Phase 1: The Assessment Phase

This phase begins with an informal assessment of your local needs for public library service, and then a determination of whether creating a new library district might meet those needs.

There also needs to be some self-assessment of the *commitment* to the districting project. The creation of a new library district can be a time-consuming and difficult process. Individuals and groups need to determine whether they are willing to put in the time and effort needed to work through the process.

Even at this early stage of a districting project, there is help available. Throughout the Assessment Phase, and the whole districting process, you should feel free to call your Idaho Commission for Libraries area field consultant for help and ideas. He or she will be glad to help you understand the technical aspects of districting and can also provide you with help in your self-assessment of your commitment to the process.

At the end of the informal Assessment Phase, you will need to decide if creating a library district is something that you want to pursue.

- If you have determined that the local situation makes a successful districting effort unlikely, or if you determine that you are not ready to put in the time and effort needed to create a library district, then it is best to look for other alternatives to gain or improve library services.

- If you determine that districting is a possibility, and you are willing to do the work, it will be time to start a more formal planning process.

The Tasks of the Assessment Phase

There are nine tasks that need to be completed during the Assessment Phase of a library districting process.

- Task Number **One** is to determine whether there is a perceived need for a library district through informal conversations with members of the community.

- Task Number **Two** is to form an exploratory group of supporters to plan and carry out the Assessment Phase.

- Task Number **Three** is to create a written vision statement of what a library district could provide.

- Task Number **Four** is to assess potential costs for the district.

- Task Number **Five** is to make formal presentations about library districting to community organizations.

- Task Number **Six** is to identify and contact potential supporters of a library districting effort.

- Task Number **Seven** is to identify potential opponents of a library district.

- Task Number **Eight** is to create a formal committee to pursue the library districting process.

- Task Number **Nine** is to make preliminary decisions about what geographical area will be covered by the library district and about how the district will relate to any existing public library entities within or near this area.

While we have shown each task of the Assessment Phase as distinct, the tasks often overlap and may not be completed in this order. For example, if an existing library is considering a districting effort, Task Number Six may be completed (in the form of the library board) before any other task is begun. For the sake of clarity, however, we will treat each task separately, and in an order that is likely to be pursued if the districting effort is beginning with a community group rather than with an existing library board, since this would be the most complicated scenario.

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Reality Checks

In addition to the tasks listed above, throughout the process, the proponents of the library district will need to perform reality checks to determine whether it is still feasible to pursue the creation of a library district. These reality checks, while not a distinct task, need to be planned throughout the project. They need to be scheduled periodically during the Assessment Phase and, indeed, throughout the entire project.

When conducting a reality check, the list of tasks that should have been completed is reviewed. At each reality check meeting, the group needs to ask whether the tasks have been completed and whether the information gained indicates that a districting effort is likely to be successful. Documentation that has been developed as part of the process should be examined. In addition, people should be asked about their own energy level and enthusiasm for the project. It is especially important to check with library board members to determine their level of commitment.

If a reality check is positive, then it will encourage the group to continue with the project. If the reality check indicates that there are problems, then it may indicate that the group needs to change direction or slow down. At worst, it may indicate that a district library is not a possibility under present conditions. It is best to find this out now, during the Assessment Phase, before pouring a great deal of time, energy, and money into the effort. If the Assessment Phase makes it clear that a districting effort is likely to fail, the group should discuss other options for obtaining or improving public library services. These options can be explored with your ICfL area field consultant.

Task Number One: Conversations about Library Services

A library districting effort always begins because someone wants to improve the current public library service.

In some cases, public library service is non-existent. There is no public library that is easily accessible. People must drive many miles to get to a public library. They may have to purchase a non-resident card, because they are not being taxed for library service. [Remember: Public library service is *not* free.] Some public libraries simply do not have the tax base to provide adequate service, even when they serve everyone in their community. A districting effort that consolidates two or more libraries can often create better library service by eliminating duplication of services and taking advantage of economies of scale. Sometimes, a districting effort may occur because a city library board recognizes that library services cannot be adequately supported by the city or because there is confusion about the roles of the city council and the library board in governing the library. So, library districting begins with a desire to improve library service.

The community wants either to establish tax-supported library service or to improve existing library service. As participants talk about this issue, they find out that other people also want to have better library service. If a library already exists in the area, supporters may bring their concerns to the library staff or to the library board. This may cause the library board to begin looking at the creation of a library district as a possible way of meeting those needs. Or the people themselves may form an informal group with the idea of improving public library services.

At this point in the process, the people who are interested in improving library service need to be careful to assess public interest in library services. Just because you think of public library service as a public good does not mean that everyone does, particularly when tax dollars are involved. Libraries that do not promote themselves adequately cannot expect the community to understand the library's value as a center of lifelong learning and economic development.

Your informal conversations should now become more deliberate. Talk about library service with your friends or in the groups to which you belong. Do other people join in the conversation, or is the subject quickly changed? Typically, if there is a perceived need, informal contacts will lead to the telling of stories about the lack of access to library service or about inadequate service. They will also help you to expand your group, as people may volunteer to help.

If the proposed districting project involves the service area of an existing public library, it is also very important that decision-making bodies for the libraries involved be kept informed about the assessment process from the beginning. Regardless of who initiates the districting process, be sure to keep all the appropriate people informed. This includes city library directors and board members, the city council, and the district library's director and board. Objections or even indifference from any of these groups may be fatal to the process. It is vital, therefore, that these groups feel they have been fully informed about the districting process from the beginning. If possible, board members and library directors from existing libraries should be encouraged to take a leading role in districting efforts.

As you continue to talk about library services, it is also a good idea to find out about the history of library services in your area. If there is no library now, was there ever a library? If so, why did it close? If there is a library, is there anything in its history that would indicate problems for a districting effort? Was there ever a district in the area that was dissolved? Is there any history of antagonism between libraries in the area? Below is a brief history of library districting in Idaho.

Reality Check

"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. [See I.C. § 33-2702(6).]

