



State of Wisconsin Council on Library Network and Development

To: State Superintendent Jill Underly, Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers,
Wisconsin Legislators

From: Ellen Kupfer, Chair, Council on Library and Network Development
(COLAND)

Re: COLAND Biennial Report on Wisconsin Libraries, 2023-2025

Date: July 12, 2025

At the Annual Meeting of the Council on Library and Network Development (COLAND), the Council approved the attached Biennial Report on the Value of Library Services, Statistical Report, Challenges, Opportunities, and Recommendations in Wisconsin for 2023-2025. Mandated Report [Wisconsin Statutes s. 43.07 \(5\)](#).

COLAND advises the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to ensure that all Wisconsin residents have access to library and information services. The 19-member council, appointed by the Governor, functions as a forum through which librarians and members of the public identify, study, and collect public testimony on issues affecting Wisconsin libraries and other information services. Members serve three-year terms. Council findings are communicated as advisory recommendations to the State Superintendent, Governor, and Legislature.

Noteworthy in the Biennial Report

- Wisconsin has: 381 public libraries providing 467 facilities and bookmobile services that serve 5.94 million state residents, 2.84

million of which currently hold active library cards; 15 regional public library systems coordinate services among those libraries, providing leadership and training, and promoting resource sharing and technology; and approximately 2,200 public school library media centers serving about 823,000 students.

- The Wisconsin Public Library Consortium's Digital Library offers a cooperative collection of about 365,000 copies of e-books, downloadable audiobooks, and streaming video available to public library cardholders. These titles were used almost 9.5 million times in 2024 (compared to 7.6 million times in 2022).
- In 2024, the American Library Association reported a decrease in reported book challenges from 2022, but the number still far exceeds the challenge numbers prior to 2020. ALA identified the underreporting, censorship by exclusions, and legislative restrictions as contributing factors in the decrease of reported challenges.
- Statewide need for strong broadband and digital equity.

Recommendations for the future:

COLAND makes the following recommendations to State Superintendent Jill Underly:

- Continue to advocate for state aid to libraries at a level that will maintain or increase service to communities and schools.
- Support affordable statewide broadband and digital equity.
- Monitor trends in emerging technologies such as AI and cybersecurity.
- Support adequate staffing of all libraries by maintaining or increasing current staff.
- Encourage youth to consider the field of library science.
- Protect intellectual freedom and the freedom to read.
- Reduce barriers to licensing/certification for librarians, especially those which disproportionately affect underrepresented groups.
- Ensure library facilities and buildings are well maintained, provide sufficient space, and are capable of meeting the needs of their customers.

Thank you for your consideration of this report. If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at kupfer11e@aol.com, 262-496-7855.

Wisconsin Libraries, 2023-2025

Value of Library Services, Statistical Report, Challenges, Opportunities, and
Recommendations

Biennial Report

Council on Library and Network Development (COLAND)

July 2025

COLAND Biennial Report on Wisconsin Libraries,
2023-2025

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION 3
 COLAND Members, 2023-25 4
 COLAND Meetings, 2023-25..... 4
GENERAL INFORMATION..... 6
CHALLENGES 9
COLAND GOALS: 2023-202510
2025-2027 BIENNIUM GOALS14
 2025-2027 GOALS15
RECOMMENDATIONS16

INTRODUCTION

The Council on Library and Network Development (COLAND) advises the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to ensure that all Wisconsin residents have access to library and information services. The 19-member council, appointed by the Governor, functions as a forum through which librarians and members of the public identify, study, and collect public testimony on issues affecting Wisconsin libraries and other information services. Members serve three-year terms. Council findings are communicated as advisory recommendations to the State Superintendent, Governor, and Legislature.

In order to ensure access to the library and information services, COLAND carries out the following responsibilities:

- Promote free access to knowledge, information, and diversity of ideas by all Wisconsin residents.
- Facilitate the most effective use of library resources through interlibrary cooperation among all types of libraries.
- Promote cooperation and resource sharing among public, school, academic, other types of libraries, and related agencies.
- Plan, coordinate, evaluate, and set statewide priorities for the development of networks to enable library cooperation and resource sharing within Wisconsin.

