

# **Wisconsin Libraries, 2011-2013**

Challenge, Adaptation, and  
Recommendations

**Biennial Report**  
**Council on Library and Network Development**  
September 2013

By statute, on or before July 1 of every odd-numbered year, COLAND is required to 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. [Wisconsin Statutes s. 43.07 (5)]

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## Introduction

The past two years were ones of great change and challenges for Wisconsin libraries. Our public libraries and systems worked with diminished funds to meet increasing demands for resources, public access computing, adequate bandwidth, and digital resources in a rapidly changing publishing world. The funding environment, already strained from the economic downturn, was further challenged by a ten percent reduction in funding for the public library systems and some of the state library contracts. In addition, the “maintenance of effort” public library systems membership requirement for public libraries was removed during the biennial budget, allowing reductions in local appropriations. Many libraries saw reduced support from their municipalities or counties, particularly in the second year of the biennium. Public-sector library workers, at the local, regional, and state level, were subject to sharp increases in payroll deductions due to changes effected by 2011 Act 10, the “Budget Repair Bill” that, combined with the elimination of collective bargaining rights for public workers, may have led to the retirement of many long-term librarians. Public libraries, schools, universities, and the public library systems were all faced with higher-than-usual attrition and an influx of new, often less-experienced staff. Libraries were also affected by the provision in the budget requiring WiscNet to divorce its operations from the University of Wisconsin; in the face of the need for increased Internet capacity, libraries were left with additional needs and fewer resources to address them.

Wisconsin’s libraries and public library systems marshaled on despite the challenges. Use of libraries remained high, despite reductions in hours and expenditures on library materials and resources. Services and programs continued strong despite the loss of long-term directors and key staff. Libraries continue to be as heavily used as ever—and as new state, federal, and national programs suggest libraries as a place to connect to the Internet and electronic resources, libraries must continue to meet additional new demands while addressing the informational, educational, and avocational needs they have traditionally provided. During the ongoing economic downturn, many people are turning to their library for help finding a job or for improving their job skills. More and more employers rely on online forms and reporting and, for residents without home Internet, 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 restoring and maintaining a healthy state economy, and to enrich the lives of Wisconsin residents.

Unfortunately, a challenging economy combined with reduced state funding for library services has led to reduced funding for many Wisconsin libraries and a resulting reduction in access to quality library service for Wisconsin residents.

Wisconsin now has:

- 384 public libraries providing 466 facilities that serve 5.7 million state residents
- 17 regional public library systems coordinating services among those libraries, providing leadership and training, and promoting resource sharing and technology
- approximately 2,000 public school library media centers serving about 880,000 students
- hundreds of academic and special libraries serving students, professionals, businesses, and others

