

# **Wisconsin Libraries, 2013-2015**

Opportunities, Analysis, and  
Recommendations

**Biennial Report**  
**Council on Library and Network Development**  
November, 2015

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

During the past two years, Wisconsin libraries have been faced with new and changing expectations, and have devised innovative approaches to address them despite little or no increase in funding. The job market has led to more lost employment and interest in entrepreneurial business, and libraries have stepped in by offering workshops, tools, and resources, often in the form of “maker spaces” to encourage development of new skills, and meeting spaces more conducive for collaboration and project development.

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 information, 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:

- 383 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

Wisconsin also has number of prison libraries. Thomas Maloney, Director of Library and Technical Services for the Department of Corrections, oversees the libraries of 19 Adult institutions (18 male, 1 female), one Juvenile facility (Lincoln Hills/Copper Lake School), 14 male Correctional Centers, two female Correctional Centers, and four Department of Mental Health (DHS) Mental Health Institutions.

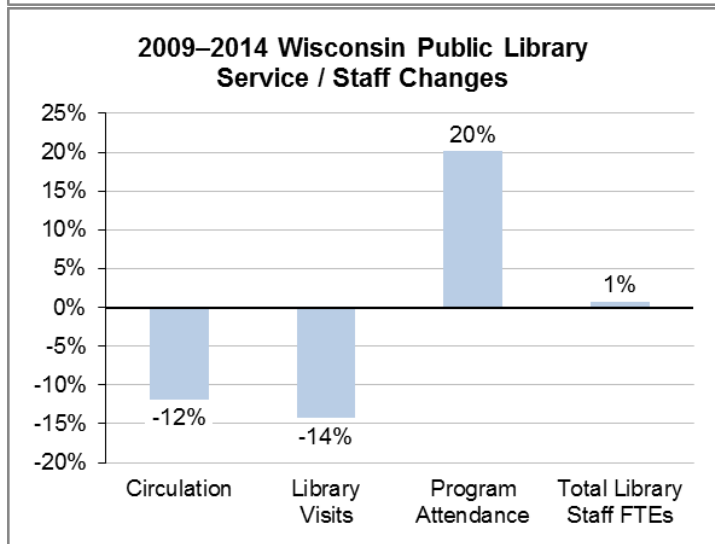
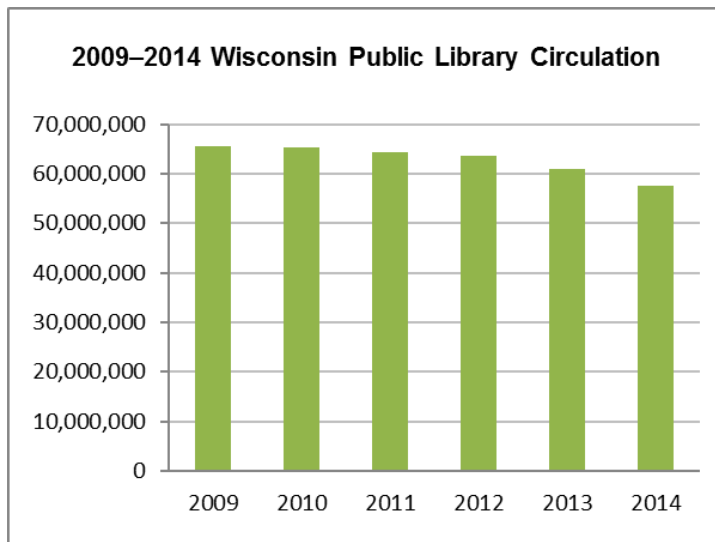
Besides the direct services libraries of all types provide to their constituents and customers, Wisconsin residents and businesses also benefit from cost efficiencies brought through high levels of coordinated interlibrary cooperation. Wisconsin’s libraries cooperate through regional library systems 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 seven 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, e-book 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 down-loadable 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 has decreased slightly along with decreases in hours. Flat or reduced budgets are threatening library service levels at a time when library service is more important than ever to Wisconsin residents.

Although Wisconsin's population has increased 1.2 percent from 2009 to 2015, public library use has decreased during that span. As shown on the accompanying graphs, checkouts of books and other items at libraries have decreased, as have visits to libraries. Staffing at libraries has not changed markedly, but attendance at library programs has increased 20%. Some, but not all, of the decrease in library checkouts has been offset by use of down-loadable materials. The remaining decrease, along with the reduction in visits to the libraries, may be attributable to expanded broadband Internet to households, and the increase of streaming video services such as Netflix and on-demand programming.



Wisconsin still ranks number one nationally in per capita public library interlibrary loans (ILL). Since 2002, ILL has increased over 265%, 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 percent 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 made great progress in providing statewide access to electronic resources through the BadgerLink program. In 2015, over 6.5 million IP addresses are registered with BadgerLink and 840

organizations are directly registered to use BadgerLink. That number includes 454 schools and 164 public libraries. Other schools and libraries may access BadgerLink without being directly registered with the site. Established by the Wisconsin 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. The total number of searches conducted in BadgerLink tripled between 2009 and 2014. A total of 121,191,977 searches were conducted in BadgerLink in 2014. The BadgerLink website was redesigned twice since 2013, making it easier for students, educators, and the general public to easily find the information they need.



