

# SECTION III

## **Findings from Focus Groups and Site Visits**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**T**he study's research team visited 16 public libraries serving urban, rural and suburban communities in two states: Indiana and Wisconsin. Libraries in the two states are organized quite differently. All 239 libraries in Indiana are organized as separate taxing districts, while Wisconsin's 382 public libraries are organized primarily (89 percent) as municipal government libraries that derive the bulk of funding through local government allocations. Even so, the libraries in the two states had much in common.

Both states fund a statewide telecommunications network. Wisconsin's BadgerNet dates back to 1995 and ensures all Wisconsin public libraries have access to a minimum connectivity speed of 1.5 Mbps. About 63 percent of Indiana's public libraries connect through the Public Library Internet Consortium (PLIC), established in 2006 and managed by the Education Networks of America (ENA). All libraries on the Indiana network also have a minimum connectivity speed of 1.5 Mbps. Library staff in both states, however, continue to report their patron technology demands match or surpass current Internet connection speeds, and many directors report recently upgrading or planning to upgrade available bandwidth. Free public Wi-Fi access was available in all but one of the libraries visited.

Both states fund and provide access to a statewide collection of electronic resources: INSPIRE in Indiana<sup>1</sup> and BadgerLink in Wisconsin.<sup>2</sup>

Library boards in both states are likely to have representation from the local school district; this is a requirement in Wisconsin state statute. Both states provide trustee manuals to orient library board members to their responsibilities in serving in this position.<sup>3</sup>

Site visits reflected several trends observed in past visits to eight other states:

- ▶ Better funded libraries have integrated technology expenditures into their regular operating budgets while smaller and less well-funded libraries are more likely to depend on fundraising and grants to support technology costs.
- ▶ Library computer use continues to increase, driven in large part by job-seekers applying for employment and/or filing for unemployment benefits online.
- ▶ Attendance in patron IT classes teaching computer and Internet basics, as well as more targeted training on job seeking or office software, continues to be high. More libraries are providing one-on-one training and "open lab" time to offer more personalized assistance.
- ▶ The majority of library computer users interviewed report that they have no computer or Internet access at home, and they visit the library about once a week to use library computers and Internet access.

### Expenditures and Fiscal Planning

Until recently, Indiana libraries have been in the enviable position of receiving stable local funding based on a fixed share of local property tax dollars. Since 2002, Indiana libraries have functioned within the constraints of a frozen levy level—usually between 3 percent to 5 percent "allowable growth" each year. Many libraries also had established capital project funds, which are used largely to fund hardware, software and even IT staff salaries, in addition to building maintenance. *"If it weren't for the capital improvement funds, we would have a difficult time keeping up with technology,"* said one library director.

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1. Indiana State Library. <http://www.in.gov/library>.

2. BadgerLink. <http://www.badgerlink.net>.

3. The Indiana trustee manual is online at <http://www.in.gov/library/3274.htm>, and the Wisconsin trustee manual can be found at <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/trustee.html>.

With the passage of “circuit breaker” legislation in 2008 to cap property taxes, however, all of the libraries visited in winter 2009 expected cuts effective immediately in FY2009. Losses in revenue are expected to more than double in FY2010 and continue increasing through 2012. For instance, one library with a budget of about \$12 million expects a cut nearing \$800,000 in FY2009 and estimates a roughly \$2.2 million reduction in 2010. Several libraries report that they began to freeze open positions immediately after the legislation was passed in March 2008.

In late 2008, Indiana libraries also were grappling with the fact that committed local funding was delayed more than six months because property tax bills and tax allocations were delayed by a change in how these taxes were assessed. As a result, several libraries were funding operations through cash reserves, “rainy day funds” or even bank loans.

Wisconsin libraries were far less likely to report dire financial impacts in FY2009, but library directors are unsure what FY2010 and FY2011 budgets will bring as several communities have suffered plant closures and job losses. Most receive all or most of their funding from city/village governments. Most also are reimbursed with county funds as part of a state formula based on circulation. While some participants mentioned recent budget increases, these have barely kept up with the cost of living; libraries have many fixed expenses (e.g., utilities and health benefits) that are growing faster than their budgets. Most library directors express hope that the library budget will be flat in the coming year, with one noting, “*Maintaining is the new increase.*”

### Patron Technology Needs

As has been widely covered in news reports,<sup>4</sup> most library staff confirm that use in general, and computer and Internet use in particular, has grown significantly over the past six to nine months, driven largely by job losses. Interviews with Indiana’s patrons finds almost all of the working-age adults use the computers for job-related purposes, such as updating their résumés, looking for jobs and filing online job applications. An electrician says he downloads free computer training classes to help him stay current; a middle-aged woman is renewing her nursing certification; a realtor is researching government grants. Some libraries report long lines for filing unemployment paperwork—particularly on Sundays and Mondays. All patrons report using e-mail for both job-related and personal correspondence, and most young people interviewed use social networking sites.

In Wisconsin, eight of 32 people interviewed identified themselves as unemployed and/or looking for work. One said: “*85 percent of the job market is online. You have to be online.*”

In both states, the vast majority of those interviewed report using library computers at least weekly. More than half reported either that they had no Internet access at home or that the library’s Internet access is significantly faster. Perhaps because of the recent economic downturn, Indiana and Wisconsin patrons interviewed between November and March 2009 were more likely to report having to wait to use computers than in other states visited in past years of this study. All of the libraries visited have time limits for computer use and most allow extra time if no one is waiting or if the patron requests more time for education or job-seeking purposes. Some also report reducing the time limit from one-hour to 30-minute sessions during peak after school hours.

The most common patron requests are for more computers and more time available on computers, but staff also report an increase in requests for access to scanners.

### Sustainability

Several factors are involved in sustaining patron access to technology—including available bandwidth, availability of IT staff, technology skills of front-line staff, technology planning and adequate physical space.

4. American Library Association. “Libraries and the Economy.” <http://www.ala.org/ala/newspresscenter/mediapresscenter/presskits/libraries-intougheconomictimes/economy.cfm>.

A majority of libraries visited and staff interviewed report they employ five-year technology replacement plans—if they have a plan at all. In some cases, libraries report they had changed from a three- or four-year plan to adopt a five-year replacement plan with RAM and operating system upgrades along the way. Almost all libraries with replacement plans stagger the replacements.

*“Every time a computer breaks, you wonder: do I replace it at the same level or jump ahead? Buy new or repair? What’s the break point?”* said one library director.

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### Bandwidth

Both Indiana and Wisconsin have made recent investments in their statewide telecommunications networks, including funding to improve Internet access speeds without additional cost to the local library. In part for this reason, all libraries visited reported access speeds of at least 1.5 Mbps (T1). In fact, state-level data from the Public Libraries and the Internet National Survey 2008–2009 show that 75 percent of Indiana libraries and 94 percent of Wisconsin libraries report access speeds of 1.5 Mbps or higher (pages 90 and 122).

Mirroring national trends, however, library staff in both states report difficulty in meeting patron demand for high-bandwidth applications, including videoconferencing, distance education and multimedia Web sites. *“Their (patron) expectations for bandwidth are just unbelievable, and they get very hot about it,”* said an Indiana director of a suburban library with 3Mbps bandwidth. *“You could add a T1 every year, and you’d be at 95 percent (usage), no matter what.”* The library plans to upgrade to 15Mbps in summer 2009. Most library directors interviewed report they recently had requested an upgrade or were considering doing so if costs were not prohibitive. More library staff in these states than in states visited in past years report using bandwidth management techniques to prioritize and control bandwidth usage at peak times.

### Staffing

Whether state-specific or the logical progression of change and staff turnover, library staff members interviewed in Indiana and Wisconsin are more likely to describe themselves as comfortable managing patron technology requests compared with library staff interviewed in the past two iterations of this study. Most library directors report that having technology skills is an important consideration when making new hires. The Indiana State Library revised its certification requirements for librarians, branch managers and library directors in July 2008. Staff are now required to re-certify every five years and to demonstrate ongoing professional development, including a required number of hours of technology training.

Several libraries in Wisconsin report success with Project Play, an initiative based on the Public Library of Charlotte–Mecklenburg County’s Learning 2.0 program.<sup>5</sup> Another Wisconsin library put in place technology competencies for all staff, which are part of their performance reviews. As has been consistently the case, library directors in rural and geographically isolated communities are less likely to feel they can make such demands when pay and benefit levels are relatively low for highly skilled staff.

► *“We’ve had to change our whole health insurance program to offer a job to an IT person. We literally turned everything upside down to entice an IT person to come to work for us.”*

This dynamic also plays out for libraries seeking dedicated IT staff support. Several rural library directors, most of whom contract with outside vendors for IT support, report that an IT staff person would require a salary greater than the director is paid. One Indiana library director in a community of about 20,000 people reports, *“We’ve had to change our whole health*

5. Information on the Public Library of Charlotte–Mecklenburg County Learning 2.0 program can be found at <http://plcmlearning.blogspot.com>, and information on Project Play is online at [http://projectplay.owlsweb.info/?page\\_id=5](http://projectplay.owlsweb.info/?page_id=5).

insurance program to offer a job to an IT person. We literally turned everything upside down to entice an IT person to come to work for us.” In addition to outside vendors, most Wisconsin library directors report receiving some technical assistance from regional library system staff for troubleshooting Internet connection and other technology-related concerns.

## Advocacy

The states diverge significantly in the area of advocacy. With a history of stable funding, most of the Indiana public library directors report that there has been little need for direct advocacy around funding and technology support in the past. Trustees and Friends of the Library have not been mobilized to campaign for libraries, and several directors are concerned these volunteers would be unwilling to play a larger role in this area. Others countered, however, that they are taking a more active approach to recruiting potential trustees for consideration for board appointment with an eye to adding advocates and power brokers. Library trustees interviewed affirm that they had not been asked to play a strong advocacy role in the past, but expect reduced funding for all libraries to spur greater involvement in the future. *“I think we’re going to get really good at it (advocacy). As our funding drops, we’ll have to,”* one trustee said.

In contrast, Wisconsin public library directors and trustees are far more likely to report a history of advocacy for libraries. They offer a variety of approaches to increase visibility and funding for public libraries. Advocacy activities include presentations at city and county budget meetings, outreach to local chambers of commerce to demonstrate electronic resources for businesses available for free through the library, and the use of detailed library statistics to demonstrate demand for computers and the Internet.

