**State of Public Library Management in Oregon – 2010**

September 2010

OLA Legislative Committee

**Public Sector Management**

Oregon has 133 public library entities as listed in the Oregon State Library database in 2010.[[1]](#footnote-1) Branch libraries bring the total number of library facilities in the state to 215. Of the 133 library entities, 19 are independent municipal corporations (e.g. districts) while the others are part of city or county government. The Hood River Library System closed on July 1, 2010 after a failed election to form a library taxing district. In November 2010, a revised special district proposal won approval by the voters. The libraries in Hood River, Parkdale and Cascades Locks remained shuttered through the end of 2010.

**Nongovernmental Management**

In 2007, libraries in Josephine County were closed. Community members formed the Josephine Community Libraries, Inc., a nongovernmental nonprofit organization dedicated to reopening and operating the libraries in Josephine County. Josephine Community Libraries, Inc. is operating under a three year agreement with the County who contributed $300,000 to the effort. On December 20, 2008, the Grants Pass library opened again. In 2009, three of the branches reopened - Illinois Valley, Williams and Wolf Creek. This system is funded through memberships, grants and donations and managed by a volunteer board of directors. The reality is that it is extremely difficulty to have public libraries without dedicated, stable public funding. Even so, the people in Josephine County are making progress. Table 1 provides an overview of funding of library services over the past five years and is an updated version of the table in last year’s report, *State of Public Library Management in Oregon – 2009*.

**Private Sector Management**

In Oregon, the only library currently operated under private sector management is the Jackson County Library System. The County Commissioners closed the library in April 2007 due to the loss of federal timber payments. In September 2007, the Commissioners contracted their management responsibilities for the 15-library system to LSSI for five years. The Commission retains its governance role, which includes funding the contract from County general fund revenues and setting policy. The Oregon Library Association monitors developments in Jackson County, as we believe all Oregonians should have access to quality library services and resources.

Table 2 compares the Jackson County Library System with other public libraries in the state serving populations over 85,000. Using the Cost Per Service Unit metric, it appears that public sector management outperformed privatized management. The Jackson County Library Services costs per service unit were similar to other Oregon libraries, but the system’s libraries were opened up to 65% less. The LSSI model in Jackson County appears to rely on reduced access to services and materials to achieve at a similar cost to those with additional hours of operation. For example, the Medford Public Library, Jackson County’s main branch, is open 24 hours a week which is very low for a library that was conceived as an anchor for a revitalized downtown and serves as a central hub.

The question for county and city administrators considering private sector management is what constitutes quality. The broader questions concern transparency – how are public funds being expended and is quality being sacrificed for private profit. This is an ongoing debate in the library community and is escalating. The Oregon Library Association remains one of the few library organizations with an adopted policy concerning public management of public libraries.

**Table 1: Josephine County Library Services**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Fiscal Year** | **Population of Service Area** | **Circulation** | **Registered Borrowers** | **Reference Transactions** | **Program Attendance** | **Total Operating Expenditures** | **Annual public service hours** | **Library Collection Expenditures** |
| FY 2005 | 78,600 | 492,695 | 34,840 | 31,094 | 3,874 | $1,290,348 | 3,712 | $85,476 |
| FY 2006 | 79,645 | 485,901 | 36,942 | 27,452 | 3,387 | $998,252 | 3,746 | $61,518 |
| FY 2007 | 81,125 | 316,227 | 37,325 | 1,490 | 0 | $552,485 | 1,612 | $14,106 |
| FY 2008 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | CLOSED |
| FY 2009 | 83,290 | 102,695 | 4,482 | n.c | 1,397 | $91,214 | 1,020 | $17,000 |
| FY 2010 | 83,665 | 220,721 | 10,230 | 7,140 | 3,153 | $341,069 | 2,189 | $47,295 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Table 2: Comparative data among Oregon public libraries serving populations grater than 85,000**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Population served** | **Total circulation** | **Total reference questions** | **Total program attendance** | **Total Service Units** | **Total Operating Expenditures** | **Cost Per Service Unit** |
| Corvallis-Benton Co. Public Library | 86,725 | 1,674,356 | 239,863 | 36,314 | 1,950,533 | $6,362,268 | $3.26 |
| Douglas County Library System | 105,395 | 689,753 | 107,347 | 21,789 | 818,889 | $2,127,459 | $2.60 |
| Hillsboro Public Library | 132,787 | 2,513,747 | 83,519 | 29,415 | 2,626,681 | $6,981,077 | $2.66 |
| Beaverton City Library | 139,008 | 2,701,583 | 74,244 | 44,092 | 2,819,919 | $6,721,242 | $2.38 |
| Eugene Public Library | 157,100 | 2,929,086 | 128,960 | 38,725 | 3,096,771 | $11,170,458 | $3.61 |
| Deschutes Public Library District | 170,705 | 2,457,926 | 64,406 | 87,676 | 2,610,008 | $8,587,735 | $3.29 |
| Jackson County Library Services | 207,010 | 1,528,568 | 150,670 | 58,502 | 1,737,740 | $5,436,402 | $3.13 |
| Salem Public Library | 235,256 | 1,201,294 | 106,627 | 100,693 | 1,408,614 | $4,016,078 | $2.85 |
| Multnomah County Library | 724,680 | 22,715,292 | 785,009 | 321,415 | 23,821,716 | $56,110,376 | $2.36 |
| **Average** |  |  |  |  |  |  | **$2.63** |

**Table 3: Hours of main library operations for** **Oregon public libraries serving populations greater than 85,000**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Population served** | **Number of branches** | **Weekly hours of operation of main library** | **Public services hours** | **Cost Per Service Unit** |
| Corvallis-Benton Co. Public Library | 86,725 | 3 | 69 | 9.468 | $3.26 |
| Douglas County Library System | 105,395 | 10 | 40 | 16,103 | $2.60 |
| Hillsboro Public Library | 132,787 | 1 | 64 | 5,972 | $2.66 |
| Beaverton City Library | 139,008 | 1 | 63 | 3,214 | $2.38 |
| Eugene Public Library | 157,100 | 2 | 64 | 8,956 | $3.61 |
| Deschutes Public Library District | 170,705 | 5 | 59 | 18,105 | $3.29 |
| Jackson County Library Services | 207,010 | 14 | 24 | 15,624 | $3.13 |
| Salem Public Library | 235,256 | 1 | 53 | 4,416 | $2.85 |
| Multnomah County Library | 724,680 | 17 | 57 | 50,591 | $2.36 |
| **Average** |  |  | **54.7** |  | **$2.63** |

All data are from the Oregon State Library’s annual statistics appearing as the *2009-2010 Oregon Public Library Spreadsheet*.

Available at: http://oregon.gov/OSL/LD/statsploregon.shtm

1. Oregon State Library. 2011. *2009-2010 Oregon Public Library Spreadsheet*. Available at: http://oregon.gov/OSL/LD/statsploregon.shtm [↑](#footnote-ref-1)