

How to Use These Standards

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A locally developed long-range plan for the library is the key to effective library service. A local planning effort can account for circumstances unique to the municipality or service area that cannot be anticipated from a statewide or a national perspective. The planning process described in the previous chapter and in other planning guides is a continuous process of assessment, review, and revision, “a series of approximations to a moving target.” (Robbins-Carter and Zweizig, 1985) These standards are meant to guide local libraries in Wisconsin to their own fruitful, locally focused planning efforts.

The standards offer a starting point that library boards and library directors can use to direct local long-range planning efforts. Specific standards are recommended in the areas of governance and administration (including planning, funding, and public relations); staffing; collections and resources; services; and access and facilities. By meeting these standards, a library establishes a baseline from which it can strive for excellence. A community considering the establishment of a new public library should assess its ability to meet these standards. If a library or a community cannot meet these standards, board and staff members should explore alternate means for delivering library service.

Levels of Use

At the most basic level, a library can focus its attention on the checklists provided in chapters 4 through 8, noting whether or not it meets the recommended minimums. Each standard is presented as a simple statement; either a library meets the recommendation or it does not. The checklists are formatted to encourage a library to copy and use them separately. It is expected that every library should strive to meet, at a minimum, these basic recommendations. Libraries that exceed the basic recommendations should develop service goals based on local needs.

At a higher level of effort, a library can apply the standards in the context of a broader, locally based planning process. This process is discussed in Chapter 2. By engaging in a planning process, local planners can produce a plan of service designed to meet specific local needs. One of the standards in Chapter 4, in fact, requires that a library undertake a planning effort to assess local service needs. When accepted planning methods are conscientiously employed to develop service goals and a plan of action, the resulting goals will more accurately reflect the needs of the community. This is not meant to suggest that libraries that adopt a planning process should abandon these standards. In the context of a broader planning process, a library can use the checklists to gather information about itself and the community during the information-gathering phase of a planning process. The topics and issues addressed by these standards could be used as an outline for a local plan of service.

A bibliography of sources to help guide local planners through a library planning process is available at pld.dpi.wi.gov/files/pld/pdf/planning.pdf.

Quantitative Measures

Like previous editions, this edition of the standards is a hybrid of sorts. On the one hand, this document gives support to contemporary thinking about the need to establish service goals for individual libraries at the local level. On the other hand, this document responds to an interest in offering specific, prescriptive recommendations regarding key library service parameters for those local libraries that want to use such measures.

Selected standards include a quantitative recommendation for library service. Because they tend to be the convenient yardsticks by which libraries are often defined and described (“How large is the collection at XYZ library?” or “How many full-time equivalents (FTEs) are on staff?” and so on), these measures tend to take on a larger import than other standards. For that reason it is necessary to discuss the origins of these quantitative standards and their use. The quantitative standards included in this edition and the chapters in which they appear are shown in the chart below.

Quantitative Standards by Chapter (with standard # in parentheses)

Chapter 4	.....	Director—hours per week (#17)
	.....	Total operating budget (#34)
Chapter 5	.....	FTE staff per 1,000 population (#7)
	.....	Staff continuing education hours per year (#8&9)
Chapter 6	.....	Volumes held per capita (print) (#16)
	.....	Periodicals titles per 1,000 population (print) (#17)
	.....	Audio recordings held per capita (#18)
	.....	Video recordings held per capita (#19)
	.....	Materials expenditures per capita (#20)
	.....	Total collection size per capita (#21)
Chapter 8	.....	Hours open (#8)
	.....	Public access computers per 1,000 population (#20)
	.....	Reader seating per capita (#38)
Appendix C	.....	Quantitative standards regardless of community size

Generally, the service targets recommended in these quantitative standards are drawn from the data assembled from the latest public library annual reports submitted to the Division for Libraries, Technology, and Community Learning (DLTCL). The Public Library Standards Task Force used this information, standards established in other states, and their collective professional judgment to establish the quantitative standards used in this edition. Standards are established for seven different population levels at four levels of effort: *basic*, *moderate*, *enhanced*, and *excellent*. These correspond with the actual 2009 [Wisconsin Public Library Service Data](#) by population range at the 30th, 50th, 70th, and 90th percentiles, adjusted for anomalies and outliers.

