

**Audit/Assessment**

**Berks County Public Libraries and the  
Reading Public Library and District Library Center**

**Conducted by  
The Ivy Group  
2014**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Audit and Assessment of the Berks County Public Libraries (BCPL or “the System”) and the Reading Public Library and District Library Center (RPL-DLC) is the result of a year-long study commissioned by the Berks County Board of Commissioners. All operational facets were considered, including current staff, capacity, and service gaps, in order to identify potential savings, increase efficiency, and/or improve quality—all goals supported by Commonwealth Libraries in its efforts to bring more clarity to the relationship of systems to District Library Centers and related state aid.

The study solicited widespread input from Trustees and directors of BCPL’s nineteen member libraries, elected officials of the City of Reading and Berks County, and the staff of both Reading Public Library and the System. The consulting team also analyzed numerous documents and studies pertaining to the operations of both entities.

The overall goal of the project is to improve the quality of public library services available to the residents of Berks County by:

- Determining if best professional practices are being applied to the delivery of library services;
- Evaluating the extent to which personnel and financial resources are being managed efficiently;
- Identifying areas in which there is duplication of services provided by the System and RPL-DLC; and
- Recommending strategies for eliminating service gaps.

The Audit and Assessment incorporates significant trends and best practices in public library service delivery, including:

- New models of library management and service provision;
- Technologies that enhance workflow customer service;
- Initiatives and programs of greatest interest to the public; and

- The role of print, social media, and broadcast media in promoting library services.

A review of the Berks County Comprehensive Plan and interviews with elected officials identified areas where services made available by System libraries could align more closely with County priorities and planning objectives:

- Expanding access to and the use of technology;
- Increasing participation in partnerships, communications, and intergovernmental initiatives, such as the County Technology Department, schools, and workforce development agencies;
- Enriching the quality of life for residents with more cultural and entertainment opportunities;
- Expanding the City's position as a regional education and training center by supporting workforce development;
- Addressing the needs of the elderly; and
- Supporting academic achievement, post-secondary education, and life-long learning.

To review the full Comprehensive Plan, please see [www.co.berks.pa.us/Dept/Planning/Pages/Berks-County-Comprehensive-Plan.aspx](http://www.co.berks.pa.us/Dept/Planning/Pages/Berks-County-Comprehensive-Plan.aspx)

## **Findings**

### *Overlapping Services*

- A clear delineation of the respective roles and responsibilities of BCPL and RPL-DLC will result in less fragmented service delivery and, ultimately, improve the quality of service to member libraries and County residents.
- The overall volume of work will not be reduced even if some functions are merged.

### *Underserved Populations Across the Community*

- Because both BCPL and RPL-DLC have lost staff over the past several years, some services have been curtailed and quality has diminished.
- Reorganization of BCPL and RPL-DLC operations can lead to efficiencies and the possibility of redeploying staff to address identified service gaps.

### *Funding*

- Compared with similar systems in Pennsylvania, BCPL is underfunded.
- Other systems are providing services and resources to County residents that BCPL cannot because it lacks sufficient financial resources.
- There is sufficient dissatisfaction to justify a reexamination of the current allocation formula.

### *Contractual, Communications and Planning Gaps*

- Many services traditionally provided by a District Library Center are being absorbed by BCPL without any contractual agreement.
- The System and RPL-DLC would benefit from improved lines of communications.
- RPL's current strategic plan focuses on its role as an urban library serving a needy population rather than on its role as a District Library Center.
- The System's efforts should be focused to a greater extent on what are characterized as big picture, long-term issues.

## **Recommendations**

The System, rather than the Reading Public Library, should be designated as the District Library Center for Berks County. RPL should serve as the Resource Library for Berks County and continue to receive funding for collection development and back up reference services.

Increased efficiency and improved customer service call for a focus on staffing and staff training—particularly in the areas of technology, communications and community relations—and clarity regarding finances and funding allocations. It is recommended that the service aspects of technology, collection development and materials management, interlibrary loan and delivery, youth services, and community awareness and marketing, currently performed from two locations, be consolidated as noted in subsequent sections of this report.

In addition, there is the need for greater transparency and more widespread understanding of the financial operations of BCPL and RPL-DLC by means of:

- An annual program budget, beginning in 2016;
- Online financial reporting;
- Evolving the current funding allocation formula to metrics-based funding distribution; and
- Balancing County and local funding.

Of some concern is the fact that both the System and RPL-DLC Boards initiated strategic planning midway through this study, rather than building plans on its findings—an indication of the need for better coordination. Both the System and RPL-DLC would benefit from visionary strategic planning based on a collective understanding of service gaps (for example, there is currently no comprehensive plan for service to adults and seniors) and relative roles and responsibility as operations and personnel are reorganized.

## BACKGROUND AND SITUATION ANALYSIS

The manner in which public library services in Berks County are organized has long been under discussion. The lack of clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of the System and the RPL-DLC has fostered an environment of competition and distrust which often impedes progress and the provision of quality services.

In 2012, the Berks County Community Foundation issued a comprehensive report detailing the status of public library service in the County, refueling the debate about structure and funding. Although the report accurately detailed the many challenges confronting public libraries in the County and made several well-founded recommendations, it did not receive widespread support.

The Ivy Group's 2014 Audit and Assessment of BCPL and RPL-DLC differs from the Community Foundation study in that the consulting team was not asked to create a new organizational structure for public library services. Rather, the goal of the project has been to identify areas of duplication and to recommend strategies for collaboration, cost containment, and implementation of best practices.

Demographic shifts are an important factor to consider when evaluating the future provision of library services in Berks County. In March 2014, The Center for Rural Pennsylvania, a legislative agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, released [Pennsylvania Population Projections 2010-2040](http://www.rural.palegislature.us/documents/reports/Population_Projections_Report.pdf) (please see: [http://www.rural.palegislature.us/documents/reports/Population\\_Projections\\_Report.pdf](http://www.rural.palegislature.us/documents/reports/Population_Projections_Report.pdf)) which revealed that, unlike many other counties in the Commonwealth, the population of Berks County has not decreased and, in fact, is projected to grow. In 2010, the population of Berks County was 411,791. By 2020, projections are 440,143; by 2030, 471,457; and by 2040, the County will have grown by 20% to 495,416. Are BCPL and the RPL-DLC prepared to serve a growing population in a no-tax-increase, no-construction environment?

Established in 1986, Berks County Public Libraries (BCPL or the "System") is a department of County government. Seven Trustees appointed by the County Commissioners provide oversight for the System. While Pennsylvania library systems differ greatly in size, complexity and form of governance, BCPL's federated structure is most prevalent. The System comprises 19 independent libraries, each governed by its own Board of Trustees.

An important responsibility of the BCPL Board is to approve the formula for distributing State and County funds to libraries within the System.

Other BCPL programs and services include:

- Acquisitions
- Bibliographic services
- Consulting
- Delivery
- Financial management
- Graphic design and public relations
- Interlibrary loan support
- Outreach
- Resources
- Technology
- Training and continuing education
- Youth services

The State Librarian and the Governor's Advisory Council designated one of the 19 member libraries—the Reading Public Library (RPL)—as a District Library Center (DLC). According to the PA Library Code 141.22 (please see: <http://www.pacode.com/secure/data/022/chapter141/s141.22.html>), District Library Centers are qualified to receive funds from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for providing specified support services to public libraries in Berks County. These required services include:

- Service 64 hours per week
- Interlibrary and intra-library loan
- Reference services
- Delivery
- Consultation and training services
- Promotion of district library resources and services
- Circulating, reference and audio visual collections sufficient to serve population of 75,000
- 12% of budget spent on materials
- District Consultant
- Staff with professional qualifications to fulfill all duties and responsibilities
- Facility which houses collections and personnel



Multiple sources fund the System, the RPL-DLC and RPL. The DLC's District Executive Committee annually negotiates funding to individual system libraries. The State Library requires that the State and member libraries must approve the distribution of County Coordination Aid.

In 2013, the DLC received \$274,481 in State aid, and the System received \$263,204 in County Coordination Aid. County funding provided \$3,219,526. The System also received \$1,078,493 in State aid.

RPL-DLC's total operating revenue for 2013 of \$2,666,800 includes \$100,000 from the City of Reading. Berks County provides \$1,158,980 in County Aid, County coordination aid reimbursements, local financial effort and Wide Area Network charge reimbursements.