▶ *“Libraries don’t put out fires,” she replied, “We put out ignorance.”*

However, directors of small and rural libraries in Wisconsin are more likely to describe their trustees as less supportive of technology and less engaged in their communities. They also report local government officials are less likely to understand the need for technology because they themselves are not active users of computers and Internet resources.

All of the focus group participants agree that the bad economy is helping to position libraries as essential services, but that libraries still have to compete for funds with police and fire services. One Wisconsin director notes that when told that *“libraries don’t put out fires,”* she replied, *“We put out ignorance.”* Another reports that her library ranks first in a community survey of city services.

Most also agree libraries still have work ahead of them in changing outdated perceptions about libraries. *“I think it’s going to take 100 years before anyone looks at libraries and doesn’t think books first,”* stated one library director.

## METHODOLOGY

The site visit planning and execution employs a number of methods to achieve the goals of this portion of the larger study. These include:

- ▶ Reviewing previous studies and reports and state-level data regarding Internet connectivity, technology-based services provided by libraries, and stability of funding (e.g., Internet studies, ALA Public Library Funding study, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES]), Federal State Cooperative System of Public Library Data [FSCS]).
- ▶ Engaging in discussions with a range of individuals familiar with library funding, governance and telecommunications issues.
- ▶ Conducting state site visits to more fully explore factors influencing public libraries providing stable and sufficient funding, staffing, and technology, and meeting with state library agencies, public library directors, and other key local stakeholder communities (e.g., library trustees, local government, private local funding groups, etc.).

- ▶ Conducting follow-up phone interviews with selected state and public library staff as required or appropriate.

The use of environmental scan techniques, secondary data analysis, focus groups and telephone follow-up enables the project team to support the detailed data reported by individual libraries by “grounding” those data in the governance and funding realities of a library community.

The site visits “drill down” to learn more about the challenges public libraries face in providing and sustaining sufficient high quality services and high-speed bandwidth for the range of public access services they provide.

The following states were selected for site visits:

- ▶ Indiana
- ▶ Wisconsin

### **Communication with Selected States**

The research team contacted staff in each of the two state libraries, asking them to recommend public library directors to participate in focus groups. The research team requested that these library directors reflect a range of libraries of varying population size, budgets and governance structures. The team also sought representation of libraries that had experienced a high degree of success in creating and sustaining technology access, as well as those more financially vulnerable.

Six to eight public library directors were invited to participate in each small focus group, and two focus groups were scheduled per participating state. The research team also scheduled between six and ten site visits to libraries in each state.

# Indiana Case Study

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In a time of rapid technological change and recessionary funding affecting libraries in all states, Indiana public libraries face particular challenges and opportunities. As part of a larger December 2007 report, the Indiana Commission on Local Government Reform recommended a consolidation of the current 239 library districts into 92 county systems.<sup>6</sup> When the research team visited libraries almost one year later, alternative proposals were being considered in preparation for the 2009 Legislative session.

Libraries also were affected by delays in receiving allocated tax funding, as tax bills had been sent and received late. This led many libraries to borrow from capital and “rainy day” funds to cover operations. “Circuit breaker” legislation passed by the state Legislature in early 2008 that would cap property taxes led many libraries to immediately freeze open staff positions.<sup>7</sup> All libraries anticipated significant declines in local revenue over the coming years and were preparing to reduce costs and step up fundraising. Several library directors voiced concerns that they would be seeking funding in competition with other non-profit and government agencies.

Even as funding was down (including revenue from endowments), libraries were reporting dramatic increases in computer use—particularly for job-seeking and e-government purposes. In addition to capacity issues, several library directors raised concerns about patron privacy as staff members were being asked to assist with government transactions that included personal identification and financial data. While most libraries continue offering computer and Internet classes to patrons, library staff reported increased requests for dedicated one-on-one assistance in using new software programs and navigating the Internet effectively.

Finally, in July 2008, the Indiana State Library revised its certification requirements for librarians, branch managers and library directors. Instead of being certified once, librarians are now required to re-certify every five years and demonstrate ongoing professional development, including a required number of hours of technology training. While some library staff voiced concerns about paying for ongoing training, most were supportive of efforts to build skills.

► *All libraries anticipated significant declines in local revenue over the coming years and were preparing to reduce costs and step up fundraising.*

### Overview: Governance and Statistical Information

Indiana has 239 public library systems with 437 physical library locations and 39 bookmobiles to serve more than 5.8 million residents. All of Indiana’s public libraries are organized as library districts (100 percent) and 98 percent are in cooperative relationships with other public libraries in the county, region or state.<sup>8</sup>

6. Indiana Commission on Local Government Reform. “Streamlining Local Government,” December 11, 2007. [http://indianalocalgovreform.iu.edu/assets/docs/Report\\_12-10-07.pdf](http://indianalocalgovreform.iu.edu/assets/docs/Report_12-10-07.pdf).

7. Indiana Department of Local Government Finance. “Circuit Breaker Fact Sheet.” <http://www.in.gov/dlgt/files/CircuitBreakerFactSheet.pdf>.

8. Institute of Museum and Library Services. Public Libraries Survey: Fiscal Year 2006. Washington, DC: IMLS, 2008. [http://harvester.census.gov/imsls/pubs/pls/pub\\_detail.asp?id=121](http://harvester.census.gov/imsls/pubs/pls/pub_detail.asp?id=121).

In FY2006 (the most recent year for which national statistics are available), Indiana's public libraries reported hosting more than 38.8 million visits; answering more than 5.4 million reference questions; and circulating more than 72.8 million items (e.g., books, films, sound recordings, audiobooks). Indiana public libraries borrowed or loaned an additional 216,000 items on behalf of its residents, who are served by 4,639 employees. Of these employees, 897 hold a Master's degree in Library and Information Science (MLIS), and another 464 work as librarians but do not hold a master's degree.

Indiana's public libraries rank ninth in the number of public-use Internet computers per building (14.44), compared with public libraries in other states.<sup>9</sup> The State of Indiana ranks 18th in the deployment of computers and Internet use in schools.<sup>10</sup>

Indiana's libraries are primarily (67 percent) single-building libraries, averaging 10,983 square feet in size. The remaining 33 percent are multiple-outlet libraries (a central library with branch libraries) ranging from an average of about 7,500 (outlets) to over 33,500 (central libraries) square feet in size.

### Funding Summary

Most (86.4) percent of Indiana's public library funding comes from local sources (tax dollars). The balance comes from state sources (6.8 percent); other sources (6.6 percent) such as private fundraising, gifts, bequests, fines and fees; and federal sources (0.2 percent).

Nationally, Indiana ranks sixth in total operating revenue support; eighth in state support; eighth in local support; and fourteenth in "other." Indiana surpasses the national average for per capita local operating revenue at \$42.97, compared with the U.S. average of \$29.11.

Indiana ranks sixth in total operating expenditures (\$47.75 spent per capita); tenth in staffing (\$29.20); and second in collections (\$7.49). The largest percentage of operating expenditures is used for staff costs (salaries, benefits, retirement), with 15.7 percent spent on collections, and the remaining 23.2 percent spent for other things, such as programming, building maintenance and utilities, computer hardware and software.

In FY2006, Indiana public libraries spent more than \$99.6 million on capital expenditures (e.g., building repairs, renovations, new buildings). While 44.4 percent of the libraries had no capital expenditures, those that did clustered in the \$100,000 and more (18.8 percent) and the \$10,000–\$49,999 (27.6 percent) ranges. Another 9.2 percent spent between \$50,000 and \$99,999 on repairs, renovations or other construction.

### Connectivity Summary

More than 90 percent of Indiana's public libraries have broadband connectivity (defined as a connection that is direct and "always on") provided directly through a local telecommunications company, local school districts, the local city/county government or a state telecommunications network (education, research, etc.).<sup>11</sup> A majority of public libraries (63 percent) connect through the state Public Library Internet Consortium (PLIC) cooperative established by the Indiana State Library.<sup>12</sup> All consortium member libraries on the network have a minimum Internet connection of 1.5 Mbps.

Access to the state's telecommunication network is available to all libraries, but the cost is prohibitive to many. If not for the support of federal (E-rate) and state funds, many of the libraries that currently have broadband connectivity could not afford to keep this level of connectivity. There are many rural areas in Indiana, often at a distance from an urban center. This can be a factor in the viability and sustainability of small, local Internet service providers.

9. Ibid., Table A3.

10. The Information Technology & Innovation Foundation. 2008 State New Economy Index. [http://www.itif.org/files/2008\\_State\\_New\\_Economy\\_Index.pdf](http://www.itif.org/files/2008_State_New_Economy_Index.pdf).

11. *Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2006–2007*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2007. <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/ors/plftas/0607report.cfm>. Page 128.

12. Ball, M. A. "Aggregating Broadband Deployment: Surveying the Benefits and Challenges for Public Libraries," *Government Information Quarterly*, 26(4). October 2009.



In 2006, the State Library estimated that as many as 140 public libraries may be challenged in acquiring, maintaining and improving IT and supporting technology-based library services.<sup>13</sup> Many of the most vulnerable libraries have computers older than three years, which has its own set of problems, especially in accessing Internet sites designed for newer browsers and increased computer memory and storage.

The State of Indiana ranks 24th in the nation in its media download speed at 1.955 Mbps, compared to the national median speed of 1.97 Mbps.<sup>14</sup>

## Focus Group Summary

The research team conducted two focus groups in Indiana. On November 24, 2008, staff from five urban and suburban libraries met at the Plainfield-Guildford Township Public Library. On November 25, staff from four rural libraries met at the Washington Carnegie Public Library. We are grateful to Jacob Speer and Jim Corridan at the Indiana State Library for their advice and assistance in organizing the focus groups and site visits, and to all the librarians who shared their experiences and perspectives. A list of participating libraries is included in Appendix F.

