



# Book Smart

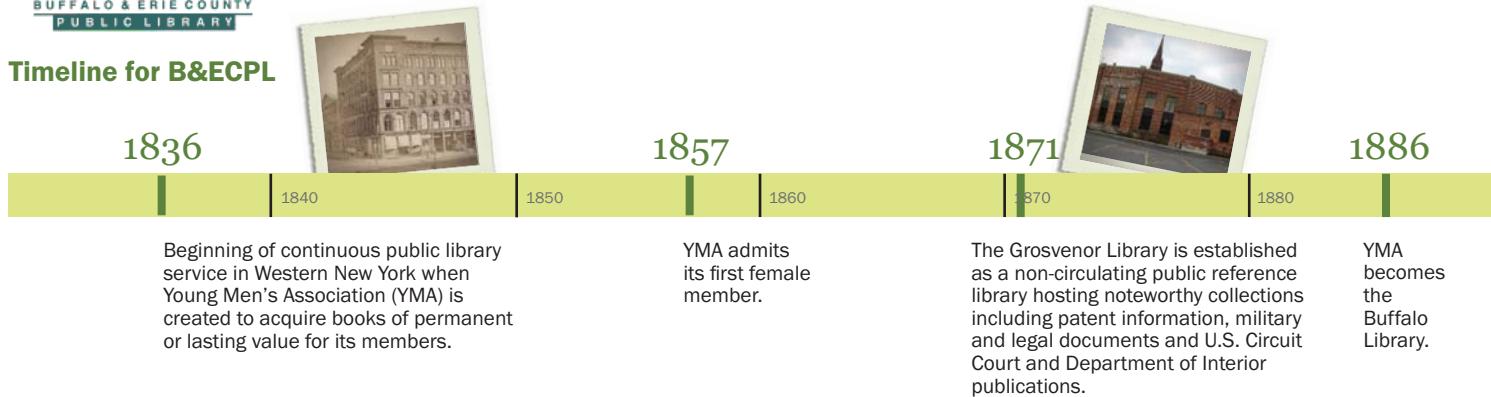
A Field Guide to Library System  
Organization for the Buffalo & Erie  
County Public Library System

JUNE 2011

**UB** Regional Institute  
University at Buffalo The State University of New York

A report submitted by the University at Buffalo Regional Institute  
to the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library System

## Timeline for B&ECPL



# Introduction

## THE CONTEXT

### Library systems across the country are facing budget cuts and exploring new organizational models to meet growing service demands

Since its formation as a federated system in Erie County in 1953, the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library (B&ECPL) has operated a central library, branches in the City of Buffalo, and member libraries in surrounding towns and villages. Currently, the B&ECPL operates a central library, 8 Buffalo branches and 22 member libraries supporting one or more branches. The B&ECPL, like other library systems around the state and nation, is currently contending with significant financial challenges that may alter services and central-member library relations, with some bearing on long-term system sustainability. The Library faced a recurring \$7 million shortfall in 2011, stemming largely from Erie County's decrease in its financial commitment by 21 percent. The same lower level of funding, \$18.2 million is projected for 2012, 2013 and 2014.

## PROJECT TEAM



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## THE CHARGE

### To critically examine library system organization options for the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library

In this context, the University at Buffalo Regional Institute, upon invitation by the B&ECPL executive director and trustees, member library trustees, Association of Contracting Library trustees, and board members of the Library Foundation, conducted a six-month project assessing alternative models of library system organization for Buffalo and Erie County. The objective, evidence-based research includes a critical examination of the pros, cons, tradeoffs and implications of the current and alternative models for the B&ECPL system organization, drawing upon current data and the experience of comparable library systems around the state and nation.

**1953**

1950

New York State merges the Grosvenor Library, Buffalo Public Library and Erie County Public Library to create one federated organization: the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library. Ownership of library collections is transferred to Erie County.



1960

1960s-1970s 25 library buildings are constructed in Buffalo and the surrounding towns.

1970

Located in downtown Buffalo, the Central Library is completed.

**1976**

1980

Erie County revenue shortfalls result in service and personnel cuts. Small restorations occur the following year and a portion of the laid off staff is recalled.

**1992**

1990

B&ECPL asserts its independence in a court case that secures administrative and financial authority previously constrained by officials of Erie County government.

**1998**

2000

1990s Automated functions and electronic resources grow within library system.



1897

1900

1910

1920

1930

1940

1950

Buffalo Library enters contractual agreement with City Buffalo and becomes the Buffalo Public Library, establishing a free circulating and reference library open to all city residents.

The Erie County Public Library is created to provide bookmobile service to rural towns and villages, outreach services and centralized support services for the county's independent, autonomous community libraries, each with its own board of trustees.

## THE APPROACH

### A field guide

A field guide helps users identify plants, animals or other objects in nature. It is often a picture guide organized by family, color, shape, location or other descriptors. Field guides group distinct species into types to highlight common characteristics. This "field guide" for organizational structure uses these principles of categorization to comprehend library systems. Although they can be complex and distinct, library systems likewise share general characteristics.

## THE VISION

### High-quality library services for all

The primary goal of the process of considering organizational reform is to provide high quality library services for all. Pursuit of this overarching goal occurs in an environment of strong community support for libraries and significant fiscal challenges necessitating efforts to achieve long-term financial stability.

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Planning consultants confirm that B&ECPL maintains more library buildings per capita than any other community in North America.

2004/2005

Erie County's fiscal crisis costs B&ECPL 25% of its annual funding. The system closes 15 libraries, reduces hours, cuts more than 225 full and part-time library employees, grounds bookmobiles and slashes book, subscription and media purchases.

2006

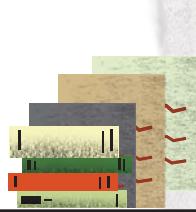
B&ECPL opens the 20,000 square-foot Frank E. Merriweather, Jr. Library, the first new library constructed in the City of Buffalo since 1986.

2007

By unanimous vote, the Erie County Legislature makes the Library Protection Act a permanent local law, ending 14 years of temporary renewals.

2011

The Library Tax Levy is reduced 18%, from 2010's \$22,171,833 to \$18,171,833, a level below that received by B&ECPL in 1993. Combining this loss with reductions in state aid, increasing costs and a shortfall carried over from a discontinued 2008 restoration, results in a total recurring budget shortfall nearing \$7 million.



# Library Field Guide Glossary

## Boards of Trustees



Structures for boards of trustees, including numbers of members and terms of appointment, vary greatly across libraries. There are two variables, selection and authority, with choices for each within these structures:

### SELECTION

**Elected** by public vote



**OR**

**Appointed** by parent government, e.g., a county or city



### AUTHORITY

**Governing Board** has full authority over the governance of the library. This board typically hires the library director, sets policy, and works closely with the director in establishing and presenting the library's budget.



**Advisory Board** has less governing authority. This board may participate in policy and budget development, but does not have fiduciary responsibility or direct oversight of the library director.



## System-Wide Library Services



Library systems provide services to individual member libraries in a role similar to that performed by the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) for member school districts. In Erie County, system services for the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library, housed at the Central Library, include managing the Library's Internet, online catalog, circulation system, telephone and email reference, electronic databases, automation, acquisition, cataloging, library material processing, repair of damaged materials, program development, interlibrary loan, shipment of requested books and other library materials between Erie County public libraries, payroll, finance, human resources, benefits administration, and employee assistance.

## Funding Sources



**Parent Government** - The parent government is any government that ultimately takes responsibility for the library system. The parent government generally provides a bulk of the library system's funding and often appoints board members. In some cases, as in Buffalo & Erie County Public Library, a county serves as the parent government.



