

Introduction

The [Idaho Commission for Libraries](#) (ICfL) publishes this detailed handbook to help individuals and groups interested in creating or enlarging public library districts.

Why are library districts so important? There are four basic reasons:

- 1. The creation of library districts is the *only* way in which all Idahoans can receive public library service.**¹ One of ICfL's goals is that *All Idahoans will have local access to library services*. As of 2017, 17.4% of Idahoans did not live within a legally established library service area. Most of these people live outside of incorporated areas or in communities so small that they could not provide adequate public library services by themselves. According to Idaho Code, the *only* way that residents living outside of incorporated areas can receive tax-supported public library services is to reside within a library district. Thus, in order for these people to receive public library services, library districts will need to be created. [[See Idaho Code section 33-2702\(6\).](#)]
- 2. The creation of library districts is the *only* way of providing adequate support for public library services in many parts of Idaho.** Even where public libraries do exist, some are so small that they cannot adequately meet the ever-increasing information needs of their communities. As libraries continue to redefine their mission around providing access to new technologies and people spaces, public libraries operating on very small tax bases simply cannot keep up. Recognizing this, the State Legislature established statutory *minimum* limits for new library districts. New districts must serve a minimum population of 1,501 and have a market value for assessment purposes adequate to raise a minimum of \$25,000 in tax revenue. [[See I.C. § 33-2703.](#)]

¹ "Public library service" means the provision of planned collections of materials and information services provided by a library established under the provisions of chapter 26 or 27, title 33, Idaho Code, and paid for primarily through tax support provided under these statutes. These services shall be provided at a facility, accessible to the public at regularly scheduled hours and set aside for this purpose. The services shall be governed by a citizen board appointed or elected for this purpose and shall be administered and operated by paid staff who have received appropriate training in library skills and management. The services shall meet standards established by the board of library commissioners.

3. **The creation of larger library districts can save taxpayers money.** Economies of scale are important in getting the most from each taxpayer dollar. The creation of larger units of service can decrease administrative costs and provide larger potential discounts for the purchase of library materials. The combination of several smaller districts into a larger district can save on administrative costs, such as bonding a treasurer. In addition, through centralized purchasing the new district may get larger discounts from vendors because of its increased buying power.
4. **Library districts provide a form of governance that helps assure a continuity of funding and services.** City libraries often face difficulties because they are in competition with other city departments for city tax dollars. Typically, when tax revenues are low, city councils may sacrifice funding for the library to fund “essential services” such as the police, the fire department, and streets. In addition, there is often confusion between the role of the city council and the library board in running the library. It is not uncommon for city councils to believe that they have the right to control library expenditures and to make personnel decisions about the library director even though these powers are granted statutorily to the city library board. This confusion about the role of the city council and the library board can lead to conflicts that can have a detrimental effect on library services.

Because of these issues, the Idaho Commission for Libraries maintains that the ideal governance structure for Idaho libraries is *autonomous library taxing districts having a population-financial base to provide excellent local service and to be responsible members of the state’s resource-sharing network.*

While each districting process will be unique, there are some legal and administrative components that are common to all districts. In addition, while political, social, and economic factors may vary from place to place, the experience of previous districting efforts — both those that were successful and those that failed — can provide information about successful strategies and potential helps and pitfalls in the districting process.

At the same time, as we began revising this *Handbook*, it became apparent that we could not anticipate every possible situation that might arise in the districting process. Districting is a legal process and involves work with county commissioners, the Idaho Commission for Libraries, the Idaho State Tax Commission, the county clerk, the county elections office, and the county assessor. Politically, however, it involves work with many other groups and individuals, including city councils, educational support groups, business groups, and taxpayer associations. Thus, this publication is not designed to tell you what to say or do in every situation. It will tell you about the legal process for creating a library district, and it will give you a general process to follow to work toward a successful districting election or consolidation.

You, the reader, will have the responsibility of adapting this to your own situation. In some cases, the process described in this handbook may be overly complex for your needs; in others, you may have to do even more in order to ensure a successful library districting project.