A History of Library Districting in Idaho

1919		Pierce – Forms as a quasi-school-community library in Clearwater County.
1951	September 5	Snake River School-Community Library – Forms in Bingham County.
1952		Sugar Salem School-Community Library – Forms in Madison County.
1955	July 27	Grace – Forms with the same boundaries as Commissioners District 3 in Caribou County.
	September 8	Council Valley – Forms with the same boundaries as School District 13 in Adams County.
1956	November 6	Boundary County – Forms with the same boundaries as Boundary County.
1958	March 11	Oneida County – Forms with the same boundaries as Oneida County.
	May 3	Latah County – Forms with the same boundaries as Latah County, excepting the city of Moscow.
	July 29	Portneuf – Forms with the same boundaries as School District 25 in Bannock County, excepting the city of Pocatello.
	August 12	Madison – Forms with the same boundaries as Madison County, excepting Sugar-Salem School Community Library District.
	August 12	Nez Perce County – Forms with the same boundaries as Nez Perce county, excepting the city of Lewiston.

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	September 5	Bear Lake County – Forms with the same boundaries as Bear Lake County.
1962	May 22	Lewis County – Forms with the same boundaries as Lewis County.
	June 5	Lost River Community – Forms with the same boundaries as Butte County.
1964	May 11	Kuna School Library – Forms in southwest Ada County.
1965	April 12	Boise Basin – Forms in the eastern portion of Boise County.
1966	January 24	Valley of the Tetons – Forms in the southern portion of Teton County. The remainder of the county joins the district on October 13, 1976.
	August 22	Midvale – Forms with the same boundaries as School District 433 in Washington County.
	November 8	Benewah County – Forms with the same boundaries as Benewah County, excepting St. Maries and Plummer.
	November 8	Clearwater County – Forms with the same boundaries as Clearwater County, excepting Pierce District and Elk River School-Community Library.
	November 16	South Bannock – Forms with the same boundaries as Bannock County, excepting the city of Pocatello and Portneuf District.
	December 6	Freemont County – Forms with the same boundaries as Freemont County, excepting Ashton and St. Anthony.
1967	July 10	Richfield – Forms in the northern portion of Lincoln County.

	November 27	Clarkia – Forms in the southwestern corner of Shoshone County.
1968	December 9	Little Wood River – Forms in the eastern portion of Blaine County.
	December 17	Eagle – Forms with the same boundaries as the Eagle Water and Fire District in Ada County. Dissolves and is absorbed by the city of Eagle on May 31, 1974.
1969	February 10	Minidoka – Forms in the eastern portion of Minidoka County. Dissolved on May 13, 1986.
1971	December 13	Horseshoe Bend – Forms in the southwestern portion of Boise County.
1972	September 13	Mackay – Forms in the southwestern portion of Custer County.
	October 19	Camas County – Forms with the same boundaries as Camas County.
	November 7	Franklin County – Forms with the same boundaries as Franklin County, excepting Preston.
1973	January 8	Jefferson County – Forms in a portion of Jefferson County, excepting Ririe, Rigby, Lewisville, and Roberts.
	August 1	Oakley – Forms in the southwestern portion of Cassia County.
	November 13	Cambridge – Forms with the same boundaries as the Cambridge School District in Washington County.
	December 1	Eastern Bonner – Forms in the eastern two-thirds of Bonner County, excepting Sandpoint. Sandpoint dissolves and is

		absorbed by the district on December 19, 1983.
1974	May 31	Eagle – Dissolves and is absorbed by the city of Eagle.
	July 1	Rockland School-Community Library – forms in Power County.
	August 27	Meridian – Forms in the west-central portion of Ada County, excepting the city of Meridian. The city of Meridian joins the district on August 26, 1975.
	December 16	Eastern Owyhee – Forms with boundaries similar to those of the Grandview School District in Owyhee County.
	December 16	Northside – Forms in an area north of Wallace in Shoshone County. Dissolves in 1980.
1975	August 26	Meridian – The city of Meridian joins the Meridian District.
	October 28	Hayden Lake – Forms in an area north of Coeur d'Alene in Kootenai County. Dissolves into the Community Free Library District (CLFD) on September 30, 1986.
	December 15	Pinehurst-Kingston – Forms in the western portion of Shoshone County.
1976	March 16	Kootenai County – Forms with the same boundaries as Kootenai County, excepting Coeur d'Alene, Post Falls, Harrison, Rathdrum, Athol, Spirit Lake, and Hayden Lake District. The city of Rathdrum joins the district on October 1, 1982. Dissolves into CFLD on September 30, 1986.
	October 13	Valley of the Tetons – The remainder of Teton County joins the district.
	December 13	Clark County – Forms with the same boundaries as Clark

		County.
1977	November 15	Wilder – Forms with the same boundaries as the Wilder School District in Canyon County.
1978	July 6	American Falls – Forms with the same boundaries as Power County, excepting the Boise Basin and Horseshoe Bend districts.
	November 13	Garden Valley – Forms in the remainder of Ada County, excepting Boise Basin and Horseshoe Bend districts.
1979	December 10	Bruneau – Forms in the eastern quarter of Owyhee County.
1980		Northside – Dissolves.
	May 12	Bonneville County – Forms with the same boundaries as Bonneville County, excepting the city of Idaho Falls.
	May 15	Ola – Forms in the area surrounding Ola in Gem County.
1982	October 1	Kootenai County – The city of Rathdrum joins the district.
1983	October 17	Lizard Butte – Forms in and around the city of Marsing in Owyhee and Canyon Counties.
	December 19	East Bonner – Sandpoint dissolves and is absorbed.
1984	August 30	Ada County – Forms from the remainder of Ada County, excepting Boise, Eagle, Garden City, Meridian District, and Kuna School-Community Library District.
1985	September 19	Nampa Suburban – Forms in the area surrounding the city of Nampa. Dissolves on July 1, 1986.