**State Aid** - Individual states have different forms of state aid for libraries. In New York State, formula aid is provided by the Governor and State Legislature for public library systems. New York's aid, which goes to twenty-three public library systems, supports interlibrary loan, delivery, continuing education, coordination of collection development, automation and Internet access. In addition, direct formula aid goes to individual public libraries through the Local Services Aid Program. The approximately 754 public libraries in New York State that belong to a public library system and meet the Department of Education's minimum standards are entitled to receive this aid.



**Cost Shares** - In some organizational structures, member libraries pay for system-wide services. In a cooperative system, individual libraries may pay a coordinating entity that provides services to the entire system. The coordinating entity often does not run its own library, but serves as an umbrella organization to capitalize on the power of collective purchasing and efficiencies. As members of a federated system, member libraries in the B&ECPL system do not pay any fees for services provided by the central system.



## Library Tax Options

**Library District** - Through New York State legislation, some libraries establish a Special Library District, which functions similarly to a school district. Voters elect trustees and approve a tax levy in support of the library district. Other libraries establish a School District Public Library by passage of a referendum placed on the school district ballot. School District Public Libraries have service areas aligned with school districts, and voters within the district decide on the library's tax levy and trustees.



**Municipal Ballot (Chapter 414)** - Public libraries in New York State can place a funding proposition on a municipal ballot. The library obtains signatures from voters on a petition to request a library-funding proposition be included in the next municipal election. The number of signatures must equal at least 10 percent of the number of votes cast in the last gubernatorial election. This process must be repeated any time a change in funding level is requested.

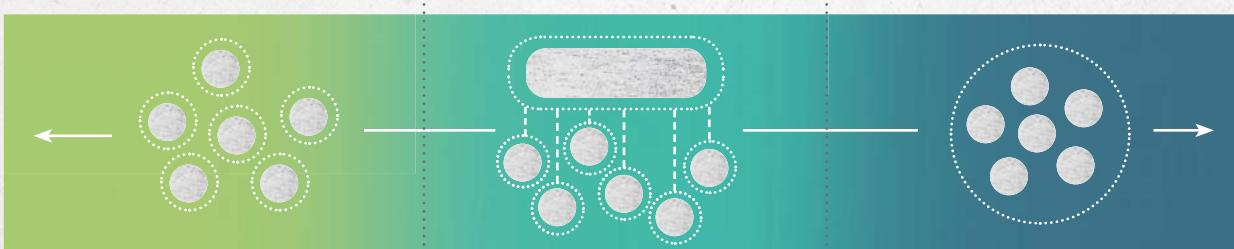
**School District Ballot** - Public libraries in New York State also have the ability to place a funding proposition on a school district ballot. This usually requires the library board to pass a resolution notifying the school board of the library's desire to put a funding proposition on the ballot for the upcoming school district election. The process must be repeated any time a change in funding level is requested.

# Contemplating Organizational Models

Library leaders face dual goals of providing excellent and cost effective services. For library systems facing cost and quality pressures, organizing optimally to accomplish these goals presents challenges. How does a multi-member system with independent autonomous parts achieve collective excellence? How should forward-looking communities assess alternative library system organizational structures? What are the tradeoffs for alternative organizational models? What factors are most salient in considering organizational reform? **No model is pure or automatically optimal. Any organizational choice, arrayed along a spectrum of centralization in terms of governance and service delivery, has pros and cons.**

## DEGREE OF CENTRALIZATION...

### ...LESS CENTRALIZED



## ORGANIZED TO FUNCTION...

### ...individually

### ...as a blend of collective and individual

### ...collectively

## PROS AND CONS...

### PROS

*individual freedom*  
*protection of minority interests*  
*healthy competition*  
*robust idea exchange*

### CONS

*incoherence*  
*self-interest over public interest*  
*parochialism*  
*inequality across diverse groups*  
*diseconomy of scale*

### PROS

*coherence*  
*ease of coordination*  
*equity across diverse groups*  
*economies and efficiencies of scale*

### CONS

*bureaucratization*  
*conformity*  
*diminished individual freedom*  
*inflexibility*

Multi-member federated and centralized systems may originate in decentralized groups of independent organizations. In moving toward centralization, decentralized organizations voluntarily trade off some independence and singular identity to gain the cost and effectiveness benefits of economies of scale, streamlined operations, equity, and cross-organization coordination.

New York State's 23 public library systems support over 1,000 public libraries and local branches. In the 1950s, the State Legislature and Governor authorized the establishment of public library systems in Education Law. Governance and function for the systems are established in the regulations of the Commissioner of Education. Each public library system is governed by a board of trustees. New York State designed library systems to increase capacities of local libraries, enabling them to buy services and share resources. Systems qualify for state aid based on an approved five-year service plan and annual budgets and reports.

**New York State supports establishment of three types of library systems, as defined by the NYS Department of Education. These are:**

### The Cooperative Model

**(16 in New York State)**

Created by agreement of member boards, chartered libraries maintain their autonomy.

### The Federated Model

**(4 in New York State)**

Created by action of the legislature or boards of supervisors of the county or counties involved. Member libraries are autonomous and have their own boards.

### The Consolidated Model

**(3 in New York State)**

Chartered as a single entity with one board of trustees. All libraries are units of the parent organization.



# Organizational Models for Libraries

There are three basic prototypes for library system organization. They vary by the nature and amount of authority distributed between parent government, library system board, and individual member libraries, diagrammed as follows:

## The Cooperative Model

The INDIVIDUAL LIBRARIES operate autonomously and may appoint a system board to provide central services to libraries.



### INDIVIDUAL LIBRARIES

#### GOVERNANCE

*Each member library is governed by its own Board of Trustees. The system board members are often appointed by the individual member libraries.*



APPOINTS

*The system provides services to libraries and facilitates cooperation among the member libraries.*



## The Federated Model

The PARENT GOVERNMENTS determine both the funding levels and the appointment of board members, but member libraries remain autonomous.



### PARENT GOVT.

#### GOVERNANCE

*A Board of Trustees governs the library system. Each member is appointed by the parent governments.*



*The system provides services to member libraries.*



### SERVICES

*Member libraries maintain their own charters and individual Boards of Trustees.*



## The Consolidated Model

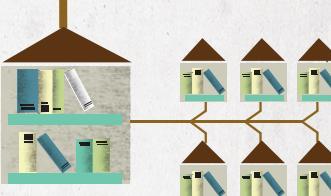
The PARENT GOVERNMENT oversees both funding and the appointment of board members.



### PARENT GOVT.

#### GOVERNANCE

*A Board of Trustees governs the library system. Typically, each member is appointed by the parent government.*



*Individual libraries do not have their own boards.*

 = Decision-making authority

## Considering the Library District Option

Although this report focuses on the three core organizational structures for libraries, the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library is also considering a Special Library District option. Library districts may incorporate elements of any of these organizational types. Regardless of organizational variation, library districts have two key elements: 1) taxpayers must approve a tax levy in support of the library district; and 2) taxpayers elect the trustees. In these ways, library districts are thus akin to school districts functioning in the region.

### Special Library District Option

The **TAXPAYERS** **vote** on the tax levy to support the library and **elect** board members to a single governing board.

### TAXPAYERS

#### GOVERNANCE

*Board members are elected by the public.*

*Library district has one administrative structure and one board.*



### Why Consider a Special Library District?

The New York State Board of Regents Commission on Library Services recommends the creation of library districts to promote availability of library service to all New Yorkers and to improve local support for libraries. Direct public voting on library funding can mean more financial support for libraries as more than 90% of public library budget votes are passed each year.

