

# Guidelines for Collection of Public Library Nonresident Usage Statistics

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## Introduction

Certain nonresident usage statistics are needed for county library plans to meet the statutory county library planning requirements. The Division recommends that regional public library systems work with their member libraries and counties on procedures for the collection of adequate nonresident usage statistics. Local library policies and procedures should be established for collecting the library usage statistics needed to receive county payments. It is important that these procedures be applied uniformly throughout the county and system. The definitions and guidelines below help to achieve the goal of accurate and comparable statewide nonresident usage statistics.

It is essential that data be collected in a manner which can withstand scrutiny by your county and adjacent counties. If your library has rigorous procedures for confirming the place of residence of each user, your county as well as adjacent counties will probably have no problems accepting your data. By statute, a county clerk may have access, upon request, to all "books and records" used to determine both the annual library material loans to county residents who do not maintain a public library and the total annual library material loans per Wis. Stat. s. 43.12 (4). However, the identities of individuals using the library are protected under Wis. Stat. s. 43.30.

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## An Overview

For counties and systems in Wisconsin to monitor local public library use patterns, there must be common agreement on how to define "public library use." The most common measure of public library use is circulation. Circulation of physical library materials is the measure of nonresident use for which Wisconsin counties are currently required to provide payment of at least 70% of cost per Wis. Stat. s. 43.12. Admittedly, circulation of physical library materials represents only one aspect of the range of services offered by public libraries. Libraries also offer a wide range of

other services to residents and nonresidents alike: downloadable and other online resources, reference service, programming, in-house use of material, computer access, wireless Internet, and so on. For reasons of accuracy, consistency, and simplicity, circulation is nevertheless accepted as a reasonable measure of the use of library services relative to the total service provided.

- Tracking of library checkouts is generally considered to be more accurate than other measures of use. Libraries have more experience gathering this data, nearly all libraries track the use through automated systems, and there is greater consistency from library to library regarding this measure than other measures.
- Patron use of the full range of library services generally correlates with circulation. If circulation statistics indicate that a particular category of library users account for 25% of total circulation, it is generally accepted that that group would also account for approximately 25% of usage of the full range of library services.
- A costing model that focuses on one measure—circulation—is simpler, easier, and less costly to administer than one that factors in a wider range of library services.
- A data model that incorporates other, comparatively new and emerging services such as downloadable content or wireless Internet use is not collected or measured consistently throughout the state.

Today, circulation statistics are generally accepted as a reasonable representation of the total service provided by libraries, and the total operating costs divided by total circulation is generally accepted as a reasonable estimate of the overall unit cost for library use.

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## Establish Uniform Definitions

The purpose of library use statistics is to determine the use made of a public library by persons from the home community and those residing in areas outside the primary taxing district of the public library. To complete this task, it is necessary to learn the residency of nonresident users and to measure the circulation to each identified group. Adopting the following definitions will better ensure comparability of collected data within the county, within the system, and statewide:

- **Public library use.** The circulation of a legally established public library's materials (physical checkouts) to users of that public library. Although public libraries provide a wide range of services, for practical reasons of data collection, circulation is now the measure that state law provides for total library use.
- **Circulation transaction.** The act of lending an item from the library's physical collection to a registered user, generally (although not always) for use outside the library. This activity includes checking material out and renewing the loan of materials previously borrowed. Each of these is reported as a circulation transaction. Items included are those circulated from all library units (such as main library, branches, bookmobiles, and book-by-mail programs) administered by the library board. Interlibrary loan items provided to the library and then circulated by the library to a registered user should be included, but

interlibrary loan items sent to other libraries are not to be reported as circulation transactions. "Bulk loans," such as the placement of collections of materials in a nursing home or preschool, are not to be included. Circulation of a multi-part item representing a single title (such as a book-on-CD title containing more than one disc) should be counted as a single circulation transaction.

- **Library taxing unit.** A municipality that has established a public library under Wis. Stat. s. 43.52; a group of two or more municipalities that have established a joint library under Wis. Stat. s. 43.53; or a county taxing as a consolidated county public library under Wis. Stat. s. 43.57(1). Residents of a county who reside outside these library taxing units are not residents of a library municipality.
- **Residency of user.** The residency of a user must be properly identified and classified in order for a library to tally resident and nonresident use. In most instances, classifying residency is not complicated and is based on identifying the taxing jurisdiction to which the patron pays taxes to support library service. Residents of a joint library comprised of municipalities are considered residents of that library taxing unit. Residents of a town that is not part of a joint library but instead makes annual "contributions" to a municipal library are not residents of a library municipality; rather, they are considered county residents of municipalities which do not maintain a library.
- **Resident user.** A resident borrower is an individual who resides within the library's legal service jurisdiction. Each library will define resident borrowers according to local policy. Some libraries may consider as a "resident borrower" an individual who owns property in the jurisdiction of the library taxing unit, even though the individual may maintain a primary residence elsewhere, arguing that the individual, as a local property owner, is supporting the library through taxes. For purposes of usage statistics, such individuals may be considered resident borrowers, if this is the policy adopted by the local library board.