	October 1	Consolidated Free Library District – Forms with the same boundaries as Kootenai County, excepting Coeur d'Alene, Harrison, and Post Falls.
1986	May 6	Jefferson County – The Grant area is added to the district.
	May 13	Minidoka – Dissolves.
	May 20	Hansen – The Hansen City Library dissolves into a district with the same boundaries as the school district in Twin Falls County.
	July 1	Nampa Suburban – Dissolves.
	September 30	Hayden Lake – Dissolves into CFLD.
	September 30	Kootenai County – Dissolves into CFLD.
	November 4	Unsuccessful attempt to add the city of Priest River and the southwestern part of Bonner County to the East Bonner District.
1991	December 17	Nez Perce Free Library District and Lewis County Free Library District consolidate to form the Nez Perce-Lewis County Libraries.
1992	November 3	North Bingham Library District – City of Shelley dissolves into a district with the combined boundaries of the Firth and Shelley school districts.
1993	November 2	Latah County – City of Moscow joins the district after many years of operating jointly by contract.
	November 9	Unsuccessful attempt to form Gem District, with the same boundaries as Gem County, excepting the city of Kellogg and

		the Clarkia District.
1994	May 24	Second unsuccessful attempt to form a district in Shoshone County.
	November	Harrison Library – Joins the Kootenai County Libraries.
1996	May	Pinehurst-Kingston – Consolidate with Kootenai County Libraries and the Salmon Public Library to form the Lemhi County District Library.
1998	May	Stanley District – Forms in Custer County.
	May	Nez Perce-Lewis Counties Library District – Annexation of Kooskia in northern Idaho County. The district's name changes from the Nez Perce-Lewis Counties Library District to the Prairie River Library District.
1999	May	Aberdeen Library District – Is established.
	August	Meadows Valley Library District – Is established in New Meadows.
	November	Prairie River District – Annexation of Kamiah.
	November	Priest Lake Library District – Is established.
2000	May	Aberdeen Library District – Is established.
2002	November	Freemont County Consolidation – Ashton and St. Anthony.
2003	November	West Bonner Library District – Annexation.
2017	November 27	Donnelly Public Library District – Forms in Valley County, using the same boundaries as the fire district, about 1/3 of the

		county.
2018	May 15	Gooding Library District – Forms using the same boundaries as the fire district and including the city of Gooding.

If you have any additional information for this history, or would like to submit corrections, additions, or deletions, please let us know.

Task Number Two: The Exploratory Group

At this point, then, the first decision is made. A group of people, rather than an individual, needs to take a more deliberate approach toward assessment. In this handbook, we will call this initial group *the exploratory group*. If an existing library board is involved in the effort, it should take on *some* of this role, but it is important that other community members also be involved. If no library board exists in the districting area, this group may be an informal group, or the districting project may be taken on by some existing community organization.

The exploratory group will need a public face, someone respected in the community with the leadership skills and social connections to help get a districting project off the ground. All members of the exploratory group, including its leader, should be residents of the proposed district. Only residents of the proposed library district will be able to vote to approve the formation of the district. There is no specific number of people required to form an exploratory group. The important thing is that they all have the time and the interest to follow through with the tasks of the Assessment Phase.

The exploratory group will do much of the work of the Assessment Phase of the districting effort. One of their first activities should be to create a plan and a timeline for carrying out this part of the project. The plan does not have to be detailed. It simply needs to list the tasks to be done and an approximate date by which the tasks should be completed. We have prepared an [Assessment Phase Checklist](#) to help you complete the Assessment Phase tasks. This checklist can be used as is or it can be adapted to create your own checklist.

Task Number Three: Creating a Vision

One of the first tasks of the exploratory group will be to create a vision statement for the proposed library district. When you begin talking about a library district, you begin with a desire for better library services, but as you move further into the assessment process — particularly before you begin making formal presentations to groups — this is the time when you develop a more specific vision of what good public library services will look like for your community. Your vision statement does not have to look like any other community's vision statement. The important thing is for your vision statement to reflect the needs and values of your community.

The vision statement tells the reader of the organization's desired end-state. This one-sentence statement describes the clear and inspirational long-term desired change resulting from the work of the proposed library district. Be concise.

Some examples of public library vision statements:

- Austin Public Library [Texas]: "The Austin Public Library is key to making Austin a dynamic creative center and the most livable city in the county." [21 words]

- Berkeley Public Library [Illinois]: "The Berkeley Public Library will foster the spirit of exploration, lifelong learning, the joy of reading, and the pursuit of information and knowledge for all ages and cultures." [28 words]

- Madison Public Library [Wisconsin]: "Madison Public Library: Your place to learn, share, and create." [10 words]

- Pima County Public Library [Arizona]: "Our Vision is an educated, connected community of readers, learners, doers, and dreamers." [13 words]

- Providence Public Library [Rhode Island]: "PPL is a library re-imagined. Our library is a place where tradition and innovation intersect – an open and collaborative center of teaching and learning where people can connect, experience, create and achieve. Approachable and inclusive, PPL is committed to making a meaningful difference in the lives of Rhode Islanders and everyone we serve." [53 words]

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In some communities, the library will emphasize services to children; in others, services to retired adults. Some communities may plan for services for businesses or farmers. One community may simply choose to highlight access to a good public library with more access to recreational reading. Another may stress improved services in an existing library, which, once the district has formed, will become a branch of a larger system. In still others, emphasis may be on a makerspace or books-by-mail service. The community may express a desire for access to information in various formats, such as streaming video and music, subscription databases, more eBooks, or faster broadband Internet access.

How can you begin to develop a vision of what a district library might mean for your community? One excellent way is to visit libraries in similar communities and to talk to librarians and library board members. These field trips will make you aware of what is possible in similar situations.

At this point, you should also be in contact with your Idaho Commission for Libraries area field consultant for your part of the state. The Idaho Commission for Libraries works across the state to support development, so your consultant can provide examples of libraries across the state or even the nation. This wider vision will be central to your effort.

Reality Check

As access to information becomes an increasingly important commodity in our society, people who are unserved by a tax-funded library will be left behind educationally and economically. It is extremely important that communities make decisions about library services from this perspective.

You may also want to hold public meetings, where you can ask people to identify what kinds of services they would like to have from a new library district. One valuable

exercise is to ask people to brainstorm what library services they would like to have within the next 10 years. Services can then be prioritized, and the vision statement written on the priorities of the community.

Once this information about the possibilities for library service has been collected, the exploratory group should write a vision statement. This statement should be focused on the general and should not promise specific services. For example, a vision statement could include statements such as:

- Children in our community will have easy access to information they need for their educational and recreational activities.