This biennial report is mandated by [Wisconsin Statutes § 43.07 \(5\)](#), “On or before July 1 of every odd-numbered year [COLAND will] transmit to the state superintendent a descriptive and statistical report on the condition and progress of library services in the state and recommendations on how library services in the state may be improved.”

COLAND Members, 2023-25

Professional members are library science, audiovisual, and informational science professionals representative of various types of libraries and information services, including public libraries, public library systems, school libraries, public and private academic libraries, special libraries, and library educators. Public members are individuals who have demonstrated an interest in libraries or other types of information services. ([Wis. Stat. § 15.377\(6\)](#))

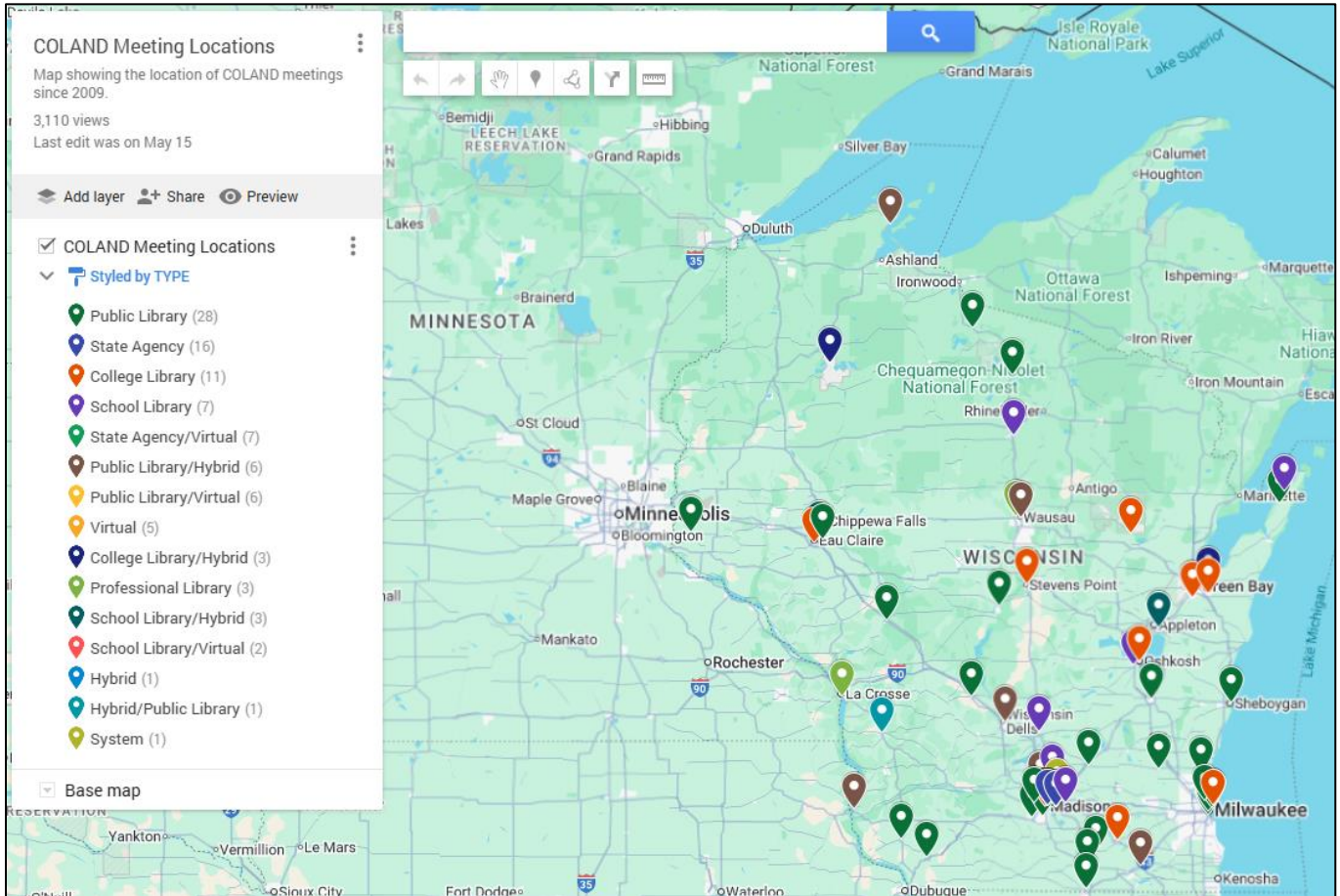
Amy Beth Bahena-Ettner
Amy Thornton
Andi Cloud
Christinna Swearingen
Colleen Rortvedt
Dennis Myers
Ellen Kupfer
Mayor Eric Genrich
Isa Small
Jaime Healy-Plotkin
Joshua Klingbeil

