



## Guidelines for Libraries Seeking to Expand or Reduce Service Areas

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### A. Purpose

With changes in local support, technology, transportation, population, and user expectations, adjustments to a library's service area may be needed. As authorized by the public library statute, libraries are responsible for determining their own service areas, and the Office of Commonwealth Libraries is responsible for administering the distribution of state aid based on those service areas that libraries are eligible to claim. Because these changes may impact the service areas of other libraries or library systems in relation to state aid, there is a need for clarification on the process to consider such changes. In all cases the goal must be to provide quality, equitable service to the community.

These guidelines apply to existing libraries and library systems that receive state aid and any library that intends to apply for state aid. For these guidelines, service area is defined as the municipality or municipalities that a library or library system claims for state aid. This definition is not meant to define or limit the extent to which a library or library system may provide services to the public.

Regardless of any changes to a library's service area, state-aided libraries shall continue to serve all residents who qualify under the [Guidelines for the Statewide Library Card System](#).

### B. Authorization

As outlined in [24 PA. C.S.A. § 9334 \(a\)](#), "to qualify for quality libraries aid, a local library or library system shall make a minimum financial effort of \$5 per capita for each person residing in the municipalities that will be part of the direct service area in which the library is applying for aid."

As outlined in [22 Pa. Code §131.31](#), "Application for State aid shall be made in accordance with instructions provided by the State Library and shall be submitted to the State Library by October 1."

As outlined in [22 Pa. Code §131.41](#), "A local library initially may apply for State Aid for the municipality in which it is located and for as many of the other municipalities in its direct service area on behalf of which it can qualify for State Aid with the required local financial effort."

As outlined in [24 PA. C.S.A. § 9311 \(b\) \(15\)](#), “The State Librarian shall have the power and duty to “Whenever necessary, for the purpose of administering the library laws of this Commonwealth, act as arbiter in defining the direct service area of any library.”

As outlined in [22 Pa. Code §131.34 \(a\)](#), “State aid for a municipality shall be paid only to the library board of directors responsible for service to the municipality, and may be granted only once in any year on the basis of the population of the municipality; provided that, in the case of a municipality served by a library governed, under a home rule charter adopted under the Home Rule Charter and Optional Plans Law (53 P.S. § § 1-101—1-1309), by an agency other than a library board of directors, the aid may be paid to the municipal government. Except as provided in this subsection, State aid for district library service shall be paid only to the board of directors of the library agency designated as a district library center by the State Librarian.”

As outlined in [22 Pa. Code §131.46](#) - Controversies over service areas. “The State Librarian is authorized to act as arbiter in defining the direct service area of a library in the event a municipality is claimed by more than one library as part of any library service area. In such arbitration, opportunity shall be afforded the municipal authorities of the municipality affected to express their wishes with respect to library service.”

Also, in [22 Pa. Code §141.21](#), “A municipality is judged to contribute to the support or to aid in the maintenance of a local library when it appropriates to the library annually an amount of money which is equivalent to 15% or more of the yearly income of the library from all local municipal sources.” Note: for purposes of local municipal sources only, a municipality is defined as a county, city, borough, town, township or a school district of the second, third or fourth class, which establishes or maintains a local library.

Expansion of service area is outlined in [22 Pa. Code §131.42](#): “A local library may expand its direct service area to receive State Aid at any time it is able to meet the local financial effort required of \$.00025 times market value of taxable property of the municipality or municipalities added, if it complies with the following conditions:

- The municipality or municipalities for which state aid is sought are contiguous to the existing service area for which state aid is received.
- No other library has a prior claim to the municipality or municipalities in its own direct service area.
- All the municipal authorities affected agree to the inclusion of the municipality in the direct service area of the library.”

[Note: *the local financial effort (LFE) requirement is superseded by the statute, the conditions remain.*]

Additionally, the requirements for expansion and reduction of service area are outlined in [22 Pa. Code §141.21 \(6\) and \(7\)](#):

- (6) Expansion of service area. Whether the library should expand the service area to which it gives all its services free of charge. For any plan to be approved which includes

projected expansion of direct service area, the plan of the library shall be accompanied by a copy of the agreement with the municipal authorities that the municipality or municipalities be included in the direct service area of such library. Any municipality which is added to a direct service area of a library shall be considered part of that area for a period of not less than 10 years, except when any of the following apply:

(i) Special approval is granted by the State Librarian for excluding such municipality or municipalities from such direct service area.

(ii) The municipal authorities of such municipality or municipalities resolve to withdraw from such direct service area.

(iii) The municipality or municipalities are included in another library service area through merger of two or more libraries or by contractual agreement.

(7) Reduction of service area. Whether the library should reduce the direct service area to which it gives all its services free of charge. For any plan to be approved which includes reduction of service area, the library's plan shall be accompanied by a copy of the library's notification to the municipal officers of the municipality or municipalities affected and to the county library board of directors if one exists within the same county. Plans for the use of state funds which include reduction of service area shall not be approved unless the library also plans to cease to give free library service to the residents of the municipality or municipalities affected.