Member libraries in Berks County, as many others across the Commonwealth, question the fairness of the current funding allocation formula and wrestle with how best to distribute State aid to individual libraries. Numerous allocation formulas have been tested: the abiding truth is that some libraries are always happy, and some are not. In Berks County, because the level of dissatisfaction has been so great, the Project Steering Committee suggested that this issue be addressed.

In Berks County, as well as in other parts of Pennsylvania, there is significant confusion on the part of elected officials, the public, and librarians themselves about not only funding for library services but also the role and responsibilities of District Library Centers versus library systems. This confusion is exacerbated in Berks County by the fact that BCPL's System Administrator also serves as the consultant for the Reading District Library Center—a situation not seen elsewhere in Pennsylvania. An additional concern of County Commissioners is that the System does not receive compensation for these consulting services. It is widely perceived that overlapping services result in waste and inefficiency. At the same time, the structure creates manpower and service gaps.

## PROJECT GOALS

- Identify areas of duplication where the Reading Public Library-District Library Center (RPL-DLC) and Berks County Public Libraries (BCPL or “the System”) are providing the same services.
- Determine whether best professional practices are being applied to the delivery of public library services in Berks County.
- Evaluate the extent to which the System and the RPL-DLC are positioned to respond to current and projected trends in public library service delivery.
- Eliminate service gaps.
- Identify opportunities to maximize resources by eliminating overlaps—financial, technology, staff, and materials.
- Explore options for improving customer service while optimizing financial and human resources.
- Identify strategies for aligning public library services with the planning goals of Berks County.
- Recommend possible private or public sector partnerships.

## PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The Ivy Group implemented a phased information-gathering process that integrated both primary and secondary qualitative research and quantitative tools and methodologies:

- Analysis of Census and other data;
- Review of the services which District Library Centers are required to provide according to the Pennsylvania Library Code, and the services currently provided to member libraries by the System;
- Benchmarking the performances of the Reading Public Library and Berks County Public Libraries against that of peer libraries and library systems across the country;
- One-on-one interviews with key staff of the System and the District Library Center, library directors, elected officials, City and County administrators, and Trustees;
- Consultation with the Office of Commonwealth Libraries;
- On-site visits to BCPL and RPL facilities;
- Technology and financial assessments;
- Online survey of Directors and Trustees of BCPL member libraries;
- Meetings with the Library Study Committee; and
- Presentation to the Berks County Board of Commissioners.

As part of the environmental scan conducted in conjunction with the study, the consulting team reviewed:

- Census data and projections for Berks County;
- Berks County Libraries Task Force Report: Berks County Community Foundation;

- Previous financial statements and annual reports for BCPL, RPL-DLC, and the Reading Public Library;
- PA Code 141.22: District Library Centers;
- Organizational charts for BCPL and RPL-DLC;
- Current strategic plans for BCPL and RPL-DLC;
- Reading Public Library: District Negotiated Agreement Fiscal Year 2013-2014 and Reading Public Library: District Negotiated Agreement Fiscal Year 2014-2015;
- Berks County Comprehensive Plan; and
- County Coordination plan and budget.

During its first onsite visit, the consulting team visited the RPL and the offices of BCPL. The consultants facilitated a meeting with the Library Study Committee to review the process that would be used to conduct the study. The session also included a discussion about the current relationship between the RPL and BCPL and issues that Committee members hope the study will resolve.

A benchmarking study compared the performance of BCPL with that of five peer federated systems in Pennsylvania. The performance of the RPL was measured against that of four libraries serving similar urban populations in other states. The Data provided by the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) was used to identify the peer sets by:

- Demographic indicators;
- Size of population served;
- Circulation;
- Number of branches;
- Annual budget; and
- Number of library visitors.

Inputs (i.e., government income), outputs (i.e., programs, number of computer uses) and analysis (i.e., cost per circulation) were compared using the most recent published statistics from IMLS and the Public Library Data Service. In addition to comparing the data

available from IMLS, the consulting team sent a questionnaire to the directors of the peer libraries to gather data not available from published sources. The questionnaire focused on issues related to management practices, purchasing, and funding.

Consultants conducted in-depth interviews with 27 individuals including staff of BCPL, the RPL, directors of representative member libraries, elected officials, Trustees, and City and County administrators.

The interviews focused on:

- Perceptions of public library services in Berks County;
- Perceived areas of overlap between the System and the District Library Center;
- Suggestions for increased efficiency and service improvement;
- Areas of conflict between the City and the County; and
- Future outlook for public library services in the County.

Subsequently, an online survey was fielded to obtain input from Directors and Trustees of BCPL member libraries. The survey focused on:

- Satisfaction with/importance of BCPL programs and services;
- Satisfaction with/importance of RPL-DLC services;
- Perceived duplication of services provided by BCPL and the RPL-DLC; and
- Future needs and priorities.

The Ivy Group's technology consultant met with technology staff at RPL, BCPL and the County to:

- Determine where public libraries are on the technology continuum;
- Understand how technology is being used or might be used to achieve organizational efficiencies;
- Analyze whether technology staffing levels are sufficient to meet the needs of libraries and their customers;
- Determine whether best professional practices are being applied in providing access to technology in Berks County libraries; and

- Recommend areas where the County might partner with the BCPL or the RPL-DLC to support technology.

The team subsequently facilitated a second meeting the Library Study Committee to review progress to date, present research results, and obtain feedback from Committee members regarding possible responses to the research findings.

The Audit and Assessment report was submitted to the Steering Committee and the Board of Commissioners for review and approval. The consulting team met with both the Committee and the Commissioners to present and discuss the findings.

## **AREAS OF STRATEGIC FOCUS**

## LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY

Both a direct service made available to the public and a tool that supports all library offerings, technology is an increasingly important component of modern library service provision.

As a public service, technology has become vastly popular. Library computers are used thousands of times each week by both residents who lack home computers as well as computer owners who seek convenience. WiFi access also provides connectivity for users of portable devices.

As a tool for supporting services, the integrated library system (ILS) is the backbone of library operations. The ILS tracks the hundreds of thousands of books and other materials as they circulate among libraries and manages patron reserves, fines, and other data. Technology also supports effective communication, both internally and externally. Communication among library staff is essential to providing superior service, while communicating with the public is facilitated through library websites, social media, and email.

### Best Practices

- Libraries have a clear strategic plan for implementing technology, including a detailed replacement and upgrade schedule. In order to minimize capital expenditures, computers may be leased with expenses accounted for in the operational budget.
- The library's ILS goes beyond being the means to locate a book and manage check outs. It is a tool that enables patrons to manage accounts (pay fines, renew/reserve materials), get reading suggestions, and manage their reading lists.
- The library's website becomes a "digital branch", providing access to downloadable materials such as e-books, audiobooks, magazines, music, and movies. It is a resource for library news and events and provides opportunities for patrons to interact with staff and other users.
- Libraries use social media to connect with patrons.

- Libraries have high speed Internet bandwidth sufficient to handle the growing needs of the public.
- WiFi is available in all parts of the library and offers printing functionality.
- Libraries provide electrical outlets and furniture appropriate for users of portable devices.
- Libraries offer advanced technology for users to experience. This can be as simple as a technology “petting zoo” where users can test e-readers and tablets, for example. It can be as advanced as makerspaces, complete with 3-D printers and video editing equipment.
- Outsourcing of technology services is increasing as is moving some operations to the cloud as an alternative to maintaining equipment in-house.

### **Situation Analysis**

Currently, technology support services provided to the System, the District Library Center, and the member libraries are decentralized. One individual at BCPL provides technical support for member libraries, configuring and maintaining 500 computers in 20 buildings. The BCPL Tech Coordinator maintains the BCPL and member library websites. Under a contract with BCPL, RPL manages the ILS as well as the computer network for all member libraries. The ILS administrator is Reading Public Library’s assistant director whose assistant also maintains equipment in the Reading Library and its branches.

The long-outdated ILS is being upgraded to Polaris, a new state-of-the art system. The upgrade will solve many of the current problems with the catalog and circulation system and will enable member libraries to enhance service and better connect the public to library resources. However, library staff will need to be trained on Polaris, and a public awareness campaign will be necessary to inform the community of the features of the new ILS.