### Expenditures and Fiscal Planning

At a time when the national recession was nearing its one-year anniversary and government agencies at all levels were reporting budget deficits, Indiana libraries were first grappling with the fact that committed local funding was delayed more than six months because property tax bills and tax allocations were delinquent due to a change in how these taxes were assessed. As a result, several libraries were funding operations through cash reserves, “rainy day funds” or even loans. One large library reported paying almost \$150,000 in interest on a loan. Several focus group participants contrasted this to times in the past when they received interest from reserve funds and endowments—all of which also were down in the wake of the financial crisis.

► *“We’ve been living off of borrowed money and cash reserves.”*

*“A large percentage of Indiana counties have not received their tax allocations for 2008 yet, so we’ve been living off of borrowed money and cash reserves,”* said one suburban library director.

Until recently, Indiana libraries have been in the enviable position of receiving stable local funding based on a fixed share of local property tax dollars. Since 2002, Indiana libraries also have functioned within the constraints of a frozen levy level—usually between 3 percent and 5 percent “allowable growth” each year.

Many libraries also had established capital project funds, which are used largely to fund hardware, software and even IT staff salaries, in addition to building maintenance. *“If it weren’t for the capital improvement funds, we would have a difficult time keeping up with technology,”* said one participant.

Most libraries also reported that grant funding from local community foundations, the Lilly Endowment and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is used heavily to purchase new computers and software. As has been the case in other states, small libraries with per capita revenue below the state average were far more likely than their suburban and urban colleagues to rely on non-tax revenue to fund technology expenditures. Indiana is unique among the 10 states visited as part of this research effort to have such an extensive network of community foundations—close to 100 throughout the state.<sup>15</sup> The Lilly Endowment was mentioned by all libraries as a funder of library technology efforts, and is, in fact, the top giving foundation in the state.<sup>16</sup>

Most libraries also reported that they receive E-rate discounts to defray telecommunications costs.

13. *Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2006–2007*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2007. <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/ors/plftas/0607report.cfm>. Page 131.

14. Communications Workers of America. “Speed Matters: A Report on Internet Speeds in All 50 states.” July 2007. [http://www.speedmatters.org/document-library/sourcematerials/sm\\_report.pdf](http://www.speedmatters.org/document-library/sourcematerials/sm_report.pdf).

15. Indiana Grantmakers Alliance. Community Foundation Locator. <http://www.indianagrantsmakers.org/locator>.

16. The Grantsmanship Center. Top Giving Foundations: Indiana. <http://www.tgci.com/funding/top.asp?statename=Indiana&statecode=IN>.

► *“We’ve just gone through a strategic planning process, and we’re looking at the effect of these caps for next year (FY09), and we’ll lose \$500,000 to \$1 million in revenue. We’ll lose anywhere between \$2 million and \$4 million in 2010.”*

Statewide, 87 percent of libraries report applying for E-rate, above the national average of 51 percent.<sup>17</sup>

Indiana is on the cusp of two major changes affecting public libraries: the property tax cap approved by the legislature in 2008 and the possible consolidation of library districts based on the recommendations of the Indiana Commission on Local Government Reform. All libraries expect to begin losing revenue in FY2009, with more significant losses in years 2010–2012. Libraries were no longer allowed to establish capital project funds, and it was

expected that these funds would be rolled into general operating accounts, all subject to a single cap. The exact impact was unclear at the time of the focus groups—as was the case with potential consolidation efforts. Legislation approved by the state Senate called for planning committees in each county to study possible efficiencies of merging libraries or services and serving the unserved.

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### *Meeting Patron Technology Needs*

As has been the case in other states, Indiana librarians reported increased use of public library computers for e-government services and job-seeking. The state encourages residents to apply online for unemployment, family assistance and motor vehicle licenses. State residents may renew license plates online for 2009 and save \$5 for each vehicle.<sup>18</sup> The top item in a list of frequently asked questions on the State of Indiana Web site describes how to file for unemployment and leads readers to an online self-service form.<sup>19</sup>

► *“The irony of the government requiring people to do all this stuff online is that it most affects the people who don’t have the resources to go online.”*

*“The irony of the government requiring people to do all this stuff online is that it most affects the people who don’t have the resources to go online.”* As an example, another library reported that its county welfare office had been downsized and an unemployment office closed temporarily. *“We were actually flooded (with people) because they had no other place to go.”*

Several focus group participants confirmed similar trends in their libraries, saying that many job-seekers were struggling to navigate online job applications. *“So many places, especially entry-level jobs, you have to apply online. A lot of times, the people applying for those jobs have no technical skills, so there’s a lot of hands-on assistance necessary for them. We have to adjust our definition of what is and is not the reference librarian’s job,”* said a suburban library director. Libraries reported offering online job searching classes, résumé-writing workshops, open computer labs with one-on-one assistance for creating resumes and opening e-mail accounts, and collaborating with the Indiana Department of Workforce Development. *“Demand for one-on-one help is overwhelming.”*

### *Supporting Education*

Focus group participants also highlighted services for K–12 students and distance learners. Most of the libraries described cooperative relationships with local public schools in their districts. Several libraries share fiber Internet connections between area schools and their libraries, which allows them to pool for

17. Information Institute, Florida State University. Public Libraries and the Internet 2008. Figure 95. [http://www.ii.fsu.edu/projectFiles/plinter-net/2008/08\\_State\\_Summaries\\_p\\_66-163.pdf](http://www.ii.fsu.edu/projectFiles/plinter-net/2008/08_State_Summaries_p_66-163.pdf).

18. State of Indiana, Bureau of Motor Vehicles. [http://www.in.gov/portal/news\\_events/35583.htm](http://www.in.gov/portal/news_events/35583.htm). Accessed February 23, 2009.

19. State of Indiana. Top FAQs. [http://www.in.gov/portal/faq.html?faqid=69&p\\_created=1175614633](http://www.in.gov/portal/faq.html?faqid=69&p_created=1175614633) Accessed February 23, 2009.

bandwidth. Since the library's peak times are different from the schools, both agencies benefit, and students are able to access school data through the public library's computers.

*"A lot of those kids don't have computer access (at home), and the first place they come is to the library."*

One library provides school reading lists with a link to the library catalog so students can easily check books' availability. Another library has a shared catalog with its public and independent schools.

*"We're seeing a lot more students who are learning on the Internet, who are commuting, who need a lot more instruction at the public library."*

The most common library support for students reported was access to online homework help and databases, including the statewide INSPIRE virtual library<sup>20</sup> and the LearningExpress database with practice exams for the GED, ACT, SAT and more. Library directors also cited frequent student use of word processing, presentation and publishing software for homework and school assignments.

Aside from supporting formal education, focus group participants—particularly in more rural communities—cited ongoing demand for computer and Internet search classes. *"I think our need is just teaching people how to use the computer. I have so many that come in and say, 'I don't even know how to work this thing.' We always have a waiting list for basic classes,"* said a staff person in a community of fewer than 5,000 people. This was echoed by others in the group. All of the libraries offer one-on-one technology assistance for patrons as staff time allows. Larger libraries also are implementing or considering online classes linked off the library Web site to teach software applications.

### Sustaining Technology

There are many factors involved in sustaining access to technology—including available bandwidth, availability of IT staff, technology skills of front-line staff, technology planning and adequate physical space. Focus group participants reported challenges on several fronts to ensuring quality public access to technology.

#### Bandwidth

As has been noted in other states, most libraries (except those with fiber connections) struggle to meet patron demand for high-bandwidth applications, including streaming media and downloading audio and video from library Web sites.

*"At one time, we would have said a T1 was just the world, but it just changes too fast. We went from a T1 to two T1s to three T1s to now 15 Mbps of fiber"*

*"Their expectations for bandwidth are just unbelievable, and they get very hot about it,"* said the director of a suburban library with 3 Mbps bandwidth. *"You could add a T1 every year, and you'd be at 95 percent (usage), no matter what."* The library plans to upgrade to 15 Mbps in summer 2009.

*"At one time, we would have said a T1 was just the world, but it just changes too fast. We went from a T1 to two T1s to three T1s to now 15 Mbps of fiber,"* said another library director.

Libraries with fiber connections were able to achieve this connectivity by partnering with a local school or schools and/or by working with the INPubLibraries network, managed by the Education Networks of America (ENA). Most of the larger libraries were considering or currently implementing some kind of bandwidth management plan—either using a software solution or segregating traffic using different Internet connections.

*"When we started to discover we had very low bandwidth starting at 3 p.m., we had to start managing it, or no one would have anything,"* said one participant.

*"I think our need is just teaching people how to use the computer. We always have a waiting list for basic classes."*

20. Indiana State Library. <http://www.in.gov/library/inspire/faq.html#>.

As depicted in previous years of the Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study,<sup>21</sup> a few focus group participants were unable to report their maximum access speeds but said their connectivity was adequate most of the time. One of the libraries that struggles with shared 1.5 Mbps access for public, staff and wireless-enabled computer users could purchase access to a fiber line, but cost is prohibitive. The library lags behind residential users and a local hospital that has several 20 Mbps feeds.

*“We’d probably have three times the amount of use if we allowed people to visit sites we presently block. And the only reason we block them is because we don’t have enough broadband resources to be able to handle it,”* said the library IT director. The library blocks streaming media, social networking and online games for children over five years.

Before January 1, 2009, well over 50 percent of public libraries on the state network were encountering pent-up demand for bandwidth, causing staff and patrons to experience inconsistent and/or inadequate online connections at some point in the day. To address this, the Indiana State Library redirected state funds to assist libraries by allowing those libraries consistently encountering such issues to add bandwidth at no cost to the library.

Despite bandwidth concerns, most libraries offer wireless access and consider it essential to meet public access demands in their communities. Most libraries also allow patrons to use peripherals (such as USB drives or digital cameras) on library computers as long as nothing is downloaded onto the public computer’s hard drive.

In order to meet the requirements of the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and continue receiving E-rate telecommunications discounts, most focus group participants reported filtering public access computers. Libraries with limited or no dedicated IT staff reported that this has an impact on patron access and staff time with nearly daily requests to unblock sites, including the Evansville Zoo. One library that requires patrons to fill out a request form to unblock Web sites reported that some patrons are put off: *“The report is due in an hour, and I don’t have time to fill out the form and wait for an IT person to unblock it.”*

### **Staff Support**

The need for on-site technology staff support was cited as a prominent need. Smaller libraries mostly depend on contracted IT or school technology staff. All of the larger (communities larger than 30,000) or better funded libraries have one or more full-time IT staff, but acquiring this support did not always come easily. *“We’ve had to change our whole health insurance program to offer a job to an IT person. We literally turned everything upside down to entice an IT person to come to work for us.”*

As has been consistently reported in all of the states visited, Indiana library directors reported that frontline staff have a range of skill and comfort level with technology. While it was common that one or more staff would carry a heavier burden in troubleshooting and assisting patrons with technology concerns, several directors said it was their responsibility to prioritize skills training and to raise competencies. Several directors said technology competency is a key consideration in new hiring.