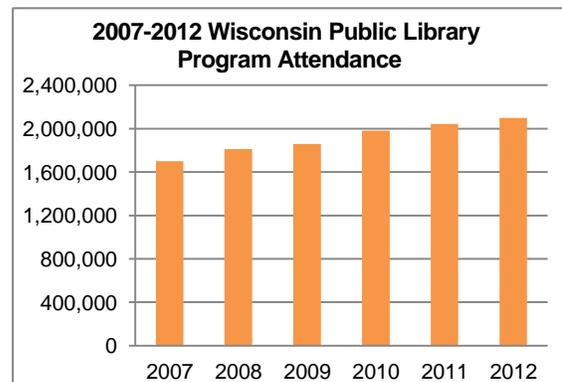
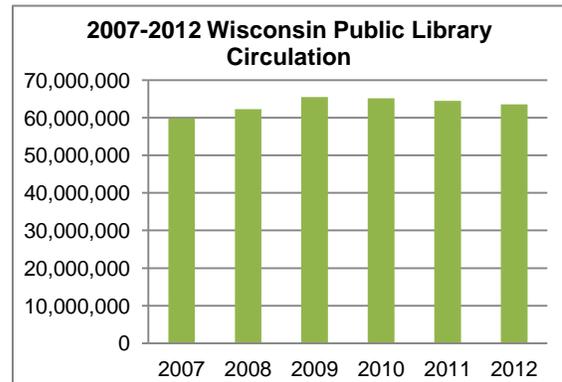
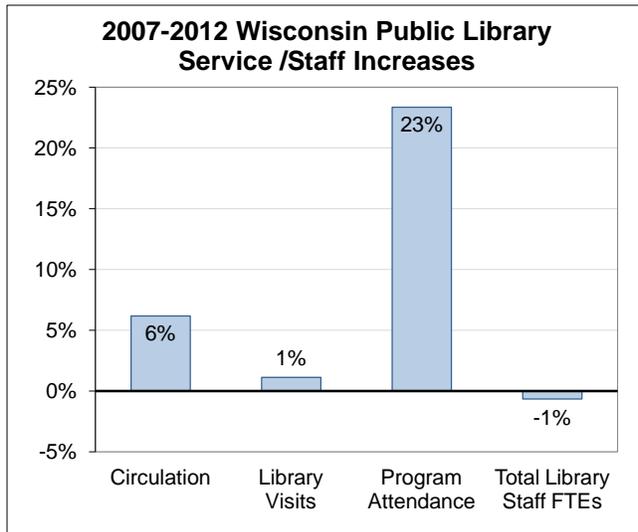
Besides the direct services libraries of all types provide to their constituents and customers, Wisconsin residents and businesses also benefit from cost efficiencies brought through high levels of coordinated interlibrary cooperation. Wisconsin’s libraries cooperate through regional library systems and statewide services and organizations. Every year, millions of library items are shared among all types of libraries throughout the state. This statewide sharing of library materials means that everyone in Wisconsin has access to over 7 million titles owned by Wisconsin libraries of all types. Resource sharing is also a cost-effective method of avoiding unnecessary duplication of purchasing.

Resource sharing goes beyond the sharing of books and physical materials. Wisconsin also benefits from electronic databases, digital e-books, and digital audiobooks that are available to our residents and businesses through cost-effective centralized purchasing as well as statewide and regional consortia licensing. BadgerLink provides 43 information and educational databases, many full-text, to students, researchers, businesses, and other residents throughout Wisconsin, whether in libraries, at home, or on remote devices. Many regional public library systems cooperatively purchase additional databases for the

libraries throughout the counties in those systems. The Wisconsin Digital Library offers a cooperative collection of nearly 60,000 e-books and over 10,000 downloadable audiobooks available to public library cardholders. The collection, the third-largest e-book collection in the country, is successful because of cooperation among the public library system and its member libraries contributing to the shared collection.

### Wisconsin Libraries

Library use in Wisconsin continues to grow; however, reduced funding is threatening library service levels at a time when library service is more important than ever to Wisconsin residents.



While Wisconsin's population has increased 1 percent from 2007 to 2012, public library use has grown at a much faster rate. As shown on the graph above, public library service levels have increased dramatically. However, during this period, total library staffing actually decreased. This indicates that public libraries have been relying on relatively stable staffing levels to provide higher and higher levels of library service to the public.

Wisconsin still ranks #1 nationally in per capita public library interlibrary loans (ILL)--since 2002, ILL has increased over 179%, primarily due to the expansion and enhancement of public library participation in regional systems, overlaid with statewide ILL coordination through WISCAT and other systems. Over 90% of our public libraries now participate in shared library automation systems. The regional online catalogs open up a much broader range of resources to citizens who log in from home or work to reserve materials. And our statewide delivery network provides quick and efficient transfer of materials.

Wisconsin has also made great progress in providing statewide access to electronic resources through the BadgerLink program. Established by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) in 1998, BadgerLink provides online access



