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Public Library Funding Disparities: What Can Be Done?

This information is intended to update the Iowa library community about significant disparities in public library funding across Iowa and suggest solutions. The article was first published in 2007 (*Footnotes*, January/February 2007). All statistics in this article have been updated with the most current information as of August 2010.

How are public libraries funded?

Public libraries in Iowa are established by city ordinance and receive funding to serve their city's residents from the city's General Fund. This funding is raised by levying property taxes. In Iowa there is a cap on the amount a city may levy for the General Fund of \$8.10 per \$1,000 assessed property valuation. The majority of Iowa cities (83%) are at this limit. Additional funds may come only from increased valuation of property or from special levies.

Iowa public libraries receive financial support from counties for providing library service to rural residents. Public libraries are funded from the county's Rural Services Fund. The maximum levy for Rural Services is \$3.95 per \$1,000 of assessed property value in the unincorporated areas.

Like counties, cities without a public library contract with a local public library to provide library service to their residents. The funding comes from the city's General Fund as described earlier.

Both city and county support of public libraries is mandated by Iowa Code 256.69. A tax of at least \$.0675 per \$1,000 assessed property valuation must be levied by each county and city for the purpose of library support. The \$.0675 per \$1,000 is an inadequate minimum. No public library in Iowa could keep its doors open if it were funded at this level.

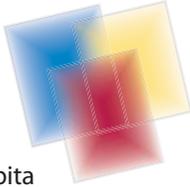
What are the disparities?

Typically, two methods are used to measure library funding: per capita and cents per \$1,000 assessed property value. To figure a library's per capita funding from its city, divide the city's annual appropriation to the library by the population of the city. For example if the appropriation is \$20,000 and the population is 1,000, divide \$20,000 by 1,000 and the per capita library income from the city is \$20. Funding from contracting cities is figured the same way. With county funding, divide the county's total appropriation for library funding and divide it by the rural population of the county.

Library funding measured in cents per \$1,000 assessed property value indicates how much the city or county is funding library service based on property value. Fortunately, both per capita and cents per \$1,000 have already been calculated and the statistics are available on the [State Library Web site](#).

The disparities in public library funding across Iowa are illustrated by the following statewide averages using fiscal year 2009 data (the most recent at time of publication):

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Per Capita

- \$31.87 – the statewide average city funding for public libraries
- \$14.39– the statewide average county funding for public libraries

Cents per \$1,000 Assessed Property Value

- \$1.16 – the statewide average city funding for libraries
- \$0.21 – the statewide average county funding for libraries

Why are the disparities a problem?

Adequate funding is essential for providing high quality library service – the kind of service all Iowans deserve. If some government bodies are funding library service at discounted rates, it affects the quality of service a library is able to provide. Inadequate funding results in libraries that:

- are open only a limited number of hours
- can't offer a wide range of up-to-date books and other resources
- may not be able to offer special services for children and teens
- have outdated computers and other technology
- are not handicapped accessible
- pay low staff salaries leading to high turnover and customer service problems

Secondly, it is not equitable for one group of Iowans to pay for library service at one rate while another group gets the same service for a substantially discounted rate. All Iowans should provide equitable financial support for library service.

What can be done to address the funding disparities?

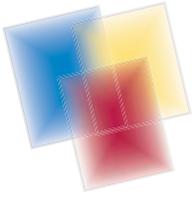
The Iowa Commission of Libraries (the State Library's policy-making board) passed the following resolution at their August 16, 2010 meeting:

"The Iowa Commission of Libraries strongly endorses the principle that public libraries should receive adequate and equitable funding from cities and counties for providing library services to Iowans. Toward that end, the Commission encourages public library boards to adopt policies regarding contracts for library services that assure equitable tax support for public libraries by all jurisdictions."

The Commission respects the authority of Iowa public library boards to decide whether to contract with a county or city without a library for a particular funding amount. The Commission also wishes to support public library boards that decide to pursue equitable funding from counties and contracting cities.

Suggestions for addressing funding disparities are below:

- Identify what more your library could do for the community if it were equitably funded from your city, county and contracting cities
- Compile the funding statistics that pertain to your library
- Discuss funding disparities at a library board meeting
- Be aware that the Open Access program allows a local public library board to decide not to loan items to residents of a jurisdiction which is contracting with a library(s) at a rate that the board deems to be inequitable (item 3H in the agreement). (The library must notify the State Library, in writing, of its intent and its rationale for the decision.)
- Discuss funding disparities with your city manager, city fiscal office, mayor, council members and ask for their support
- Make sure counties and cities without libraries are aware they are required by Iowa Code to arrange for library services
- Make sure your own city and cities without libraries know about the [Special Library Levy](#).
- Make sure contracts for library services from counties and cities without libraries are written
- Review these contracts annually and use funding statistics to make the case for better funding for your library
- Ask the city for their support and participation when approaching counties and contracting cities for library funding.