#### The Basic Process for Creating a Special Library District

- Work with stakeholders to identify goals and priorities to develop a process for choosing the key features of a proposed special library district...
- Work with local legislators regarding sponsorship of a bill to introduce and pass in State Legislature. If the State Legislature passes the bill...
- Circulate petitions in support of a ballot referendum to hold a public vote. If voters approve...
- Formally establish the new entity with elected trustees, and apply for charter with the Board of Regents and registration.

(Source: Ellen M. Bach, Esq. Whiteman, Osterman & Hanna LLP)

# Anatomy of the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library

Perhaps more than any other public service in the region, the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library and its member libraries rely upon a multi-tier structure of financing from several levels of government.

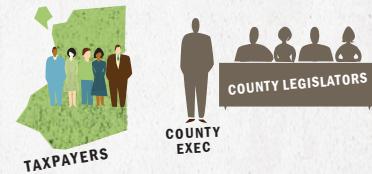
Public funding for area libraries comes from a combination of state, county and local sources together with revenues raised by the libraries themselves. Given the substantial constraints at each of these levels throughout the years, libraries face limited resources in spite of increasing demand.

The timeline on pages 2-3 demonstrates that dwindling resources have affected services throughout the history of the library system. Patterns in the early years of the 21st century led trustees and staff to focus on identifying libraries with the greatest capacity to deliver services to residents with the stark realization of impending cuts. In 2005, the B&ECPL Board adopted a plan to support 36 of the former 52 libraries. Some libraries needed to raise supplemental revenues to meet New York State standards. Some local communities came to their library's aid to offset the reductions in financial support from Erie County.

The B&ECPL has established a development office to improve the system's visibility, encourage advocacy and raise funds for special projects.

## Taxpayers/Erie County Library property tax

A local law, the Library Protection Act, dedicates a portion of Erie County's real property tax for library purposes and guarantees that funds appropriated by the Legislature cannot not be re-appropriated to cover mid-year shortfalls elsewhere in the County budget.



## Fund Balance Onetime Sum

As a result of final action in 2010 of the Erie County Legislature, the B&ECPL received a one time sum of \$3 million. In addition, the B&ECPL has agreed, by action of the Board of Trustees, to utilize up to \$2.6 million in undesignated fund balance to continue to have open hours at all locations.

## New York State State aid

Formula aid is provided by the Governor and State Legislature for public library systems. State aid supports interlibrary loan, delivery, continuing education, coordination of collection development, automation and Internet access. Direct formula aid to assist individual public libraries is provided by the Local Services Aid Program through library systems. Any libraries that meet minimum standards set by the Education Department can receive this aid.



## Other

Additional revenues are raised through grants. A small percentage of revenue is generated from patron fines and fees.

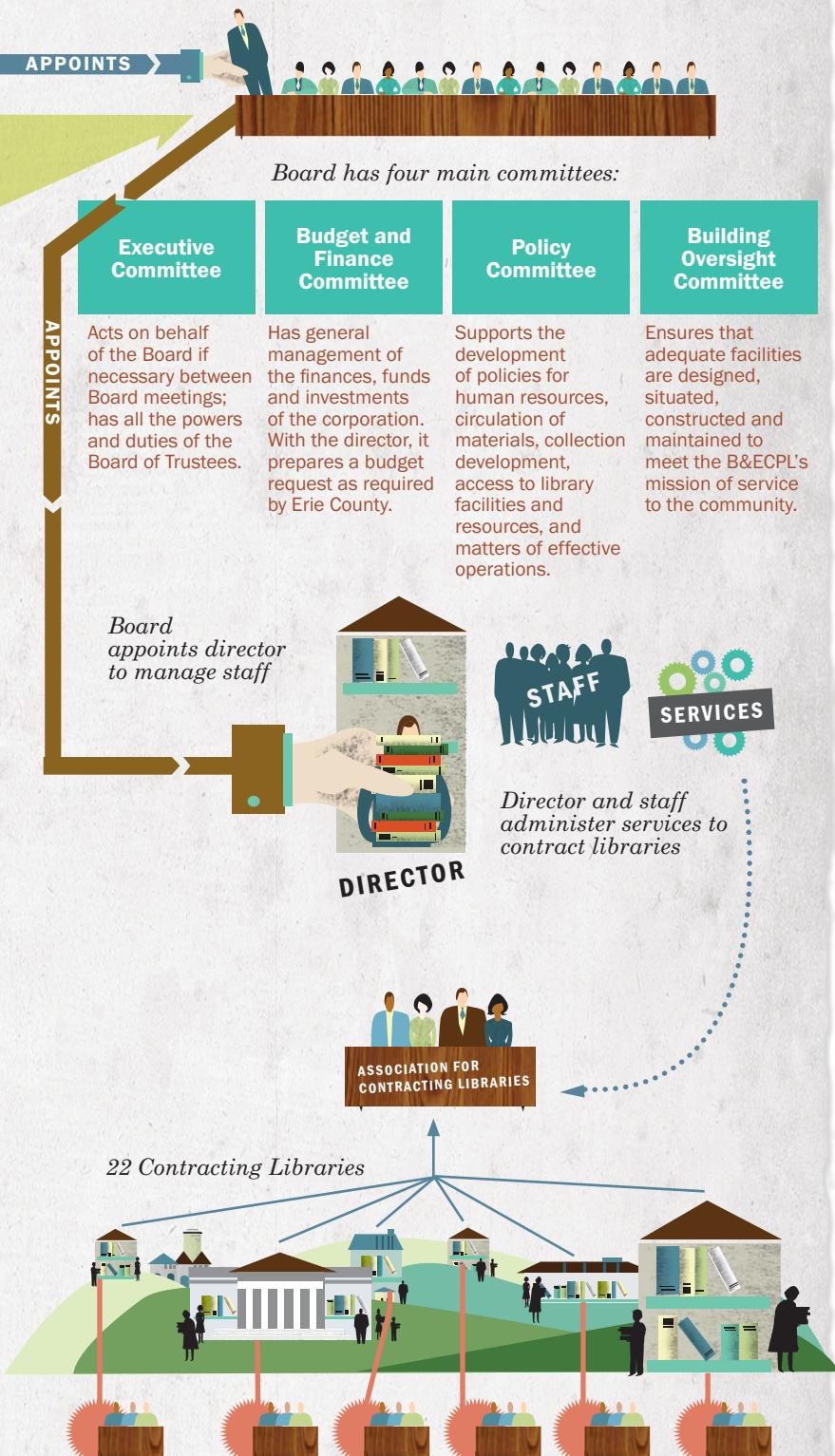


# Library (A Federated System)



**Population Served** 919,040  
**Circulation** 8,013,600  
**\*Library Locations** 37  
**Operating Budget** \$27,320,613  
**Per Capita** \$29.73

\*Includes Central Library, member libraries and branches



## B&ECPL Board of Trustees

**15 Members,**  
**Appointed by Erie County Executive and Legislature**

The Buffalo & Erie County Public Library system Board of Trustees consists of 15 members who serve five year terms on a rotating schedule. The trustees are appointed by the Erie County Executive, who appoints ten members (two each calendar year), and the Mayor of Buffalo, who appoints five members (1 each calendar year). All system trustees are subject to confirmation by the Erie County Legislature.

## B&ECPL Director

**Appointed by B&ECPL Board**

Director serves as administrative, executive and fiscal officer of the B&ECPL with the supervision and control of the Board of Trustees. The director oversees business affairs, administration, and employees of the Central Library and eight Buffalo branches.

## Association of Contracting Libraries (ACT) Board

**Acts as a Liaison**

Promotes cooperation among member libraries, provides a forum for exchange of information and ideas and is a mechanism for liaison between the contracting libraries, their trustees and staff and the B&ECPL trustees and staff.