Local libraries can establish service targets by selecting the appropriate level of effort to apply to each standard. Libraries may also choose to use the four different levels to set a target of progressive improvement over time. For example, a library may plan to achieve the moderate level for “hours open” within two years and achieve the enhanced level within five years.

In addition to establishing per capita standards, the Public Library Standards Task Force also established a number of quantitative standards that apply regardless of community size. These standards are based on the judgment of the Public Library Standards Task Force that residents of any community need and deserve at least a basic level of library service. In 2006, additional minimum legal standards for library system membership were added. These standards are listed in Appendix C.

As with any statistical comparison, it is important to note the possibility of inconsistent data-gathering efforts, which can lead to invalid statistical comparisons. To help avoid the possibility of invalid comparisons, it is essential that all Wisconsin libraries utilize the definitions that are provided with the state annual report form (and on the Internet at pld.dpi.wi.gov/pld_annrpt). Some of these definitions are also included in Appendix F.

Planners should also consider demographic and social factors that may affect the application of these quantitative standards in particular situations. For instance, the distribution of compact discs from the settlement of the music industry price fixing lawsuit in 2003 may have had a disproportionate affect on the standard for audio recordings per capita. At the same time, the growing trend to listen to music in MP3 or other digital formats may affect the demand for compact discs and instead increase demand for electronic resources. Similarly, the first part of the past decade saw a considerable increase in DVDs to meet demand, but more recent marketplace changes to video-on-demand or streaming media have softened the demand for DVDs. Librarians and planners should consider changes in the community and the library marketplace that may affect the quantitative standards published in this edition.

One additional note concerning quantitative standards: many factors that are very important in determining the quality of local library service are difficult to measure. The Public Library Standards Task Force urges library boards and staff to utilize the entire *Standards* document, not just the quantitative measures, when evaluating their library and planning for service improvements.

Service Population and Per Capita Standards

Each of the quantitative standards offers recommendations that vary according to a library’s service population. For these measures, a different service target is recommended for each of seven population categories.

Nonresident Borrowers

It is crucial, before applying the per capita standards for every library in the state, to develop a meaningful and accurate estimate of the population it serves. In Wisconsin, estimating a library’s service population is complicated by the fact that libraries provide service to many individuals who do not reside within the

When applying these measures, it may be necessary to take into consideration recent shifts in demand and use of specific types of library materials as well as marketplace changes.

municipality that established the library. These “nonresident borrowers” include county residents who have access to the library as part of the county’s plan for library service, residents of other municipalities within the same system area, and, in many cases, residents of other system areas. In almost all cases, a library’s true service population is greater than its “official” municipal population.

Methods for Estimating Service Population

It is recommended that a library employ one of the following methods for estimating its service population. Any of these methods will produce an estimate of the library’s service population that is a truer reflection of its actual use patterns than the strict use of the municipal population. These methods will produce an estimate of the library’s service population that can be used to apply the quantitative standards that appear in this document. Methods that allocate nonresident populations on any basis other than observed use of library collections and resources are subject to greater error. The DLTCL encourages all libraries to make an estimate of their extended service population as a point of reference for use of these standards and for other library planning purposes.

Use the Service Data population

Starting in 2000, the service population reported in the annual [Wisconsin Public Library Service Data](#) is based on each library’s share of total circulation to county residents who do not live in a library community. For example, if the ABC Public Library accounts for 20 percent of the total circulation from libraries in the county to county residents who do not live in a library municipality, then 20 percent of the county nonresident population is allocated to the ABC Public Library. This number is then added to the library’s municipal population to derive an estimate of the library’s total service population. This estimate should, in most cases, be a more accurate estimate of service population than estimates used in previous Service Data editions. However, libraries with significant usage by residents of other library communities and/or residents of other counties may wish to use one of the alternative methods discussed below.

