palace is an addition, not a replacement.

Why introduce a new eBook platform/collection?

No single eBook platform can meet the diverse needs and demand of every library and patron in Massachusetts. Introducing a new platform expands the content available, encourages competition, creates new opportunities to advocate for more sustainable pricing and lending models, and, most importantly, keeps libraries at the center of the digital lending experience.

How can people access the CommonShelf Collection?

We've created a patron information webpage.
It's important to note:During the pilot phase, everyone will need to get a CommonShelf/Palace virtual library card—this is created in the app and can only be used with CommonShelf/Palace. When a person is setting up their card and accessing CommonShelf for the first time they will be asked for their zip code and they must be in Massachusetts (and the device's location setting turned on) because the app uses geolocation to establish initial authorization.

After that they can be out of state and still be able to access CommonShelf. **The virtual library card can only be used with CommonShelf, not for other library services**Once a library is enrolled in CommonShelf, patrons can use their local library card to access the collection.

Before a library joins CommonShelf, for patrons to access CommonShelf they either have to have a BPL eCard or create a virtual card with the Palace app, correct?

Yes, this is correct during the pilot phase. After that, when a library enrolls, patrons can use their local library card.

Why do CommonShelf accounts not take someone's state residency or standing with their local library into account?

CommonShelf signups now require a zip code for registration. Libraries will be able to join CommonShelf starting in the first quarter of 2027, and once a library joins, patrons will use their library cards to access the collection.

What is the plan for using CommonShelf to strengthen residents' relationship with their local libraries? If they don't need a library card anymore, why would they come to us?

The virtual library card can only be used with CommonShelf, not for other library services. When a library joins CommonShelf, their patrons will access it and other digital content through their local library's CommonShelf landing page, strengthening that relationship and keeping the library at the center of the experience. In addition, once a library enrolls, patrons can use their local library card to access the collection.

How can we measure the value our patrons get out of CommonShelf? What metrics are being put in place?

Available CommonShelf metrics include user registrations by ZIP code, daily active users, and checkouts.

Can I get my local usage statistics?

MBLC will provide quarterly reports showing CommonShelf registrations by patron ZIP code. The Virtual Library Card registration form collects patrons' ZIP codes to support this reporting.

Does the rollout of CommonShelf mean that MBLC is turning to a direct patron service model?

No, CommonShelf/Palace follows the same model as other statewide services like

Commonwealth Catalog, databases or Overdrive/Libby in which the MBLC partners with our affiliates and libraries to bring the service to the patrons. This is done to save money and/or to expand the service.

Why does the rollout of CommonShelf feel so rushed?

CommonShelf is being introduced in phases and is currently in pilot phase. Because funding has already been committed to collection titles, including metered-access and time-limited titles, we want to make them available to as many patrons as possible during the pilot while giving libraries time to onboard with Palace.

How can local libraries give input into this rollout plan?

Information sessions that were held in October gave us important feedback that we have already been able to implement. Lyrasis was able to add a zip code field to the registration process, which will help MBLC provide community specific data. There will be further opportunity for the library community to share ideas as we move into later phases of the pilot project.

How many items can I borrow and have on hold in the CommonShelf Collection?

Patrons may have 10 items on hold ,10 items checked out at one time. All items borrow for 21 days.

What is the difference between BPL's Palace collection and the CommonShelf collection?

BPL has chosen to share with CommonShelf all titles it purchases through Palace Marketplace, making those titles available to libraries and patrons statewide.

Can I add CommonShelf collection items to my library's catalog using MARC records or an API?

Yes. Statewide CommonShelf content can be added to local catalogs. At this time, patrons of libraries without local Palace collections will need a virtual library card to access the content.

Does participating count as state aid?

Items libraries purchased through CommonShelf/Palace count towards the materials requirement. Libraries will have access to local usage data for ARIS reporting.

Will our patrons need a new library card?

Once a library enrolls, patrons can use their local library card to access the collection. During the pilot, patrons will need to create a CommonShelf/Palace virtual library card. The virtual library card can only be used with CommonShelf, not for other library services.

How do holds work on the shared CommonShelf content?

First come, first served and filled in the order they were placed.

Can a Network join instead of individual libraries?

- Networks can purchase from Palace Marketplace to share content to member libraries and share content onto CommonShelf.
- Because Palace is built around a library first branding model, we are encouraging individual libraries to join.
- Note: networks do not get a landing page or library card login; that only happens at the individual library level.

Can our network's OverDrive content be discovered by patrons at a different Network through Palace?

No -- Palace doesn't currently support cross-Network discovery of each Network's own OverDrive content. A patron in one Network won't see another Network's OverDrive collection through Palace.

Does CommonShelf work with Aspen?

Yes.

How can my library join the CommonShelf collection?

Library enrollment will start in February or March 2027. The MBLC is currently working out the process for how this will occur with Lyrasis.

What does it cost to join CommonShelf?

The MBLC is using Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant funds to cover the platform costs to add every public library in the state to the Palace platform. That means libraries that wish to join will not have to pay platform fees. MLS has paid the base platform fee for the CommonShelf collection, and MBLC is paying to expand it to everyone.

What does joining give my library?

- An individual library-branded landing page in the Palace app with the library’s logo and identity.
- The ability to curate that landing page with lists, lanes, and locally relevant content.
- Digital collection configuration that can bring together local and network OverDrive collections, the CommonShelf collection, Palace Marketplace purchases, and other eligible digital collections.
- Access to Palace Marketplace for additional digital content purchasing.

- An administrative dashboard Palace Collection Manager to support patron management, reporting, and access to your local usage data
- You keep your existing vendor relationships; joining doesn't require giving those up.

Who do I contact with questions about CommonShelf/Palace?

If you have questions about implementing Palace, the pilot project, marketing materials, or other similar questions, you can contact Maureen Amyot, MBLC Director. If it's a support-related question for problems with the app or registration, you can contact support@thepalaceproject.org.

What technical information will my library need to be ready to provide to join? To set up your library in Palace and connect it to the appropriate collections, Lyrasis/Palace will need a small set of technical and administrative details. This information helps confirm authentication, display your library correctly in the app, connect available digital collections, and route patron support questions to the right place.
You'll need:

- A primary point of contact, including name, role, and email address.
- Any additional staff who should be included in onboarding, configuration, training, or technical follow-up.
- ILS information needed to support patron authentication.
- Digital collection information, including local or network collections that should be available through Palace.
- Patron support email address for questions or issues from users.
- OverDrive and other vendors access keys or credentials needed to connect eligible collections.
- Library logo and any basic branding files needed for the library's landing page in Palace.
- Barcode prefix and a test barcode/PIN with lending privileges so authentication and borrowing can be tested before launch.

Is there content in CommonShelf or Palace Marketplace for community colleges, other higher ed, or K-12 schools?

Yes. K–12 schools and higher education institutions have used the Palace app and Palace Marketplace. As more libraries across Massachusetts adopt Palace, these institutions can also consider adding CommonShelf to broaden access to and discovery of digital content for their

communities. However, it’s important to note that, unlike Sora, content in CommonShelf/Palace will not be limited by age or grade level.