## Contracting libraries

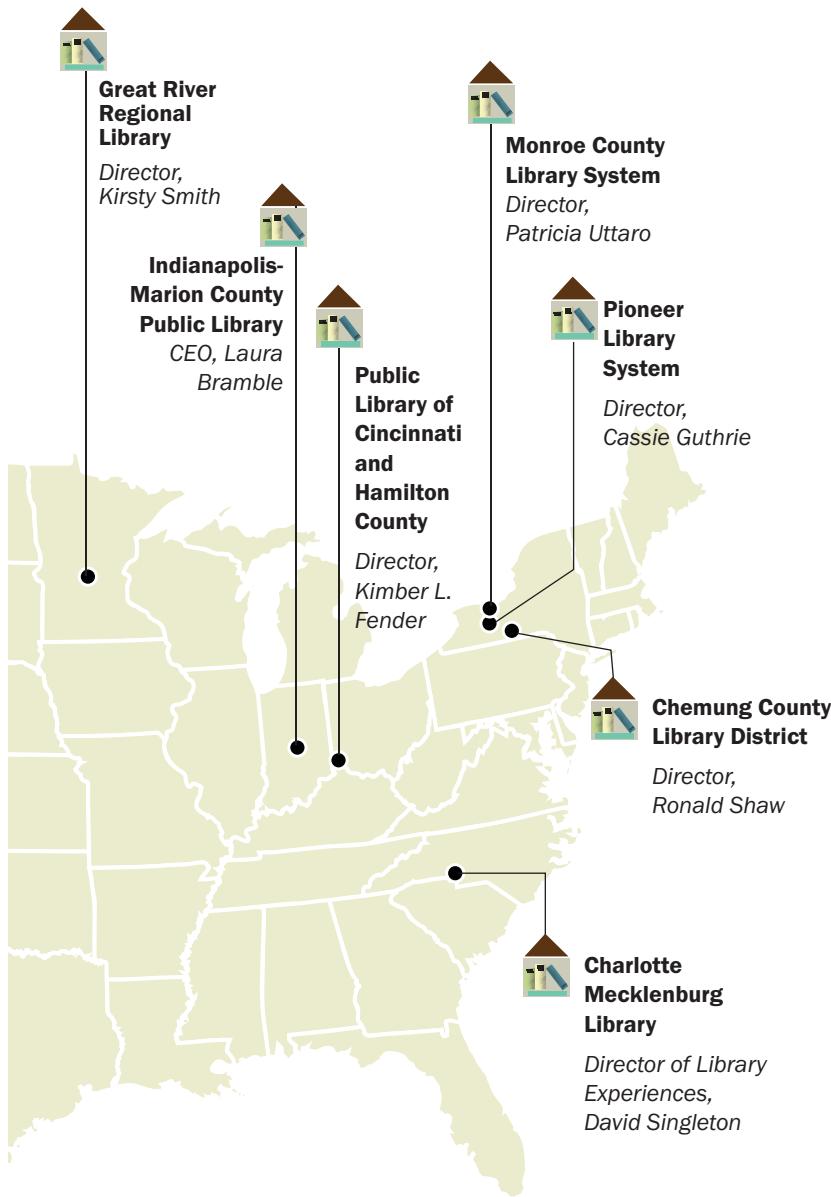
**Contracts for Services from Library System**

Each member library has its own Board of Trustees. Members annually contract with the central library for services, including circulation services and budgetary allocations. The system provides funding for almost all of the operations of member libraries while the local municipality or membership association provides for the library building and capital needs.

# Insights from the Field

## Who we interviewed

The UB Regional Institute conducted phone interviews with directors of seven different library systems across New York State and the country. In consultation with the B&ECPL Board of Trustees, Association of Contracting Libraries and other library professionals, these systems were chosen based on location (both within and outside of New York State), comparable size (either in population served or number of branches), and organizational structure (1 cooperative, 2 federated, 2 consolidated, and 2 consolidated with special library districts). Common threads across library systems interviewed included challenges in funding and sustainability prompting explorations for change and passionate commitments by library staff to the core mission of libraries in service to the public.



## What we asked

The UB Regional Institute asked a set of questions to gain insights into the challenges and opportunities that libraries face in their current climates. Directors provided basic information including population served, circulation and operating budgets, as well as the number of trustees serving on boards, how they are appointed and the terms of appointment.<sup>1</sup>

Specific questions included the following:

*Talk about changes over time in terms of usership, funding, services and access.*

*Is your governance model considered consolidated, cooperative or federated? Do you have a special tax district as part of your current funding structure? If yes, how has that affected your operations and services? If no, has it been considered for your system?*

*What are the biggest lessons you learned in how organizational structure and governance affects your work?*

*What are the biggest lessons you learned in sustainability and funding issues (as related to governance or not)?*

*What advice would you give to the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library system as it explores governance structures and sustainability as part of planning for the future?*

## What we are reporting

Hearing the lessons directly from library directors provided unique, informed and insightful perspectives on libraries in the 21st century. The fruits of the discussions are most valuable without interpreting the advice. The summaries that follow present as much direct quotation and reference as possible to ensure the accuracy of the directors' perspectives and to give readers unadorned advice offered to the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library.

<sup>1</sup> Populations served were based on U.S. Census data, some of which had official 2010 counts at the time of reporting, and others were based on population estimates. Circulations were reported from a full year of data from 2010. Operating budgets were based on adopted budgets for 2011.

# Pioneer Library System

Director, Cassie Guthrie

**The Pioneer Library System (PLS) is a New York State chartered, cooperative public library system serving the 42 public libraries in Livingston, Ontario, Wayne and Wyoming counties. PLS was created to enhance the service of and promote cooperation among its member libraries.**

**Population Served 301,741**

**\*Operating Budget \$10,070,806**

**Circulation 2,885,814**

**Per Capita \$33.38**

**Library Locations 42**

\*Combined operating budget for Pioneer Library System and member libraries in Livingston, Ontario, Wayne and Wyoming Counties

## ADVICE FROM THE FIELD

*The Pioneer model allows the system to focus on services to individual libraries.*

Pioneer is not faced with the challenge of trying to run a central library in addition to providing services to member libraries. The system affords the opportunity to focus on providing services to all member libraries equally.

*Limited resources create competition within municipal boundaries.* When libraries struggle to compete for limited resources within current government structures, public services are pitted against one another. Ultimately, the status of library funding becomes personality dependent, both in library leadership and in government.

*Geography matters.* In the Pioneer Library System, there are four counties represented, so the current cooperative structure works best for providing services. The challenge for library systems funded primarily by New York State is the uncertainty and timeliness of aid payments, and working with member libraries to develop realistic cost share projections.

*Stable funding is always voter directed.* A tax district de-politicizes the budget, in the sense that libraries are no longer competing with other municipal services. Within the Pioneer System, some members have library tax districts following school district or legislative boundaries, but as the Pioneer System covers four counties, it may be too complicated to create one district for the system.

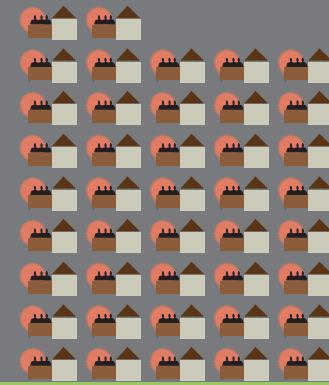
**“** As library professionals, we believe in what we do, and yet we spend most of our time trimming and cutting out of necessity instead of being able to focus our energy on providing quality service.