I-JOBS, Historical Preservation Grants and others help Iowa libraries

Several Iowa public libraries have received funding from state and federal grants to invest in new buildings and technology, as well as historical preservation efforts. The grants have come from the state's I-JOBS and Historical Presentation programs, as well as the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Development program.

The Malvern and Le Mars public libraries were recipients of the state's Historic Preservation Grants. The Malvern Public Library received just over \$4,000 to develop a local history archive that includes a climate-controlled room to archive and store *Malvern Leader* newspapers and other historical resources.

In 2009, the Le Mars Public Library received a \$17,200 preservation grant to digitize microfilm of the *Le Mars Sentinel* newspaper. The grant specified that the money be used to digitize the oldest microfilm dating from 1870 to 1920. Library director Sue Kroesche went through several stages of fundraising to secure the \$30,000 it took to digitize the microfilm from 1870 to 2008.

"We have the digitized newspapers available online right now and those who use it like it a lot. We had more than 7,900 hits in August alone," said Kroesche. "We also got CD versions of the digitized papers so they can be accessed from the library, but most people prefer to use it online."

The State Historical Society of Iowa's Web site states the grants are not funded for FY11, but libraries may want to check back in the future. For more information call the historical society at 515-281-5111.

Libraries have also benefitted from the state's I-JOBS state investment program. Community Attraction and Tourism (CAT) grants from the I-JOBS program helped the Dunkerton Public Library with its new building project. The library received a \$98,000 grant towards construction of the \$540,000 building.

Susan Winter, director of the Hubbard Public Library, said CAT grants are awarded on a percentage based on how much money they raise and spend on the building project. Their grant is for up to \$325,000. The total project budget is \$1,444,890. Winter said the building is essentially paid for, but additional fundraising for a separate endowment is still in the process to help pay for increased operating costs.

Williamsburg collected a \$600,000 grant in July, 2009 towards its new library. According to library director Loretta Hanson, the city submitted their proposal in April and received the grant in July.

"My advice to libraries applying for a CAT grant is to answer the questions the grant application asks," said Hanson. "Tell them what they want to know, not what you think they need to know. As I watched various entities present, I noticed that those who did not answer the questions, but instead tried to steer the question process, ended up either grantless or having to present again and again."

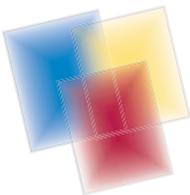
The new library's estimated cost is more than \$4 million, most of which has been raised. Hanson said she hopes to have a grand opening in August 2011.

Call the Department of Economic Development, 515/242-4700, for more information on CAT grants.

On June 15, 2010, USDA Rural Development in Iowa announced that the Clarksville Public Library would receive \$234,638 in loan and grant funds for library expansion and service enhancements. The money was made available from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and administered through USDA Rural Development.

The library will nearly double in size, become compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, have a children's room, space for the Butler County genealogical service, increased room for media materials, reading areas and computer access, as well as additional office space. The library serves the citizens of Clarksville and the surrounding communities in Butler and Bremer counties.

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Other public libraries assisted through USDA Rural Development are:

Blakesburg - library equipment - \$1,400
 Callender - library equipment - \$3,522
 Centerville - library equipment - \$4,950
 Dayton - library equipment - \$5,116
 Duncombe - library equipment - \$4,100
 Eagle Grove - library automation - \$8,200
 Fontanelle - library expansion - \$150,000
 Griswold - library equipment - \$10,500
 Lewis - library facility - \$187,250
 Maquoketa - library computers - \$1,700
 Red Oak - library equipment - \$92,000
 Crystal Lake - library automation - \$3,000 grant



Special funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act end September 30, 2010. However, libraries that submitted applications this year will be kept on file for possible funding in 2011. According to Darin Leach of the USDA Rural Development office in Des Moines, libraries should reach out to their local USDA Rural Development offices to learn more, or [visit their Web site](#).

State Library a busy hub for Iowa artists

Photographs, paintings, and other forms of art are becoming a mainstay at the State Library.

Three years ago the State Library's marketing team decided to contact local art councils, museums and artists' organizations to find out if there were artists interested in using the beautiful space on the first floor to exhibit their work for a month. After a slow beginning, the concept grew and the schedule swelled. The 2010 schedule has been fully booked since March.

Marketing team member Helen Dagley said the program has not only been a hit with library users and artists, but has drawn new visitors and customers.