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## Statutory Responsibilities for Reimbursement of Nonresident Library Usage

Wisconsin Statutes determine the units of government responsible for reimbursement of library use by nonresidents. Following are the statutory responsibilities for different categories of nonresident usage:

- **Users who reside in the same county but live in municipalities that do not maintain a library.** Per Wis. Stat. s. 43.12, financial support for serving these residents (at a level of at least 70% of operating costs) is provided to the library by the county. Operating costs do not include federal expenditures or capital expenditures.
- **Users who reside in another municipality that maintains a library that belongs to your same system.** Under the terms of system participation, member libraries must guarantee

access to all other system residents per Wis. Stat. s. 43.15(4)(c)(4). Some county library plans and system plans account for this usage in their payments.

- **Users who reside in other counties in your system and live in municipalities that do not maintain a library.** Under the terms of system participation, member libraries must guarantee access to all other system residents per Wis. Stat. s. 43.15(4)(c)(4). If the residents are in adjacent counties to yours, then per Wis. Stat. s. 43.12, financial support for serving these residents (at a level of at least 70% of operating costs) is provided to the library by the adjacent county. Operating costs do not include federal expenditures or capital expenditures.
- **Users who reside in counties adjacent to yours and live in municipalities that do not maintain a library.** Per Wis. Stat. s. 43.12, financial support for serving these residents (at a level of at least 70% of operating costs) is provided to the library by the county. Operating costs do not include federal expenditures or capital expenditures.
- **Users who reside in a county adjacent to yours that maintains a consolidated county public library.** Wis. Stat. s. 43.12(2) now allows a consolidated county public library to request payment for services provided to residents in adjacent counties who live in municipalities that do not maintain a library. The county that maintains the consolidated county public library must provide notice of its intent to bill libraries in the adjacent county. In turn, the libraries in the adjacent county may request payment from the county that maintains the consolidated county public library for service they provided to county residents who are not residents of a municipality that contains a branch of the consolidated county public library.
- **Users who are residents of a non-adjacent Wisconsin county not in your system.** Some systems maintain reciprocal borrowing agreements with other systems, counties, and/or libraries that provide for open access - and in some cases - payment for cross-system-border usage. Per Wis. Stat. 43.17(11)(b), a library has the option of reducing service to or refusing to serve non-system users in an adjacent system if adequate payment was not received in the most recent year borrower's cards were honored.
- **Users who are residents of other states.** The statutes do not address public library service across state borders. Libraries may establish their own policies concerning usage by residents of other states.

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## Categories of Residence to be used for Data Gathering

Participants in this data-gathering effort must agree upon the specificity of information needed. Consistency of the data-gathering categories will improve the usefulness of the data.

- At the very least, registered users should be tracked according to the library taxing jurisdiction in which they reside. This would include residency categories for patrons who

reside in each of the municipalities in the county that support a public library, plus a category for all residents in the outlying county area.

- Home county borrowers may be further classified according to their town of residence. This produces a clearer understanding of geographic use patterns within the county.
- Usage statistics for other counties within your system may be reported according to users who live in municipalities with a library and those without.
- Registered users who live outside your system can be identified by home county, home community, the county where they pay their library taxes, or public library system. Because cross-county borrowing declines rapidly as distance increases, a more detailed classification of cross-system users is necessary only for immediately adjacent counties.
- Libraries should be aware that if they do not keep accurate usage statistics, they may be denied payments for service.

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## **Data Collection Procedures**

Automated circulation systems can be configured to capture actual usage data and automatically break it down by residence category. All that is usually required is that patron records include data fields indicating the towns, villages, cities, counties, and states where significant numbers of patrons reside. Provided that patron records are accurately coded by residence, properly configured automated circulation systems can keep highly accurate and detailed records of usage by patron residence.

In order to ensure accurate statistics by residence categories, all libraries should periodically ask patrons whether they still live at the address shown in the library database. We recommend that this be done at least once a year. Annexations by a library municipality require re-coding of the patron residence category for any library patrons affected by the annexation. Current address information should be verified when a card is renewed or when temporary cards are issued.

Some libraries issue "business" or "school" library cards. Persons using these cards can be classified according to their home address or the school / business address. A decision regarding how residency will be determined in these cases must be made before use is counted.

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