Use systemwide nonresident usage data

If nonresident use data is gathered on a systemwide basis in a multicounty system, an allocation of the system nonresident population can be made, based on the library’s share of the total system circulation to nonresidents. This variation has the advantage of rendering county boundaries within the system invisible.

Base estimates on local circulation patterns

A library also can examine resident borrowing as a proportion of total circulation and extrapolate a rough, circulation-based estimate of its overall service population. If residents and nonresidents can be assumed to borrow material at roughly the same rate per capita, and residents account for 85 percent of the library’s total circulation, then it can be said that residents also account for 85 percent of the total population. If the library’s municipal population is divided by the proportion of circulation transactions that go to residents, the result will be an estimate of

the library's total service population. For example, a library with 85 percent resident circulation and a municipal population of 7,500 will have a service population of 8,824 ($7,500 \div 0.85 = 8,824$).

Add the population of surrounding unserved areas

If, through the observation of nonresident use, the staff of a municipal library is aware that a majority of residents of an adjacent town or towns use the library, it may simply add the population of the town or towns to its municipal population.

Municipal Population

In some cases, it may be more pragmatic to present the library's service population in terms of its municipal population. Sometimes—when presenting the library's budget to the municipality, for example—it may cloud the matter if the library claims a service population larger than its municipality. Common councils and village boards tend to focus their attention on the municipality, and many tend to classify themselves according to their municipal population. In this instance, the library may be able to press a clearer case for its needs if its arguments are based upon the municipal population. Therefore, as an extra point of reference and in addition to the service-population-based standards, this document provides an analysis of the quantitative measures based on the municipal populations of the state's public libraries (Appendix A). Each edition of the [Wisconsin Public Library Service Data](#) includes the official Wisconsin Department of Administration's annually updated population estimates for each library municipality.

Libraries are encouraged to produce plans for service based on their service population instead of their municipal population. Consistency is crucial, however. If a library evaluates its services by applying its extended service population to the calculation of one of the quantitative standards, it should apply its extended service population to the calculation of all of the quantitative standards.

Quantitative Measures and Local Planning

The notion of issuing quantitative standards may seem to run counter to the planning theme that service goals should be defined at the local level. Quantitative measures, however, are intended as a tool that libraries can use to help establish selected service goals. They are presented here with substantial flexibility in order to be configured by local planners to best reflect the local situation and local needs. As part of a local planning process, individual library boards and staff can establish service targets on the basic, moderate, enhanced, or excellent level of effort. Libraries also can establish a goal of moving from one level to a higher level over a period of time.

Libraries may wish to supplement use of the quantitative standards with peer comparisons to similarly-situated state and national libraries. Statewide statistics are available at pld.dpi.wi.gov/pld_lib_stat. The Public Library Association's annual *Public Library Data Service: Statistical Report* is one source for national data. Nationwide public library statistics are also available from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) through the Public

Local or county planning departments and school districts may be able to provide useful population projections for long-range planning.

The Public Library Service Data, compiled by DPI from public library annual reports, can be useful to compare your library's services, resources, and funding to other libraries in Wisconsin.
pld.dpi.wi.gov/pld_dm-lib-stat

Library Survey (PLS) at <http://harvester.census.gov/imls/publib.asp>. The Public Library Peer Comparison Tool at <http://harvester.census.gov/imls/compare/index.asp> allows the user to get information on a particular library or to customize a peer group by selecting the key variables that are used to define it. The user can then view customized reports of the comparison between the library of interest and its peers on a variety of variables selected by the user.