Although the bandwidth has been increased, currently there is no contract for WAN services. The previous contract with RPL was terminated in June, 2014 in anticipation of a migration to a new ILS platform.

## Service Gaps

The current staffing model is inadequate to meet the needs of member libraries as well as the public. Staff at both BCPL and RPL are overwhelmed by requests for equipment maintenance and other tech-related services. Member libraries use non-standard equipment—some of which is donated—meaning that additional support time is often required. In addition, the need to handle immediate, varied equipment problems does not leave staff sufficient time to develop strategies for implementing technology across the member libraries. There is simply no time to establish plans to stay ahead of the curve and implement new services. Technology staff could be better used training librarians and helping them make more effective use of computers. Member library staff must submit website update requests to the BCPL office. A password protected access to the CMS with levels of permission would enable member libraries to maintain a current, professional web presence that would meet customer expectations.

## **Recommendations**

- Consolidate all technical support under one agency. While either RPL or the BCPL office would be suitable for this function, it may work best for technology support to be housed at RPL as that is where the ILS is hosted.
- Resolve the issues associated with the WAN services contract as soon as possible.
- Consider holding in reserve some County funding to help with equipment leasing/replacement expenses.
- Leverage the resources of the County's IT Department to achieve more favorable purchase and licensing agreements.
- Consider the use of Help Desk software to track and monitor technology-related issues, perhaps employing the system used by the County's IT Department.
- Designate a Director of Library Technology who would work with member libraries to develop a comprehensive technology plan.
- Add at least one computer technology support position.

- Reevaluate the job description of the BCPL Technology Coordinator.
- Develop a technology replacement schedule, possibly based on leasing desktop equipment, that would pave the way for the standardization of all hardware and software across the member libraries. County funds would be used as seed money to upgrade equipment. Subsequently, costs could be shared with the member libraries.
- Investigate the possibility of moving network resources, such as servers, to the cloud or the County's IT department.
- Finalize implementation of the new ILS, train staff, and unveil its features to the public.
- Expand WiFi capacity, including printing functionality.
- Develop a modern, mobile-responsive, ADA-compliant website which patrons may access as a "digital branch" to search the catalog, access downloadable materials, manage their accounts, and interact with staff. Via a password-protected content management system, changes to the website can be made as needed by member libraries. The overall responsibility for the website could then be moved from IT to Communications and Marketing.
- Survey member libraries to determine possible projects for advanced technology in libraries. BCPL should then work with libraries to develop plans for implementing these services.

### *Potential Savings and/or Workflow Efficiencies*

If equipment were standardized, less support time would mean more time available to be proactive: helping the member libraries use their technology more effectively will boost productivity and public satisfaction. An additional support position will further enable technology staff to be forward-thinking, as well as minimize response time to issues, reducing equipment downtime, and enhancing the user experience.

Outsourcing of servers and online services—moving some resources to the cloud or to the County's IT department—would cut up-front capital costs and eliminate the need for staff to devote time to maintaining those services in-house.



Enhanced websites will enable libraries to communicate more effectively with the public and to optimize access to digital resources. Users will be able to take better advantage of the services libraries provide and make effective use of funds invested.

The new ILS will enable library staff to more efficiently use and share their holdings. The ILS will improve foster greater use of library materials through ease of access, reading suggestions and user ratings.

## **COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT AND MATERIALS MANAGEMENT**

Public access to the materials libraries hold is critical. With rapidly changing technology, libraries in a consortium environment have both challenges and opportunities in this regard. The challenges lie in ensuring that the shared materials database is as “clean” as possible. Consistency in how items are entered is essential: duplicate and/or variant records make it increasingly difficult to isolate a desired item. Opportunities lie in streamlining acquisitions processes and leveraging volume purchasing. The latter is particularly applicable in terms of providing eResources across the consortium.

### **Best Practices**

- Centralized management of cataloguing which ensures consistent quality control over the shared materials database
- Centralized acquisitions and processing to leverage volume discounts
- Centralized purchasing / leasing of eResources as well as platform costs
- Specialized collections selected through specific staff expertise
- Centralized acquisitions and processing to leverage local library savings and maximize staff resources for direct public service

### **Situation Analysis**

Surveys of member libraries indicate a strong level of concern that the quality of the materials database is compromised by duplicate and/or variant records.

Cataloguing is performed by both BCPL and RPL. BCPL staff manages the acquisition and processing of materials for member libraries, with the exception of RPL which handles its own, resulting in a level of efficiency not evidenced in many federated library systems across the Commonwealth. Space at BCPL central offices is more suitable for the provision of technical services directly connected to BCPL’s delivery system. Space at RPL is much more confined.

There remains a gap in member libraries' appreciation for the value of centralized acquisitions and processing. Libraries tend to look for perceived cost savings and speed (i.e., "why not just buy from Amazon or a discounter?") and typically don't consider the additional costs of getting materials shelf-ready such as the time and staff/volunteer resources that are required. To truly understand the value of centralized acquisitions and processing, a program-based financial model would be necessary.

Public demand for eBooks and other eResources is escalating. But unlike traditional physical books, these resources do not "reside" in any one library. Their digital form makes a centralized collection universally available and delivery nearly instantaneous to the end user. As the designated resource center for BCPL, there is certain staff expertise at RPL that benefits the system in selecting specialized areas of the countywide collection, such as eResources and materials related to the history of Reading and Berks County. Currently, eResources are provided on a centralized basis through RPL with some cost abatement provided by BCPL.

### Service Gaps

- The current public catalog is inefficient due to duplicate and / or variant item records.
- Public and staff experience difficulty in isolating needed items.
- Duplication of processes and staff responsibilities between BCPL and RPL reduce resources available for direct public service.

### **Recommendations**

- Centralize all cataloging and technical services functions at BCPL.
- Create and monitor the implementation of clear and consistent cataloging standards.
- Designate BCPL as the point of contact for vendor negotiations and contracts for materials acquisition.

- Develop a model for collaborative collection development, utilizing collection analysis tools and distributing responsibility for specific collection areas.
- Consider utilizing a floating collection model to reduce volume in delivery and increase turnover rate.
- Continue to leverage RPL staff expertise in selection of materials related to the history of Reading and Berks County and core reference resources that are of benefit countywide.
- Identify staff expertise, within RPL as the resource center for BCPL, for other specialized collections (e.g., ESL materials, foreign language materials, and other areas identified as priorities by the system as a whole).

### *Potential Savings and/or Workflow Efficiencies*

By centralizing all cataloguing and technical services staff, resources at RPL could be deployed for more direct public service and community outreach within the City of Reading. This was noted in interviews with key stakeholders who view the services of RPL, particularly in the branch locations, as positively impacting on the lives of residents most in need. At the same time the centralization of cataloguing at BCPL would allow for higher and more consistent quality of the union catalog, ensuring more effective search and retrieval of records, both for the public and staff. Centralization of cataloguing and acquisitions should continue to allow for selection opportunities based on staff expertise throughout the consortium.

Having a single point of contact for countywide materials acquisition helps to ensure cost control and efficient purchasing. The cost of OCLC bibliographic support is limited to a single institution. Training for cataloguing and technical services staff is also limited to a single institution. From a budgetary standpoint, centralizing these services will also allow the consortium as a whole (and its funders) to have a comprehensive view of total costs.

## **TRAINING, CONSULTING, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

High performing organizations focus resources on ensuring staff are well-trained and routinely provided the opportunity to upgrade skills, grow their expertise, and incorporate best professional practices into their day-to-day activities. Their culture's fulcrum is a shared commitment to mission and an understanding of the importance of each individual's role—and how best to perform that role—in the organization's success. In addition, the most highly qualified individuals seek employment within organizations committed to providing ongoing professional development opportunities.

### **Best Practices**

- Job expectations are clearly defined. Library staff participate in sequenced training and skills development opportunities and receive regular feedback on performance.
- Training is designed to ensure an appropriate ratio of technology and non-technology topics.
- Individuals with professional credentials and training experience develop the curricula and oversee and/or conduct training.
- When appropriate, technology is used to achieve training efficiencies.
- Workshops are offered at a variety of times and places to accommodate schedules of both full and part time employees.
- Training programs have clearly stated learning objectives.
- Training objectives are integrated into the annual goal setting discussion or performance appraisals.
- Training is available to trustees on topics relevant to their role.
- Libraries partner with other public and private sector agencies and organizations to offer training programs.