**“** There are so many political “big fish in small ponds,” we lose what’s best for the public.

## The Cooperative Model

**Some Individual Member Libraries are School/ Special Legislative Tax Districts**

*Each public library is governed by its own board of trustees.*

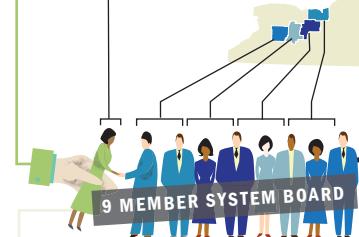


**42 INDIVIDUAL LIBRARIES**

*A nine-member board is appointed...*

*...by the Board of the Central Library (1)*

*...by each county advisory council (2 per county)*



*This board coordinates service delivery and facilitates cooperation between libraries.*

*Terms are five years, and two terms expire on December 31 each year.*

# Monroe County Library System

Director, Patricia Uttaro

**The Monroe County Library System is a federation of 20 independent public libraries, some with multiple branches, located in Monroe County, New York. Each library is responsible for providing library services to its local service area. Libraries are governed by their own boards of trustees and are funded by local taxes.**

**Population Served 744,344**

**Circulation 9,000,000**

**\*Library Locations 33**

**\*\*Operating Budget \$40,670,525**

**Per Capita \$54.64**

\*Includes central library, member libraries and branches

\*\*Combined operating budget for Monroe County Library System and member libraries in Monroe County

## ADVICE FROM THE FIELD

**Empower the library directors.** The twenty member library boards give their directors a great deal of autonomy to run the libraries. In turn, the directors are very cooperative with one another, avoiding territorialism, even in providing equity in cost shares.

**Consider Multi-Regional Systems to save costs.** There are systems that, if shared across libraries within a region, may provide tremendous cost savings and opportunities to seek support for programs on a larger scale. For example, Monroe and B&ECPL could collectively explore regional data systems and seek joint funding for programs to serve all patrons in Western New York.

**Reforms are needed at the state level.** As systems have faced decreasing state aid and pared down to bare bones budgets, the formulas and requirements for state aid will need to be evaluated. For example, the outreach department is currently costing the Monroe County Library System more than state aid covers because of the stringent requirements attached to be eligible for the aid. There are cheaper options for service delivery, but libraries need relief from the current eligibility requirements for aid to implement them.

**Don't forget about private funding.** Facing the realities of declining government funding, Monroe is turning to private philanthropy as a key source to supplement its income. The library is establishing a new endowment and focusing on its centennial celebrations as an opportunity to promote planned giving to ensure future funding stability and decrease vulnerability to government spending cuts.

**“** The reason the library system works is because everyone participates. Sometimes being a smaller library is a bigger challenge. In our system, the directors have great respect for each other and are committed to all branches doing well as part of the system.

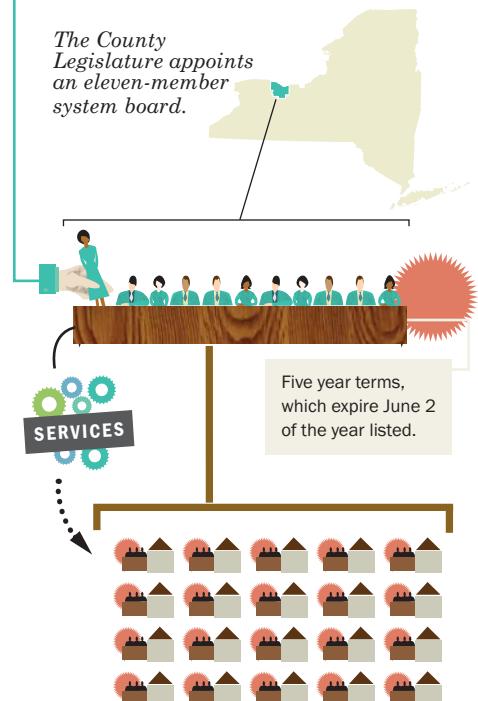
**“** We have to be realistic about the future of state funding. We are only just beginning to feel the impacts of the cuts and there are more on the horizon.

## A Federated System



## PARENT GOV'T.

*The County Legislature appoints an eleven-member system board.*



*Individual libraries have their own boards.*

# Great River Regional Library

Director, Kirsty Smith

**Great River Regional Library (GRRL) is responsible for library operations and services, including staffing and materials, at a headquarters in St. Cloud, Minnesota and 31 branch libraries. Each branch library community provides the physical facility for public service operations.**

**Population Served 454,208**

**Circulation 4,129,443**

**\*Library Locations 32**

**Operating Budget \$9,452,014**

**Per Capita \$20.81**

\*Includes central library and branches

## ADVICE FROM THE FIELD

*Libraries are infrastructure, not a nicety.* To reinforce ongoing community support, advocates need to continue to push libraries as essential core services. Libraries must be vigilant to ensure this advocacy stays in the public arena as a relevant and critical service for the community. This message depends on strong, consistent communications which requires libraries to focus on advocacy in addition to services.

*Don't focus only on people currently using the library.* Library professionals may hear there are people in communities who do not currently use the resources provided, but that does not mean they should be discounted as potential advocates for the libraries. There are always those who say, "I don't use the library, but I still think it's important!" and they are often willing to be supportive when governments discuss library budgets.

*When working across municipal boundaries, balance needs, expectations and the ability to contribute to the system.* This is true for library systems regardless of whether they serve six counties or one.

In the Great River Regional Library system, with the unique federated joint powers structure, this need for balance is especially evident in developing annual budgets. The formulas are based on population, tax capacity and usership, with municipalities responsible for buildings and maintenance.

**“**We can't ever rest on our laurels in the library business. We need to constantly prove our worth by focusing on services. The public is our best advocate.”

## A Federated System

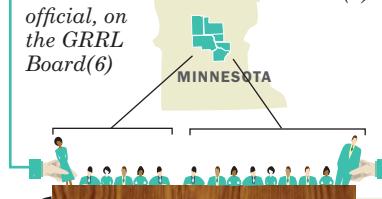


## PARENT GOV'T.

*A fifteen-member board is appointed...*

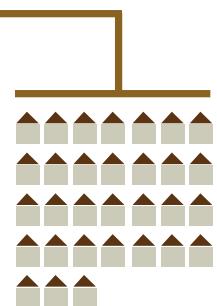
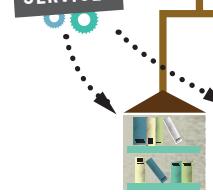
*...each county has one Commissioner, an elected official, on the GRRL Board (6)*

*...the balance determined by budget share (9)*



Terms are three years.  
Trustees serve no more than three terms.

**SERVICES**



# Charlotte Mecklenburg Library

Director of Library Experiences, David W. Singleton

**The Charlotte Mecklenburg Library has 20 locations throughout Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. Facing three years of mid-year reductions and a major funding cut in 2010, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library lost 183 positions, closed four facilities and cut hours by more than 54 percent.**

**Population Served 890,515**

**Circulation 7,930,974**

**\*Library Locations 20**

**Operating Budget \$26,810,806**

**Per Capita \$30.11**

\*Includes main library and branches

## ADVICE FROM THE FIELD

**Reframe the way we think of funders.** All funders, even if it is a major funder like the County, are interested in the outcomes of the services provided and deserve to have good information about impact. Funding partners should be managed the same way relationships with donors are handled, which requires consistent communication about 'return on investment.'

**Even when times are tough, don't underestimate people's desire to know the facts.** As Charlotte Mecklenburg faced the harsh realities of severe budget cuts, staff held a series of meetings to talk with their communities. Library staff learned how much the public did not know about the libraries. More importantly, staff members heard how much community members wanted to be informed in order to better advocate for the libraries in the future.