Limited staff coverage was the leading barrier to making time for technology training—even when it is offered online and doesn’t require travel. The new state requirements for continuing education provide an additional incentive for libraries to address this issue. Most libraries anticipated in-house training—either offered by library IT staff or a local vendor under contract—or online learning through WebJunction or Ed2Go would increase as a result. One library includes training during staff meetings as part of its professional development strategy and long-range technology plan.

*“There’s always tension between IT and other staff, because the staff don’t feel like they have adequate training, and the IT staff doesn’t have the time to give them training,”* a director with an outside trainer said.

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21. In the 2006–2007 study, 13 percent of libraries reported “don’t know” when asked about the library outlet’s maximum speed of public access Internet services (Figure 19). In the 2007–2008 study, 10 percent of all libraries reported “don’t know” (Figure C15). In both years, rural libraries were most likely to report they didn’t know the maximum connection speed. [www.ala.org/plinternetfunding](http://www.ala.org/plinternetfunding).

### Advocating Support for Library Services

With a history of stable funding, almost all of the focus group participants reported there has been little need for direct advocacy around funding and technology support in the past. Trustees and Friends of the Library have not been mobilized to campaign for libraries, and several directors were concerned these volunteers would not be willing to play a larger role in this area. *“In order to get them to serve on the board, you have to promise you won’t make them do anything except come to a meeting once a month.”* Others countered, though, that they were taking a more active approach to recruiting potential trustees for consideration for board appointment with an eye to adding advocates and power brokers.

► *“That’s what I think is going to be our biggest issue: just getting out there and showing people what we’re already doing.”*

Most participants saw room for growth in the area of marketing and community outreach around library technology. One said, *“That’s what I think is going to be our biggest issue: just getting out there and showing people what we’re already doing.”* Despite the computer and Internet resources available in their libraries, most directors reported that residents are still largely unaware of these efforts. As examples of library outreach efforts, one director mentioned a trustee talking with city and county councilors about his daughter’s use of the library’s online homework help program and its value. *“He talked about how many people use the libraries and the computers and how that surprised him at first.”*

Directors are involved in community organizations, including serving on the board or being members of groups such as chambers of commerce; Rotary, Kiwanis and Lions clubs; and churches. One library director reported that community involvement is among the professional development goals for library managers. Another library director has encouraged library staff to participate in the county’s leadership programs to put them in contact with community decision-makers.

### Greatest Needs

Because they serve a range of people from first-time computer users to very sophisticated technology users, libraries are challenged not only to meet many needs, but to keep up with rising expectations. *“That’s been the challenge that libraries have always had, that we serve a demographic of all ages and ranges and levels of income and education.”*

For that reason, better-funded libraries are looking toward more interactive Web sites, more active marketing of online resources, and additional exploration and use of social networking. *“For a lot of people, the Web site is the library.”*

Smaller libraries also are looking toward creating or improving their Web presence, but hiring a full-time trainer and/or dedicated IT staff top the list. *“I’d like to see a full-time tech so that we don’t have to shut down the computer for a week until he (the contracted IT staff person) can get here.”*

### Site Visit Summary

The research team visited 10 libraries serving communities ranging in size from 9,100 to 217,000. All but one of the libraries offered wireless access. The site visits included interviews with staff members, library patrons and trustees. A complete list of libraries visited can be found in Appendix F.

### Expenditures and Fiscal Planning

Interviews with library directors revealed similar financial considerations and stresses to those discussed in the focus groups. With the passage of Indiana’s “circuit breaker” legislation in 2008, all of the libraries visited expected cuts effectively immediately in FY2009. Losses in revenue were expected to more than double in FY2010 and continue increasing through 2012. For instance, one library with a budget of about \$12 million expected a cut nearing \$800,000 in FY2009 and estimated a roughly \$2.2 million reduction in 2010. Several

libraries reported that they began freezing open positions immediately after the legislation was passed in March 2008.

Other funding sources were reported or anticipated to be down, including county income tax, excise taxes and commercial vehicle taxes. One library reported its budget had been flat dating back to 2003, as overhead costs grow about 10 percent, leading to reduced hours and staff positions.

As with the focus group participants, several of the libraries reported they rely on grant funding from local community foundations and others, in addition to the capital improvement and rainy day funds, to support technology and other library services.

Most libraries reported they had a line item in the general operating budget for technology, which represented about 8 percent to 10 percent of the library's budget, including staff salaries, hardware and software.

### *Meeting Patron Technology Needs*

In a time of economic upheaval, interviews with patrons revealed that almost all of the working-age adults said they use the computers for job-related purposes, such as updating their résumés, looking for jobs and filing online job applications. An electrician said he downloads free computer training classes to help him stay current. A middle-aged woman said she was renewing her nursing certification. A realtor said he has researched government grants. Some libraries reported long lines for filing unemployment paperwork—particularly on Sundays and Mondays. All patrons reported using e-mail for both job-related and personal correspondence, and most young people interviewed use social networking sites.

This increased use had an impact on staff time and raised privacy concerns for several library directors. *"We have a lot of people who have never looked at a computer, let alone held a mouse in their hand. Our staff has to be very careful that they don't input a Social Security number. Sometimes it's really difficult."*

In addition to significant increases in technology use for job-seeking and filing unemployment, several libraries reported being the primary online access point during recent disasters—flooding or tornadoes. Federal Emergency Management Agency applications could only be filed online. Most libraries reported increased library use in the past year. *"They're (elected officials) surprised when I tell them we're busier than we've ever been in our history,"* said one director, who was looking at ways to bring older computers that had been cycled off the floor back into use to reduce wait times.

► *"If it wasn't for the library being here, I couldn't go to school. There's no way I could afford it. There is no other resource."*

A community college student insisted on being interviewed so the library would know how much she appreciates its services. The mother of a preschooler, she was getting divorced and also working part-time. *"If it wasn't for the library being here, I couldn't go to school. There's no way I could afford it. There is no other resource."*

Others reported doing a variety of life maintenance tasks, such as looking up directions, making travel reservations, shopping, banking and paying bills. Many said they research hobbies and other personal interests. The unemployment office and Department of Motor Vehicles were the most frequently used government sites cited by interviewed patrons.

The number of people reporting weekly use (87 percent) was among the highest of any state visited. Indiana computer users also reported the most waits: more than half said they have had to wait occasionally, usually during peak hours and usually less than 15 minutes. However, one woman noted, *"My husband came for the first time today. He expected to wait for a computer but got right on. He said, 'Everybody would be here if they knew they could get on right away.'"*

Among the 10 states visited in the past three years as part of this study, only Pennsylvania had a lower rate of computer ownership and Internet access at home than Indiana. Of the 56 library computer users

► *"We have a lot of people who have never looked at a computer, let alone held a mouse in their hand."*

interviewed in eight Indiana libraries, 38 percent said they owned a computer; and 21 percent have Internet access at home.

As in site visits in other states, users expressed strong satisfaction with the library computers, although some indicated their answers would have been quite different before the library's new computers were installed and bandwidth upgraded.

All of the libraries visited have time limits, usually one hour with extensions if no one is waiting. About half of these were using time management software. One library that recently had implemented such software estimated it freed up about two hours of staff time each day not to be manually signing out computers. Statewide, about 91 percent of Indiana libraries report having time limits, and 58 percent manage time limits manually.<sup>22</sup>

### *Sustaining Technology*

Six of the 10 libraries visited have one or more full-time IT staff, while the other four rely on outside contractors and/or self-taught library staff members for IT support. Connectivity speeds varied, but all libraries visited provided a minimum of 1.5 Mbps Internet access. All but one library visited also provides wireless access, often on a shared connection with library desktop computers.

### *Technology Replacement and Planning*

As in the focus groups, most libraries reported having a technology replacement plan recommending upgrades or replacements every three to five years. One library recycles computers from its lab to children's and youth areas. The library is struggling to get all the computers at the same level without being able to replace them at the same time. *"Every time a computer breaks, you wonder: do I replace it at the same level or jump ahead? Buy new or repair? What's the break point?"* Several libraries reported they had moved from a three-year replacement plan schedule to a four- or five-year plan.

Another library also described the importance of "batching" computer replacement to reduce multiple versions of hardware and software. The library cycles its public access computers, staff computers and computer lab computers as a group on a five-year schedule.

### *Staffing*

As described earlier, most of the libraries visited had one or more dedicated, full-time IT staff members. One library joined forces with five other libraries without any full-time IT staff in 1998 to create an IT consortium to help with specifications in a grant to add wireless. They needed help with standards. *"We were all out reinventing the wheel."* They negotiated a contract where they paid only for the services used. Ten years later, 40 libraries are in a consortium with a new vendor, and 10 libraries stayed with the old vendor. Typically, these libraries were using 300 hours/month in IT support. Some larger libraries are in the consortium to supplement their on-site IT staff. A new contract also allows non-library government agencies to join. *"If libraries can solve problems for government, how helpful would that be? If the library can help the county get lower IT costs, it's a friendlier environment in the future."*

Barriers to staff training echo findings reported by the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA). Most directors and staff indicated there is inadequate coverage for staff to be out of the building, and it is difficult to get part-time staff gathered together at one time for staff development. While less of a concern for online learning, several staff indicated it was still difficult to dedicate time for online classes while in the library, and at least one library reported it lacked the infrastructure to support distance education. Most libraries reported that they fund and encourage professional development, but a

► Most libraries reported that they fund and encourage professional development.