## Situation Analysis

Because of budget constraints and staff reductions, training has not been a priority for either BCPL or RPL-DLC, with both staff and member library directors identifying this as an area of concern. Staff want ongoing training and more continuing education opportunities in the future, expressing fears that they are not keeping pace with constantly evolving technology.

Library directors report that they are unable to plan to send staff to classes because they rarely know topics and schedules far enough in advance. Small libraries find it particularly difficult to send employees to training because they do not have adequate staff coverage.

Member library staff also have a limited awareness of the consulting services that are available.

Neither BCPL nor the RPL-DLC has an individual on staff who is responsible for managing a training program. There is no one to identify resources for training, coordinate a schedule of classes, or manage logistics. Additionally, the roles and responsibilities of the two entities for training and consulting services are not clearly differentiated.

### Service Gaps

- Staff has limited opportunities to maintain or expand skills.
- Employees of member libraries do not have access to the tech training required to assist customers.
- Trustees do not receive the training they need to fulfill their policy and fiduciary responsibilities.

## Recommendations

- Form a joint training committee comprising representatives from BCPL, RPL-DLC, and member libraries.
- Survey library employees and boards to identify topics for which there is the greatest demand.
- Assign RPL-DLC the responsibility for developing training programs for the public and assisting the staff of member libraries in implementing them.
- Assign to the System the responsibility for providing training to library staff and trustees.
- Encourage member library boards to invest in continuing education for their staff either through more release time or actual dollars.
- Develop a roster of individuals qualified to provide instruction in critical subject areas.
- Identify other library systems, County departments, agencies and businesses which could become viable training partners on tech topics as well as core subjects such as supervision, customer service, emergency preparedness, etc.
- Develop and promote a quarterly training calendar for member library staff.
- Increase efforts to educate library directors and trustees about the professional consulting services offered by the System Administrator/District Library Center Consultant.

### Potential Savings and/or Workflow Efficiencies

- County residents will consistently receive higher quality services because staff is adequately trained.
- Best practices will be applied to the delivery of public library services.

- Trainers will be vetted to ensure that all workshops and seminars reflect professional best practices.
- Member libraries will be in a better position to attract and retain qualified employees.
- Trustees will have the training they need to manage the complex issues confronting their institutions such as funding, technology, building programs, and strategic planning.

## **INTERLIBRARY LENDING AND DELIVERY**

Interlibrary loan expedites the sharing of resources among libraries and makes it possible for customers to obtain information and entertainment materials not owned by their local library. Since no single library can possibly own all of the materials needed by its customers, interlibrary loan is an essential, collaborative service. Smaller libraries with limited budgets or space to house a large collection can turn to larger libraries to meet customer demand for titles. Providing accurate, cost-effective, timely ILL service enables larger libraries to make a valuable contribution to the overall effectiveness of the collaborative. Delivery service is intrinsically linked to interlibrary loan in two ways. It is the mechanism that distributes the new materials purchased by member libraries and processed by the System to the appropriate member library locations. The delivery service also moves materials among member libraries to fill interlibrary loan requests. Yet cost-effective and efficient delivery is also the most challenging ILL logistical issue.

### **Best Practices**

Best professional practices for interlibrary loan for both borrowing and lending libraries are found in the Pennsylvania Interlibrary Loan Code. The guidelines detailed in the Code are intended to serve as an overview of interlibrary loan protocols and standard practices. The Code encourages libraries to:

- Add and maintain their holdings in appropriate union catalogs and lists in a timely manner;
- Offer interlibrary loan to their users at no cost;
- Lend returnable materials at no cost and keep copy fees to a minimum;
- Evaluate available options and maximize access to content, such as purchase, full-text, or web content, before using interlibrary loan to meet the needs of their users;
- Select the most efficient and effective means for interlibrary loan; and
- Use local, regional, or other resource sharing consortia whenever possible.



Please see:

[https://www.webjunction.org/content/dam/WebJunction/Documents/pennsylvania/September-2011-390 Interlib Ln Guide.pdf](https://www.webjunction.org/content/dam/WebJunction/Documents/pennsylvania/September-2011-390%20Interlib%20Ln%20Guide.pdf)

## Situation Analysis

The RPL-DLC collection is an important asset for BCPL member libraries (and to libraries outside of Berks County which request titles from Access PA). The libraries borrow from each other, but rely most heavily on the larger resources of RPL. All but one member library now submit their own Access PA requests. However, on some occasions, they have to locate materials that are available only from libraries outside the County and, in some instances, from institutions outside of Pennsylvania—in these cases, requested items are located using the OCLC of which both RPL and BCPL are members. In addition, because the funding formula for the distribution of state aid in place at the present time uses circulation as one of the factors that determines the amount that each library receives, libraries are reluctant to lend their new and highly desirable items.

RPL-DLC pays for its ILL shipping costs. The System pays all shipping materials. Both RPL-DLC and BCPL have IDS memberships.

At RPL, the Interlibrary Loan Department has one full time and one part time employee. Statistics for 2013 indicate that the Department provided 57,000+ items to other libraries and received 3,087 items from other libraries. (This number includes the in-County loans.)

BCPL is responsible for delivery services to all of the other member libraries including the three branches of the RPL. A custodian at RPL-DLC makes deliveries once a week to the Wyomissing Library which is not a member of the System. Occasionally on an as needed basis, a custodian at the RPL makes additional deliveries to the Library's three branches.

The Bibliographic Services Manager supervises eight part time drivers who make deliveries five days a week on three routes. BCPL's Administrative Assistant oversees maintenance of the three vans which are owned by Berks County. Even though the bulk of the ILL requests are filled with titles from RPL, RPL does not have the space to store the delivery vans, making it necessary to garage them at System headquarters where there is more space.

## Service Gaps

ILL, as currently conducted, is highly inefficient. Library directors appreciate the delivery service and think that it is generally reliable. Customers are also pleased with the services. The challenge is to sustain the high level of director and customer satisfaction while untangling the ILL process—particularly delivery.

It should be noted, however, that customers who use the RPL branches or the Wyomissing Public Library generally wait longer to receive requested items than do individuals who use other public libraries in Berks County.

## **Recommendations**

- Consolidate all delivery services at System headquarters with funding for delivery to Wyomissing and RPL branches included in the DLC budget.
- Relocate one RPL employee primarily responsible for ILL to System Headquarters, and designate to one employee in the RPL Circulation Department the responsibility for pulling materials from the shelves to satisfy ILL requests.
- Revise the current allocation formula so that libraries receive credit for lending books. If this recommendation is accepted, member libraries should be required to lend all items in their collection.
- Train member libraries in using the Access PA ILL module so that they can submit timely and accurate requests.
- Leverage the expertise and experience of RPL librarians by assigning to them the responsibility of submitting requests to OCLC.
- With respect to demand for popular new titles, pilot test the following:
  - Setting aside copies of popular titles that are segregated from the hold queues and remain in the libraries. Libraries have found this "Bestseller Express" service to have marketing appeal and deliver customer satisfaction; and
  - Assigning to the System or District purchase of extra copies of hot titles that would be shared among all libraries.

- Investigate the need for IDS affiliate memberships for libraries. Recent changes in IDS policies may negate the need for BCPL to cover the cost for affiliate members.

*Potential Savings and/or Workflow Efficiencies*

- Customers will have more timely access to popular materials.
- Libraries may be able to save money by eliminating one IDS membership and one OCLC membership for the RPL-DLC.
- Consolidated delivery will increase efficiency.
- Increased clarity among member libraries regarding the respective roles of BCPL and RPL-DLC for delivery and ILL.
- Wyomissing Library can provide better customer service with more frequent delivery service.

## **OUTREACH AND SERVICES TO YOUTH**

Youth services is the signature service of libraries across the United States. Elected officials, community leaders and the general public regard public libraries as educational pillars of academic achievement and lifelong learning. Berks County is no exception.

The Berks County Comprehensive Plan sets forth a goal to “expand educational opportunities to meet the need for skilled and professional workers.” The County’s Public libraries contribute to this effort by providing quality services, materials and programs for young people as well as for County adult residents who continue to pursue educational goals.