**Consider volunteers as a resource.** Charlotte Mecklenburg Library supplemented the limited staff left after budget cuts with volunteers. In the last year, the library more than doubled the number of volunteer hours from 25,000 to 55,000. Volunteers had an opportunity to see behind the scenes of libraries and learn first hand what it takes to operate and provide services. Volunteers became knowledgeable, passionate advocates who could speak meaningfully through experience about what it takes to run a library.

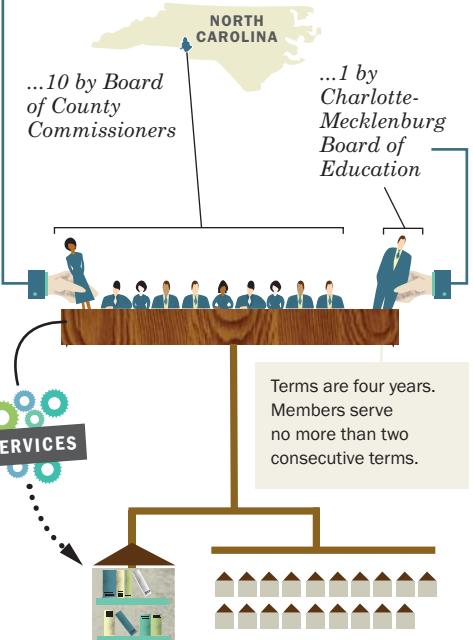
**Partnerships are key to success.** Whether small or large scale, partnerships move external organizations from "disinterested to fully invested" in the future of libraries. The mission of libraries often aligns nicely with organizations working in the community. For example, the Charlotte Mecklenburg library partners with International House, a leading provider of direct services to Mecklenburg County's ever-growing international community. For many immigrants, libraries are one of the first welcoming places in their transitional experiences. As a result, the immigrant population has become a strong advocacy base for the libraries.

## A Consolidated System



## PARENT GOV'T.

*An eleven-member board is appointed...*



**“** Charlotte Mecklenburg Library focuses on creating the “we” in libraries, because it isn’t about “us and them.” Libraries need to capitalize on the power of the community, who intuitively understand the value of libraries, by integrating them as partners who become articulate and passionate advocates.

# Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library

Chief Executive Officer, Laura Bramble

**The Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library in Indiana is made up of the Central Library, 22 branches, and the Library Services Center.**

**Population Served 874,594**  
**Circulation 16.6 million**  
**\*Library Locations 23**

**Operating Budget \$37,450,115**  
**Per Capita \$42.82**

\*Includes central library and branches

## ADVICE FROM THE FIELD

*A strong library foundation can have a significant impact on the ability to provide services.* The Indianapolis-Marion Public Library Foundation, an independent fundraising entity, has been a tremendous asset for the library system. Through private donations, local and national grants, the Foundation provides \$1.5-\$2.0 million annually for library programming. These programs would not be possible without this fundraising support mechanism.

***Take the time to include the public.*** There is often pressure to make immediate decisions in times of crisis, but communities need to be involved at every stage of decision-making for the library. When budget cuts happened in Indianapolis in 2010, library officials felt the need to take immediate action. But library staff found the community wanted to be more involved and informed than the original timeline allowed. Although the public acknowledged the need to make time sensitive choices, citizens still wanted time to understand the facts around the decision-making.

*Advocacy can emerge unexpectedly from crisis.* Budget cuts in Indianapolis-Marion County led to a reduction of library hours by 26% in 2010. Studies recommended closing two to six branches. The public protested the closings and a large grassroots effort organized to advocate for the libraries. This independent group wrote petitions and raised awareness about the need for libraries. The Sustainable Library Citizens Coalition now has more than 1,000 members who participate in creating long term solutions to sustain the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library financially.

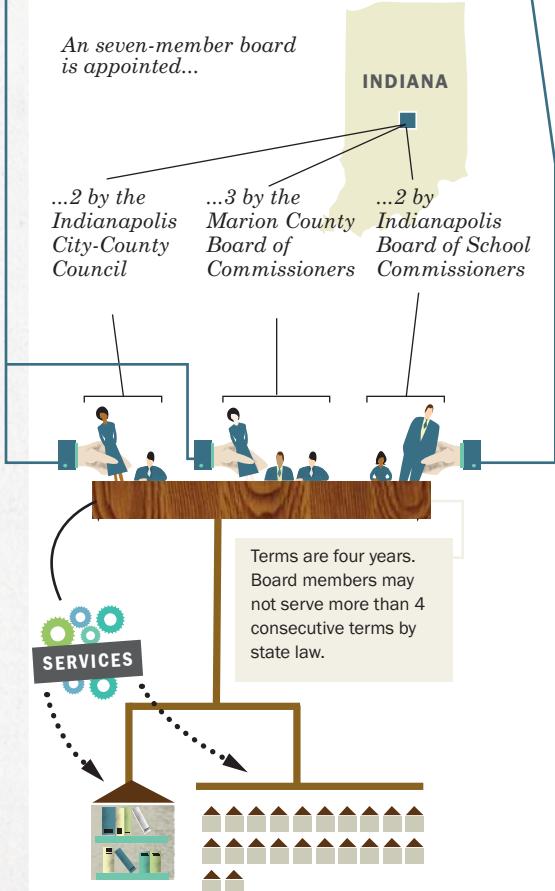
*Being an independent municipal corporation has served the Indianapolis Library well.* Although Indiana does not provide direct state support for the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library, the Library is empowered as its own independent municipal corporation, which gives the Board the ability to levy a tax for the library. Recently, state laws authorized the City Council to modify the budgets and tax levies of municipal corporations, so there has been a slight shift. But overall, being a municipal corporation has given the Library opportunities to shape and manage the budget.

## A Consolidated System



## PARENT GOV'T.

*An seven-member board  
is appointed...*



# Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County

Director, Kimber L. Fender

**The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County (PLCH) is among the largest and busiest public library systems in the nation. In addition to its main library in downtown Cincinnati, Ohio, PLCH operates 40 branch locations throughout Hamilton County.**

**Population Served** 802,374

**Circulation** 16,372,499

**\*Library Locations** 41

**Operating Budget** \$54,486,830

**Per Capita** \$67.91

\*Includes main library and branches

## ADVICE FROM THE FIELD

**Stabilizing funding sources is a long process.** In an era and climate that is opposed to new taxes, it took eight years to convince the PLCH board Cincinnati that a tax levy was a viable option. As a first step, market research was conducted and early polls showed a 58% approval rate for tax-based library funding. The board conducted a large scale media and education campaign, and raised \$400,000 in six months to support the process. By the vote in 2009, the tax levy was approved with a 73% approval rate. Now the system is yielding \$20 million a year in consistent support from taxpayers.

### **Inconsistent funding has high costs.**

When funding would drop unexpectedly, capital projects were stalled, so money and time were lost. It makes building and maintenance projects, which can take a long time to plan and implement, very difficult to facilitate. Ultimately, inconsistent funding leads to inconsistent services.

**It's hard to argue with the numbers.** PLCH learned that collecting data, not just surveys but ongoing observations, has saved the system millions of dollars over the years. Using data to make decisions also solidifies that the library is not making decisions based on perceptions, but on hard numbers, which lead to rational justifications with the staff and the public.

**Simple governance structures maximize efficiency in decision-making.** PLCH has only one board overseeing its county-wide system, which has 40 branches and one of the busiest main libraries in the country. "Seven board members make the decisions. It's so much easier to work with seven people who are all intimately involved in the process than spending time trying to educate multiple levels of governance."