22. *Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study, 2007–2008*. State summaries. [http://www.ii.fsu.edu/projectFiles/plinternet/2008/08\\_State\\_Summaries\\_p\\_66-163.pdf](http://www.ii.fsu.edu/projectFiles/plinternet/2008/08_State_Summaries_p_66-163.pdf). Figures 82 and 87.

few staff members raised concerns about how they would be able to pay for continuing education in order to meet new certification requirements. One library foundation provides funds that may be used for tuition reimbursement, and a few libraries described robust internal training programs for which they have received state approval as continuing education providers.

Most library staff described themselves as pretty comfortable or very comfortable meeting patron technology demands, despite being largely self-taught in their technology skills. Most would like more training, but finding time for training is a constant challenge, particularly if travel is involved. A slim majority of staff reported they had taken at least one online class or webinar, and referenced training from sites such as WebJunction, Lynda.com, the Indiana Cooperative Library Services Authority (INCOLSA) and free online classes.

Library directors also reported higher expectations for their staff members' technology skills, particularly when hiring new staff. One library started testing the technology skills of new hires 10 years ago, and several libraries reported offering full-day staff institutes that include technology training.

### *Bandwidth*

Several libraries had increased bandwidth within the past six months, going from 1.5 Mbps to 3 Mbps or 3 Mbps to 10.5 Mbps, for example. The change was recent enough that many patrons commented on the difference it made in their library experience. The library with 3 Mbps reported maxing out its utilization on a daily basis every afternoon before upgrading. The cost increased from \$1,300 per month to \$3,200 per month for 10.5 Mbps, and utilization consistently is reaching 60 percent after only three months. The library is investigating options for 50 Mbps, but this would more than double the cost again.

## **Advocating Support for IT Services**

As with the focus groups, most library directors and trustees reported they had not previously been involved with a lot of direct advocacy on behalf of the library or library technology. Most of the directors and trustees, however, talked about the importance of being involved and active in other community agencies. At one library, all branch managers are members of the local chambers of commerce. Several library directors reported that they encourage library staff to get involved with community groups and allow work time to develop these relationships. *"It's a small world,"* one said. *"I get to meet people, and everyone knows I'm from the library."*

After a tornado, one library became a hub for a long-term economic recovery group that began working only one week after the tornado struck and then turned its attention to the economic disaster that followed. The library director was asked by the mayor to lead the group of 40 local non-profit, education and government agencies connecting community members with local, state and federal resources. The library provided meeting room space for the group and for Small Business Administration staff assisting patrons with low-interest loans; computers for use in patron trainings and applications; free Wi-Fi access; and a safe, comfortable place for residents to gather and connect. *"People sometimes ask, 'How did you make all those community connections?' It didn't happen overnight, but every time we add a partner, it widens support for the library and allows us to stretch our funding."*

Most libraries identified Friends' groups, schools and local community foundations as partners in supporting the library and library technology.

Several library directors and trustees reported becoming more active in recruiting and recommending new board members for appointment. Trustees at two libraries described how they had worked to build a diversified board with representation from the financial sector, farming and teaching. Another library director said he had been reluctant to begin making recommendations for appointment to the board, but *"when we got lemons, we began making recommendations."*

► *"Every time we add a partner, it widens support for the library and allows us to stretch our funding."*



Consistently library staff and trustees stated that the greatest value of technology in public libraries was that of providing free and equal access to everyone in the community. *“To some extent, people would not know what technology could do for them without the library.”*

### *Trustees*

The research team interviewed eight trustees from seven of the libraries visited. The trustees were evenly dispersed in the number of years they had served on the board from as little as one year to as long as 16 years, with a majority serving between six and 12 years. They included retired persons, business people, an educator, an attorney and an IT director from communities of 105,000 people or less. The majority had received some orientation or a handbook outlining their responsibilities, but most said that advocacy was not a component of this training. As indicated by library directors in the site visits and focus groups, they affirmed they had not been asked to play a strong advocacy role in the past, but expected reduced funding for all libraries to spur greater involvement in the future. *“I think we’re going to get really good at it (advocacy). As our funding drops, we’ll have to.”*

Almost all of the trustees highlighted their role as stewards of public funding. One trustee said he started at the library while it was in deficit 14 years ago, and the library now has a several hundred thousand dollar “cushion” for capital improvements. *“The board is aware we’re spending the taxpayer’s money. We’re more frugal than with our own money.”* Another trustee said the board tries to show county council members they are not extravagant or wasteful.

Regardless of age or background, the trustees were enthusiastic about technology and the opportunities afforded through free access to computers and the Internet in libraries. Trustees highlighted the importance of these services for supporting educational pursuits, job-seekers and even gaming for local teens. *“We’re trying not to just stay current with technology, but to stay ahead. Technology has shown us what’s possible for our library.”* One trustee who said technology provides more efficiency and access to resources said all board members had been given instructions on the library’s technology resources and how to use it from home. As a result, all but one of the board members are library technology users.

While free access to computers and the Internet was the most valued technology-based service, trustees also cited wireless access, 24/7 access to online databases and the library’s Web site. One trustee in a suburban library had this to say: *“If you had 100 computers, you could fill them all. They are always busy. Second (most valued service) would be Wi-Fi—we’re one of the few places in town that has it.”*

# Wisconsin Case Study

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wisconsin's significant investments in regional library systems and statewide resources—including a statewide telecommunications network (BadgerNet), online databases and a non-profit Internet provider—believe its status as 28th in the nation for state funding for public libraries. Thanks to these resources, funded largely through state Universal Service Funds, every library in this largely rural state enviably has a minimum Internet connectivity of 1.5 Mbps (T1), and over 90 percent are in shared Integrated Library Systems (ILS) managed by one of the state's 17 regional library systems. Most regional systems also provide some level of technology support for their member libraries. *"I can't imagine offering library services here (in a rural community) without the library system. The Internet backbone is vital, and they do a ton on top of that,"* said one library director. Even with T1 Internet access, however, many libraries reported that they do not have adequate bandwidth to meet patron demand, and several libraries reported they work with multiple Internet service providers to cobble together needed bandwidth.

While most libraries report their budgets have remained stable in FY2009, prospects for the coming fiscal year are still unclear. A few library directors raised concerns about their communities' ability and willingness to meet state maintenance of effort requirements in the future and noted that the requirement can be a double-edged sword that discourages increased investment in libraries for fear it won't be sustainable. A 2 percent property tax cap at the state level translates to eroded buying power for many libraries as healthcare and utility costs rise at a higher rate.

While most libraries report they have five-year technology replacement plans, many do not follow the plan. In a situation not at all unique to Wisconsin, close to half of the computers granted by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in 2002 were still in public use seven years later. Several libraries visited would not have been in compliance, for instance, with one regional system's obsolescence policy that limits the support the system will provide for PCs older than five years and for peripherals older than three years. Regional library staff noted the burden placed on their limited IT support staff people when local libraries fail to follow replacement schedules or choose not to participate in group computer purchasing that would allow for greater standardization among the libraries the regional systems support.

By statute, library boards must include public school district representation, which appears to create a stronger connection between the schools and public libraries compared to other states visited by the research team. Many boards also include representation from city or county governance.

All libraries visited offer free wireless access, and data reported through this study's national online survey indicate this is the case for 91 percent of all libraries in the state (see page 122).

### Overview: Governance and Statistical Information

Wisconsin has 382 public library systems with 457 physical library locations and eight bookmobiles to serve more than 5.6 million residents. Wisconsin's public libraries primarily are organized as municipal government libraries (89 percent). Most of the rest are organized as multi-jurisdictional libraries (6.5

percent) and county libraries (2.1 percent).<sup>23</sup> All of Wisconsin's public libraries are in cooperative relationships with other public libraries in the county, region or state. As stated above, there are 17 regional library systems in the state.<sup>24</sup>

In FY2006, (the most recent year for which national statistics are available), Wisconsin's public libraries reported hosting more than 33.9 million visits; answering more than 5 million reference questions; and circulating more than 59.2 million items (books, films, sound recordings, audiobooks). Wisconsin public libraries borrowed or loaned an additional 12.4 million items on behalf of its residents, who are served by 3,011 employees. Of these employees, 622 hold a Master's degree in Library and Information Science (MLIS), and another 548 work as librarians but do not hold a master's degree.

Wisconsin's public libraries rank 35th in the number of public-use Internet computers per building (9.56), compared with public libraries in other states.<sup>25</sup> The State of Wisconsin ranks 10th in the deployment of computers and Internet use in schools.<sup>26</sup>

Wisconsin's libraries are primarily (94.8 percent) single-building libraries, average 9,726 square feet in size, and the majority serve communities with fewer than 10,000 residents. The remaining 5.2 percent are multiple-outlet libraries (a central library with branch libraries) and range from an average of about 6,978 (branches) to over 71,499 (central libraries) square feet in size.

## Funding Summary

Most (91.6 percent) of Wisconsin's public library funding comes from local sources (tax dollars). The balance comes from other sources such as private fundraising, gifts, bequests, fines and fees (5.6 percent); state sources (2.3 percent); and federal sources (0.5 percent).

Nationally, Wisconsin ranks 18th in total operating revenue support; 28th in state support; 16th in local support; and 23rd in "other." Wisconsin surpasses the national average for local operating revenue at \$30.14 per capita, compared with the U.S. average of \$26.25.

Wisconsin ranks 20th in total operating expenditures (\$35.56 spent per capita); 18th in staffing (\$24.36); and 27th in collections (\$4.31). The largest percentage of operating expenditures is used for staff costs (salaries, benefits, retirement), with 12.3 percent spent on collections, and the remaining 18.1 percent spent for other things, such as programming, building maintenance and utilities, computer hardware, and software.

In FY2006, Wisconsin public libraries spent more than \$12 million on capital expenditures (e.g., building repairs, renovations, new buildings). While about 59 percent of the libraries had no capital expenditures, those that did clustered in the under \$10,000 (19.9 percent) and \$10,000–\$49,999 (13.6 percent) ranges.

## Connectivity Summary

Wisconsin heavily subsidizes bandwidth (\$3.1 million annually) for libraries using the state Universal Service Fund. For the past six years, the \$3.1 million in state funds had not increased while library bandwidth needs had. The 2007–2009 state budget passed in October 2007 with the additional funding authority to increase BadgerNet subsidies. By April 2008, over 70 percent of the state's public libraries received a bandwidth increase, most at no additional cost. With this upgrade, all libraries have a minimum of a 1.5 Mbps connection.

