

## **A Brief Evaluation of Outagamie County Library Service Plan: 2005-2009**

On October 12, 2004 the Outagamie County Board of Supervisors adopted a new Outagamie County Library Service Plan. What follows is a brief evaluation of the 2005-2009 Plan.

### **Major Issues**

The Plan identified two major issues: decreasing funding percentage being paid by the County and variation in funding percentages received by the libraries. Both issues appear to have been successfully addressed by the Plan.

#### Decreasing Funding Percentage

Because the amount and cost of library service provided to the county by municipal libraries had increased more rapidly than the county's reimbursements, the funding level dropped from 88.5% in 2000 to 75.8% in 2004. However, progress was made on this issue between 2005 and 2009. While the funding level hasn't increased as quickly as municipalities would like, the funding level reached 80.4% in 2009.

#### Variation in Funding Percentages

Because of the switch in funding methodologies that occurred in 2000, libraries were being funded at different percentage levels of the new formula. The 2000-2004 Plan attempted to hold libraries harmless by freezing payments to libraries with higher funding levels and increasing payments to libraries with lower funding levels. While this approach helped, there was still a large variation in funding levels among libraries. The 2005-2009 Plan included a funding methodology that was more aggressive in moving libraries to the same funding percentage, and beginning in 2007 all libraries were funded at the same percentage level (78%) of the county funding formula.

To get all libraries to the same funding level required significant cuts in funding to some libraries. In 2005, two libraries received cuts, and one library did not receive a funding increase. In 2006, three libraries received funding cuts, and four libraries did not receive increases. In 2007, four libraries received funding cuts.

### **Activity and Funding Levels**

During the period covered by the Plan, public library circulation increased an average of 4.0% annually. Because eligible expenditures increased at a much slower rate (0.9% annually), the cost per circulation decreased an average of 2.7% each year.

Circulation to county residents living outside of communities with libraries increased more than total circulation (4.2% annually). Although county resident use of municipal libraries increased by an annual average of 4.2%, the total bill to the County only increased an average of 1.7% annually because of the decreasing cost per unit of circulation.

During the period covered by the Plan, the County's payments to municipal libraries increased at an average of 3.1% per year.

### **Goals and Objectives**

The 2005-2009 Plan contains three goals and related objectives. Goal A calls for municipal libraries to continue providing library service to all county residents. The objectives relating to countywide library service have all been met, and progress has been made in resolving intersystem service inequities.

Goal B calls for the County to compensate public libraries at 100% of the county funding formula. While the specific procedural objectives contained in the Plan were all met successfully, Outagamie County is still a long way from funding libraries at 100% of the formula.

Goal C calls for continuous planning and education regarding public library service in Outagamie County. While the first four objectives have been successfully achieved, it's not clear how much information was shared with town and county officials about the use of municipal libraries by their constituents.

### **Guiding Principles**

Appendix B of the 2005-2009 Plan is an articulation of the principles that guided the development of the Plan. These principles, which are based upon statutory requirements, history, and practices, appear to continue to have merit. While the OWLS Board will want to review all of the principles, it's likely that these principles will continue to be acceptable. However, Principle No. 9, regarding the voluntary appointment of non-residents to municipal library boards, will need to be discussed in the context the County's ability to appoint additional library board members.

### **Conclusion**

It appears that the 2005-2009 Plan has been generally successfully in achieving its goals and objectives. Perhaps the most notable achievement was funding all libraries at the same percentage of the county funding formula, beginning in 2007. The biggest continuing challenge for Outagamie County is to make better progress toward the goal of reimbursing municipal libraries at 100% of the funding formula for providing countywide public library service.