Four Methods of Library Districting

As you begin to read this *Handbook*, it is important to understand that there are four basic methods by which a library district can be created or expanded:

1. **Establishment.** In an establishment project, a library district is created where none existed before. There are three possibilities for establishment:
 - a. A district is created where no library currently exists (the new district may start its own library, or it may contract for services with another nearby library);
 - b. A city library becomes a district library, usually comprising the area within the city limits and an area around the city; or
 - c. Two or more city libraries work together to form a district consisting of their cities and the contiguous² untaxed area between and around the cities. All establishments are created by an election of the registered voters within the proposed district. [[See I.C. §§ 33-2702 through 33-2706.](#)]
2. **Annexation.** In an annexation, an existing library district adds contiguous unserved territory to the district. In this *Handbook*, we will use the term *annexation* only when a district is adding territory that is not served by another tax-supported library. Annexations can occur either through an election or through a petition. [[See I.C. §§ 33-2707 through 33-2708.](#)]
3. **Combination.** A library district may add a city that operates a city library, which chooses to become part of the district. In addition to having a different legal process, the combining of multiple library policies and procedures can complicate the administrative and political processes involved in this kind of project. [[See I.C. §§ 33-2702 through 33-2705 and 33-2709.](#)]
4. **Consolidation.** A consolidation occurs when two or more contiguous library districts combine to become one larger district. This can be carried out by a vote of the library boards and by an order of the county commissioners. An election is not necessary. [[See I.C. § 33-2711.](#)]

² Contiguous: having a common boundary or edge; abutting; touching; adjacent.

Each type of project will require a different level of involvement and will present different kinds of challenges. As we work through the districting process in the following pages, we will illustrate the differences in approach that each type of project may require.

The Role of the Idaho Commission for Libraries

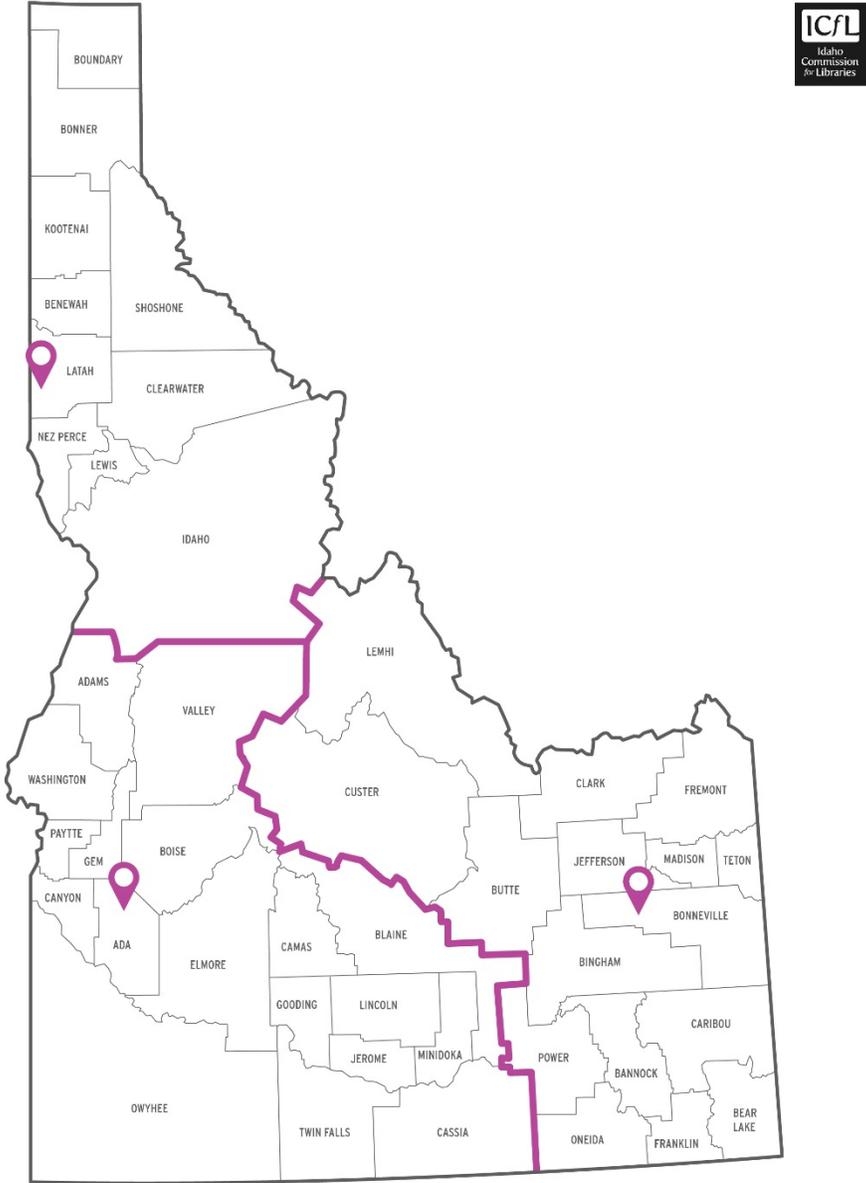
The Idaho Commission for Libraries supports efforts to create library districts. The ICfL can provide the following services to groups interested in library districting:

Consulting Services. For any districting project, the Idaho Commission for Libraries strongly encourages you to use the services of your [area field consultant](#), who will not only have the most current information about districting, but will also know of valuable resources in your area that you can use. For these reasons, your ICfL field consultant will be your most valuable resource in a public library districting effort.

There are three ICfL area field consultants:

- **Northern Idaho:**
 - Emily Sitz
 - 220 E. 5th Street, Suite 307, **Moscow**, Idaho 83843
 - 208-882-8882
 - In-state toll-free: 866-212-0646
- **South Central and Southwest Idaho:**
 - Kevin Tomlinson
 - 325 W. State Street, **Boise**, ID 83702
 - 208-334-2150
 - in-state toll-free: 800-458-3271
- **Eastern Idaho:**
 - Patrick Bodily
 - 1820 E. 17th Street, Suite 130, **Idaho Falls**, ID 83404
 - 208-525-7211
 - in-state toll-free: 208-548-6212

The following map shows which counties are served by each ICfL office.



Your Idaho Commission for Libraries area field consultant will help you work through most of the legal and political issues of creating a library district. ICfL area field consultants can also provide facilitation services for meetings which



will help develop a library district and assist the group in reaching consensus on which districting option will work best.

Information and Ready Reference. In addition to this handbook, ICfL produces fact sheets on an as-needed basis about changes in laws that affect districts, and an annual calendar for carrying out the procedures required for holding library district trustee elections. On the [Trustee landing page](#), the District Library Elections heading is on the right. The link to the calendar is just below that.

Here are two fact sheets that you might find especially helpful:

- The [Districting Process Map](#) lists the major desired results, activities, and stakeholders for each phase of the districting process.
- The [Library District Fact Sheet](#) answers some of the frequently asked questions about library districts.

Feel free to reproduce either or both fact sheets for use at community presentations and other districting activities.

For more information about districting services provided by the Idaho Commission for Libraries, please contact your ICfL area field consultant.

Additional Information

- §: Section.
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- Idaho Code: The laws enacted by the Idaho Legislature. These statutes are available online at <https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/>. Sometimes abbreviated I.C.
- Idaho Commission for Libraries: Idaho's state library agency. Effective July 1, 2006, the Idaho State Library changed its name to the Idaho Commission for Libraries and the Board of Trustees was renamed the Board of Library Commissioners. The ICfL is a library development agency that assists libraries to build the capacity to better serve their communities. For more information, visit <https://libraries.idaho.gov/>.
- Library District: An independent taxing district, governed by its own board of library trustees. A library district is a political subdivision of the state.

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