23. Institute of Museum and Library Services. *Public Libraries Survey: Fiscal Year 2006*. Washington, DC: IMLS, 2008. [http://harvester.census.gov/imls/pubs/pls/pub\\_detail.asp?id=121](http://harvester.census.gov/imls/pubs/pls/pub_detail.asp?id=121)

24. Wisconsin Public Library Systems. <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/wisysdir.html>

25. Institute of Museum and Library Services. *Public Libraries Survey: Fiscal Year 2006*. Washington, DC: IMLS, 2008. [http://harvester.census.gov/imls/pubs/pls/pub\\_detail.asp?id=121](http://harvester.census.gov/imls/pubs/pls/pub_detail.asp?id=121). Table A3.

26. The Information Technology & Innovation Foundation. 2008 State New Economy Index. [http://www.itif.org/files/2008\\_State\\_New\\_Economy\\_Index.pdf](http://www.itif.org/files/2008_State_New_Economy_Index.pdf)

BadgerNet covers all areas of the state and provides a backbone, the middle and last-mile connections. The state general fund supports the network at about \$16 million annually. In addition, the state collects about \$6.5 million from the federal E-rate program, providing combined support of \$22.5 million.<sup>27</sup>

BadgerNet is the state's telecommunications network; it does not provide Internet service. Most BadgerNet users (e.g., state government, schools, and libraries) receive their Internet access via WiscNet (<http://www.wiscnet.net>).<sup>28</sup> WiscNet started providing Internet access in 1991 to 26 colleges and universities in the state. When the first BadgerNet network was built in the mid-1990s, WiscNet expanded its services to include K–12 schools and public libraries. WiscNet is a not-for-profit association under the auspices of the University of Wisconsin–Madison. It is governed by a Board of Directors representing member institutions. For public libraries in the state, the average annual membership in WiscNet is about \$450. Many libraries have this fee paid for by their regional library system.<sup>29</sup>

Wisconsin public libraries also benefit from the TEACH (Technology for Educational Achievement) program, which is administered by the Wisconsin Department of Administration, Division of Enterprise Technology. TEACH subsidizes much of the cost to provide telecommunications access (e.g., data lines and video links) to eligible schools, libraries, and other educational institutions.<sup>30</sup> Under the data line program, applicants can request up to 3 Mbps data line for \$100 per month, or up to 20 Mbps for \$250 per month. Applicants must demonstrate demand to request increased access speeds without additional cost. Approximately 95 percent of the state's public libraries get subsidies from the TEACH program.

About 91 percent of Wisconsin's 382 public libraries are in regional Integrated Library Systems (ILS). Some of these have 50+ member libraries. On average, about 20 percent of the bandwidth of a typical Wisconsin library on a typical day is taken with shared ILS (circulation, OPAC, etc.) traffic. Almost all libraries now have Web-based ILS, and the bandwidth needs increased dramatically compared with the old text-based ILS. A circulation transaction is also very time-sensitive so this becomes a "quality of service" issue for libraries. The wide area networks (WANS) managed by the library systems are often configured to give preference to network traffic from the shared ILS, vs. more general traffic intended for the public Internet.

Based on residential Internet download and upload speed tests, the State of Wisconsin ranks 28th in the nation in its median download speed at 2.37 Mbps, compared to the national median speed of 2.35 Mbps.<sup>31</sup> This represents an improvement from 1.55 Mbps in 2007.

## Focus Group Summary

The research team conducted two focus groups in Wisconsin. On March 4, 2009, staff from eight urban and suburban libraries met at the South Central Regional Library in Madison. On March 5, staff from eight rural libraries met at the Wisconsin Valley Library Service offices. We are grateful to Bob Bocher at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Division for Libraries, Phyllis Davis at the South Central Library System, and Marla Sepnafski and Patty Curthoys at the Wisconsin Valley Library Service for their advice and assistance in organizing the focus groups and site visits, and to all the librarians who shared their experiences and perspectives. A list of participating libraries is included in Appendix G.

### *Expenditures and Fiscal Planning*

For the most part, better-funded libraries have integrated technology expenditures into their regular operating budgets, while smaller and less well-funded libraries are more likely to depend on fundraising and

27. M. Bard, N. Bolt, R. Weingarten, and J. Windhausen, "Public Library Connectivity Study—Findings and Recommendations." July 2007.

28. Several other ISPs besides WiscNet offer Internet service via BadgerNet, but WiscNet is still the ISP for most K–12 schools, libraries and higher education.

29. BadgerNet and WiscNet background provided by Bob Bocher, Technology Consultant, Wisconsin Division for Libraries, Technology and Community Learning.

30. Technology for Educational Achievement. <http://teach.wisconsin.gov>.

31. Communications Workers of America. "Speed Matters: A Report on Internet Speeds in All 50 states." August 2008. [http://www.speedmatters.org/document-library/sourcematerials/cwa\\_report\\_on\\_internet\\_speeds\\_2008.pdf](http://www.speedmatters.org/document-library/sourcematerials/cwa_report_on_internet_speeds_2008.pdf).

grants. One small library purchased five computers for a new building with funds from its Friends of the Library foundation. Another small library, which does not charge for photocopies, keeps a jar on the counter for people to contribute. The director said she considers the proceeds to be the library's "technology fund" to be used for computer replacements or other expenses beyond the library's budget. About \$10,000 has been collected in the last three or four years.

All participants have technology plans as part of the regional library system plans required by the state. The replacement schedule is generally five years, although most participants said it is not strictly followed. One director of a small library described her replacement plan as *"when it dies."* They agreed that technology expenses overall are increasing. A shared public access catalog and interlibrary loan service through the LINK (Library Interchange Network) consortium were cited as a significant expense (and benefit). One director said it represents 8 percent of his budget. Several focus group participants noted that technology costs are increasingly being charged to line items that aren't necessarily delineated for technology, such as utilities (for wireless), programming (for class trainers) or collections (for databases) funds. Or, as one said, *"We are having to rob Peter to pay Paul out of some line items."* Several libraries—more than in other states visited—receive free Internet connections from local Internet service providers. It was noted by several focus group participants that the costs for the state-provided service were higher than purchasing directly from local providers.

Participants reported that library budgets have been stable but increasingly precarious in recent years. Many receive all or most of their funding from city/village governments. Most also are reimbursed with county funds as part of a state formula based on circulation. While some participants mentioned recent budget increases, these barely have kept up with the cost of living. It was noted that libraries have many fixed expenses, utilities and health benefits especially, that are growing faster than their budgets. One director openly rejoiced that an employee's son had gone off his father's medical plan, saving the library \$6,000. Several said they anticipate the economic downturn may bring cuts in their 2010 budgets. Their hope is that the library's budget will stay the same, with one noting she had read that *"maintaining is the new increase."*

■ *"Maintaining is the new increase."*

Most of the focus group participants said their libraries have not sought out private funding to support technology, except as part of a building project or through grants. One director in a small community said she has serious concerns about meeting her replacement schedule but hesitates to reach out. *"I've thought about having sponsored computers, but I worry that we tap those same people for summer library program, and I'm afraid they're only going to do one thing, and we need them for that as well. You can't tap the same people eight times—we're not that big of a community."*

Other than the economy, cited barriers to funding were outdated perceptions of libraries and lack of understanding about the higher costs associated with public access computers. *"I think it's going to take 100 years before anyone looks at libraries and doesn't think book first. So the fact that things are changing doesn't mean it's easy for us to change,"* one library director stated.

Participants cited several examples of how they have dealt with resistance. One said his library strives to keep current, but the mayor was indifferent until representatives of a potential new business paid a visit to the library before going to see the mayor. *"They told her, 'You guys spend money on your library. You've got a nice library. It's clean. It's well taken care of. You've got lots of material. We think that you're probably running your city pretty well, because you actually care about your library.'"* The library received a 3 percent budget increase.

Another library provides database training at chamber of commerce meetings. The library may not get an immediate dollar return but believes it is important because its members *"have the ears of local politicians"* and *"because they now can use a lot of the resources that we have—for free, and they're finding a lot of value in that."*

One director said she works at building a relationship with the city council. Members are invited to a library board meeting once a year with members of the public sharing what they think is important about

the library. She attends council meetings on a regular basis and “goes down the street” with the members afterward. *“Then they get to complain to me, and then I get to do rebuttal.”* She also conducts library tours for new council members.

### *Meeting Patron Technology Needs*

Library use is up. As is true elsewhere, the bad economy is credited with bringing more people to the library, many of them job-seekers. Internet use at one urban library has increased 300 percent in the last five years and continues to grow. One library had a 25 percent increase in computer use in the last year. Some participants don’t have software to track computer use, but observed there are no “down times” for library computers—that, unlike a year or so ago, these computers are in constant use throughout the day. It also was noted that every county used to have a state-funded job center but many have closed. *“A lot of the burden that should be placed on the job center isn’t being placed on them—it’s kind of defaulting to us.”*

Focus group participants said assisting the public with technology needs—particularly those who have little or no previous computer experience—is a major challenge. One participant noted that even college graduates who have not recently looked for a job have trouble looking for and applying for jobs online. Some larger libraries are offering more classes aimed at addressing a variety of needs, from how to use e-mail to how to search for a job.

All the participants reported their libraries are doing more one-on-one training, sometimes by appointment, because it is more efficient. Much of this training is basic, such as how to use a mouse. One larger library has staff and volunteers assigned to do basic computer training and assist with résumés, so reference librarians can focus on more difficult questions. Several noted that this one-on-one training is highly personalized and creates higher expectations.

*“Once they feel safe with us and know that what they’re sharing with us is confidential, they then ask for the next thing and next thing. First the e-mail, then the online job applications, and then could somebody help me write my résumé or at least look it over for me?”*

It was noted that many rural libraries serve communities with large senior populations and that the library plays an important role in introducing them to technology. One focus group participant related a story about a gentleman who was able to contact people he graduated with 50 years ago and to research his family history. *“E-mail changed his life . . . it opened a door.”* Others told how being able to request books online makes a difference.

Most of the participants said they believe they are meeting their patrons’ needs. They said the greatest frustration for most users is not being able to use some networked computers to prepare and e-mail documents, such as résumés, since the computers networked through the integrated library system do not support Microsoft Office. This may mean waiting for another computer, in some cases.