- The library will promote lifelong learning opportunities for the entire community.

- Adults will have access to information that will help them in their homes and business enterprises.

- Delivery systems for library resources will make these resources accessible to all people in the community.

- Through the library district, our community members will access data from around the world.

Statements that include desired services, stated as possibilities, should be saved for later, when the new district is planning its budget and plan of service, but not included in the vision statement. For example:

- To reach people throughout the service area, the district library may use non-traditional delivery systems, such as Ask-A-Librarian or books-by-mail.

- The district library collection will contain materials in a variety of formats, including print, eBooks, streaming media, and online subscription databases.

- The library will serve as a gateway to the world, not only through the Internet, but through interlibrary loan and resource sharing with other libraries and library networks.

- The library will provide maker training and tools.

- We will have an agreement with the _____ Public Library so that our patrons can use its services without purchasing a non-resident card.

The distribution of the vision statement will probably be the first truly "public" act of the group that is leading the districting effort. If the effort is coming from a new group, the vision statement should be sent to media outlets along with a story about the group and its interest in assessing the need for a library district. If a library board is leading the districting effort, the statement can be officially adopted by the board and then sent to the local paper along with a story about the assessment process that the group is conducting. In either case, the story should include a means of contacting the group for comments.

Some information to share with your community about the importance of libraries:

- Lee Rainie, director of internet and technology research at the Pew Research Center, discussed the Center's latest research at the Public Library Association's 2018 meeting. He noted that libraries are trusted and expected to help people get the information and services they want. He also argued there are new hopes (and demands) for libraries to help people navigate an information environment filled with "fake news" and "weaponized narratives." He presented the Center's latest findings about how librarians can distinguish between the "information engaged" and the "information wary" patrons: http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/04/09/the-information-needs-of-citizens-where-libraries-fit-in/.

- Most Americans – Especially Millennials – say libraries can help them find reliable, trustworthy information: http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/30/most-americans-especially-millennials-say-libraries-can-help-them-find-reliable-trustworthy-information/.

- Social Role of the Library: http://www.ala.org/research/librariesmatter/taxonomy/term/143

- A Look at Some Facts and Figures: http://libraries.idaho.gov/files/MFB_FactsFigures_2016_0.pdf

Writing Your Own Vision Statement:

- 30 Example Vision Statements: https://topnonprofits.com/examples/vision-statements/

- Guide to Creating Mission & Vision Statements: https://topnonprofits.com/vision-mission/

Task Number Four: Cost Assessments

At this early stage, it is not possible to give an accurate operational cost estimate of library services for your area. However, you should be able to give a range of costs. State law requires that a new district be able to raise a minimum of $25,000 in tax revenue for library services. This figure should be treated as the *absolute minimum* for costs. The maximum levy for a library district's operational budget is 0.06% of market value for assessment purposes. The operations budget, then, will fall somewhere between these two figures.

A somewhat more accurate figure may be calculated by examining the statistics for libraries serving similar size populations. Statistics for Idaho public libraries are published annually by the Idaho Commission for Libraries at https://libraries.idaho.gov/idaho-library-statistics/. Average operational expenditures *per capita* are calculated for libraries in various size categories. By multiplying this *per capita* figure by the population to be served by the proposed district, the exploratory group can get a ballpark figure of what the typical district of that size spends for services.

A better approach, however, would be to ask your area field consultant at the Idaho Commission for Libraries for the names of library districts in your area that he or she believes are providing a good level of service. Using the budget figures from such districts to figure a *per capita* support level will give you the amount you will need to provide the best possible services for your community.

A note of caution on discussing costs. At this point in the process, it is difficult to give accurate figures on the operational costs for a new district. Without determining the specific services to be provided or the specific boundaries and governance structure for the district, figures at best will be inexact. *When discussing operational costs, it is wise to give a range of costs rather than a specific cost.* If the supporters do mention a specific figure, it is likely that people will assume that this will be the figure that will have to be raised. Later in the Planning Phase of the districting process, it will be possible to provide much more accurate figures to the public.

If the new district will have to purchase, build, or extensively remodel a building to provide district services, the exploratory group will need to include these costs in their total cost estimate as capital costs. Capital costs are the costs of buying or building a library facility or other large costs that may be raised through special assessments, such as bond issues or a plant facility reserve fund. For more on that topic, see I.C. § 33-2729:

https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title33/T33CH27/SECT33-2729. If it appears that there will be major capital costs in beginning the library district, these costs should be stated forthrightly and openly in any estimate of the district's total cost. (The opponents of the districting effort will certainly include these costs in their estimates of the total cost of the district.)

The issue of costs is usually one of the most difficult aspects of promoting a new library district. No one is opposed to public libraries, *per se*. But many people do not like the idea of taxes. It is best when discussing the costs of a library district to be open and aboveboard about the costs and about how money will be raised through property taxes. At the same time, it is also useful to point out how economical library service is. Most Idaho public libraries give their users access to thousands of books at a cost of less than one hardback book in typical annual *per capita* tax charges.

There are many tax calculators on the Web, including:

https://www.calculatorsoup.com/calculators/financial/property-tax-calculator.php.

An example of how much the proposed library district will cost a homeowner.

A property with an initially assessed value of $225,000 is taxed at 0.06% per year (the maximum levy rate for a library district) and the assessed value is automatically increased by 2% per year.

Tax Year	Assessment Value	Property Tax
2018	$225,000	$135.00
2019	$229,500	$137.70
2020	$234,090	$140.45
2021	$238,772	$143.26
Total Taxes		**$556.41**

Task Number Five: Presenting the Idea to the Community

Once your exploratory group has determined informally that there is an interest in improved library service, and you have created a vision statement of what that service would be like, and you have calculated a ballpark range of the costs, it is time to begin approaching groups in the community. Ask to be given time at the business meetings of service clubs (Kiwanis, Rotary International, Federated Women's Club, for example) and educational organizations (school board, parent-teacher organization). Tell these groups what you have been thinking about. Present your vision, but also be honest about the costs. Make sure that you talk about tax-supported library service. Try to take at least two people to each group: one to speak and one to record what is said. After the meeting, look at the recorded questions and comments. Count the ones that seem positive and the ones that seem negative. If you have many positive comments and few negative, then creating a library district could be a real possibility. A worksheet for analyzing group and individual meetings has been provided: Group / Individual Meeting Analysis Form.