### **Best Practices**

- Libraries gain recognition as leaders in their communities for emergent literacy and reading readiness.
- Libraries are key to early literacy skills for children.
- Children’s librarians are knowledgeable about early childhood development and childhood literacy and have programs that support pre-reading skill-building.
- Libraries provide developmentally-appropriate programs, resources and spaces appropriate for children in preschool, lower elementary grades, tweens, and teens.
- Children’s librarians train the trainers—parents and other care givers—on the selection of materials, story-telling techniques, and appropriate use of technology for children.
- Programs for children from birth to 18 months introduce them to reading and the love of books.
- Libraries maintain mutually productive relationships with schools to support academic achievement and maximize resources.
- Children’s programs are planned as lessons with clear learning objectives.

- Robust summer reading programs are well attended, support academic achievement by averting the “summer slide”, and save school districts and, ultimately, tax-payers money.
- Library programs are aligned with Common Core objectives and STEM curricula.
- Youth services coordinators provide training for children’s librarians to spark innovative and fun programs.
- For efficiency and quality, coordinators create templates for programs that can be replicated by multiple libraries.

### Situation Analysis

BCPL has a Children’s Services Coordinator on staff. This employee is responsible for:

- Program development and support for member libraries;
- Outreach services such as *Baby Step Bags* and *Dial-a-Story*;
- System-wide programs, such as *Summer Reading* and *Children’s Book Week*;
- Resources and equipment, such as story time kits, puppets, flannel boards, etc.; and
- *Make it and Take It* workshops.

BCPL’s Outreach Services Coordinator, a preschool program specialist, one full time and one part time library assistant, and three StoryRiders are responsible for Bookasaurus and the extremely popular StoryRiders initiative which extends children’s services to County preschools, daycare centers and Head Start programs. StoryRiders, in place for 12 years, plans programs based on the school calendar and visits every member library once a week. Target audiences for the programs are children, their parents, and member library staff.

The Bookasaurus is not open to the public. Its mission is to take library materials and programs to children enrolled in Head Start programs, Berks County Intermediate Unit locations, and other daycare centers and nursery schools. Since the staff was reduced from two full time to one full time and one part time employee, the number of stops has been

reduced with the program emphasis now on reaching children with the greatest need. There is a waiting list of schools and centers that want to be placed on the Bookasaurus schedule. Employees have been told that when the twelve-year old van can no longer be kept in service, Bookasaurus will be terminated.

All BCPL member libraries have a designated youth services staff member. The larger libraries may have a full time children's services librarian; children's services is not a full time position at most of the smaller libraries. Part time employees generally work between 10-30 hours per week, and a portion of those hours are frequently spent at the circulation desk. Most importantly, the majority of the youth services staff do not have an MLS degree or even special training in early childhood education or other relevant areas of study.

The RPL-DLC does not provide support for youth services. At the RPL, the Assistant Library Director also serves as the Manager of Youth Services and supervises a staff of seven in the combined Young Adult and Children's Services Departments. On an informal basis, the Assistant Library Director and other members of the RPL Children's services staff serve as a resource for BCPL member libraries.

RPL-DLC is designated as a Family Place Library which means that it provides integrated services for children and their parents. The Library offers numerous bilingual programs, including Chinese events which have attracted large and diverse audiences. Resources for children include Tumble Books, Story Web, an online catalog, and a digital collection.

### Service Gaps

- There is a disconnect between the needs of member libraries for youth services support and what the BCPL Youth Services Coordinator provides.
- The number of staff devoted to children's services in member libraries is inadequate.
- Children living in sixteen unclaimed municipalities are no longer served by the bookmobile.
- There is a lengthy waiting list of schools or day care programs interested in being placed on the Bookasaurus schedule of stops.

- Member libraries offer insufficient tween and teen spaces, programs and services.

## Recommendations

- Transfer the position of the BCPL Youth Services coordinator to the RPL-DLC and retain the responsibilities for outreach services at BCPL.
- Review and update the job description for Youth Services Coordinator to reflect the trends and recommendations detailed in the Audit and Assessment report.
- Develop a comprehensive plan for the delivery of youth services in Berks County.
- Develop management strategies for eliminating the disconnect between services that are the responsibility of the Youth Services Coordinator and those delivered by the outreach staff—to repair a fractured service delivery model that impedes evaluation, sound planning, and accountability.
- Evaluate the current capacity of the Bookasaurus and StoryRiders programs to satisfy demand and need.
- Solicit the support of the County to expand the StoryRiders concept by creating a trained corps of youth services specialists who can be deployed across the system.
- Increase efforts to coordinate the work of RPL youth services staff and BCPL's Coordinator of Youth Services and Outreach Service Manager.
- Assist member libraries with programs for older elementary school children.
- Address issues associated with the summer reading program which were cited in the research and reflected in the enrollment decline.
- Review existing coordination between school and public libraries; establish goals for future school and library partnerships in the County; and identify other possible areas of collaboration.
- Offer additional programs which support Common Core learning objectives and STEM curricula.

*Potential Savings and/or Workflow Efficiencies*

- Skills and resources available for youth services are maximized by cooperation between BPLC and RPL youth services staff.
- The quality of children’s services will improve because it is delivered in a more strategic, consistent, and cohesive manner.
- Children who enroll in summer reading programs and read a minimum number of books will not experience the summer slide, and school districts will reduce instructional time required to reteach skills when children return to school in the fall.
- The gap between children who are served and those who are either unserved or underserved will be narrowed.
- The County reaps benefits for every child who enters school ready to read.
- Support for early childhood literacy helps the County achieve its goal of a more skilled and literate work force.

## OUTREACH AND SERVICES TO ADULTS AND SENIORS

Fifteen percent of Berks County's 66,000 residents are 65+ years old. (As a point of comparison, only 6% of the County's population is under the age of 5.) The segment of the population ages 45—64 is projected to grow, increasing demands for customized programs and services and calling for sound strategic planning to meet the needs of these complex market segments.

### Best Practices

In 2014, The Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) issued a white paper which establishes best practices in service delivery to older adults and seniors.

- Decisions about program and service delivery to older adults and seniors are based on reliable demographic information.
- The needs and preferences of adults and seniors are reflected in library materials, programs and services.
- The library facility is a safe and welcoming environment appropriate for older customers.
- The library is central point where seniors can access information about community services for older adults;
- Services and materials are provided to older adults who can no longer visit the library in person.
- Staff is trained on the nuances of providing services to older adults.
- Partnerships with other agencies and organizations expand and improve services for older adults.

Please see:

<http://www.ims.gov/assets/1/AssetManager/Older%20Adults%20IMLS%20funded%20projects%20and%20services%2014Apr2014.PDF>

## Situation Analysis

In the past, neither the System nor RPL-DLC has staffed a coordinator of programs and services for adults and seniors. At one time, BCPL used the bookmobile to extend access to older residents who are physically unable to visit public library facilities. However, the bookmobile was eliminated from the budget in 2009 and outreach to older County residents was effectively terminated. Recognizing the increasing demand for services to these population segments, BCPL recently rewrote the Outreach Coordinator's job description to include outreach to adult residents as well as youth of Berks County and has since filled the position with a new employee.

Adult programming at RPL is organized and facilitated by the Reference Department staff. A part time employee, using a personally owned vehicle, provides limited outreach to older County residents. A few BCPL member libraries reach out to nursing homes, also on a limited basis.

### Service Gaps

Addressing the needs of the elderly is a Berks County Comprehensive Plan goal—particularly underserved are individuals who

- Live in nursing homes;
- Are home bound;
- Lack transportation to library facilities;
- Cannot use technology to access library resources and services; and
- Have limited literacy skills.

BCPL has no comprehensive, coordinated approach to programming and service delivery for older residents.

## Recommendations

- Develop a comprehensive plan for service delivery to adults and seniors.
- At the end of three years, determine whether or not one employee can coordinate services to both adults and children.