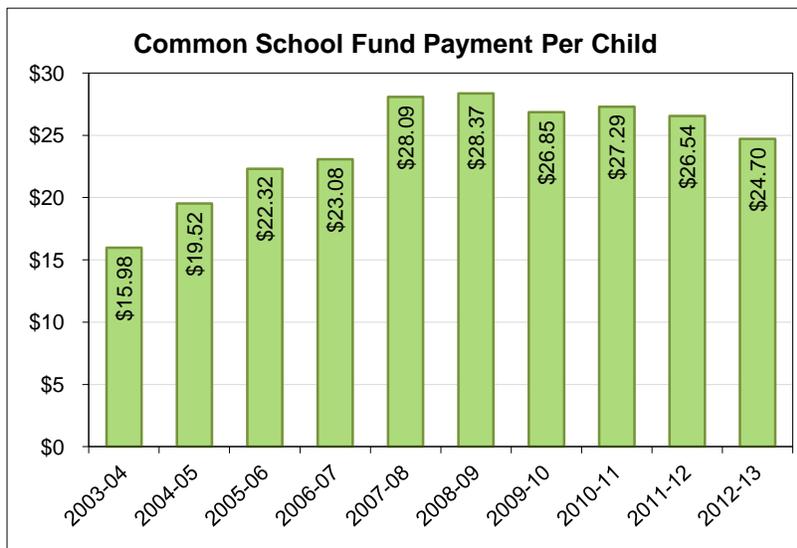
to information resources for Wisconsin residents in cooperation with the state's public, school, academic, and special libraries. Through statewide contracts, BadgerLink provides access to more than 1,500 newspapers and more than 14,000 magazines and books. BadgerLink patrons conduct about 65 million searches yearly.

Wisconsin libraries of all types have been leaders in the use of technology to increase the information available to library users.

Wisconsin's public school library media centers now provide a total of over 32,000 computers and other devices for the use of their students in completing class assignments and research. Wisconsin's TEACH program has been instrumental in making high-speed Internet connections available to Wisconsin's schools and libraries. All Wisconsin academic, school, and public libraries now have Internet connections, and almost all now have high-speed Internet access.

The number of Internet-connected public-use computers available at public libraries increased more than 40 percent between 2007 and 2012, to 6,165. The Division for Libraries and Technology (DLT), with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, distributed funding for 447 PCs to 100 Wisconsin public libraries in 2010.

Currently, 376 Wisconsin public libraries with service areas including 99% of the state's population offer free wi-fi service to library visitors. In 2005, only 101 public libraries offered wireless service.



The Common School Fund, one of the trust funds set up by the Wisconsin Constitution, funds the purchase of books and other instructional resources for school libraries. The annual earnings of the Common School Fund are distributed on a per pupil basis each spring. In 2012-13, \$30.1 million was distributed to Wisconsin's 425 school districts, which amounts to \$24.71 per child, down from \$27.29 per child in the 2010-12 school year. Common School Fund aid now represents the only source of funding for the purchase of school library materials in most school districts. While Common

School Fund aid has generally been stable, it has been threatened by legislative attempts to divert for other purposes the funds going into the Common School Fund. Most recently, the allowable percentage of a district's funds allocated to the purchase of computers for the library has increased from 50% to 100%. That change may affect the amount of books and research materials available to students in our classrooms.

Research shows that the very earliest experiences in a child's life have significant long-term effects on how that child will learn and develop. Consequently, with encouragement from the DPI's Early Learning Initiative, more and more public libraries are providing programs for children ages 0-5 and their parents to provide experiences giving young children the best possible start to life and learning. Between 2002 and 2012, attendance at public library programs for all ages in Wisconsin increased by 45 percent, exceeding 2 million attendance statewide in 2011.

Wisconsin libraries of all types are expanding services beyond the walls of their libraries by digitizing library materials and making them available on the Internet. With the help of DPI-awarded federal Library Services and Technology (LSTA) grants, many libraries have contributed to the over 1 million digital items available at Recollection Wisconsin ([recollectionwisconsin.org](http://recollectionwisconsin.org)), formerly known as Wisconsin Heritage Online).