As you continue through the Assessment Phase and into the Planning Phase, you will need to continue to meet with groups. By beginning with those who are likely to be the most positive, you will not only build your own confidence, but you will have a quick reality check on the prospects of success. If a local PTO is not supportive, for example, your chances of a successful districting project are not very good.

If you find support where it should be, the next step is to see if there is support in less likely places. You will do this in the same way: by talking to organizations that do not represent educational or community improvement interests. As you continue in the process, you will not only learn whether there is adequate support to proceed, but you will also begin to identify the supporters of, as well as the opponents to, the effort.

Task Number Six: Identifying Supporters

General Supporters.

As you work through the Needs Assessment and Visioning tasks, individuals will begin to identify themselves as supporters of the districting effort. It is important that the names, addresses, e-mail addresses, and telephone numbers of these people be kept in a spreadsheet or database so that they can be searched by these fields.

One aspect of the needs assessment should also be to determine whether you will have adequate volunteer help to carry out the effort. As you meet with groups that are likely to be supportive, you can ask for potential volunteers to sign up. If a library already exists, you can also put a sign-up sheet at the library, along with a sign on the door to notify library users that you are looking for volunteers. If you get a good number of volunteers, that is a sign that there will be support in the community. If, however, there are few people who are willing to sign up as potential volunteers, this may signal that there is inadequate community support to proceed.

When asking for potential volunteers to sign up, it would be wise to ask for more than just name and contact information. You may want to ask volunteers if they have any specialized skills that would be useful in the districting effort. Such skills might include digital skills, creative writing, graphic arts, public speaking, public relations, or organizational skills. A sign-up sheet has been provided: Volunteer Sign-up.

Reality Check

Placing a voluntary sign-up sheet at the library or other location, or using an online voluntary sign-up method, is the legal way to recruit volunteers for the districting effort. A public library in Idaho is prohibited by I.C. §§ 74-120(1)(a) and (b) from distributing or selling a list of potential volunteers from its patron database without first securing the permission of all those on the list. See https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title74/T74CH1/SECT74-120/.

Opinion-Leader Supporters.

In addition to seeking general supporters, you should also identify community opinion leaders who you think would be supportive. In general, the community leaders who will be most likely to support a districting effort will be those who tend to support other educational and governmental services. They are people who tend to look to the future of the community as well as to the present, and who are generally considered to be interested in new ideas and opportunities. These people should be contacted individually.

Opinion-leader supporters will be drawn from the following groups:

- *political leaders*, such as city council members, county commissioners, school board members, and legislators;

- *business leaders*, such as the managers of leading companies, heads of the chambers of commerce, bankers, and leading representatives from farm, mining, or timber industry associations;

- *media leaders*, such as newspaper editors and publishers and the station managers of local radio and television stations;

- *educational leaders*, such as school superintendents, presidents of the local teachers' association;

- *social leaders*, such as religious leaders, heads of important community groups, and service organization presidents. Other social leaders may not hold any official position in the community, but because of their family history in the community or their wealth, they are generally seen as a powerful force in community life.

The spouses of these leaders may also become important opinion-leader supporters in a districting effort.

The effort to find opinion-leader supporters should begin by listing all the important opinion leaders in your community. These people should be listed by name. After your group has created this list, you can make an initial assessment of whether each person is likely to support the project, oppose the project, or be neutral. A worksheet has been provided: Opinion Leaders.

You then begin contacting those you believe likely to be supportive, and then those you feel will probably be neutral. This should be done individually and by appointment. Try to take two people to each meeting. Take a copy of the vision statement with you. After explaining what you are considering, ask the person whether he or she would be likely to support such an effort. Assure him or her that all comments will be kept confidential if that seems necessary. Take notes at the meeting, if participants are comfortable with that.

After the meeting, compare notes. If the person being interviewed did not want you to take notes, write down your impressions of the meeting as soon as possible after the meeting, then compare your impressions. (However, make sure that you honor any commitment that you have made to keep information confidential!) After comparing notes, assess the person's support level:

- Very Supportive: Will speak for the effort and will actively work for it.

- Supportive: Will speak for the effort, but not work for it.

- Neutral: Will not speak for or against the effort.

- Opposed: Will speak against the effort.

- Very Opposed: Will speak against the effort and actively work against it.

The Group / Individual Meeting Analysis Form can help you perform this analysis.

If it appears that there will be good support from your community's opinion leaders, then this should encourage you to continue with the effort.

Task Number Seven: Identifying Opponents

While you are identifying the potential supporters for the districting project, be sure to identify potential opponents as well. When identifying opponents, however, it is essential to look for those opponents who are community opinion leaders or who represent organized groups. Community leaders who are most likely to oppose a districting effort are those who oppose taxes and tax-supported services in general. They may do this out of concern about their own taxes or they may oppose taxes on principle.

Whether you should contact opinion leaders who you believe will oppose the districting effort at this point in the process is a political decision that will depend to a large extent on what you know about the person and the community. In some cases, an opinion leader may become less opposed to a project if contacted. He or she may see the contact as a sign of respect, and thus a failure to contact may be a sign of disrespect. On the other hand, if you contact people who tell you that they oppose the project and you continue to work on it, they may see this as a sign that you disregarded their opinion.

Contacting opponents may also give them more time to organize against a districting effort. Then again, some people who you think will oppose the effort may surprise you. Public libraries carry a tremendous amount of good will in a democracy. People who do not support other forms of tax-supported services often are very favorable to public libraries.

If you decide to discuss the districting project with opinion leaders who you expect to oppose the effort, you can use the same process as for interviewing those who you expect to be supportive or neutral. Remember that you are simply seeking information. Do not argue with those who say they are opposed to a library district but offer to give them more information if they wish it.

If you find that the opposition to the project is weak, this is an indication that the project is probably viable, and you will probably want to proceed.