"On one occasion," said Dagley, "the library's reference staff learned that two corporate visitors had driven down from Minneapolis especially to see an artist's work. Apparently they were interested in commissioning him for a project and were eager to see a variety of his art. They decided to make a day of it and took a tour of the city and dined in the nearby East Village."

Exhibitions are publicized primarily through the State Library's electronic newsletter to library cardholders and by word of mouth. According to Dagley, artists have said they notice substantial increases in hits to their Web sites after the newsletter goes out.



"Sudan Lost Boys" by
Azza Khalafallah



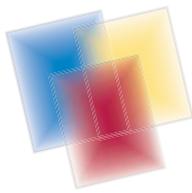
Art of
Carol Ladd Steinmetz



Art of
Karen Cooper



"Flower in His Buttonhole"
by Anya Starr



Libraries keep “plowing” along



From left, Toni Roberts, Sarah Killy and Jean Borgeson from the Rippey Public Library

A studious but upbeat group of librarians enjoyed their trip to the State Library in Des Moines on August 5 for advanced Putting Libraries on the Web (PLOW) training from Marie Harms, State Library consultant.

There have been 264 PLOW classes since its inception in 2006. There are currently 309 PLOW public library Web sites.

More than half a million Iowans live in communities served by libraries with PLOW Web sites. Iowa is the only state in the country whose state library is providing this service.

Information about the PLOW Project can be found on the [State Library's Web site](#).



Jane Millard, left, and Karla Maston, Jefferson Public Library



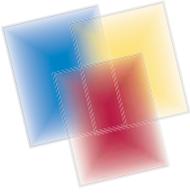
From left, Maggi Abernathy, Marie Harms and Sheryl Cody, Scranton Public Library



Jenon Cody, left, and Sue Kellogg, Grand Junction Public Library



From left, Shari Minnehan and Sandy Kersey, Churdan Public Library



Iowans answer the call of service and the results shine

Back in August, the State Library announced that Iowa ranks second in the nation for volunteering according to the Corporation for National and Community Service's latest Volunteering in America Report.

As the Iowa Commission of Volunteer Services (ICVS) explored how Iowans currently connect to volunteer opportunities, it was discovered that libraries are often another volunteer connector system ICVS would like to recognize. ICVS acknowledges in most communities where there is no local volunteer center, libraries are the community's connection to upcoming events, community resources, and volunteer opportunities.

Since more and more people are searching for volunteer opportunities online, the commission has instituted a statewide Volunteer Solutions (VS) system on volunteeriowa.org; an online Web portal that acts as a "one-stop shop" for Iowans to find volunteer opportunities in their community. This system allows libraries to provide even more assistance to their community's organizations by promoting their volunteer needs, as well as linking community members and groups who want to volunteer their time, talents and resources to enjoyable and rewarding volunteer experiences.

Benefits for using the system:

- Quick and easy posting of volunteer opportunities
- Worldwide 24/7 access by potential volunteers to see and respond to agency opportunities
- Built in function for ongoing communications between volunteers and agencies
- Tracking reports that recap postings, responses, volunteer hours, and much more
- Gift Connections to list needed or available goods and services
- Ability to post news items or community spotlights

To take full advantage of the system, an agency account must be created prior to posting volunteer opportunities:

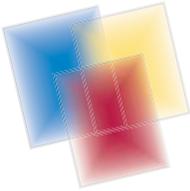
1. Visit www.volunteeriowa.org
2. Click "Need Volunteers?"
3. Click on "Register as an Agency"
4. Click on "Register here!"
5. Enter your organization's name and click "Sign Up!" to make certain you are not already listed.
6. Enter the information requested to complete your registration and click "Save and continue"

Upon completion, the registration request will be submitted to an administrator for review and approval. An e-mail confirmation will be mailed to the organization when the account has been approved and their online volunteer posting adventure can begin!

If technical assistance is needed while registering or posting opportunities, contact the [ICVS](http://www.icvs.org) or call 1.800.308.5987.



The Laurens Public Library and its librarians Nancy Walker and Glenda Mulder were recently honored by the Upper Des Moines Opportunity, Inc. (UDMO) at its annual Meeting and Volunteer Recognition Ceremony. UDMO honors volunteers and community partners who have made a difference in the lives of those the agency serves. In particular the library was praised for the work it does with the Laurens-Marathon preschool. Walker and Mulder also help students select books based on a particular theme or letter that is being studied in class.