- Conduct a survey of member libraries to determine the needs of older residents in their communities and identify ways in which BCPL can support their existing programs and services for seniors.
- Research programs and services delivery models for seniors which have been successful in libraries elsewhere and develop conceptual models for adult and senior programs which can be replicated at member libraries.
- Identify organizations and agencies with which BCPL could partner to expand senior programming and resources.
- Expand the menu of adult and senior services to include:
  - Additional programming, technology training, and support for adult learners;
  - Reader's Advisory Services;
  - Delivery service to residents of the County's nursing homes, Berks Heim, and six Senior Neighborhood Centers; and
  - Information assistance for older residents applying for e-government services.
- Train member library staff on techniques for providing quality customer services to older adults.
- Consider establishing a senior citizens advisory council to counsel libraries on programs and services which would be of greatest interest to them.

### *Potential Savings and/or Workflow Efficiencies*

- The County will move towards reaching its goal of addressing the needs of its older residents.
- Older County residents will have technology access and "know-how".
- Older adults and seniors will have a reliable resource for obtaining information about senior services.
- Libraries will provide the places where seniors can remain connected and engaged.



- Libraries and, ultimately, the County will be able to capitalize on the skills, resources, and experience of Boomers who are an active and engaged market segment.

## **PUBLIC AWARENESS AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS**

Nationwide research consistently demonstrates that the public is not well informed about the full range of services available at their libraries. In response, libraries are paying more attention to creating and managing their brands and executing strategically sound public information plans. Feedback from BCPL member libraries suggests they would welcome additional assistance with increasing public understanding of the benefits of using their public libraries.

### **Best Practices**

Successful public information programs:

- Are based on a strategic branding and marketing plan;
- Differentiate branding, marketing, advertising, and PR;
- Tailor communications to market segments;
- Rely on consistent, compelling messaging;
- Articulate customer benefits;
- Disseminate information on a timely basis;
- Incorporate materials for non-English speakers;
- Integrate print, broadcast, and social media;
- Seek cost-efficiencies by means of productive partnerships with organizations that have access to target audiences; and
- Incorporate measurable outcomes.

### **Situation Analysis**

The State Library Code stipulates that District Library Centers will provide public relations programs and materials for libraries in their districts. The Reading District Library Center, however, does not offer this service to Berks County libraries. Reading Public Library recently hired a Director of Advancement and Communication; however, that individual supports the fundraising efforts of the Foundation and develops communications and outreach materials exclusively for RPL. An administrative assistant to that position has successfully used social media and newspaper coverage to promote RPL events.

BCPL has a Community Relations Coordinator on staff. The focus of that individual's efforts is to design posters, flyers, bookmarks, calendars, user guides and materials to promote

County-wide programs such as Book Bonanza (BCPL's annual used book sale) or summer reading. This individual also provides graphic design and printing services for member libraries. Additional responsibilities include borrower card production, website design and update support, and County print shop liaison.

### Service Gaps

- No comprehensive marketing or community relations plan exists.
- No staff member has professional marketing training or experience.
- There is no plan in place to measure the cost effectiveness of marketing initiatives.
- Libraries have a limited capacity to reach non library users.

### **Recommendations**

- Recruit an individual who has training and experience in marketing planning and communications who would be responsible for County-wide marketing initiatives and advocacy.
- In the short term, transfer the responsibility for graphic design and printing services (a District Center responsibility) to the RPL-DLC.
- Broaden the scope of the Community Relations Coordinator's job to include a more holistic approach to strategic marketing, promoting of library services throughout the County, and managing relationships with other County agencies and organizations.
- Create a system-wide marketing plan that identifies target audiences and key benefits messages which articulate the value of public library services.
- Expand the public's understanding of public library services beyond "a place to borrow books".
- Create templates for member library marketing materials and websites which can be edited directly by member libraries.

- Make better use of marketing partnerships with other County departments and agencies, schools, businesses, and non-profit organizations.
- Orchestrate County-wide card registration drives.
- Adopt brand standards and manage the BCPL brand accordingly.
- Continue to increase the use of social media to generate greater awareness of library programs and resources.

### *Potential Savings and/or Workflow Efficiencies*

Effective marketing ensures that taxpayer investment in libraries has a significant return because County residents are better informed about and, therefore, more likely to access public library resources. Many residents of the County—such as job seekers, English language learners or students—have personal and professional aspirations that can be supported by library services about which, without marketing, they are uninformed.

If BCPL cultivates mutually beneficial partnerships, it will be able to reduce the cost of using targeted marketing distribution channels to educate specific segments about the programs and services of greatest interest to them.

## FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

In Pennsylvania, libraries are not the exclusive responsibility of a particular level of government, but, just as they share in the benefits of high-performing libraries, so too do they share responsibility. County commissions are responsible for seeing that library services are available to residents throughout a county. As designated by the Pennsylvania Library Code, local city, borough, and township councils, commissions and boards of supervisors ensure that library services are available to residents in their respective communities. For local libraries to thrive, commissioners and the governing bodies of the cities, boroughs and townships partner to provide the resources through collaborative agreements.

### Best Practices

Beyond the basics of accounting and auditing, best practices in public library financial management include presenting a program budget, providing user-friendly online public reporting of financial information, making metric-based funding decisions, and balancing library funding between county government and the cities, boroughs, and townships within the county.

By illustrating the cost of individual library services and programs, program budgets provide a platform for informed decisions about which services to retain and where to explore alternatives. Beyond the standard budgetary line-item format—funds for personnel, materials, operations, and, perhaps, capital— a program budget specifies the costs of programs and services, including all direct costs for personnel, materials and operations, overhead costs for administration, management and space, and unit costs.

Even libraries with strong online customer services—catalog access, eBooks, job searches, renewals, interlibrary loans, database searches, etc.—sometimes overlook the “backroom” administrative information that is part of providing public services. This information should be easily accessed on a library website, and, at a minimum, include the annual budget, periodic financial reports, and audit results in user-friendly formats.

Metrics-based funding relates county priorities to funding allocations, balancing the general principle of equal service to all residents with data from each library that indicates service use and need. The distribution of funds to member libraries should be in proportion to the population of each library’s service area. All residents of a county benefit

from good library service, and they all help pay the bills through their taxes. They may use the library frequently, occasionally, or never, but all benefit: excellent library services result in a better informed community, higher real estate resale values, a more skilled workforce, and children who do not lose reading skills in the summer. Nevertheless, these important impacts are hard to measure independently of those of other contributing institutions, such as schools and employment programs. As a proxy for outcomes, libraries measure outputs, such as circulation and computer use—statistics which are a solid basis for the distribution of funding to member libraries. Library circulation, for example, a practical measure of output, routinely and affordably captured, can be used to represent the actual outcomes of library service.

## Situation Analysis

### Budgets and Online Reporting

The preparation of the library budget and the posting of information on the library website is the responsibility of the library staff.

### Metrics-Based Funding Distribution

The Berks County Commissioners appropriate more than \$3 million per year for the provision of library services. As reported in the Berks County Public Libraries Year-End 2013 budget (*see Appendix*), the County funding is divided into three major categories (with 2013 actual funding amounts):

County Public Library System Staff and Operations	\$ 1,208,545.
County/Reading Public Library funding agreement	900,000.
County Library Aid to member libraries	1,110,981.
Total County Library Funding	\$ 3,219,526.

It is important to note that all of this funding is in support of local library service. There is no separate County library. All of the funds are either for the County system which supports and provides programs and services for local libraries or are direct appropriations for local libraries.

The distribution of County and State funding among the BCPL member libraries is determined by the System Board. For 2015, the total of \$2,189,474 is managed as follows:

- Annual County and State aid are combined into a total distribution to the member libraries.
- The member library's total distribution of State and County Aid is a sum of Parts I, II, and III.
  - Part I. Each member library's municipal share of the incentive funding from the State is identified and the sum of these amounts (\$321,713) is deducted from the total.
  - Part II. Fifty percent of the funds remaining after deducting the Part I total are divided into a base allocation for each member library. Members with branches or multiple libraries (Reading and Spring Township) receive a base allocation for each library/branch. Thus, the total of \$933,881 for the base allocations is divided by 23 for a base allocation to each member library and branch of \$40,603.50 in 2015.
  - Part III. The other fifty percent of the funds remaining after deducting the Part I total are divided into a Variable Allocation (\$933,881) for each library determined by the library's percentage of the following:
    - Local Effort – weighted 35%
    - Circulation – weighted 57%
    - Computer Use – weighted 8%
- The 2015 funding distribution imbeds local government funding into a larger category titled "Local Effort" which incorporates donations, fundraising, rent, fines, and other income raised by the local library as well as appropriations from the local government—a blended approach wherein each library receives some base level of funding regardless of size (Part II) and some funding based on the scope of activity and local funds raised (Parts I and III.) *See Appendix for the 2015 Funding Distribution.*

## Balanced County/Local Funding

A unique agreement between the City of Reading and Berks County stipulates that, along with other, non-library provisions, the County pay \$900,000 per year to Reading for the Reading Public Library, and County Commissioners appoint five of the RPL board members. Because the County provides funds and has seats on the RPL Board of Trustees, the RPL is *de facto* a “County library”, and it is a judgment call whether the \$900,000 should be counted as local support, County support, or both. In parts of this report, this amount may be excluded to provide a better basis for comparisons. The report will note how these funds are addressed in each instance.