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 Technology for Educational Achievement (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 43 percent between 2007 and 2014, to 6,284. 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.

Approximately 350 public libraries had fiber installed in 2013-2014 enhancing the BadgerNet broadband network. As a result of the fiber project public libraries were able to receive 10 Mbps BadgerNet connections for \$100 a month and up to 100 Mbps for \$250 a month. The fiber project funding came primarily from the federal E-rate program, which the TEACH program applies for to help support broadband and Internet connectivity in schools and public libraries.

Currently, 380 Wisconsin public libraries with service areas including 99 percent of the state's population offer free wi-fi service to library visitors. In 2005, only 101 public libraries offered wireless service.

School districts receive an annual distribution of earnings from the Common School Fund. These funds are used to purchase library books and other instructional resources, digital and print, as well as computers for use in school libraries. The annual earnings of the Common School Fund are distributed on a per pupil basis each spring. In 2014-15, \$35.5 million was distributed to Wisconsin's 425 school districts, which amounts to \$29.05 per child, up from \$24.71 per child in the 2013-14 school year. Common School Fund aid now represents the only source of funding for the purchase of school library materials in many school districts. While Common School Fund aid has generally been stable, it has been threatened by legislative attempts to divert the funds going into the Common School Fund for other purposes.

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 Growing Wisconsin Readers early literacy initiative, more and more public libraries are providing programs for children ages 0-5 and their parents and caregivers to provide experiences giving young children the best possible start to life and learning. Between 2009 and 2014, attendance at public library programs for all ages in Wisconsin increased by 20 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

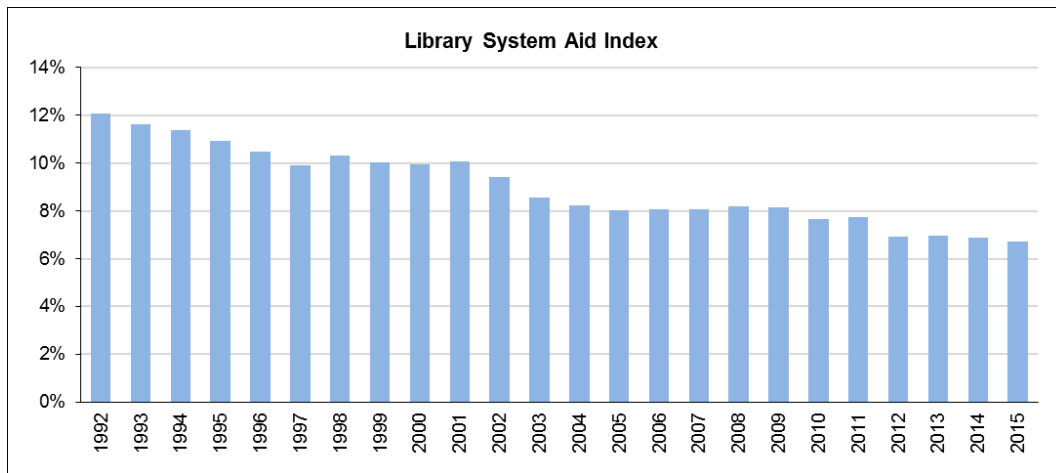
materials and making them available on the Internet. With the help of DPI-awarded federal Library Services and Technology (LSTA) grants, many libraries have contributed to the over one million digital items available at Recollection Wisconsin ([recollectionwisconsin.org](http://recollectionwisconsin.org)), formerly known as Wisconsin Heritage Online.

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), finally \$150,000 in 2014, with libraries and the library systems thereafter carrying on the project independently. Wisconsin now has the third largest and most active Overdrive collection of e-books and digital audio in the country.

### **Challenges**

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

- 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, is their primary option for public access computing.
- In 2015, the Department of Workforce Development began enforcing online reporting and confirmation of applications for recipients of unemployment insurance. Many unemployed relied on public libraries as the place to fulfill that new requirement.
- The Affordable Care Act required many Wisconsin residents to obtain health insurance on the national exchange. Those without computers or high-speed Internet sought assistance at public libraries since the state did not have its own exchange. Similarly, fears of changes in immigration law enforcement drove more to seek U.S. citizenship, using library resources.
- 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 a 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 383 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 operating expenditures from local and county sources, has dropped to 6.7% since the 10% reduction in state aid to public library systems in 2011 (affecting 2012 and 2013). The amount of state aid has remained flat since 2012 through the next biennium, 2016 and 2017.

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. That 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, they 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.

- The Committee on Joint Finance added a budget item to the 2013-15 biennial budget, requiring the Department of Administration to conduct a review of Wisconsin's 17 regional library systems to look for efficiencies or consolidation using LEAN practices. However, Governor Walker vetoed the measure, stating that the DPI has the authority to conduct such a study.