Katelyn Dubiel
Kristi Williams
Linda Leonhart
Michael Otten
Nick Dimassis
Rachel Thomas
Rebecca Ferrell
Robert Lee Nunez II
Terrence Berres
Terri Muraski

COLAND Meetings, 2023-25

Libraries vary depending on location and the organization or system they are affiliated with. COLAND makes a deliberate plan to visit a variety of libraries (i.e., smaller rural libraries, school libraries, larger urban public libraries, tribal libraries, college libraries) to become familiar with the challenges to libraries and programs that uniquely meet their community's needs.

In order to fulfill our mission of advising on library and technology issues throughout the state of Wisconsin, COLAND met in these libraries during the years 2023-2025:



July 11, 2025	Marathon County Public Library
May 9, 2025	Northwoods Elementary School
March 14, 2025	Prairie du Chien Memorial Library
January 10, 2025	Microsoft Teams
November 1, 2024	McIntosh Memorial Library
September 13, 2024	Mead Public Library
July 12, 2024	UW-Madison Field Day Learning Games Lab
May 10, 2024	UW-Green Bay Library

March 8, 2024	Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe University Community Library
January 12, 2024	Microsoft Teams
November 10, 2023	Matheson Memorial Library
September 8, 2023	Bayfield Carnegie Library
July 14, 2023	Kilbourn Public Library
May 12, 2023	Appleton East High School
March 10, 2023	Appleton East High School (Virtual due to weather)
January 13, 2023	Virtual Tour of Recollection Wisconsin

GENERAL INFORMATION

Wisconsin’s public, school and academic libraries transform communities by providing:

- Resources for work, school, and personal growth.
- Access to broadband technology and technology training.
- Literacy and life-long learning programs and classes.
- Places to access and add to the world’s knowledge.

Wisconsin residents use and value libraries as a:

- Cost-effective source for books, digital resources, and technology.
- Place for independent learning and community gatherings.
- Community anchor for economic growth and a primary contributor to community quality of life.

Public libraries are a gateway to a better life through lifelong learning. The library is the only institution that serves residents in all stages of life. Early literacy programs help young brains develop and prepare for school.

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs encourage young adults to consider careers in science, technology, and engineering—much needed for Wisconsin’s economic development. Individuals use the library to apply for jobs, file their taxes, do their banking, order supplies, and stay in touch with family.

For many in Wisconsin, the public library is the most reliable, and sometimes their only source of internet. Libraries have provided access to service in their parking lots, loaned Wi-Fi hotspots to people and worked to help people find and use affordable Wi-Fi. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) provided [Library Services and Technology Act \(LSTA\)](#) funds to collaboratively develop the Internet Discount Finder with the Public Service Commission (PSC) to provide information about home internet costs.

Wisconsin’s public libraries have long provided valuable support to residents seeking to improve their career skills, change careers, and apply for jobs. As the world of work has moved to utilizing on-line portals and services to access applications and training for jobs, libraries are often the resource for people in the community. As the nature of work evolved following the pandemic, libraries adjusted to the needs of their patrons. Besides the direct services libraries of all types provide to their constituents and customers, Wisconsin residents and businesses also benefit from cost efficiencies brought through high levels of coordinated interlibrary cooperation. Wisconsin’s libraries cooperate through regional library systems and statewide services and organizations. Every year, libraries of all types throughout the state share millions of library items. This statewide sharing means that everyone in Wisconsin has access to over 22 million physical items owned by Wisconsin public libraries.