Task Number Eight: The Working Group:
Getting Formal Buy-in

If the exploratory group has found that there appears to be adequate community interest and support for forming a library district, the next step is to form *a working group*. The working group will be that group of people who will do the work necessary to create a library district. If an existing public library is going to become part of the new district, it is essential that at least one of the five board members make a strong commitment to the project and that no board members oppose it. **This cannot be stressed strongly enough: If substantial support is not available from the existing library board, the districting project will almost certainly fail**. Other community members should also be included in the working group. If there is no existing library to take the lead, the working group will probably be made up of interested community members, many of whom served in the exploratory group.

It is also essential that the library director and other staff support the project. Staff members often fear that districting may threaten their employment or their employment benefits. The working group needs to be honest with the staff on these points. In some cases, districting will have little effect on the continued employment or terms of employment of the staff. In other cases, districting may have very serious implications for the staff. This is particularly true when a city library becomes a part of a new district or when library districts consolidate.

At this point in the project, it is too early to determine exactly how the districting process will affect staff members, but the exploratory group needs to deal with the staff in good faith. If it is anticipated that the districting process will make major changes in the conditions of employment, this needs to be stated up-front. Staff members need to be assured that their concerns will be considered as the districting process moves forward. Including staff representatives in the working group is one way to do this, but staff members who serve on this group should be asked to be open-minded about the process.

Potential working group members need to be educated about the commitment they are making, before they are asked to join the group. Since most districting projects will involve running an election, and therefore will entail a great deal of work, it is important that working group members go into the process with their eyes open. One way that this can be done is to hold a meeting with all potential members of this group. Your Idaho Commission for Libraries area field consultant should be asked to talk about the

districting process and the many steps that need to be taken. It would also be valuable to have someone from a districting project from another area talk to the group. They can give your potential members a more accurate picture of the commitments that must be made for a districting project to be successful.

People should be asked to make a commitment at the end of the meeting. The formation of a good working group, which includes some of the community's opinion leaders, is another sign that a districting project could be successful.

Task Number Nine: Preliminary Districting Decisions

The working group will continue to carry out the tasks of the exploratory committee outlined above, and they will also begin to make preliminary decisions about what the proposed library district will be like.

The working group should look at every possible option for providing service for its community. In general, larger districts can provide better library services since they will have a stronger financial base and there will be less duplication of services. Even if a community is located far from an existing district, it might be possible for that district to provide better service through a branch, a bookmobile, or books-by-mail than through an independent stand-alone library.

Recognizing this, I.C. § 33-2703 states that **a new library district is required to serve a minimum of 1,501 people and to be able to raise a minimum of $25,000 in tax levies**. The working group will need to check whether the population and assessed valuation within any proposed district option meets these minimum requirements. The county clerk can usually give the group information about the population and the assessed value of a proposed district option. If the proposed districting option does not meet the minimum requirements, the working group will need to explore other options, such as increasing the boundaries or asking an existing library district to annex the proposed territory.

See https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title33/T33CH27/SECT33-2703/.

If the territory surrounds or is contiguous to the service area of other public libraries (even if they are volunteer libraries), the working group will also need to confer with those library boards. Early in the process, most boards will not be willing to commit to major changes in their operations. However, they may be willing, even eager, to examine their possible options in working with a new district. Indeed, such a library board may even be willing to take a leading role in a project once they know that they have determined that a new district may benefit them.

The working group should look at a few social and geographical patterns that might affect the new district. One method that can help in this process is mapping. The process begins with a high-quality map of the county or counties involved. On this map, cities, schools, libraries, and library branches should be marked.

Using a topographical map and a road map, the working group should think about patterns of travel within and outside of the potential district. Look at the natural barriers in your area — geographical features such as mountains, rivers, and deserts. Then look at the transportation patterns using the road map. What places are easy to get to? What places are more difficult to reach? Are some parts of the potential district more readily connected to areas outside the potential district than to other parts of the potential district?

A Geographical Analysis worksheet has been prepared to help with this task.

A tax-code map of the county or counties that shows the school district boundaries and other special taxing district boundaries can then be used to show existing taxing district boundaries. District boundaries are usually set for a reason. Current district patterns, therefore, may provide useful information about how best to set boundaries for a new district. (These district lines may also be used later in the process to help create a legal description of the proposed district.) *A tax-code map that shows all the taxing districts can be obtained from the county assessor.*

> You can find office hours and contact information for your county's assessor(s) by searching the Member Directory of the Idaho Association of Counties:
> http://idcounties.org/member-directory/.
>
> Idaho State Tax Commission maps are available at
> https://tax.idaho.gov/gis/parcelmaps.cfm.
>
> ArcGIS Web Application
> https://istc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html

