

Jefferson County Library Service Founded in 1979

Before 1979, many Jefferson County (Wisconsin) residents did not have access to library service. At that time the county had seven municipal libraries supported by municipal taxpayers. Most residents who lived in municipalities without libraries did not contribute any financial support for libraries. Some municipal libraries were beginning to charge non-municipal county residents a user fee. In early 1978, a planning committee was formed by the county to study the issue and to ensure that all citizens of the County would have equal access to a public library.

After a great deal of study, the committee decided that the best way to provide free, quality, equal-access, countywide library service was not to establish a separate county library but instead to ask the existing municipal libraries to extend their services to rural residents. In return, the county would levy a library tax and distribute the money to the municipal libraries as reimbursement for the service they provided to the rural residents. In order to avoid double taxation, municipalities already supporting their own public library are able to exempt themselves annually from the county library tax. This carefully designed plan established a taxation structure that is fair and ensures that all county residents receive library service in the same manner at any library in the county. The fact that the county library tax is not levied on all county residents means that the tax is not subject to state levy limits.

Jefferson County Library Board and Administration

A Jefferson County Library Board was appointed to supervise the County Library Service, and to act as liaison between the libraries and the county board. The county library board is comprised of seven members each of whom is appointed by the County Board of Supervisors. The county library board is responsible for county library planning and annually selects a Resource Library from within the county to help deliver coordinated county library services in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible. The director of that library acts as the Administrator to the board and performs tasks set forth in an annual contract between the county and the Resource Library.

Library Systems in Wisconsin

Once the Jefferson County Library Service was established and all residents received equal library service, Jefferson County was eligible to join a library system. In 1980 it joined the Mid-Wisconsin Federated Library System (MWFLS) which was Dodge, Fond du Lac and eventually Washington Counties. Fond du Lac County left MWFLS in 2000. In 2016, after a great deal of analysis, Jefferson County changed its library system affiliation to join with Waukesha County and create a new library system called [Bridges Library System](#). Three citizens from Jefferson County are appointed by the County Board of Supervisors to serve as trustees on the Bridges Library System Board, one of them is also

a Jefferson County Board Supervisor.

Library systems were created by the Legislature in 1971 and are state funded. They exist under the supervision of the Bureau of Libraries in the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Library systems are single or multicounty regional units which exist to foster cooperation and resource sharing and to efficiently provide services and programs that improve local libraries.

Eight of the nine libraries in Jefferson County are members of Bridges Library System. Cambridge, which is primarily located in Dane County, is a member of [South Central Library System \(SCLS\)](#).

Relationships Between Partners

A good way to understand the relationships among all the library partners is to think in terms of three levels of service. The primary level of service is the municipal public library which is governed by a local library board and is funded by the local municipality for the benefit of the residents of that municipality.

The secondary level of service is the county library service which is funded by a county tax and enables all the county residents to use any of the municipal libraries in the county.

The third level of service is the library system. Systems provide services not offered by the municipal libraries. They are the vehicles by which the state communicates with libraries.

Important Library Legislation

Two state laws have significantly impacted library funding throughout all of Wisconsin.

Act 150 – Minimum County Reimbursement

Effective in 2001, this act required counties to reimburse each library in the county at least 70% of the cost of library services provided to rural residents. This act came about because there were wide discrepancies in the level of county funding for libraries statewide. The 70% reimbursement was chosen as an absolute minimum level of support.

In 1992 Jefferson County first met its goal of reimbursing county libraries at 100% of the average cost to provide library service to rural residents. Since that time the county library board is proud to say the county has maintained a commitment to this “fair share” funding formula, a commitment that has made a significant difference in the quality of libraries throughout Jefferson County. Maintaining that “fair share” funding

level is critical to preserving a strong, healthy partnership between the county and the municipalities in support of local libraries.

Act 420 – Adjacent County Reimbursement

Effective in 2006, this act requires that counties fund libraries in adjacent counties for 70% of the cost of past use by its own rural residents. The rationale behind this legislation is that libraries should be as accessible as possible to all citizens of Wisconsin regardless of political boundaries and taxing jurisdictions. Because library service cannot be provided without adequate funding, basic compensation is needed to help libraries meet the needs of the citizens of Wisconsin.

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