

County Commissioner Manual

December 4, 2014

For Other County Functions chapter:

Public Library Services

To improve county citizens' quality of life and to meet citizens' needs for lifelong education and literacy, counties often support public library services. Public library services ensure that citizens have free access to books, high-speed Internet services, digital collections and library programs for citizens of all ages, especially youth, families and older adults. Public libraries also provide trained staff to assist citizens with the use of these resources.

Public library service may be provided by local nonprofit agencies or in conjunction with school districts or as local municipal services. Regardless of the method chosen, counties may provide support.

Public library services are governed by The Library Code (24 PA C.S.) Passed in 1961, the Library Code defines what a public library is and how it is governed, including the responsibilities of the library's board. The Public Library Code, passed in 2012, is a continuation of The Library Code.

Counties support library services by providing funds or in-kind services to a county wide or multi-county system of libraries that serves all residents at no charge; or by providing funds or in-kind services to a single designated county library that provides free service to all residents. (24 PA.C.S. § 9302)

In addition to allocating county general funds or providing in-kind services (such as facility or technology support, health insurance, etc.) counties may levy a separate library tax millage. The levy may be established by the County Commissioners or by voter referendum. (24 PA.C.S. § 9315)

Under The Public Library Code, libraries and library systems are governed by a board of directors that has exclusive control of all moneys received to provide library services. Counties that maintain or support library services may appoint a majority of members to the county designated library or library system board of directors. (24 PA.C.S. § 9318)

The Public Library Code establishes a system of state subsidies for public library service (24 PA.C.S. § 9333). The Office of Commonwealth Libraries, within the Pennsylvania Department of Education, establishes service standards and administers this program. Eligible public libraries use state aid to defray the day-to-day costs incurred in providing public library service. On average, state aid provides about 18% of public library income in Pennsylvania.

In order to qualify for this aid, libraries must meet a set of service standards, which are set out in The Library Code (24 PA C.S.) and the Pennsylvania Code (Title 22). These standards address service aspects

such as collection size, hours of service, staff certification and also require libraries to participate in the Statewide Card Program (ACCESS PENNSYLVANIA) which permits citizens with cards from their local library to visit and borrow materials from other participating ACCESS PENNSYLVANIA libraries in Pennsylvania.

The Public Library Code establishes seven categories of state subsidy, three of which are directly affected by the level of county support:

1. Quality Libraries - Aid granted to a local library or library system on a per capita basis whose minimum level of local funding is at least \$5.00 per capita.
2. Incentive for Excellence Aid – Matching aid granted to a local library or library whose local funding levels are greater than \$5.00 per capita.
3. County Coordination Aid – Matching aid paid on a percentage of the county appropriation according to the class of county.

The State Subsidy program’s intent is to supplement local dollars, not replace them with state dollars. By law, the annual expenditure of local dollars must equal or surpass the amount spent in the previous year, for those libraries that earn Incentive for Excellence Aid. Also, local government income (from county, municipal, school district, or other specially designated district) cannot decrease from the previous year.

For Tax Chapter:

The Public Library Code (24 PA.C.S. § 9315) authorizes financial support for public library services. Appropriations by counties may be made from general revenues or by special tax. A special library tax on all taxable properties may be authorized by county resolution or by voter referendum. If a special county library tax is established by referendum, commissioners may increase the rate subsequently without re-submitting the question to the voters. Income from a special library tax shall be used for the support and maintenance of the designated county library, county library system or multi-county library system.

Funds from counties to support library services may qualify the county library agency for County Coordination Aid from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, State Library agency. This is a matching amount based on the class of the county: (24 PA.C.S. § 9317)

Class of County	Percentage Match
2	5%
2A and 3	30%
4	50%
5	50%
6	100%
7	100%
8	100%

In addition, county funding also contributes towards the library agency's maintenance of local effort which is used to generate additional state aid in the form of Public Library Subsidy funds. Libraries must maintain the level of support received from all local government agencies from year to year in order to continue to qualify for state aid. There are exceptions for economically distressed areas. (24 PA C.S. § 9331 - 9334)

For Information Technology chapter:

Information Technology in County Government Section:

Counties that provide enhanced electronic access to public records on a fee basis may wish to consider how the county's public library high-speed Internet access may be used to provide access to those who have limited funds or are unable to visit the courthouse during normal office hours.

Public Inspection Section:

Counties may wish to consider how the county's designated public library or public library system facilities and/or web site may be used to make public documents available for examination or distribution beyond normal courthouse operating hours.