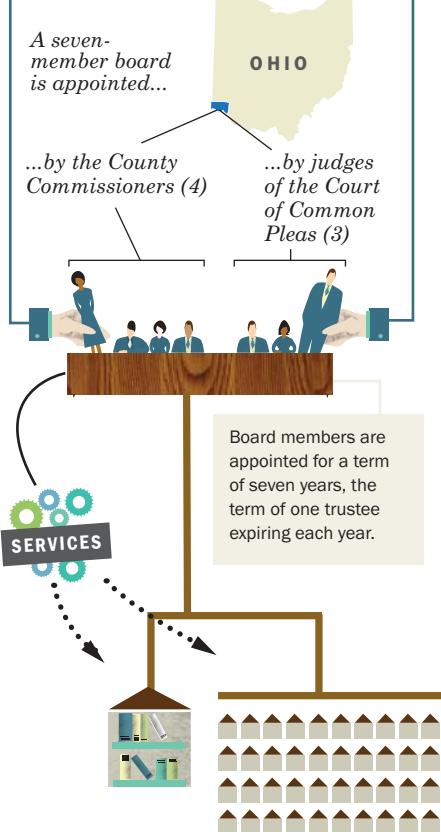
**State laws matter.** Ohio has very strong library laws at the state level. When PLCH pursued the tax levy, there was pressure from anti-tax groups who opposed the idea, but the state law favored the library's ability to have direct access to the ballot to present the decision to the voters.

## A Consolidated System

### with a Special Tax District



## PARENT GOV'T.



# Chemung County Library District

Director, Ronald Shaw

**The Chemung County Library District in New York State is composed of five neighborhood libraries in Big Flats, Elmira, Horseheads, Van Etten, and West Elmira. Chemung County created a special library district in 2006.**

**Population Served 88,331**

**\*\*Operating Budget \$2,925,672**

**Circulation 567,763**

**Per Capita \$33.12**

**\*Library Locations 5**

\*Includes central library and branches

\*\*Note: The 2005 budget, before the creation of the special library district, was \$2,101,948.

## ADVICE FROM THE FIELD

*Creating a special tax district for the library does not necessarily mean new taxes.* It is simply a new taxing mechanism. The library funding is taken out of the county's budget. Similar to school budgets, funding is generated through a standard property tax subject to voter approval. Every year, residents vote on the budget, and every three years voters elect a representative from their community to sit on the board. This gives citizens more control over total library budgets and how library dollars are spent.

### *Set realistic timeframes to make change.*

Change in Chemung County meant the merger of two library systems and the development of one unified tax district. It is essential to get people involved, including those directly affected by library services, and to mobilize political support to make change possible. The messages need to be clear and consistent, reinforcing why this change is necessary and beneficial for all involved.

### *Don't underestimate the sense of identity of individual libraries.*

Chemung County started with two individual systems. Even when the merger took place on paper to establish the unified district, that did not mean that individual mechanisms unified too. Prior to the merger, there were two foundations with different missions and rules, and two "friends" groups with individual interests and activities. There still are two sets, even with the unified district.

### *Library employees are important players.*

There are many players at the table when systems decide to consolidate. One set of players is the unionized employees who needed to be at the bargaining table every step of the way in the reorganizing process.

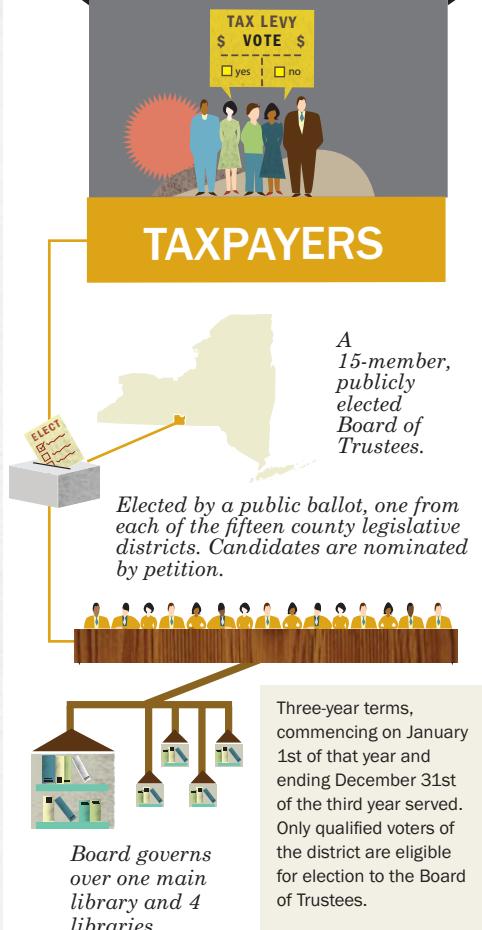
There were short and long term impacts for library employees that needed to be considered as plans to transition to a district were implemented.

**“**Instead of being overly concerned with a minority of legislators with budget power, we have come to better focus efforts on the “grass roots” of our constituency.

**“**Libraries are generally popular and cost-effective and the voters, realizing this, cast their ballots in favor of the library's budget. Work hard on the justification but, in the end, trust the voters.

## A Consolidated System

### with a Special Tax District



# *Summary of Insights from the Field*

The interviews with library directors provided valuable insights to explore the lessons learned by library systems across the nation as they face the challenges of the changing horizons of libraries in the 21st century. This summary offers a brief overview of the common themes across the interviews including perspectives on change, the growing demands of providing services, gaining public support, organizing with structures conducive to library services and considerations for funding in the future.

Some directors offered the B&ECPL specific thoughts for the future, while others reflected more broadly on the role of libraries in modern cultural and political climates. These insights provide perspectives from the field to inform an evaluation of priorities, values and tradeoffs in the final section of this report.

## *Change is normal*

For library systems across the country, change has been part of their institutional history. Interviewees from the library systems consistently described libraries reaching a crossroads at key points in history when they needed to decide which road they would follow. Crises can present opportunities to explore the options, and the B&ECPL system is not alone in seeking stability for the future.

## *It's all about the services*

It is easy to get lost in discussions about the future, but library professionals have been consistently stating throughout this process that the reason behind stabilizing the library system's governance and funding is about safeguarding the enterprise. The mission always focuses on the core goal of providing the best services for the most people possible with the greatest efficiencies.

### *Consistent advocacy for libraries will always be needed*

All of the case study libraries faced challenges similar to those of the B&ECPL. Many struggled with severe budget cuts and fluctuating funding levels, forcing difficult decisions to reduce hours and staffing. Keeping the message about the importance of libraries in the minds of community members was a common theme in interviews with library professionals. Many directors talked about the need to stay vigilant about engaging the public in discussions about libraries both as primary customers and advocates for library stabilization.

### *Structure is related to political environment and geography*

One of the library directors interviewed for this report said, “Libraries are dependent on the political environment in which they exist.” Part of the political climate depends on geographic location. There are two key geographical parameters to consider within structure: state and local municipality. The current state challenge for the B&ECPL is that New York State is not in a position to increase support for libraries in the near future. At the local level, library directors shared in interviews that multiple jurisdictions can make things complicated. Some places were dealing with four to six county governments, each with different abilities to fund and different expectations for levels of service. The B&ECPL may have an advantage by only having one county within its service area, potentially minimizing the complexities of multiple levels of government.

### *Choose your benefactor wisely*

The library's biggest fan is the one who will empower the library system the most to make decisions. Around the country, the majority of library funding is local, rather than state, federal or private funds. The B&ECPL will need to consider who will empower the library the most on budget decisions: Is it Erie County? Individual municipalities? Taxpayers?