This map illustrates Payette County, its waterways, roads, and city boundaries. The cities of New Plymouth and Payette each operate a city library. There is no district library service in Payette county, so most of the county has no prepaid access to tax-funded library service.
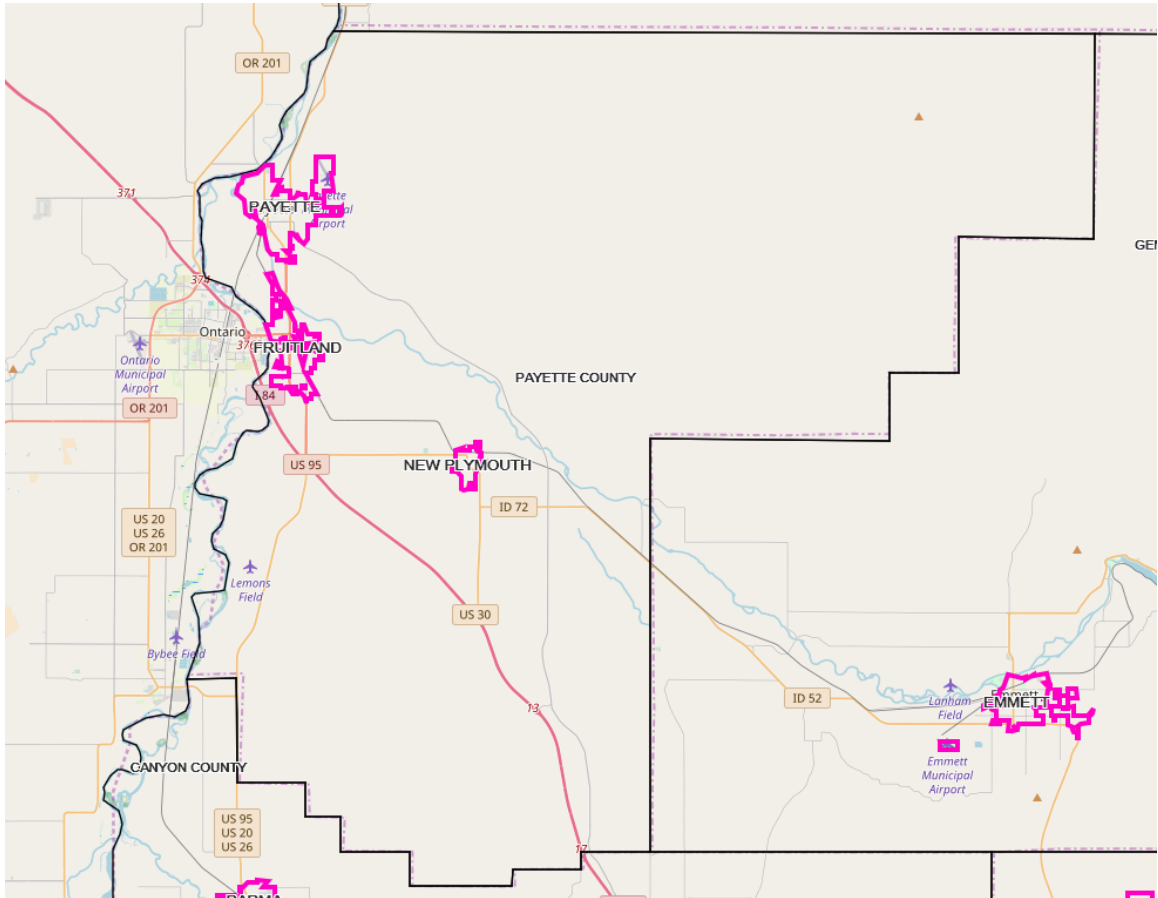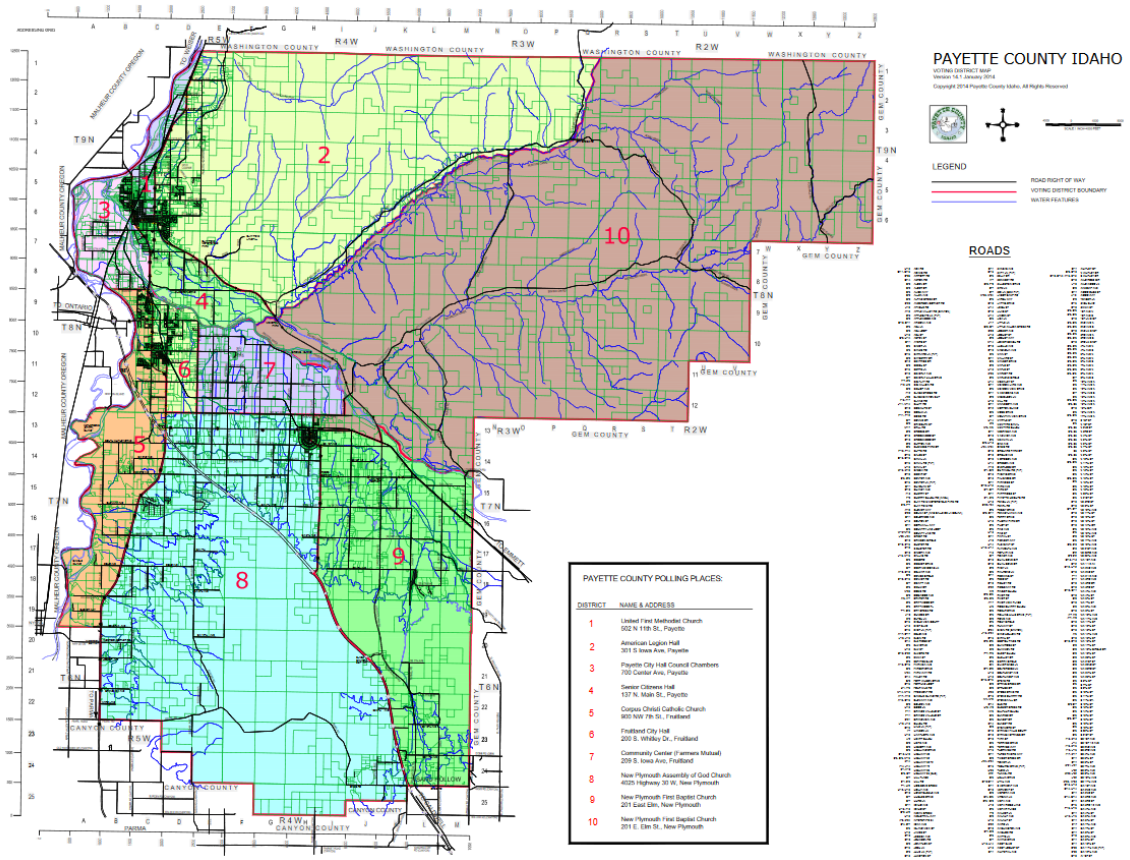

Figure 1.1 Payette County

Another map that should be examined is a voting precinct map. Older taxing district boundaries often do not coincide with precinct boundaries, as precinct boundaries usually change every ten years. However, if the boundaries are close, it might be wiser to follow the precinct boundaries. It will be easier to run an election if the boundaries of the district coincide with precinct boundaries. Because of this, following precinct boundaries will often help your relationship with the county that will be responsible for running the election.

Figure 1.2 Voting Precinct Map of Payette County

Once a mapping of the potential district area has been completed, the working group can begin evaluating the various alternative districts. A Districting Option Assessment Form for analyzing this information has been prepared for you.