## **C. Definitions**

### **Statute [24 PA. C.S.A. § 9302](#)**

Direct service area—The municipality to which the governing body of a library is responsible for extending all its library services without charge.

### **Regulations [22 Pa. Code § 131.1](#)**

Direct service area—The municipality to which the governing body of a library is responsible for extending its services without charge. The governing body of a library will be judged to have

assumed responsibility for a municipality when it grants free services to the residents of that municipality.

Municipality—A county, city, borough, town, township, or a school district of the second, third or fourth class, which establishes or maintains a local library.

### **Supplemental**

Claimed municipality – Any borough, township, city, or county included in the service area of a library or library system for the allocation of state aid.

## **D. Program Description – General**

1. The process for requesting a change to a library's service area is dependent upon the structure of the existing library organizations. There are different steps to follow if the library is a member of a federated library system; if it is located in a county with a county library; or if the library is an independent organization.
2. These processes apply to existing state-aided libraries and those libraries wishing to enter the State Aid program.
3. These procedures do not apply to District service areas.
4. As a first step and in all cases the following should occur:
  - a. Any library seeking to change its service area should engage the District Consultant(s) to discuss and determine impacts on all affected parties: communities, libraries, systems, districts.
  - b. The library board resolves to explore changing its service area through conversations with all affected parties.
  - c. The library board resolves to explore changing its service area through conversations with all affected parties.
5. The request for a change should be negotiated between the library boards of the impacted libraries, with guidance from the library directors.
6. There shall be a formal board resolution from the library requesting the change.
7. Any request for change shall include an analysis of the impact on the affected users and their communities.
8. Requests for service area changes may only be submitted to OCL once a year through the state aid application process. Requests for service area changes within a federated system may take place anytime as long as the changes are within the current system-wide service area. If a library's service area is expanded, it must agree to serve that area for a minimum of 10 years, per the Regulations, [22 Pa. Code §141.21\(6\)](#), unless an exception applies.
9. Reduction of service area. For any plan to be approved which includes reduction of service area, the library's plan shall be accompanied by a copy of the library's notification to the officers of the municipality or municipalities affected and to the county library board of directors, if one exists within the same county. Plans for state aid which include a reduction of service area shall not be approved unless the library also plans to

cease to give free library service to the residents of the municipality or municipalities affected. ([22 PA Code §141.21](#)) [Note: this only applies to communities which would become unserved and thus, not part of the Statewide Library Card Program.]

## **E. Program Description – When the Library Is in a County with a County Library and No System**

1. Expansion of Service Area
  - a. The process shall begin with conversations among the library director, county library director (if impacted by the change) and the District Consultant on implications of service area changes. Any change request shall include an analysis of the impact on the affected users and their communities.
  - b. If the service area is to be expanded or a library wishes to enter the State Aid program, the library must first confirm that it can meet the standards for an increased population. This shall include, but is not limited to:
    - 1) Certification of the library director
    - 2) Appropriate staffing levels
    - 3) Required local financial effort (LFE)
    - 4) Hours open
    - 5) Municipal authorities affected by the change shall be informed
    - 6) The expansion is contiguous to the current service area
  - c. If the library cannot meet the standards, it cannot apply for the change until it is able to fulfil the requirements.
  - d. If the proposed municipality's service area is claimed by the county library, and the library can meet the standards for the revised service area, the library board shall submit a formal written request to the board of county library requesting the change. The request shall include justification for the change, along with supporting data as appropriate to the situation. The request shall also include a description of how the library will meet the appropriate standards.
  - e. The board of the county library shall respond to the library's request within 90 days.
  - f. If the requested service area is claimed by another local library in the county, and the requesting library can meet standards for the revised service area, the library board shall submit a formal written change request to the board of the library that currently serves the area. The request shall include justification for the change, along with supporting data. The request shall also include a description of how the library will meet the appropriate standards.
  - g. The board of the local library should respond to the library's request within 90 days.
  - h. If the requesting library board wishes to appeal the decision of the county library or local library board, they may submit a concise request in writing to the State Aid Office of the Office of Commonwealth Libraries within 60 days.
  - i. The Office of Commonwealth Libraries shall respond to all libraries involved. Per the Library Code, the decision of the State Librarian shall be final based on this appeal.
2. Reduction of Service Area

- a. The process shall begin with conversations among the library director, county library director, and the district consultant on implications of service area changes.
- b. The library board shall submit a formal, written request to the board of the county library requesting the change. The request shall include justification for the change, with supporting data.
- c. The library board shall notify the impacted municipality or municipalities, the county library, and the district consultant of their decision to remove the municipality or municipalities from its service area.
- d. The county library then becomes responsible for providing service to the impacted municipality or municipalities. It may choose to negotiate reassignment of the service area to another library in the county.
- e. For any plan for state aid to be approved that includes a reduction of service area, the library's plan shall be accompanied by a copy of the library's notification to the officers of the municipality or municipalities affected and to the county library board, if one exists within the same county.