### *There is no right or wrong model*

None of these models is pure or automatically optimal. In interviews, directors often talked about how the structures they have in place are specific to the needs of the communities they serve. The advice directors would give to the B&ECPL may be different than how they would advise structuring their own library systems. There is a menu of options before the B&ECPL for restructuring the organization to reach the goal of providing high quality services for all in a time of severe financial constraint. Each organizational model has tradeoffs. Based on history and current realities, weighing structures by priorities will be the best way to ensure the library system will meet the needs of library users in Erie County.



# Evaluating Priorities, Values and Tradeoffs

## What would the tradeoffs be for Buffalo & Erie County Public Library?

To fully explore the organizational models requires assessing each prototype across core values expressed by library professionals in the planning process for the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library. While there are many variables in priority setting, four values were consistently raised by library professionals throughout the process: degree of change required; funding stability; individual autonomy; and collective power. The “at a glance” exercise presented here can assist with assessing tradeoffs, advantages and disadvantages based on priorities within each model.

## Evaluating value tradeoffs across organizational structures

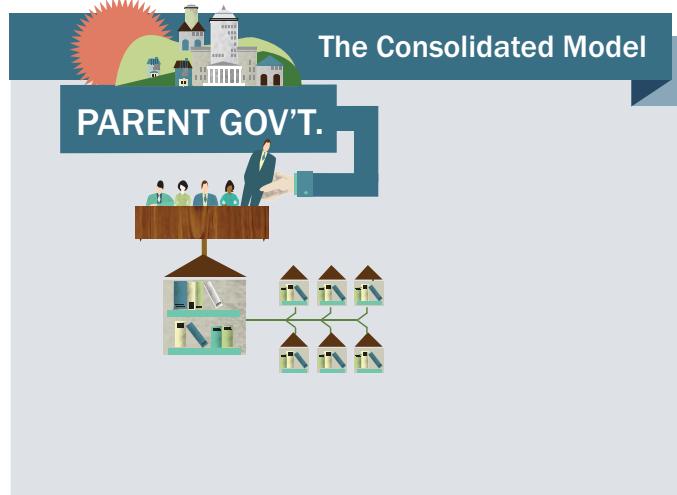
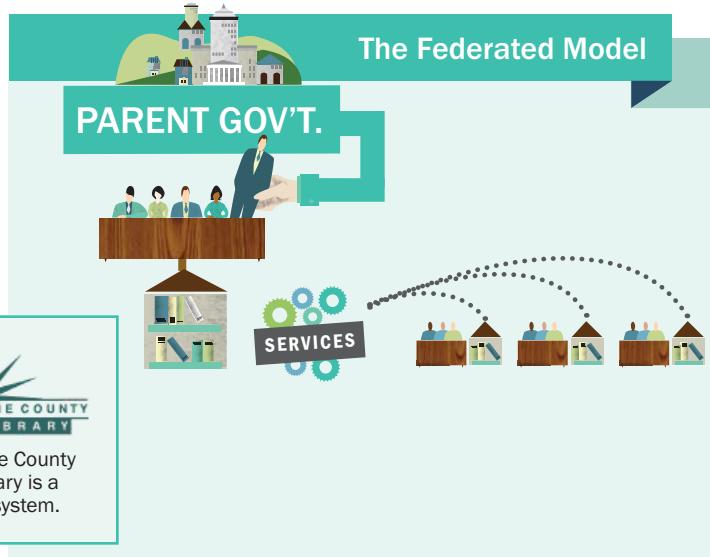
As the exercise of evaluating value tradeoffs across the different organizational structures demonstrates, there is no right or wrong model. Priorities and values underlie organizational structure choice.

No **change is required** for a federated model for the B&ECPL as federation has been the norm since 1953. A cooperative structure would require deconstructing the federation and a consolidated model would require a shift in autonomy with one centralized board.

In **funding stability**, the federated model can be financially stable, but has not been throughout the B&ECPL's history. In a cooperative structure, funding stability will vary as every library does its own fundraising. A consolidated model still depends on the parent government but may have more opportunities in efficiencies and cost sharing.

If the number one priority is **individual autonomy**, the cooperative model gives libraries the most independence. A federated model offers some, and a consolidated model requires giving up individual autonomy for the power of the whole.

**Collective power** gets lost in the cooperative model, with every library individually competing for its own resources. While federated models offer some collective power, consolidated models are best structured to achieve this value.



## DEGREE OF CHANGE REQUIRED

How much of a shift is this away from the current system structure?

## FUNDING STABILITY

Can this model provide consistent, steady resources for the library system?

## INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY

How much authority will individual libraries have within this model?

## COLLECTIVE POWER

How much does economy of scale factor into the model?

### Evaluating Tradeoffs in the Cooperative Model

| HIGH | HIGH   | VARIABLES  | HIGH | LOW   |
|------|--------|--|------|---|
| HIGH | MEDIUM | Funding stability could vary greatly across different libraries as they are subject to varied resources, tax base, population needs, and abilities to fundraise.   | HIGH | Autonomy in a cooperative structure is high, with every library having its own board and responsibility for its own fundraising and budget.   |
| LOW  | LOW    | A cooperative structure would require a high degree of change from the current system. It would involve breaking apart the federation that has been in place essentially dissolving Buffalo & Erie County Public Library System. | LOW  | The inherent power of the collective is lost in a cooperative model with individual libraries competing for their own resources, rather than focusing on being part of a larger system. |

### Evaluating Tradeoffs in the Federated Model

| HIGH   |     |        | HIGH |
|--------|-----|--------|------|
| MEDIUM |     | MEDIUM |      |
| LOW    | LOW | LOW    | LOW  |

The level of governance change required is low for the B&ECPL as this is the current structure for the library system.

In providing funding stability, the federated model has shown locally over time that it has not been an especially stable model, with budgets subject to the ebbs and flows of the parent government's ability and willingness to provide funding.

In a federation, individual libraries have their own boards of trustees, but much of the decision-making authority, especially in budget and system board appointments, typically sits with the parent government or central board.

Collective power in the federated system is high as the member libraries and collaborative entities can work together as a system to share costs and advocate for funding and operational stability.

### Evaluating Tradeoffs in the Consolidated Model

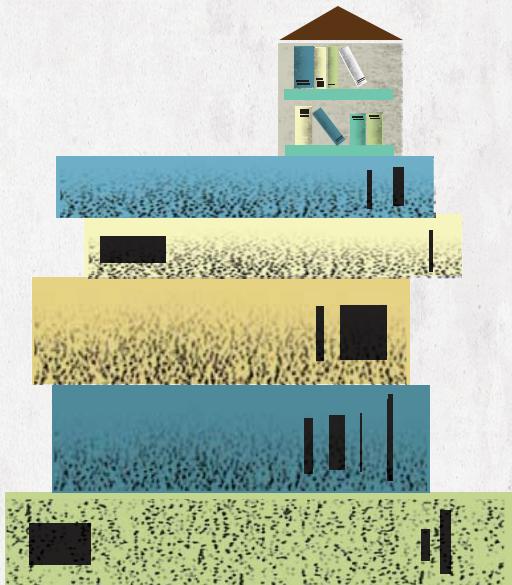
| HIGH   | HIGH | MEDIUM | HIGH |
|--------|------|--------|------|
| MEDIUM |      | LOW    |      |
| LOW    | LOW  | LOW    | LOW  |

For the B&ECPL, a consolidated structure would be a significant shift in governance, with dissolution of independent boards in favor of a single system board.

Consolidated systems depend on the parent government as the funding source. There usually are economies of scale in cost savings and efficiencies.

Individual library autonomy is low, as the model consolidates governance into a single board. Opportunity exists for input through advisory boards and friends groups.

Collective power for a consolidated system is high as the system speaks with a united voice for all branches.



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