Certification Update

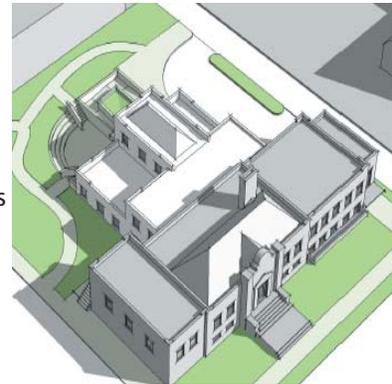
Congratulations to the following public library staff certified for the first time through the State Library's Iowa Certification Program for Public Librarians.

Maritza Acosta, Estherville
 Shari J. Burger, Lenox
 Sarah Day, Alden
 Sarah German, Conrad
 Audrey Hancock, Osage
 Catherine Harris, Oelwein
 Soyna Harsha, Algona
 Cindy McFadden, Hawkeye
 Sheryl Mooers, Waukon
 Annette Shannahan, Marengo
 Jane Wardenburg, Williamsburg
 Katelyn M. Wazny, Grimes
 Keri L. Weston, Carlisle
 Michelle Wheeler, Dunkerton
 Connie Wiegel, Charter Oak



News from around the state

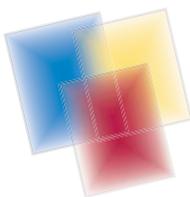
Congratulations to the citizens of **Shenandoah** for voting 66 percent in favor of a \$1.65 million bond issue on August 3 for a library expansion project. The final tally was 389-202. As quoted in the *Omaha-World Herald*, library director Jan Frank-de Ois said "I would always hope that the goodwill that we try to foster by serving our community would be reflected in the vote." The estimated cost for the library expansion and renovation is \$2.6 million. If remaining funds are raised as scheduled, ground-work will begin in early April 2011. To the right is an illustration of what the library will look like with its new addition.



The **Johnston Public Library** is closing in on its 1 millionth visitor contest. As part of the library's search for its 1 millionth patron, clues have appeared online. People are encouraged to guess the day and time the lucky person walks through the door. Both the visitor and the person who comes closest to guessing when the milestone occurs will receive a book to honor the occasion - *One Million Things: A Visual Encyclopedia*.

State Library staffer **Georgiann Fischer** won a blue ribbon in the Iowa State Fair's black and white photography division. The 2010 theme category for the State Fair Photography Salon Contest was "Iowa Family Farm." Fischer said she remembered the photo, found it in an old photo album and submitted it. It is a picture of her Aunt Gladys and Uncle Herluf Ytzen's farm near Hampton. Fischer's daughter Susan is the little girl in the photo.





More news from around the state

Library community bids farewell to several retiring librarians

Several communities will miss familiar faces in their public libraries as long-serving librarians retire. **Gloria Stover** retired as director of the Dows Community Library in June. She started at the library in 1986 and became director in 1994. **Ruth Anderson** left the Dayton Public Library at the end of July. Ruth served as director for 20 years. **Carol Bailey**, Belmont Public Library, started a new chapter in her life when she retired in August after serving 19 years as director. Alden Public Library Director, **Janeice Murra**, "checked out" of her position after serving 18 years. She retired in June. A reception was held August 29 for **Virginia Ruzicka** who took her leave as director of the Charles City Public Library after serving for 16 years.

Congratulations and best wishes to all as they turn a new page in their lives.



Davenport opened a new 26,000 square foot branch library on July 10. More than 6,000 people attended the opening day festivities to experience the environmentally-friendly, LEED-certified Eastern Avenue Branch. According to Davenport Public Library staffer Angela Campbell, "Some fans began lining up at 7 a.m., just so they could be the first to use the facility." "Throughout the day," said Campbell, "staff hustled to check out 5,997 items, full-



fill 258 library card registrations, and to make sure that all 32 public computers were being used at all times. We knew we were going to be busy when we had more than 2,000 visitors by 11 a.m."



Construction of the 4,280 square foot **Salem Public Library** on the north side of the city's public square began in September 2009 and opened on June 14th.

The design of the building recalls the many brick structures that once graced the Salem square. The building facade follows the design of Salem's first bank, 1883, once located on the site. The interior design models the decorative and historical theme of early schoolhouses of Southeast Iowa.

In addition to traditional programs, the library includes an Early Childhood Information Services center, Public Health Information center and Tourism Information area.

The library was fully funded at a cost of \$850,000 through individual donations from nearly four-hundred individuals, community fundraisers, and foundation grants. There was no bonding or tax increase involved in the project.

The Summer reading theme, "Make a Splash at Your Library" took on a whole new meaning at the **Decorah Public Library**. On a Monday in late June, staff walked into the library to find 1 1/2 inches of water from a broken toilet tank in the older part of the building on the main floor. "It was acting like a watering hose," said director Lorraine Borowski. There was no damage to books, said Borowski, but the library was closed for three days.



Reflection of books in water