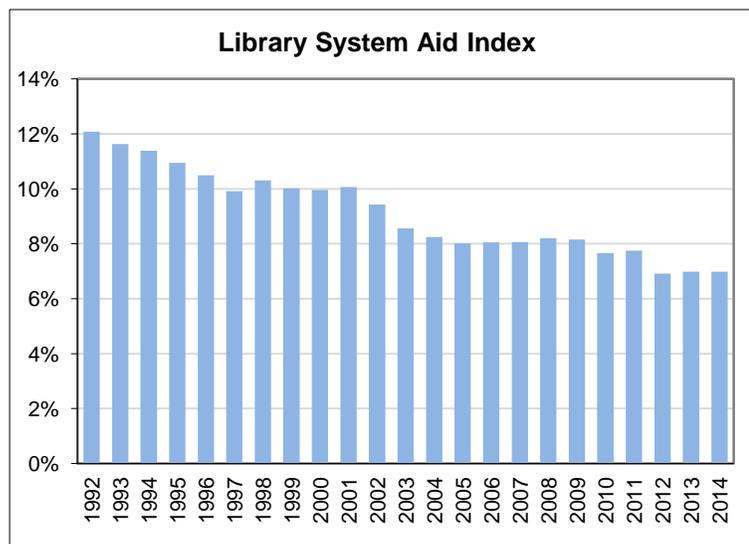
A visioning summit to plan for the future of Wisconsin libraries was held in 2008, co-sponsored by the DPI and COLAND. A number of the key findings of that summit have led to projects, goals, and recommendations included in the final section of this report.

In 2011, the DLT sponsored an e-book summit to develop strategies to assist Wisconsin libraries in rising to the challenges of the increasing popularity of e-books. The DLT is also committing substantial federal LSTA funding toward expanded e-book content to be made available to state residents through Wisconsin libraries. The project has been hugely successful. Starting in 2011, \$100,000 in LSTA funds supplemented contributions from the public library systems to the Wisconsin Digital Library, a consortium established by the Wisconsin Public Library Consortium (a cooperative purchasing and development initiative of Wisconsin's 17 regional library systems). In 2012, the consortium set a goal of \$1,000,000 in cooperative purchases, with LSTA funds providing a \$300,000 "carrot" to attract \$700,000 in contributions among the systems and their member libraries. The LSTA portion was decreased to \$200,000 for 2012 (matched by \$800,000 from the library community), and is intended to be phased out in 2014, with libraries and the library systems carrying on the project independently.

### Challenges

While Wisconsin's libraries have made significant progress, they also face challenges.

- The continuing economic downturn has resulted in loss of funding and in service cut-backs for libraries of all types. The economy has also affected state revenues, leading to the "Budget Repair Bill" of 2011, which included increased required contributions to retirement and health insurance by public employees, and sharp curtailment of the negotiating power of collective bargaining. The changes included reductions in shared revenues (which were designed to be offset by municipal savings in employee benefit costs), as well as the elimination of a minimal level of local public library funding-- the "Maintenance of Effort"--that led to a flat or reduced budgets for many public libraries in Wisconsin.
- Some state agency offices, including job centers, have closed—putting greater burdens on public libraries to serve job seekers and others needing government services. Federal and state programs have increased their reliance on digital forms and online submission of applications. Public libraries, for many Wisconsin residents, are their primary option for public access computing.
- Despite the fact that many studies show the importance of high-quality school libraries to student achievement, many school districts do not have adequate staffing to support a strong school library media program. Although a number of districts have cut positions, others realize the importance of highly qualified school librarians/library media specialists but cannot find professionals to fill these positions. The UWSSLEC (University of Wisconsin System School Library Education Consortium) continues to work with DPI to find grant funds to support educators who are interested in becoming certified. A workgroup also continues to develop model job descriptions that will help districts establish innovative staffing models with the teacher librarian in an instructional leadership role. This will also include updates to the professional guidance and Educator Effectiveness pilot.
- Over the past 30 years, Wisconsin's 17 public library systems have developed strong programs of service to their 384 member libraries, including resource sharing and open access for all state residents. Participation in public library systems is voluntary, and the public library system aid program is the primary state mechanism to support public library services in Wisconsin. Public library system aid, which is targeted at 13 percent of local and county library expenditures, has dropped to barely the 7% level, due to a 10% reduction in state aid to public library systems in last biennium (affecting 2011 and 2012). That level remains flat for the next biennium, 2013 and 2014.