Once the working group has gathered and analyzed this information, they need to think about what it will mean for a districting project. Different social and economic patterns may make one form of districting project preferable to another. Based on the information that they have gathered, they can look at the various options open to them to form or become part of a library district. As stated in the Introduction to this *Handbook*, there are essentially four methods for creating or expanding a library district: (1) establishment; (2) annexation; (3) combination; and (4) consolidation. Within these four methods, there are essentially nine ways in which a new library district can be

formed. Each of these district configurations has advantages and disadvantages. Unless otherwise noted, each requires that an election be held to form or expand the district.

a) **Establishment**. Territory that contains no library can be formed into a library district. The new library district can set up its own library and provide services itself. *Advantages of this method are that it gives the new district a great deal of control over the services it will provide. A disadvantage is that setting up a brand-new library takes a tremendous amount of work, and if there are other libraries in the area, there may be difficulties in working out reciprocal arrangements between the new library and those that already exist.* **The election process for this alternative is described in I.C. §§ 33-2704 through 33-2705**: https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title33/T33CH27/.

b) **Establishment to purchase library service from another library**. Territory that contains no library can be formed into a library district. The new district does not provide services itself, but contracts with an existing library to provide services to its residents. *The advantage of this system is that the new district does not have to set up its own library. The disadvantage is that the district must negotiate a contract with the library that provides services. This gives it less control over the services that it will provide and at times there may be major conflicts between the district and the contracting library.* **The election process for this alternative is described in I.C. §§ 33-2704 through 33-2705**: https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title33/T33CH27/.

c) **Establishment including an existing city library**. Territory that includes one existing city library can be formed into a district that serves the city and surrounding territory. *The advantage of this option is that the services of the district are controlled by the district and the district does not have to set up a new library. The disadvantages are that "rural" residents may feel that the city controls all the services, and that the district is just a way of making rural residents pay for city services.* **The election process for this alternative is described in I.C. §§ 33-2704 through 33-2705**: https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title33/T33CH27/.

d) **Establishment/Combination including multiple city libraries**. Territory that includes two or more city libraries can be formed into a district that includes untaxed territory that connects the cities together. *The advantage of this option is that the services of the district are controlled by the district and the district does not have to set up a new library. The disadvantage is that much work will be required to coordinate the services between the library branches and to assure*

that different communities feel that they are treated fairly. **The election process for this alternative is described in I.C. §§ 33-2704 through 33-2705**: https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title33/T33CH27/.

e) **Annexation of area with no library service**. An existing district library can annex untaxed territory which is contiguous to it and which contains no other public library. *The advantage of this option is that it allows an existing district to expand its service area and its services without setting up a new administrative structure. The disadvantage is that work will have to be done to make sure that the new area is adequately served, which may involve creating new services or even setting up a branch library.* **The election process is described in I.C. § 33-2707:** https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title33/T33CH27/SECT33-2707/**; a petition process alternative is described in I.C. § 33-2708:** https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title33/T33CH27/SECT33-2708/**.**

f) **Annexation of area including one or more city libraries, and the cities do not choose to join the district**. An existing district library can annex untaxed territory that is contiguous to it, which contains an existing city library (or libraries), and the cities do not choose to join the district. *The advantage of this option is that it allows an existing district to expand its service area and its services without setting up a new administrative structure. The disadvantage is that work will have to be done to make sure that the new area is adequately served, which may involve creating new services or even setting up a branch library. In addition, reciprocal arrangements will need to be worked out between the* district and the other libraries. These will be potential sources of future conflict. **The election process is described in I.C. § 33-2707:** https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title33/T33CH27/SECT33-2707/**; a petition process alternative is described in I.C. § 33-2708:** https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title33/T33CH27/SECT33-2708/.

g) **Annexation / Combination**. An existing district library can add untaxed territory which is contiguous to it and which includes an existing city library (or libraries), and the cities also choose to combine with the district. *The major advantages of this method are that it gives the district the ability to control all the services provided in its service area, since it does not require contracts for services. Because no annual contract negotiations are required, much potential future conflict is avoided. The disadvantage of this scenario is that it will require more work in the beginning. Because this kind of project is treated as an establishment*

of a new district, the election must be timed so that the existing district does not have to be dissolved before a new district is created. Good planning and negotiations may be needed to choose existing services and administrative structures for the district, when existing libraries have probably all been operating under different structures. **The election process for this alternative is described in I.C. §§ 33-2704 through 33-2705:** https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title33/T33CH27/**.**

h) **Combination**. A city library whose boundaries are contiguous with a library district combines with the district. *The advantage is that the unified district will be able to unify control of all its services, and potential conflict between the district and the city library will be eliminated. The disadvantage is that city residents may feel that they have lost control of their library and the library services provided, and if the city is large, the "rural residents" of the district may feel that the city now dominates the district.* **The election process for this alternative is described in I.C. § 33-2709:** https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title33/T33CH27/SECT33-2709/**.**

i) **Consolidation**. Two or more existing contiguous districts can be consolidated into a single district. *The advantage is that the new larger district will be able to provide improved services since less funding will be needed for administration. The disadvantage is that people may feel that there is less local control as the district grows.* **This process is described in I.C. § 33-2711:** https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title33/T33CH27/SECT33-2711/**.**

Working in stages. There may be political or legal advantages to working through a district creation or expansion in stages. For example, it may be to the advantage of an existing district first to annex unserved areas and then later to combine with existing city libraries within that unserved area. During the Assessment Phase, alternative methods to achieving the same objective should be examined.

Examine all possibilities. Any possibility that meets the requirements of the Idaho Code should be considered. Each option should be assessed as to its advantages and disadvantages. We have prepared a Districting Option Assessment Form that you can use to help you make this assessment. The result of this task will be a preliminary description of a possible district. **See I.C. §§ 33-2701 through 33-2711:** https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title33/T33CH27/.

Reality Check

The Assessment Phase is the time to determine whether a successful districting effort is possible and to make some preliminary decisions about what a district might look like. Throughout the Assessment Phase (and, indeed, throughout the entire districting process) there should be planned times for making reality checks. Reality checks should be group activities that can be included on the agendas of regular meetings or can be the sole purpose of a meeting.

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