

Public Library Service

New York State has 750 public libraries providing service from 1,100 facilities. There are four different types of public libraries – association, municipal public, school district public, and special legislative district public. Each type is created in a different way with different governance structures and different funding mechanisms, but all are eligible to receive local property taxes that are either approved by voters, a municipal board or a school board. The State currently encourages the creation of school district public and special legislative district public libraries because they provide a more stable funding source and service level and their trustees and budgets are subject to a public vote.

To help equalize services and improve the quality of libraries, the State established a network of 23 public library systems funded primarily through state aid. These library systems work in partnership with the State Library to provide resources and services to local libraries that increase the number and quality of library services offered to the public. Most of the \$75 million in state public library aid is for operating public library systems.

Libraries

New York State's 750 public libraries range in size from The New York Public Library serving 3.3 million through 85 neighborhood branches to the Thousand Island Park Library serving 121 people. More than half of New York's public libraries serve communities of less than 7,500 people, and 368 libraries do not employ a certified librarian. One million New Yorkers do not live within the boundaries of a local public library. The State currently encourages libraries to expand their service area to allow these individuals access to a full range of public library services.

There are four different types of public libraries in the State – association libraries, municipal public libraries, school district public libraries, and special legislative district public libraries. Though different, all are chartered (incorporated) by the Board of Regents, registered (licensed) by the State Education Department (SED), and eligible to receive local public funds and state funds.

Association Libraries: There are 359 association libraries, which are nonprofit entities created by association members or by a will or deed of a trust. They are governed by a board of trustees elected by association members with terms of office set by the library charter. Though they are neither separate local government entities nor created by local governments, they may receive appropriations from local governments and may also request public funding via a proposition. To request public funds by proposition, the library board must get a petition from ten percent of the voters (municipal) or pass a resolution and get a petition from 25 voters (school district). If the budget proposition is approved by the voters, funding remains at that level until a subsequent referendum increases or decreases it.



Municipal Public Libraries: There are 210 municipal libraries, which are separate local government entities that serve the boundaries of a municipality. They are initially created by the municipal board or by a petition and referendum. There is also authority for joint public libraries formed by two or more municipalities or school districts, and there are currently two joint town public libraries. Municipal public libraries are governed by a board of trustees appointed by the municipal leader and/or municipal board for terms of three to five years. The library board's annual funding request is reviewed and approved by the municipal board. The library board of trustees has legal responsibility for approving and managing the library's budget. Municipal libraries, like association libraries, may also request public funding via a proposition. Municipal libraries cannot issue debt, so financing for construction must come from the sponsoring municipality or the Dormitory Authority (DASNY).

School District Public Libraries: There are 140 school district public libraries, which are separate local government entities that share the boundaries of a school district. They are created by a majority vote on a referendum placed on the ballot by a petition of 25 voters. School district public libraries are governed by a board of trustees elected by school district voters for terms of three to five years. Their budget is approved annually by district voters and a separate tax is levied by the school district on behalf of the library. In addition, school district public libraries may schedule and conduct a special school district meeting for a vote of school district voters on a budget proposition, may receive an appropriation from other local governments, and may also request public funding via a proposition, like association and municipal libraries. School district public libraries cannot issue debt, so financing for construction must come from the sponsoring school district or DASNY.

Special Legislative District Public Libraries: There are 41 special legislative district public libraries, which are a separate local government entities with boundaries defined in the legislation that created them. They are created by an act of the state legislature and a vote of the voters in the district. They are governed by a board of trustees elected by the voters for terms that are generally five years. Their budget is approved annually by district voters and a separate tax is levied on behalf of the district. In addition, special legislative district public libraries, like all other libraries, may also request public funding via a proposition. Like municipal public libraries, special legislative district public libraries rely upon the issuance of bonds or notes by a municipality or school district to finance construction of library facilities.

The Regents Commission on Library Services report, which was adopted by the Board of Regents as state policy for libraries, recommended promoting the availability of local public library service and improving local support for public libraries through the formation of public library districts. SED offers technical assistance to create school district public and special legislative district public libraries. This creates a separate local government entity with a more stable revenue source as its budget can be regularly voted on by the public instead of being subject to a local government's budget process or requiring a referendum to be petitioned for or requested.



Public Library Systems

To help equalize services and improve the quality of libraries, the State established a network of 23 public library systems funded primarily through state aid. These library systems work in partnership with the State Library to provide resources and services to 754 local libraries that increase the number and quality of library services offered to the public. There is only one public library in the State that is not a system member.

Public library systems provide a range of coordinated services to member libraries, including technology services, such as shared online circulation systems, online catalogs, Internet access and websites. Library systems also support a central library for research with additional hours of service; manage interlibrary loans; offer ongoing staff development; provide staff experts to assist member libraries; obtain and administer grants; and coordinate centralized purchasing. Public library systems also coordinate outreach service programs for special target groups that may have difficulty using local library services.

Public library systems provide a regional entity that creates economies of scale for the large number of small libraries, many of which do not employ certified librarians. Library systems help insure that local library staff and trustees have ongoing training, information and advice. The State currently provides \$75 million annually in permanent public library services aid, most of which is for the operation of the public library systems. In 2007-2008 the State provided an additional \$5 million in one-time supplemental funds for public library systems.

There are three types of public library systems – consolidated, federated, and cooperative.

Consolidated: There are three consolidated public library systems, all of which are in New York City (Brooklyn Public Library, The New York Public Library and Queens Library). Each library system is also an association library and is chartered by the Regents as a single entity under a board of trustees that is named by the City Council. The City provides the local public funding. The library board has legal responsibility for approving and managing the library's budget. SED reviews the budget, which consists primarily of local funds with limited state aid. There are no autonomous member libraries, only neighborhood branches that follow system-wide policies.

Federated: There are four federated public library systems, which are created by county governing boards and chartered by the Board of Regents (Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, Clinton-Essex-Franklin County Library System, Onondaga County Public Library and Monroe County Library System). Counties appoint the board of trustees and provide local public funding. The system board has legal responsibility for approving and managing the library system's budget. SED reviews the system budget, which has some local funds for some systems but the balance of which is state aid. Member libraries are autonomous. Public and association libraries join the system by choice.



Cooperative: There are 16 cooperative public library systems, which are created by agreement of the boards of member libraries and chartered by the Board of Regents. Board members of member libraries elect the system board of trustees. The State provides the system funding. The system board has legal responsibility for approving and managing the library system's budget. SED reviews the system budget, which is funded almost entirely by state aid. Member libraries are autonomous. Public and association libraries join the system by choice.

In addition to public library systems, the State has also established two other types of library systems. There are 41 school library systems based in the BOCES and the Big Five Cities that provide services to elementary and secondary public and nonpublic school libraries. There are also nine reference and research library resources (3Rs) systems that provide services to libraries of higher education and other specialized libraries.