- Due to the decreased financial support, the public library systems have struggled to maintain their level of support and services during a time of increasing challenges. Added to that, the increase in retirements due to attrition, exacerbated by the changes enacted in Act 10, with six of the 17 library systems experiencing vacancies in the director position, led to efforts to merge systems in two regions of the state, but no actual merger has been achieved.
- Meanwhile, the System and Resource Library Administrators Association of Wisconsin (SRLAAW) determined it was time to review the framework for library system operations and legislative organization, seeking to determine best practices and optimal organizational structure in a time of changing library needs and reduced funding. In February 2013, SRLAAW convened a retreat of members and guests to consider issues, challenges, and options. In April a steering committee presented an issue paper with recommendations that was then shared and vetted among focus groups and constituents, so that final recommendations could be considered by SRLAAW members in August 2013.
- Special libraries, whether in state agencies, private corporations, or hospitals and health care organizations, continue to be victims of the budget knife. As the slow economy continues, vacancies in those libraries are not filled; the libraries are left understaffed, or closed altogether.
- The University of Wisconsin system libraries as well as the technical college system have had to compete with other academic programs for decreasing state revenues. Those libraries have struggled with increasing license and materials costs, and have faced new challenges with retirements and cutbacks.
- Reduced revenue, levy limits, and revenue caps combined with rapidly increasing costs have induced many schools and municipalities to reduce library services, staff, and hours open.
- Government services and information are increasingly available only online, placing greater demands on libraries to provide computers, sufficient bandwidth, and staff assistance to help the public gain access to these services and information.
- Constantly increasing bandwidth demands have caused service disruptions at libraries across the state.
- Rapidly increasing ownership of e-book readers, tablets, and other hand-held devices is rapidly increasing demands on libraries to provide e-books. Despite the success of the Wisconsin Digital Library, demand continues to outstrip available resources, even with the substantial growth in the collection as more people obtain tablets, e-readers, and other handheld devices.

### **Key Recommendations**

A healthy state economy and a bright future for all Wisconsin residents will require high-quality school, public, academic, and special libraries. To achieve this future, COLAND will:

- Promote the embedded librarian concept by presenting programs at future library conferences about how this concept is utilized in a variety of library types.
- Research new or expanded roles for librarians involving technology.
- Publish online examples of libraries utilizing the embedded librarian and anchor store concept in exemplary ways.
- Continue the partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) and collaborations with others including Wisconsin academic and public libraries, Wisconsin Council of Churches, Wisconsin public schools to donate materials and resources to Wisconsin's prison libraries as appropriate following the DOC collection development guidelines.
- Monitor statewide ILS proposals as they move forward in 2013/14.
- As the Common School Fund is an important funding source for school library media centers and is not well known and understood by Wisconsin citizens, COLAND will work with other library organizations and the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands in a public awareness campaign.
- As appropriate use of the Common School Fund is important to every school library media center, COLAND will work with DPI to ensure funds are used according to the state constitution and departmental guidelines.

- Continue to monitor and support the work of DPI regarding school library media staffing, the steering and action committees.
- Work with the Wisconsin Health Science Library Association's (WHLSA) liaison to plan a presentation at the upcoming WHSLA Annual Spring Conference.
- Encourage administrators of health science and hospital libraries to keep COLAND and the library community, including public libraries, informed of possible closures that could have an impact on other libraries and resources due to increased usage by patients and medical staff.
- Communicate to the medical library community of COLAND'S interest and influence.
- Rally resources in the legislature. Invite guests from the legislature to future COLAND meetings.
- Prepare a report of the current status of ebook accessibility across Wisconsin libraries. Collect information on collaborative purchasing initiatives among public library consortia, the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU), the Council of University of Wisconsin Libraries (CUWL), and school libraries.
- Share best practices with the library community in Wisconsin via various lists and online publications to assist busy librarians in acquiring ebooks.
- Inform legislators of current challenges facing ebook purchasing by libraries in Wisconsin.
- COLAND members should reach within as well as beyond the library community for input and attend events where administrators and leaders gather, such as SLATE (School Leaders in Advancing Technology in Education), Wisconsin ASCD, the Wisconsin School Boards Association, the Wisconsin School Administrators Association, the WiscNet Future Technology Conference, and others.
- Monitor and comment on legislative issues as they arise related to the benefit of library services in Wisconsin.
- Continue to advocate and educate decision makers about the need for affordable broadband connections that support the growing service needs for all Wisconsin libraries and schools.