## **F. Program Description – When No County Library or System Exists:**

1. Expansion of Service Area
  - a. The process shall begin with conversations among the library director and the District Consultant on implications of service area changes.
  - b. If the service area is to be expanded or a library wishes to enter the state aid program, the library must first confirm that it can meet the higher standards for an increased population. This shall include, but is not limited to:
    - 1) Certification of the library director
    - 2) Appropriate staffing levels
    - 3) Required Local Financial Effort (LFE)
    - 4) Hours open
    - 5) Agreement from all the municipal authorities affected by the change
    - 6) The expansion is contiguous to the current service area
  - c. If the library cannot meet the standards, it cannot apply for the change until it is able to fulfil the requirements. If the expanded service area is not currently claimed by another library, the Library Board of the requesting library shall submit a formal, written request to the Office of Commonwealth Libraries. If the expanded service area is currently claimed by a local library and/or a library system and the library can meet the standards for the revised service area, the board of the library requesting the change shall submit a formal, written request to the board of the library or library system which currently serves that municipality. The request shall include justification for the change, with supporting data as appropriate to the situation. The request shall also include a description of how the library will meet the appropriate standards.
  - d. The board of the local library and/or library system shall respond to the library's request within 90 days.

- e. If the requesting library board wishes to appeal the decision of the local library or library system board, they may submit a concise request in writing to the State Aid Office, Office of Commonwealth Libraries, within 60 days.
  - f. The Office of Commonwealth Libraries shall respond to all libraries involved. Per the Library Code, the decision of the State Librarian shall be final based on this appeal.
2. Reduction of Service Area
    - a. The process shall begin with conversations among the library director, and the District Consultant on implications of service area changes.
    - b. The library board shall notify the impacted municipality(ies), and the District Consultant of their decision to remove the municipality(ies) from their service area.
  3. For any plan for state aid to be approved which includes a reduction of service area, the library's plan shall be accompanied by a copy of the library's notification to the municipal officers of the municipality or municipalities affected and to the county library board of directors if one exists within the same county. Plans for the use of state funds which include reduction of service area shall not be approved unless the library also plans to cease to give free library service to the residents of the municipality or municipalities affected. **[Note: this only applies to communities which would become unserved and thus, not part of the Statewide Library Card Program.]**

## **G. Program Description – When a Library Is Part of a Federated System**

1. The system board shall develop a process for the reconsideration of service areas, based on the recommendations below. The change may be initiated by the system or by request of a member library.
2. Library regulations (§ 141.24 (b)(4)) state that within a system, the local library's "Effective service area shall be construed to be the geographic area from which come 60% of the unit's registered borrowers and usage." Note: in this case, unit refers to the library.
3. Expansion of Service Area
  - a. The process shall begin with conversations among the library director(s), system administrator, and the district consultant on implications of service area changes.
  - b. If the service area is to be expanded or the library wishes to enter the State Aid program, the library must first confirm that it can meet the standards for an increased population. This shall include, but is not limited to:
    - 1) Certification of the library director
    - 2) Staffing levels
    - 3) Local financial effort (LFE)
    - 4) Hours open
    - 5) Municipal authorities affected by the change shall be informed
    - 6) Any system-level standards
  - c. If the system board initiates the change, all affected libraries shall be notified.
  - d. If the library cannot meet the standards, it cannot apply for the change until it is able to fulfill the requirements.

- e. If the library can meet standards for the revised service area, the library board shall submit a formal written request to the board of the federated system. The request shall include justification for the change, with supporting data appropriate to the situation. The request shall also include a description of how the library meets the standards. The board of the federated system shall respond to the library's request within 90 days.
  - f. If the proposed municipality's service area is claimed by another system member library, and the library can meet the standards for the revised service area, the library board shall submit a formal written change request to the board of the library currently serving the area, as well as to the board of the federated system. The request shall include justification for the change, along with supporting data as appropriate to the situation. The request shall also include a description of how the library will meet the appropriate standards. The board of the federated system shall respond to the library's request within 90 days.
  - g. If the requesting library board wishes to dispute the decision of the federated system board, it may submit a concise request in writing for advisory assistance to the State Aid Office of the Office of Commonwealth Libraries within 60 days.
  - h. The Office of Commonwealth Libraries will respond with advice to all libraries involved.
4. Reduction of Service Area
- a. The process shall begin with conversations among the library director, the system administrator, and the district consultant on implications of service area changes.
  - b. If the change is initiated by a member library, the member library board shall submit a formal written request to the board of the federated system requesting the change. The request shall include justification for the change, along with supporting data.
  - c. The board of the federated system shall respond to the library's request within 90 days.
  - d. If the requesting library board wishes to dispute the decision of the federated system board, it may submit a concise request in writing for advisory assistance to the State Aid Office of the Office of Commonwealth Libraries within 60 days.
  - e. The Office of Commonwealth Libraries shall respond with advice to all libraries involved.



## **Expected Outcomes**

### **1. Equitable and Sustainable Library Service**

- a. Supportable access to resources and services
- b. Expanded awareness of community needs
- c. Targeted or improved resources in the form of materials and staff

### **2. Efficient Library Service**

- a. Enhanced and clarified relationships with supporting municipalities
- b. Information customized to meet local needs
- c. Timely delivery of library materials
- d. Accessibility of materials