Several participants reported increasing use of government Web sites in connection with unemployment benefits or driving tests. A few complained that the 2008 state tax forms required the latest version of Adobe Reader to complete online. There was no advance notice, which caused problems for many libraries.

### **Supporting Education**

The focus group participants confirmed that their libraries’ role in education is growing at all levels. It includes job-seekers who take classes to improve their education levels often at vocational or community colleges. Many of these new students don’t have computers at home and depend on the library to do class work. Participants also said that programs such as LearningExpress that prepare potential college students to take the SAT, ACT and other standardized tests are popular. One director said she is working with the local middle school to see about getting the same software the school uses. Another noted that the library’s EasyLink computers for preschoolers are very popular. Some said their libraries have computers dedicated for educational use or give seating priority and/or extra time to those using computers for school-related purposes.

Two participants reported that their libraries are working in partnership with local high schools on a grant-funded alternative education program for students who have been expelled or suspended. Laptops are provided by the high school and stored at the library where students go to do their class work using wireless.

The participants reported an increase in test proctoring, but noted difficulties with some college/distance education classes as many libraries don't have or allow the necessary software, e.g., streaming video.

## *Sustaining Technology*

### **Bandwidth**

Bandwidth is a major concern for the rural libraries. Several of these library directors stated community residents are limited to dial-up home Internet service. The participants said libraries are popular because of their faster speeds, although they consider them far from adequate. All Wisconsin libraries have a minimum Internet connectivity of 1.5 Mbps (T1), but most focus group participants in libraries of all sizes reported this was inadequate to meet demand at peak times. Two rural libraries reported they had doubled their speed from 1.5 Mbps to 3 Mbps in January and already are finding slowdowns at peak periods. Another library that went from 3 Mbps to 5 Mbps said she is moving up to 10 Mbps, thanks to the new availability of fiber in her community. These small libraries do not have dedicated IT staff and depend on regional library staff for network support.

One regional library system staff member confirmed that most member libraries were facing severe Internet slowdowns or lost connections in the peak after school hours and on Saturdays. She requested TEACH subsidies for upgrades in December 2008 and February 2009, and in each case was able to secure additional bandwidth for only half of the libraries that requested it. *"There's only so much money and too much demand."* While the negative impact on patrons can be high during these peak times, it's more difficult to get upgrades when a library is not at maximum bandwidth use throughout the day. The systems prioritize traffic on the integrated library system (ILS), so this is stable throughout the day, but public Web use can be disrupted at peak times. Since most rural libraries are still using copper phone lines, there is no flexibility to accommodate bursts of use. Another regional staff member described increasing demand for Internet services like Skype and videoconferencing, which *"need a barrel of bandwidth."*

■ *"There's only so much money and too much demand."*

Several libraries use two or three different ISPs to meet demand, often separating desktop from wireless connections.

While most participants from urban/suburban libraries described their bandwidth as adequate because they supplement what is available through BadgerNet with commercial providers, they also said use of peripherals on computers networked through the region is limited. Computer users are not allowed to upload or download software, mostly because of security concerns and the staff time required to monitor and maintain the equipment. One focus group participant noted that many people are disappointed to find the library doesn't have the newest version of a program needed to view something. *"We have streaming video on the city's Web site—but you can't view it in the library because we don't support it."* Social networking is allowed, but most libraries don't have Flash Player or other programs to support it. *"In part, it's working fairly well right now because we're not allowing certain software that will use a lot of bandwidth to do certain things."*

### **Staffing**

Most of the participants' libraries rely largely on regional library system IT staff and/or outside vendors for IT support. The largest library, a countywide system with a central library and seven outlets, has grown from two dedicated staff members focused on technology three years ago to almost five full-time equivalent IT staff now. Two others had a dedicated tech person, and one had a part-time trainer (funded out of the programming budget).

Participants said their libraries' staff has a wide range of computer skills. Most said their libraries look for computer skills when hiring but noted that maintaining skills is an ongoing challenge. *"It's just changing so fast. Skills that were the minimum a year ago are not the minimum now."* One pointed out that every time a database is introduced, staff need to be taught how to use it. A few months later there may be an upgrade, and they'll have to be taught again.

Hiring people with both good people skills and computer skills is especially difficult for small libraries. One director said the library might have to pay an IT staffer a larger salary than she receives. *"Finding the money to pay someone that has those qualifications is not easy in our small town because those are the people who are going to want more money than just beginning wages or a little above beginning wages, and they're going to want benefits that we can't pay them."*

Most participants said there are plenty of training opportunities at the system and state levels, and also at local colleges. But directors of small libraries said they have a hard time sending staff to trainings because they can't afford to pay for travel or extra hours. Some staff aren't interested. Three directors said they found Project Play,<sup>32</sup> an online program introducing Web 2.0 tools, to be useful. Three of the regional library systems collaborated to offer the program to library staff.

One participant summarized the challenge saying, *"You have to train your staff to be as smart as the people who walk in the door."* His library does training in "patron-level skills" for management and clerical staff, such as downloadable audiobooks and databases.

### Advocating Support

Most participants said they and their trustees are active advocates. They try to connect with decision-makers year around and are active in community groups. *"I think you're considered not cool if you don't support the library,"* said one.

Directors of smaller and rural libraries were more likely to describe their trustees as less supportive of technology and less engaged in their communities. They said local government officials are less likely to understand the need for technology because they themselves are not users.

All of the participants agreed that the bad economy is helping to position libraries as essential services, but that libraries still have to compete for funds with police and fire services. One director noted that when told that *"libraries don't put out fires,"* she replied. *"We put out ignorance."* Another reported that her library ranked first in a community survey of city services.

Participants noted that personality makes a difference, as does training. They said directors should never assume their boards know or understand what the library does, or that they understand the importance of advocacy. One county library system board is making advocacy training available to its local library boards.

Directors agreed it is good to do presentations to the city/council board. Several said they use statistics to build their case, although many uses such as downloading a book from Overdrive or reading newspapers or even using computers are not tracked or are not recognized as part of funding formulas. Directors noted that it is hard for libraries to track benefits, since they don't always know whether the person gets a job or an "A" on a test. Others said a consistent message is key. One said that in her small community, she focuses on the library as a multi-functional community center—*"that we serve everybody in the community . . . we are a haven for the disenfranchised, promoting the 'feel good' things and the 'do good things' in our library."* Another said his library director focuses on the library's educational role.

► *The return on investment in Wisconsin public libraries is \$4.06 for each dollar of taxpayer investment.*

Several focus group participants noted that a recent study on the economic impact of Wisconsin public libraries was helpful when talking with elected officials. The study found the return on investment in library services is \$4.06 for each dollar of taxpayer investment.<sup>33</sup>

32. Project Play. <http://projectplay.owlswb.info>.

33. North Star Economics, Inc. "The Economic Contribution of Wisconsin Public Libraries." May 2008. <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/econimpact.html>.



### *Greatest Needs*

In the short term, the focus group members had a varied agenda for improvements they hope to make in the coming year. These included self-check, a computer center with scanner and print manager, online credit card processing, work stations for staff, and desktop conferencing and overhead projector.

If money were no object, participants from urban/larger libraries agreed that they would add more staff in order to be open more hours—one suggested 24 hours—and offer more personalized service. Directors of rural libraries focused on more bandwidth and staff with the vision and technical skills to position the library *“as a technology hub. . . . It’s just e-mail at the moment.”* A computer lab and gaming room for teens also were mentioned.

► *“The busiest time is all the time. With this economy, the community is using the library more and differently.”*

### **Site Visit Summary**

The research team visited six libraries serving communities ranging in size from 1,100 to 265,000. One branch had opened within the past six months and achieved LEED silver certification for its “green” design features; two libraries had completed significant expansions in recent years; and another was actively advocating for a much-needed expansion. The site visits included interviews with library staff members, library patrons and trustees. A complete list of libraries visited can be found in Appendix G.

### *Expenditures and Fiscal Planning*

Most library directors report funding has been stable, and they continued to see small increases (under 4 percent) in FY2009. If libraries don’t spend all of the budgeted funds, they may put these savings into capital fund accounts, which might be used to fund big ticket technology purchases like RFID or self-check stations. The outlook for FY2010 was unclear. *“At this point, if we can stay with flat funding, we’ll all be pretty happy,”* said one library director, who anticipated cuts may not happen until 2011. Several of the communities visited had experienced the loss of one or more major employers recently or faced other municipal funding challenges that had not yet impacted library budgets, but were anticipated to do so.

Most reported that technology costs were a relatively stable percentage of the library budget, particularly as contrasted with staff benefits and utility costs, both of which have increased recently. Several directors reported that hardware costs are coming down, and the hardware purchased is of better quality and lasts longer than in the past.

Staff involved with the design and construction of the newest library branch visited highlighted how some of the “green” features of the building also provide for changing library and technology needs. For example, the library’s exposed cabling would allow for an upgrade at an estimated one-tenth the cost of recabling a more traditional library.

### *Meeting Patron Technology Needs*

Staff in most libraries reconfirmed that computer and Internet use has grown significantly over the past six to nine months, driven largely by job losses. At one library, computer use was up 15 percent from a year ago, while circulation had climbed 2 percent, and visits were up 4 percent. The director at one of the smallest libraries reported she knew of at least one patron who had found employment using the library computers and another who located a sibling using online social networking.

Other frequently mentioned uses include e-government for tax forms and unemployment applications; e-mail; homework; searching Craigslist classified listings; social networking; and online banking or travel planning. One library staff person put it this way: *“The busiest time is all the time. With this economy, the community is using the library more and differently.”* Two libraries had created job information centers within the past year to gather together technology and print collections related to jobs and careers. They also were offering or considering creating “open computer lab” time for job-seekers to drop in for one-on-one technology assistance without time limits.

About half of the libraries offer patron computer classes and report they continue to be well-attended. The other half did not have a dedicated space to provide classes and/or staff to teach classes, but offer one-on-one patron assistance. Several staff members reported the one-on-one was a more effective approach because patrons bring such a wide range of skills to classes, making it more difficult to meet everyone's needs at the same time.

