

Library District Fact Sheet

What is a library district?

A library district is an independent taxing district that provides library services for the people living within its boundaries. It is set up in accordance with chapter 27, title 33, Idaho Code.

Why do we need library districts?

Library districts, according to section 33-2701, Idaho Code, make it possible “to integrate, extend and add to existing library services and resources so that public library services may be available to all residents of the state from infancy through adulthood, beginning in the formative years and continuing for lifelong learning.”

According to state code, there are only two ways in which tax-supported public library services can be provided. One is for a city to create and support a public library. The other is to create library districts. People living outside the boundaries of a city or an established library district have no access to public library service without paying an annual user fee. They have no control over what these fees will be or what kinds of services will be provided.

Is a library district a government agency?

Yes, a library district is a political subdivision of the state.

Who is charge of a library district?

An elected library board consisting of five members governs the library district. Board members are elected for six-year terms by voters living within the library district. The board sets the budget for the district, creates all district policies, and oversees the general operation of the district. The board appoints a library director to administer the district.

How are district boundaries determined?

A group of citizens work together and explore boundary possibilities. The final decision is based upon community input.

What types of services does the library district provide?

The library board determines the types of services that the library district provides. A few library districts simply contract with other libraries to provide public library services to the residents of the district. Most library districts, however, run their own public libraries. The services they provide are dependent upon the decisions of the library board.

How is a library district funded?

Idaho Code gives the library district board the authority to levy a property tax for the support of the district. Taxes for maintenance and operation cannot exceed .06% of the assessed value for market purposes of the property in the district. With the approval of the voters, the district may also levy taxes to pay bonds or to create a facilities reserve fund. Library taxes are collected for the district by the county. Library districts may also receive gifts and grants.

How is a library district created?

A library district is established by an election. Procedures for the election are found in chapter 27, title 33, Idaho Code.

If a city becomes part of a library district, do the city residents pay “double taxes”?

No, library services will be funded only through the district levy.

Can a city library become part of a library district?

Yes, a city library can become part of a library district, either by forming a district that includes the city or by joining an existing library district if the district boundaries touch the city limits. When a city becomes part of a district library, the district library board takes over all responsibility for operating the library.

Why would a city library become part of a district?

Many small cities do not have the tax base to allow for adequate support of a modern public library. By forming or joining a library district, they can expand their tax base to provide adequate support. Several library districts in Idaho include branch libraries, which were originally established as city libraries. By joining together into a single library district, citizens of these cities have access to more library materials and services than any of the cities could have provided by itself.

Do the county commissioners have authority over the library district?

No. Library districts are independent units of government with their own taxing authority. The county commissioners have no authority over the library district or its budget. Each year the county commissioners are required to certify to the Idaho State Tax Commission that the library district's property tax budget is within legal limits, but they have no power to make changes within the budget. They also collect the taxes for the district, but they have no authority to withhold this funding from the library.

Does the Idaho Commission for Libraries control library districts?

No. Although the ICfL supports the establishment of library districts through consulting, it has no authority over local library districts. However, Idaho Code does require that the board of trustees of each library district shall annually, not later than the first day of January, file with the board of library commissioners a report of the operations of the district for the fiscal year just ended. The report shall be on the form and contain the information that the board of library commissioners requires, but in all cases must include a complete accounting of all financial transactions for the fiscal year being reported. The Board of Library Commissioners is the governing board of the Idaho Commission for Libraries.

Why can't schools provide public library services to people living outside of a city?

Schools are not authorized by state law to provide public library service and, therefore, do not have taxing authority to support such service. Many school libraries are badly underfunded and depend heavily on their local public library to provide supplementary materials for their students. If school libraries do not have the funding to meet the basic needs of their own students, they obviously cannot meet the needs of the public at large.

School libraries are designed to support the curriculum of the school. They will not contain many of the materials and services that interest adults or pre-school children.

Materials that interest adults may be inappropriate in libraries that cater primarily to the needs of school children.

Many adults feel uncomfortable in the school setting, particularly when the school library is heavily used by students.

Having adults come to the school for library services can also create serious security issues for the schools. As the security of students becomes a more and more pressing concern, so does the need for heightened security measures. The school's duty to protect its students and staff must come first.

What is wrong with annual user fees for nonresidents?

Good libraries require a steady source of income. A good collection and well-trained library staff are built up over several years. User fees are a very sporadic form of funding, as they are only available when a patron chooses to use the library. That patron, however, is benefitting from a collection and staff that has been created over a long period of time, not just the year in which the fee is paid. Without steady tax support, most public libraries would not survive. So, if libraries do not receive tax support, services will not be available even when someone is willing to pay a fee. Because residents pay taxes for the library each year, they are subsidizing nonresidents' use of the library, who pay their fee only when they use the library.

Nonresident fees are also a major problem for library staff. Many nonresidents believe that they have the right to use the public library, even if they are not paying for its services through their taxes. Library staff members report that informing nonresidents of a fee for a library card is one of the situations that is most likely to cause abusive language and behavior on the part of patrons. The administrative costs of nonresident fees also make it more expensive to serve nonresidents than residents.

In addition, some families living outside the service area of a tax-supported library are not able to afford nonresident fees. Children from these families are placed at a disadvantage in school when they do not have access to the resources of a public library that other children can use. A tax-supported library district assures that every person living within its boundaries has access to public library services when they are needed.

Nonresidents also have no control over the kinds of services that the library provides. They cannot vote for the library board for a district library or for the city council and mayor who appoint the board of a city library. They cannot serve on the library board. Often this means that people who would be very good board members are not eligible to serve. If nonresidents choose to pay the library fee, they must take whatever library services are offered. They have no recourse if the library board does not consider their needs. Inclusion in a district allows former nonresidents to have much more say in how the library will operate and the services it will provide.