Electronic resource sharing goes beyond the sharing of books and other physical materials. Wisconsin continues to benefit from electronic databases, e-books, and digital audiobooks that are available to residents

and businesses through cost-effective centralized purchasing as well as statewide and regional consortia licensing.

The Wisconsin Public Library Consortium's (WPLC) Digital Library offers a cooperative collection of about 365,000 copies of e-books, downloadable audiobooks, and streaming video available to public library cardholders. These titles were used almost 9.5 million times in 2024 (compared to 7.6 million times in 2022). This project is an example of successful statewide collaboration around collection development. Over 30,000 magazines are checked out via WPLC per month.

The Library Services Team at the DPI awarded grants to six Wisconsin public libraries for a Teen Internship Program. The federally funded grants are made possible because of the LSTA. The Teen Internship Program provides funding for the chosen libraries to offer paid summer 2025 internships to recruit and hire teens reflecting the diversity of their communities. The grant will equip participating libraries with tools and resources supporting the recruitment and retention of teen interns, while allowing the interns to cultivate connections within their communities.

STATISTICAL REPORT

Wisconsin's libraries of all types provide a connection to the world of information, opportunities, and knowledge. Because the economy of the future is information-based, good libraries are critical to restore and maintain a healthy state economy, and to enrich the lives of Wisconsin residents. Wisconsin has:

- 381 public libraries providing 467 facilities and bookmobile services that serve 5.94 million state residents, 2.84 million of which currently hold active library cards.
- 15 regional public library systems coordinate services among those libraries, providing leadership and training, and promoting resource sharing and technology.

- Approximately 2,200 public school library media centers serve about 823,000 students.
- Hundreds of academic and special libraries serving students, professionals, businesses, and others.
- Library services at 20 adult institutions, one juvenile facility, 14 male correctional centers, 2 female correctional centers, and 4 facilities operated by the Division of Care and Treatment Services, Wisconsin Department of Health Services.
- As of June 2025, BadgerLink provides access to 62 unique resources containing historic and current newspapers, articles from scholarly journals and popular magazines, encyclopedias, multimedia literacy content, images, and test and career prep materials.

CHALLENGES

- Public funding for libraries faces several challenges. School districts increasingly struggle to fund local schools. In recent years, there has been an increase in adjusting the cost of library services by moving to part-time staff, utilizing staff that are not certified (therefore less expensive), or limiting available resources. Public libraries face similar challenges with the addition of the need to maintain facilities or grow libraries as their community expands. Funding on the state and federal level is either being cut or limited in ways that may inhibit the quality and types of services provided.
- Broadband availability and affordable service can vary around the state. Issues of speed and the capacity of libraries to handle the demand for service by patrons can be an issue.
- Rapid change in computer/technological programs makes keeping up with needed services difficult. Libraries must constantly monitor trends and developments. To be able to provide the services needed, especially those related to work, computers and programs need to be

updated periodically at a cost to their communities. In addition, for staff to be able to assist patrons they must receive regular training. Cybersecurity is critical to protect all patrons' information. There also is a need to educate patrons on this issue.

- Intellectual freedom and the freedom to read continue to be challenged. Across the state, libraries have seen challenges to books, displays and programs that present a wide range of viewpoints, cultures, and beliefs. Libraries continue to represent the entire variety of their community's population and require support to do this.

COLAND GOALS: 2023-2025

COLAND members develop and implement goals and objectives that are important to all Wisconsin libraries and information services. The following narrative reflects on the COLAND Goals of 2023-2025.

1. HUMAN RESOURCES

- a. **RECRUITMENT:** Support efforts inspiring middle school, high school and college students to consider a career in library science.
- b. **EDUCATION:** Evaluate and support educational pipelines, continuing education, professional standards, inclusive practices and licensing/certification for both school and public librarians.
- c. **RETENTION:** Increase the retention of professional librarians and help advocate for competitive salaries, benefits and recognition for service in the field.