Most common patron requests are for more computers and more time available on computers, but staff also reported an increase in requests for access to scanners.

Interviews with library computer users in Wisconsin again found growing use driven by a depressed economy. Ninety-five percent said they use computers once a week or more—even higher than in Indiana, where 87 percent of those interviewed reported weekly use. By comparison, Pennsylvania, where the economy had suffered even before the current downturn, previously topped the list with 82 percent using the library once a week or more.

Many of those who use the library most frequently are job-seekers. In Wisconsin, eight of 32 people interviewed identified themselves as unemployed and/or looking for work. *“Eight-five percent of the job market is online. You have to be online.”* Another said, *“I’m doing a job search. I can’t afford Internet when I’m not working.”* A woman who lost her job in the printing industry said she is studying to be a lab animal caretaker and uses the library’s computers to do class work and work on her résumé, as well as look for jobs. One young woman reported finding a job as a crossing guard using the library’s computers. Other computer users described downloading medical forms or tracing family history using online genealogy resources provided by the library.

► *“I’m doing a job search. I can’t afford Internet when I’m not working.”*

The 32 people interviewed were computer users at six libraries in Wisconsin. About half of those interviewed (56 percent) own computers, with fewer having Internet access at home (37 percent). Those who have Internet access at home generally say the library’s connections are faster. Some come to the library for the quiet and to use other resources, as well as computers. One mother said it saves her from fighting with her children to use the computer. Most do not regard waits for computers as a problem. About one-quarter of those interviewed said they have had to wait to use a computer. When they do, it is usually less than 15 minutes and during the peak after school period or on weekends.

Almost everyone reported using e-mail for personal and business correspondence or as part of job searches. Social networking sites are more popular with younger adults, although some older adults also reported visiting them. Some, although not most, reported using government Web sites, the most popular being the IRS and Department of Motor Vehicles and some state government sites. Others reported using the library’s computers for a variety of “life maintenance” tasks, including shopping, banking, and keeping up with the news. As was found elsewhere, students, especially younger students, often said they use the library’s computers as much or more for fun as school.

As is typical, most people rate their experience using library computers as very satisfactory. Even those who made suggestions would often add a caveat, such as *“They can’t supply everything you would have on your personal computer.”* The most frequent suggestions were for increased speed and better word processing programs (for libraries that don’t have Microsoft Office). Several mentioned using computers at other libraries, especially if their library was not open on Sunday.

### *Sustaining Technology*

It was clear in all the libraries visited that the regional library systems played important roles in helping member libraries sustain technology access. In fact, an April 2008 “best practices review” conducted by the state audit bureau identified this: *“It is a best practice for regional library systems to assist their member libraries in maintaining current information technology, managing technology costs, and providing training in new technologies to ensure equal access to library services for all system patrons.”* Technology plans are created and

maintained at the regional level, for the most part.<sup>34</sup>

As was reported in Wisconsin focus groups, most libraries visited planned to replace computers every five years or did not follow a technology replacement plan. Libraries with five-year plans often upgrade RAM after three years. Several of the libraries visited had public access computers that were seven years old and/or were running operating systems dating back to 2000. One library staff member reported that he believed this was adequate because he had not heard patron complaints and that most patron use was geared to Web searching and office software, which do not require newer or more powerful computers. All libraries, however, reported upgrading RAM and operating systems on older computers.

One of the practical consequences of having older computers for the public is that one library has a policy limiting peripherals use. On these computers, the USB ports were located on the back of the desktop and patrons were jiggling or disconnecting other cables when using peripherals. Peripherals are allowed on newer computers with front-loaded USB ports. Most libraries reported they do not block peripherals, but many do not allow patron access to CD-ROM drives because patrons often inadvertently install software in this way. Most libraries do not allow software downloads from CD-ROM or the Web (such as iTunes or Open Office), unless they also have software (like DeepFreeze) that removes any changes to the operating system after a patron completes their Internet session.

### *Bandwidth*

Adequacy of bandwidth varied significantly by location. One large library with about 70 public Internet access computers has access speeds of 5 Mbps, which is considered adequate most times, except during the after school hours, 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. The library upgraded from 3 Mbps, which was not adequate most of the time, two years ago. A smaller library with eight public Internet access computers has 1.5 Mbps connectivity shared with staff computers and wireless. The library segregates the connection, but access speeds are consistently inadequate to meet needs. *“We’d have more computers if we have more bandwidth and more space (in the library building).”* Regional library system staff often work with libraries to shape and prioritize traffic on the network and may make adjustments to virus protection and firewalls to improve access speeds.

All of the libraries visited offer Wi-Fi access and report it is popular among patrons, including people who use it from the library parking lot after hours.

### *Staffing*

As noted during past site visits, the majority of library staff interviewed reported that they are mostly self-taught in their technology skills—learning from colleagues and on-the-job through trial and error. One library instituted and began enforcing technology competency requirements for all library staff, from library pages to the library director, about two years ago. *“Every job in the library involves technology,”* the director said.

There are four levels of competencies (available online at [www.ala.org/plinternetfunding](http://www.ala.org/plinternetfunding)) and the library offers in-house training to improve skills, on which staff members are then tested. The change was spurred, in part, when a library staff member sought help from IT staff to burn a CD for a patron. Subsequently, county government staff also recognized there was a deficiency in technology competencies among staff in many departments. The sheriff’s department asked for the library’s testing and training materials, and the library has provided some classes for county employees. The library also has begun cross-training across departments so as to provide better coverage.

Staff comfort levels with technology ranged from two to five (on a five-point scale), with most staff members considering themselves a four—meaning they felt capable to address most patron technology needs and troubleshoot technology before seeking assistance from an IT staff member. In at least one library

► *“Every job in the library involves technology.”*

34. Legislative Audit Bureau. “Best Practice Review: Public Library Services.” April 2008. Table 20 provides a list of technology support provided by regional library systems. <http://www.legis.wisconsin.gov/lab/reports/08-LibraryServicesFull.pdf>.

there was a disconnect, though, between the library director that felt training was adequate and library staff that indicated more staff training would be their top request for improving technology access in the library.

Most, if not all, the regional library systems offer classes and technology training for library staff, and libraries in one regional system often are able to attend training in a neighboring system. Several staff members interviewed mentioned the Project Play effort offered in collaboration by three of the regional systems and how much they enjoyed the experience and peer-sharing. One of the library staff described sharing new Internet services with patrons: *“They tell me, ‘I didn’t know I could do that!’ We are showing the tools of technology that can enhance their lives.”* Staff in two of the libraries visited mentioned using the system’s laptop lab to conduct training in the library, and several regional systems hosted “gadget days” to have library staff use MP3 players, digital cameras, e-book readers and more. Several library staff members reported they are blogging on the library Web site or participating in library Web site content development. Most library directors reported that technology skills are a consideration when making new hires.

### *Advocating Support for IT Services*

Most library directors felt that their trustees were advocates and that they had good support from local government officials. Staff at one of the libraries, however, said that “libraries are down the list” of local priorities, where many of the municipal buildings are aging and the community is fiscally conservative. *“More people will support emergency services than the library. A lot of older council members still see the library as just a place for books.”* The challenge of changing the perceptions of elected leaders was echoed in other interviews as well.

### **Trustees**

The research team interviewed seven trustees who expressed a wide range of interest and experience advocating for libraries and library technology. Most of the trustees had served on their library boards five or fewer years, but one board president had served 15 years. Reflecting the state requirement for representation for the local school district, about half of those interviewed were school administrators or board members. Schools also were the most frequently cited community partner and advocate. Other trustees were representatives from the city council, retired, stay-at-home parents or businesspeople. Nearly all had received orientation and/or a state handbook outlining their responsibilities, and most considered library advocacy an important part of their role as a trustee. As in Indiana, the Wisconsin trustees interviewed were enthusiastic supporters of technology and saw computer and Internet access as essential library services in meeting community needs.

Echoing comments from library directors in site visits and focus groups, most trustees felt library funding was adequate to strong at the local level. *“The city has never cut back library funding, but sometimes there have not been increases,”* one trustee said. Trustees at another library said funding was stable but the library was not a high priority. *“They meet with us, but when they leave, they focus on streets and sidewalks, maybe because they’re more tangible.”*

The majority of the trustees interviewed had participated in fundraising efforts, including spearheading capital campaigns, lobbying at the state level for library funding and helping to establish endowments and/or foundations. *“Our role is to assist our director and staff and our community in making sure that we are fulfilling the needs of the community. We need to take whatever steps we can to meet the needs of the community. Providing access to technology is one of those steps.”*

When asked what is most valued about the technology-based resources available in the library, trustees focused on two general themes: free computer and Internet access, and resources brokered and coordinated by the regional library systems. Trustees highlighted the free Internet access, particularly in relationship to a growing number of job-seekers, but also for continuing education and communication. The shared online catalogs and integrated library systems that allow library patrons to see and request materials across all the member libraries were considered very valuable. In fact, Wisconsin is the leader in interlibrary loans, with more than 1,100 loans per 1,000 residents—almost 10 times the national average of 149 loans per 1,000

residents.<sup>35</sup> The state also ranks eighth in the country for circulation per capita.<sup>36</sup>

*“We see technology as a tool that enables our communities to more effectively and efficiently use the library. It’s not just come and play—it’s helping people do what they need to do, whether that’s finding a book, doing research, looking for a job.”*

Perspectives on what would be the most important improvement that could be made in public access computing services varied, but additional computers was the most frequently cited request. “In this day and age, we could probably double the number, and they would be filled.” Trustees also mentioned the need for libraries to be open more hours so more families could access the library’s computers, more staff to assist patrons and teach classes, self-check to free up staff time, additional space for technology and other library services, and more outreach to raise awareness of the resources available in libraries.

*“The technology challenge for libraries is getting the message out about what can be done and why it’s important. The library needs to connect the public with what technology can do for them. People still think about books when they hear ‘library.’ The library needs a new identity.”*

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35. Institute of Museum and Library Services. *Public Libraries Survey: Fiscal Year 2006*. Washington, DC: IMLS, 2008. [http://harvester.census.gov/imls/pubs/pls/pub\\_detail.asp?id=121](http://harvester.census.gov/imls/pubs/pls/pub_detail.asp?id=121).

36. *Ibid.*