In 2013, local governments in Berks County provided an aggregate of \$840,433 for local library services—ranging from \$154,841 at Spring Township Library to \$6,500 at Bernville Area Community Library. *Per capita*, the range for the 19 libraries in the system was from \$0.84 to \$10.18. The mean *per capita* local government funding was \$2.33, and the median was \$2.16.

Berks County *per capita* funding for library services in 2013 was \$7.82. Excluding the agreement with RPL, the County provided \$5.63 in support of local libraries in 2013, either through direct grants (\$2.70) or through the provision of the County Library System services (\$2.93).

A copy of the report *Berks County Public Libraries Local State and County Funding for 2012 and 2013* is found in the Appendix.

It is significant to note that while the City of Reading provided only \$100,000 in 2013 (\$1.14 *per capita*), prior to 2010 it provided more than \$500,000 annually to the Library (more than \$5.00 *per capita*). Reading decreased its appropriation to \$100,000 from 2010 through 2014, and, beginning in 2015, increased its appropriation to \$350,000 (\$3.97 *per capita*.)

## Service Gaps

### *Limited Public Access to Funding Information*

The BCPL website currently has a very brief statement about library funding. There is no presentation of budget, financial reports or audits. The information on the individual

member libraries' websites varies; financial information is typically limited to a section of an annual report posted online or is not reported at all. At the very least, the public's inability to access this information hinders advocacy towards equitable funding formulas.

### *Underfunded Services; Uneven Funding*

The survey of member library directors and trustees indicated that financial management is a concern among those surveyed, receiving the lowest "satisfied" ranking (63%), the highest "dissatisfied" ranking (24%), and the second highest "important" ranking (96%)—implicit is a combination of concerns about insufficient funds for distribution to the 19 member libraries and the equity of the funding distribution plan.

In support of local libraries in 2013, the County provided \$5.63 *per capita*, excluding the RPL agreement, in direct grants and for the County Library System. Yes, more is needed. And more will be needed in the future. However, the gap noted here is the highly variable funding from the local governments in the County.

In 2013 local government funding for only four County libraries approached or surpassed the County's level of financial support on a *per capita* basis: Sinking Spring (\$10.18 *per capita* in 2013 local funding), Womelsdorf Community (\$7.05), Spring Township (\$5.71) and Exeter Community (\$4.08). Sinking Spring and Womelsdorf Community libraries are among the smallest in the County. Exeter and Spring Township are among the busiest. While Reading's funding of the Library in 2013 was only \$1.14 *per capita*, the rate in 2015 of \$3.97 would rank Reading fifth on the list of municipal library funding *per capita*.

The mean local government library funding of \$2.33 *per capita* is only half of what the County commits. Six of the libraries in the System received less than \$1.50 *per capita* from local governments. The current traditional line item budget does not indicate costs, in total (direct costs and indirect costs) and per unit of service delivery (per class, per participant, per book delivered) for each program or service the libraries provide. This gap in financial data means that decisions about programs are subjective rather than objective.

The distribution of state and County aid to the Berks County member libraries is based partly on metrics and partly on an arbitrary assignment. In 2015, \$933,881 (42.7 %) of State and County aid is distributed on a per-library basis and an equal amount is distributed on the basis of three variables: local effort, circulation and computer use. The flat, per-library funding bears no direct relationship to results or services provided in

contrast to metrics-based funding distribution that would enable the County to set expectations and distribute funding accordingly.

The current pattern of a fixed amount per library stands as an enticement for groups seeking to start additional libraries, a concern of community and State Library leadership. The absence of agreements between the County and the local governments that provide for a consistent and substantial level of funding from local governments in support of their local libraries leaves local library boards seeking local government funding with widely varying levels of success. County leadership in seeking municipal funding can close this gap.

## **Recommendations**

### Budget Preparation

The System should prepare an annual program budget beginning in 2016. Because this is a new endeavor, the staff should take a trial run by organizing the 2015 budget into program categories in the summer of 2015, review the draft program budget with the Board, and make revisions as needed to establish the format for 2016. A program budget for 2016 will provide the System Board with a platform for making informed choices about programs and emphases in the coming year.

### Online Financial Reporting

The System should make the budget, financial reports, and audits available online. In 2016, the staff should aim toward making the documents more user-friendly, or providing user-friendly summaries online with links to the detailed reports.

### Metrics-Based Funding Distribution

The basic Funding Distribution spreadsheet used by the System in 2014 and 2015 can be employed to first assign the Part I municipal incentive funds and to split the balance of the total of State aid and County aid into two pools: Part II (Base) and Part III (Variable). However, several changes are recommended for the determination of Parts II and III.

Part II funding should be based on the population served by each local library. Because this is a substantial change from the current flat per-library allocation, the reformulation

should be phased in over a five year period. In 2016, 20% of the Part II total distribution should be based on population and 80 percent on the current (2015) flat base allocation per library. In 2017, the split should be 40 - 60 and so on until 2020 when 100% of the base allocation will be determined by population. It is also important to note that the County's funding of the System supports local libraries approximately in proportion to their use as well – busier libraries need more System support.

Beginning in 2020, the calculations for the Variable Allocation (Part III) should exclude local government funds because local government funding levels are addressed elsewhere. With this variable factor removed, the weight of the library outputs—circulation and computer use—must be adjusted. No set or standard model for this distribution exists. A possibility is to weigh circulation at 70%, computer use at 20% and local effort (excluding local government funding) at 10%. This distribution should be reviewed on a regular basis by the System Board and revised as needed to recognize changes in library service over time and what measures best represent library use. The element of local effort remaining as part of the Variable Allocation (Part III) can serve as an encouragement for libraries to be entrepreneurial, but with less weight than in the 2014-2015 formulas because it does not include local government funding.

### Balanced County/Local Funding

The County Commissioners, in concert with the County Library System Board, should set a floor for local government matching of County Library funding by the year 2025, and negotiate agreements with the local governments to provide this funding. This is a policy decision that must be made at the County Commissioners level. This floor should be equal to the County's *per capita* level of funding for library services, excluding the special agreement with the City of Reading. In 2013, if this matching had been in effect, each member library would have received a minimum of \$5.63 per capita in local government funding.

In the interim period, 2016 – 2020, the County should establish a floor at the current (2015) local government funding level for each member library to ensure that their local government funding is not reduced during this transition period. If local governments reduce local library funding, the County funding should be proportionately reduced.

The transition to this standard relies on local governments and the County negotiating agreements by 2020. Beginning with the 2021 distribution of state and county aid, local libraries not receiving at least 20 % of the County *per capita* rate from their local

governments will not receive 10% of their scheduled County aid distribution. The funds not distributed will be reallocated proportionately among the remaining system members. In 2022, the proportion would change to 40 % for the match with a 2 % reduction in funds and so on until 2025 when a 100 % match or 50 % loss of state and county aid is triggered, effectively providing only state aid to libraries insufficiently funded by their local governments.

If County and local government funding *per capita* in 2013 were to be still in effect in 2021, two libraries in the Berks County system would fall below the 20 % threshold. In 2022, at the 40 % threshold, 10 system libraries would fall below the mark. In 2023, at the 60 % rate, only 4 libraries would be at this level (Reading Library would also be in this group based on its 2015 city funding). In 2024, three libraries would exceed the mark and in 2025, when the 100 % threshold is reached, only these same three would meet the mark.

While the principal initiative rests with the County Commissioners and local Councils, Commissions, Boards of Supervisors, and local library boards must also engage in these discussions. Local library boards can serve as intermediaries to help the local officials to understand the need for sufficient local library funding and reaching agreement with County Commissioners.