In 2014, the Public Library Development Team of the DPI conducted such a study using a consultant and a group of representatives from the library community. The report was shared with COLAND and Superintendent Evers. The Superintendent asked COLAND to review that report as well as the 2013 SRLAAW study to make recommendations. COLAND reported to the Superintendent, and the results are included in this report.

- The UW System libraries as well as the technical college system have had to compete with other academic programs for decreasing state appropriations. While the UW System has increased efficiencies with a new system-wide automation, catalog, and resource sharing platform, the overall reductions in state funding for the system has adversely affected the libraries.

## 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 recommends that:

- Planning efforts including school administrators, school board members, parents, and others to address the issue of reduced staffing in school library media centers so that all students are provided equitable opportunities to acquire the information literacy skills needed to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
- The Common School Fund must be protected for its constitutional purpose—the purchase of school library materials.
- Wisconsin should fully fund the statewide resource library contracts and expand the resources available through BadgerLink. These statewide resources cost-effectively expand the information available to Wisconsin libraries and to all residents of the state.
- Efforts should be made to reduce barriers to the ability of Wisconsin residents to use any library they choose.

In addition, COLAND adopted the following goals as a result of its Strategic Vision for Library Systems in the 21st Century:

**Strategic Direction 1. Library Consulting:** *Leverage distributed expertise to provide specialized consulting, verified by Department of Public Instruction (DPI).* Create a distributed model of consulting expertise that is verified (and certified where applicable) by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and delivered in the most appropriate method. Suggested consulting services include: building design, youth services, ADA compliance, staff development, human resource topics, strategic planning, administration, community relations, fund raising, legislative development, and library board development. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) will provide a pool of resources for these and other topics as needed. Expertise will primarily reside in library systems staff or public library staff.

**Strategic Direction 2. Provide and Support Technology Access** through aggregation of software and services including shared platforms and expertise. Whether provided by private vendor contracts negotiated at the state level or via state or regional data centers, aggregation of software and services will minimize maintenance and hosting of physical servers on-site at local libraries and library systems. Library system technical staff will be able to shift their focus from maintaining servers and data centers to assisting libraries with providing and administering technology-based services. Possible computer applications for hosted services include: email, calendars, web hosting, and other non-ILS technology commonly used in libraries and library systems.

**Strategic Direction 3a. One State - One Collection:** *Wisconsin residents will have access to the collective resources of the state.* Economy of scale is everything. By leveraging purchasing power to implement a statewide digital discovery layer with integrated library system, Wisconsin residents will have a consistent user experience and access to the widest range of information resources at the lowest unit cost for taxpayers. State interlibrary loan for public libraries will be replaced by intrastate loan at a much lower cost. Increased use of statewide library collections significantly increases the value proposition for print collections.

**Strategic Direction 3b. Resource Libraries:** *Change the value proposition.* The Wisconsin Statutes that describe and define resource libraries were written when print materials dominated public library collections. In today's environment of e-books, BadgerLink, and Google, the value proposition of resource libraries needs to be redefined. Resource libraries have specialized collections and staff expertise that can benefit Wisconsin residents who live in smaller communities. The twentieth century value proposition for resource libraries was based primarily on a print environment; the digital world of the twenty-first century requires a different value proposition. Resource libraries must redefine their value proposition for the twenty-first



century.

**Strategic Direction 3c. Delivery Service:** *Transition to multi-hub delivery network.* By transitioning to a multiple-hub statewide delivery network, print materials will be delivered faster and more efficiently reducing the unit cost of physical delivery of library materials. The new statewide discovery layer will increase use of library materials and a new delivery model will enhance capacity to meet the growing demand. Modification of the local delivery system (last mile) will be based on the new statewide delivery model. The focus for this change is on improving the library user experience and getting the most value from Wisconsin's investment in library materials.

**Strategic Direction 4. Coordinate Electronic Resources:** *Maximize purchasing power.* The transition from print resources to electronic resources will support online learning and information access for all Wisconsin residents. Statewide license agreements and library system consortia purchasing will increase value and reduce costs for taxpayers. Certain statutory language should be revised to allow for more flexible arrangements to meet local community needs. Resource libraries that have more specialized resources could link back-up reference service to those specialized resources that would not be cost-effective in a statewide consortia.

**Strategic Direction 5. Continuing Education:** *Maximize impact of continuing education funding.* Continuing education funding will be placed under the supervision of the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) Division for Libraries and Technology (DLT). The Division will use the funds to support webinars and face-to-face training and development for library staff and trustees in order to address current practices and lead change toward our desired future while taking advantage of technology developments. The Division will allocate funds through grants that encourage collaboration and regional impact.

**Additional Recommendation:** *Eliminate statutory language requiring Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to request 13% for library system aid.* The current statutory requirement that the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) submit 13% library system aid in its biennial budget is not helpful to libraries or to DPI. The current funding level is just under 7%. Eliminating this mandate and allowing for smaller increases provides DPI the flexibility to make more realistic requests