Discussion: Although COLAND itself does not interact with students themselves, the Council monitors and supports the programs and activities that the DPI conducts throughout the year. The Council received updates from staff regarding the Student Intern program and the New Director "Ask Me Anything" sessions. In addition, presentations on the Public Library Staff

Compensation Study and the Systems and Resource Library Administrators Association of Wisconsin (SRLAAW) work group regarding data which looked at ways to recruit and retain library staff, the New Directors Training Camp and the updated Certification Manual for Library Directors and the School and the Staffing Report of 2022 provided the information and an opportunity to give feedback to DPI regarding future programming. A University of Wisconsin Madison Library Sciences class attended and participated in a Council meeting giving them an opportunity to see the Council's role.

COLAND will continue to support activities to recruit and retain library staff at all levels.

2. BROADBAND ACCESS

- a. **ADVOCACY:** Advocate with stakeholders in achieving statewide broadband service that is accessible and affordable for all Wisconsinites- a foundational element of digital equity.

Discussion: COLAND monitored developments regarding the Internet for All initiative, cybersecurity, funding from the state and local government, various programs to promote internet access and AI development, policies for library usage and AI standards. Discussion of the DPI guidance for AI provided feedback to the department regarding a variety of topics.

The Broadband subcommittee expanded its membership to include additional public and professional members who have experience and expertise in internet and broadband development and implementation. Monthly guest speakers covered presentations from the PSC on various state and federal grants including BEAD, Digital Equity and state grants, the Governor's Task Force on Broadband, various programs promoting adoptability such as Internet Discount Finder, ACP, cybersecurity, "Student Adoption and Internet Affordability and Effect on Schooling," and several presentations on AI covering a variety of topics such as challenges, guidance

for school or public libraries, staff training, e-rate, and hotspot funding challenges. The subcommittee updated COLAND each month.

The subcommittee made recommendations to COLAND to support the PSC Digital Equity plan that was consequently submitted to the federal government for approval.

COLAND will continue to monitor various challenges and issues in broadband adoption, funding, support libraries in training staff to help patrons with finding and navigating the internet, issues surrounding cybersecurity and new issues as this field is constantly changing and expanding.

3. INNOVATION

- a. OBSERVATION: Actively and thoughtfully monitor trends, developments, and challenges in modern library services.
- a. ENCOURAGEMENT: Support the DPI, library districts and systems, individual libraries and professional groups as they implement and experiment with new programs- especially those which serve marginalized populations.

Discussion: Members of COLAND represent the various types of libraries and their constituents. Discussion at bi-monthly meetings reflected those perspectives. There are some concerns that are the same/similar across libraries. But there are needs unique to each type of library that need to be considered and advocated for. COLAND attempts to be aware of those differences and to advocate for them. Regular updates from DPI staff provided information supplementing professional trends. The chair attended the SRLAAW meetings to learn about challenges and provide feedback.

COLAND received presentations on the new Reading Law and its implementation, the system merger of Prairie Lakes, and Field Day Learning Lab, which develops computer game-based learning activities.

4. OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

- a. **AWARENESS:** Increase awareness of COLAND through outreach to libraries, library systems, and professional groups.
- b. **NETWORKING:** Develop and support active relationships with, and between libraries, librarians, and vital organizations aligned with COLAND goals.

Discussion: COLAND has reached out to different professional groups and libraries. The Chair has attended the meetings of SRLAAW. A flyer explaining and promoting COLAND was jointly developed by the Outreach subcommittee and DPI staff. COLAND shared a display table at the WLA conference in 2025 with DPI to provide information to all attendees on COLAND and its role. Invitations to attend COLAND meetings have been extended by the Chair, DPI staff, and members of the Council to various groups. As a result, system directors of the area where meetings are being held and various library staff (school or public) have been attending meetings at their location. This is something new. Members of COLAND have attended lobby days at the state and federal level in conjunction with other libraries and professional groups to advocate for adequate funding for libraries.

The Broadband subcommittee has included additional library and public members on the sub-committee to broaden input and information.

The Outreach and Engagement subcommittee has no further actions planned but will be available if needs are identified by the larger council.

5. INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

- a. **PROTECTION:** Vigorously defend intellectual freedom and the freedom to read.
- b. **PERSEVERANCE:** Support libraries and their staff as they face a surge in book challenges: carefully monitor state and national

trends in book challenges, as well as the groups and opinions fueling them.

Discussion: COLAND received regular updates from DPI staff regarding challenges to books and freedom to read. The Council supported DPI initiatives to provide training and resources to libraries and library staff regarding national trends in challenges to intellectual freedom, library policies to deal with challenges, collaborated with the Cooperative Child Book Center on a program for administrators and librarians on Book and Collection Challenges.

COLAND will continue to monitor and support DPI activities in this area.

2025-2027 BIENNIUM GOALS

Many of the challenges facing libraries remain the same over time. COLAND will continue its focus on several of them.

Funding issues will take a high priority as recent initiatives at the federal level to remove funding have put libraries at risk. The Council is very appreciative of the work that DPI staff do and the high level of expertise and resources they provide to all libraries around the state. COLAND will continue to advocate for appropriate funding for libraries.

COLAND recognizes the need to continue to support the recruitment, certification, compensation and retention of library staff. COLAND will continue to monitor national trends and support programs such as the Student Intern program.

As technological developments occur at an ever-expanding pace which impacts our communities, COLAND will continue to monitor and make

recommendations to the DPI regarding various issues such as AI, internet access for all, etc.

COLAND will continue to monitor trends, developments and challenges in library sciences. It will support the DPI and various libraries around the state in implementing programs to deal with their challenges. The Council will continue to network with other professional groups and encourage the DPI to work with various groups to maximize efforts to make Wisconsin's libraries the best in the nation. The Council also encourages DPI library sciences staff to work within the DPI's various divisions to utilize resources to be cost effective and provide the highest level of resources to libraries and librarians.

Two target populations have been brought to COLAND's attention for unique issues. Tribal libraries are particularly at risk for funding, staffing, and resource issues. Libraries in our prison system pose a variety of concerns including but not limited to staffing, collections, and funding. COLAND will focus on these two new areas of concern.

2025-2027 GOALS

1. COLAND will monitor trends and support programs and initiatives to recruit, train, and retain library staff. This includes but is not limited to compensation, educational pipelines, professional standards, licensing for both school and public librarians, and inclusive practices.
2. COLAND will monitor trends in emerging technologies and broadband by:
 - a. investigating emerging technologies relevant to library services including but not limited to artificial intelligence;
 - b. researching virtual/augmented/mixed reality and advanced data analytics;

- c. advocating for and support programs that promote digital literacy, cybersecurity, cyber safety, and critical thinking skills related to emerging technologies within library services for the public;
 - d. advocating with stakeholders in achieving statewide broadband service that is accessible and affordable for all Wisconsinites; and
 - e. advocating for strengthening existing protections for reliable and affordable broadband access across Wisconsin.
3. COLAND will monitor trends, developments, and challenges in modern library science and support the DPI's, library districts and systems, individual libraries, and professional groups as they implement and experiment with new programs - especially those which service marginalized populations such as incarcerated individuals.
4. COLAND will defend intellectual freedom and the right to read by monitoring state and national trends in book challenges and the groups promoting them and supporting libraries and their staff as they deal with challenges.
5. COLAND will monitor tribal libraries and support efforts to deal with challenges both unique to their system and those similar to all libraries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

COLAND makes the following recommendations to State Superintendent Jill Underly:

- Continue to advocate for state aid to libraries at a level that will maintain or increase service to communities and schools.

- Support affordable statewide broadband and digital equity.
- Monitor trends in emerging technologies such as AI and cybersecurity.
- Support adequate staffing of all libraries by maintaining or increasing current staff.
- Encourage youth to consider the field of library science.
- Protect intellectual freedom and the freedom to read.
- Reduce barriers to licensing/certification for librarians, especially those which disproportionately affect underrepresented groups.
- Ensure library facilities and buildings are well maintained, provide sufficient space, and are capable of meeting the needs of their customers.