The standards checklists and the quantitative measures are an outgrowth of the simplest level of application of these standards. The standards encourage libraries to go beyond that most basic level of application to engage in a more thorough planning process. As a result of that planning process, board and staff understanding of the community will be enhanced. The standards can then be applied in a more informed manner, and libraries will be able to improve services to the community beyond the basic level presented in the standards.

The standards are intended as an aid to local planning, not as a substitute for, or a constraint on, local planning.

Quantitative Measures and Large Libraries

Because there are relatively few large public libraries in the state (only four serve municipal populations of more than 100,000 and only twelve serve municipal populations of between 50,000 and 99,999), in-state comparisons of large institutions are limited. The standards provide analyses of quantitative measures for libraries of *all* sizes in the state. Results are reported for libraries in the population groups 50,000-99,999 and 100,000 and over, but because of the limited sample size in those categories, the results may not be as reliable as they are in other categories.

Larger libraries are strongly encouraged to supplement use of these standards with their own analyses of data drawn from peer institutions in other states in the Midwest and across the country. The Public Library Association's annual *Public Library Data Service: Statistical Report* is one source for such data. Nationwide public library statistics are also available through the IMLS public library survey data (PLS). PLS data are available at <http://harvester.census.gov/imls/publib.asp>.

Services to Populations with Special Needs

Persons with special needs include individuals of all ages who often face barriers to their use of public library services, or need specific resources at the library or accommodations to make the most of their time at the library. The barriers can be physical, as the case of persons with physical disabilities who can't leave their homes without assistance, who live in residential care facilities, or who are incarcerated. Transportation to the library can be a barrier for people living in poverty. Non-physical barriers exist as well. People who don't understand how public libraries work, fear using libraries, assume there is a cost to get a library card, or fear incurring fines have barriers preventing them from using the library. These groups might include people who are adult new readers, who have developmental disabilities, and new immigrants with limited ability to speak English. People

who have some types of mental illness may experience psychological barriers. People who have lost their jobs may find embarrassment to be a barrier.

Because persons with special needs are often not traditional library patrons, often they are invisible members of the community. However, good planning will identify all the library's potential constituencies, including individuals with special needs. The library can then develop specific strategies for reaching them and providing materials in formats they can utilize.

Two DPI publications, *Youth with Special Needs: A Resource and Planning Guide for Wisconsin's Public Libraries* pld.dpi.wi.gov/pld_ysnpl and *Adults with Special Needs: A Resource and Planning Guide for Wisconsin's Public Libraries* pld.dpi.wi.gov/pld_specialasn are invaluable tools in assisting librarians to plan for adults and children, and their usefulness is not limited to special needs populations. The plans themselves are models for strategic planning; including visions, goals, and strategies, and their bibliographies are pertinent for patrons of all ages.

Services to Youth

To ensure quality services for youth in Wisconsin, it is important that libraries of every size study the needs of children and young adults in their community and plan, fund, implement, and evaluate appropriate programs and services for them. These services should also include the parents, caregivers, and adults who work with youth.

Evaluation of services can be aided with statistics about the youth population in the library's service area. For example, the total number of children and young adults within a service population can be compared to the number of them who are library card holders; the total number of young people can be compared to attendance at programs designed to attract various age groups. Such knowledge can impact strategic planning for on-site activities and outreach services.

Information on numbers of children below age 18 by county is available in periodic editions of *The WisKids Count Data Book* prepared by the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, Inc., and The Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin–Madison. Information on public school enrollment—by county, school district, school, ethnicity, and gender—is available annually from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Center for Education Statistics, which can also provide information on private school enrollment by county, school district, school, and gender.

Branch Libraries

Although the standards generally apply to an entire institution, they also are offered as one tool a board can use to evaluate individual branches in a multiple outlet service environment; however, certain functions are likely to be provided centrally, and standards relating to those functions will not apply to a branch. Application of the quantitative standards to branch libraries requires the development of service area population estimates for each branch library.

Your regional library system also has resources and support for services to those with special needs.