Local library boards can also guide the determination of shares for municipalities to match the County funds. For example, beginning in 2025, a library with a service area population of 10,000 would need to obtain local government funding of \$56,300 (based on the 2013 data used in this example) to meet the threshold established to match the level of County funding. This amount could be simply distributed among the service area local governments on the same *per capita* basis or on the basis of circulation in each of the jurisdictions, resulting in uneven *per capita* rates or by blending the two approaches. Using circulation rather than just a straight *per capita* rate recognizes that direct services to residents vary from community to community. The concept of use as a basis for sharing funding is well-appreciated by local government officials. The point is that the group of municipalities collectively needs to fund \$56,300, and each local government determines its share. Local government funding above the County threshold level could be added back into the formula as part of local effort.

## Potential Savings and/or Workflow Efficiencies

### *Financial Transparency*

Posting of online financial information is a quality improvement that should be within the capacity of the existing staff of the Berks County Library System. Preparation of a program budget, by contrast, will require some additional work, but should be within the capacity of the existing staff of the Berks County Library System. No direct savings will result, but as the program budget serves as a platform for improved decision-making by the Board, future savings and quality improvements may be identified. In addition, a program budget will help illustrate how County funding for the system is providing local library support. This can be used to inform local library boards as they work with local elected officials to obtain additional funding.

### *Funding Distribution*

The distribution of state and County aid through a funding distribution plan is a “Zero Sum Game.” Any additional funding for one or more is subtracted from the funding for others. For each “winner”, there is a matching “loser.” Few things are more difficult for a County Library Board to untangle. In the end, funding should be based on customers served, either broadly by service available (*per capita*) or more specifically by service provided (circulation and other use measures).

The recommendations call for substantial dialogue. The transition from 2021 through 2025 to a more balanced level of local government funding for local libraries is a quality improvement that will increase funding for most libraries in the system. It will be a difficult transition for some, and some local library boards may decide they cannot meet the standard and close or combine with another nearby. Some local governments may choose to leave the matter up to the voters by placing a library tax referendum on the local ballot during the 5 year start-up period leading to implementation of the first phase in 2021.

For any proposed new library, the County Commissioners should begin immediately to require local funding matching on a *per capita* basis. This requirement will set a high threshold that will ensure there is substantial local government support for a proposed library before it applies to become part of the County system.

## **THE FUTURE: MAXIMIZING RESOURCES**

The Audit and Assessment indicates that a realignment of the responsibilities and services of BCPL and RPL-DLC is both warranted and in the best interests of County residents and financial supporters. Because current practices are deeply entrenched, any changes will require cultural shifts within both organizations. Both Boards, staff at all levels, and BCPL's member libraries must commit to a singular focus on improving services to County residents and providing the best possible return on tax dollars.

Engineering change is always complicated, but several factors make this situation particularly challenging. All System staff members are County employees. At Reading Public Library, some individuals are employees of the City of Reading while others are paid by the Reading Public Library Foundation. On top of that, a percentage of the salaries of some RPL employees are charged against the budget of the District Library Center. Reorganization will necessitate the physical relocation of some employees with many years of service. Job descriptions in some instances must be rewritten, and responsibilities may change. Three unions will want assurances that employee rights are respected and union rules are adhered to.

### **The Library Code**

At the time that this Audit and Assessment final report is being prepared, the future of District Library Centers in Pennsylvania is uncertain. The Office of Commonwealth Libraries and the Governor's Advisory Council have facilitated statewide discussions to consider possible changes to the Pennsylvania Library Code, including the sections regarding library systems and District Library Centers. Yet, because of leadership changes within the Office of Commonwealth Libraries, it is not clear if or when those revisions will be approved.

Even if the revisions to the Code do not move forward, RPL-DLC will have to address certain issues, in particular the fact that it does not have an Advisory Council which satisfies the Library Code requirements. Specifically:

- The Advisory Council is comprised of the same five individuals who serve on the District negotiating team. This is problematic in that the Advisory Council should approve the negotiated agreement and DLC budget.

- The Advisory Council is supposed to have the librarian and Trustees representing all of the libraries in the District.
- The Advisory Council is charged with monitoring the DLC's progress on a quarterly regular basis.
- RPL-DLC does not have a three year strategic plan or a Program Manager responsible for implementing a plan.
- RPL-DLC spends only 8.13% on materials acquisition versus the 12% specified by the Code. (Note: For 2015, RPL-DLC has budgeted \$382,000—or 14%—for collections.)
- Many of the services mandated by the Code as currently written either have not been fulfilled, have been only partially fulfilled, or have become, by default, the responsibility of BCPL, including
  - Continuing education for library staff,
  - Promotion of public library service,
  - Library services to youth,
  - Services to special populations, and
  - Orientation and training of trustees and directors of libraries.

## Phased Changes

The realignment of services is far reaching, and the formation of an implementation committee to oversee a phased three-year process is recommended. This committee's first order of business would be to develop a detailed implementation plan and timeline which must be approved by the County Commissioners and both the System and Reading Public Library Boards.

To garner buy-in for proposed changes, the implementation plan must be transparent and clearly articulated to all stakeholders in timely and accurate communications. To avoid confusion and misunderstandings, a Memo of Understanding (MOU) between BCPL and RPL will be required. The MOU would detail the changes to their respective roles and responsibilities and the manner in which the merger of overlapping functions will be managed.

## YEAR ONE: 2016

### *Youth Services*

Because providing support for youth services is a mandated responsibility of a District Library Center, transfer the current BCPL Youth Services coordinator position to the RPL-DLC. Retain youth services outreach at the System.

### *Cataloging*

Relocate all materials management, collection development, and cataloging functions of the Reading Public Library to System Headquarters.

### *Training*

Establish a joint Training Planning Committee that will create a calendar of training programs and identify appropriate trainers from RPL, BCPL, or outside the system. Limit RPL-DLC responsibility for training to the public at member library locations. Assign the responsibility for professional training and continuing education to the System, a change which does not require the relocation of any personnel. Determine the need to hire an experienced trainer to conduct staff and trustee training programs.

### *Technology*

In consultation with BCPL, RPL, and their respective Human Resources HR departments, consolidate all technology and tech support services at RPL. Eliminate BCPL's Technology Coordinator position to free up funds to address other staffing needs. Reassign BCPL's Technology Support Assistant to RPL. Add an additional tech support staffer to allow more time for the Director of Technology (Deputy Director of RPL) to coordinate with the County, develop a technology plan, and implement other technology initiatives outlined in the Audit and Assessment.



## YEAR TWO: 2017

### *Public Awareness and Community Relations*

Relocate graphic design and printing services to the RPL-DLC. Negotiate an agreement with the County for their continuing to provide print services.

At BCPL, hire an experienced marketing and public relations professional to oversee all design and print services, coordinate and promote all Countywide library events, manage media relations, oversee partnerships and collaborations, and coordinate communication and marketing of library programs and services with appropriate County agencies and with public and private sector entities.

### *ILL and Delivery*

Consolidate all interlibrary loan operations and delivery services at the System Headquarters. This realignment will require relocating one RPL employee to System headquarters and designating one clerical-level employee at RPL to pull materials from the shelves to fill ILL requests.

## YEAR 3: 2018

### *District Library Center*

Designate the System as the District Library Center. BCPL is better positioned to satisfy the requirements of a District Library Center than is the Reading Public Library.

The RPL-DLC has earned a reputation for providing an invaluable collection upon which all of the public libraries in Berks County rely. The contribution of the Library to residents of the City of Reading has also garnered respect. However, RPL-DLC has struggled to provide the infrastructure and all the services specified in the Pennsylvania Library Code. Designating BCPL as the District Library Center will formalize the way in which many services—including marketing and public relations, consulting, ILL and delivery, training and tech support—have been provided for a number of years.

Relieved of the responsibility of providing DLC services, RPL will be able to intensify its focus on the needs of the residents of Reading. RPL's collection is vitally important to this



effort, and as such, RPL should be designated a Resource Library and continue to receive the funds for materials purchases and back-up reference services.

When the System is granted District Center status, provisions for hiring a District Consultant should be made. The System Administrator should no longer be the District Consultant.