

Making Book:

Gambling on the future of our libraries

**A white paper by
KC Consensus**



*Approved by the
KC Consensus Board of Directors
April 2004*



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Why did Consensus study this issue?

The Charge

The geographical structure and funding systems for many metro Kansas City libraries were put in place years ago when people visited their local libraries on foot or horseback. Today, geographical boundaries are increasingly meaningless, as the public expects more, different, and seamless quality services. How should metro Kansas City libraries best be structured, organized and funded to optimize services and performance in the future?



Metro Kansas City has some excellent libraries, but the future holds challenges for even the most proficient library directors and the most loyal library patrons. Trends that are transforming libraries, technology in particular, demand a regional or statewide (or even national) response. And libraries are among the most local of institutions, with the vast majority of their funding tied to the tax base within their geographic boundaries, and subject to fluctuations in each district's tax capacity.

As the value of information continues to grow, what can we, as a region, do now to assure that our libraries can meet the future need for high-quality public libraries?

Consensus is a nonprofit organization that puts the *public* in public policy. We do this by connecting citizens to public policy issues in a variety of ways, including task forces and forums. We believe, and our experience since 1984 has found this to be true, that laypersons can learn about an issue and find innovative ways to address it. This report will begin that process. It contains the facts related to the charge, and preliminary recommendations developed by the Consensus board and intended to spur discussion. It is citizens who must determine what the facts mean, and it is citizens whose values should drive the recommendations for action.

In order for that to happen, citizens must come together to reach public judgment on this issue. This requires moving away from individual opinion and toward a shared understanding about what is in our best interests as a public. Public judgment is informed but not driven by information. Instead, it weighs alternatives and takes into account a variety of factors. While traditional decision-making processes often result in wish lists that can't possibly be accomplished, public judgment results in a realistic sense of the trade-offs and consequences involved in various actions. Public judgment also considers values and emphasizes the normative, ethical side of questions rather than the factual, informational side. Citizens who review this report would likely take into account values such as fairness, efficiency, and innovation. Depending on how those values are applied, they could lead in very different directions.

Reaching public judgment will move us closer to assuring that our libraries continue to serve us all.

"The potential for putting together a new kind of library structure in the

metro area is available to us,” said Joe Green, director of the Kansas City Public Library. “We have to be very careful and analytical in how we approach it. It can’t be just political will. The question is, is the service going to be any better or will you diminish the quality of service?”

Is this report neutral?

Consensus prides itself on studies that are neutral. The organization doesn’t operate programs; it has nothing to gain from whatever actions citizens choose to recommend. And it relies on the willingness of people in whichever field we are studying to trust that we will be fair, and to help us with interviews and data during the course of the study. For two reasons, this study required extra effort on our part to assure others (and ourselves) that all points of view were fairly represented.

The first reason is that library directors who spoke with us were taking a risk. They knew that the final result of the study could be recommendations for mergers or other actions that could be very unpopular with their boards and patrons. Of the seven library directors in the five-county area, five agreed to be interviewed and two, the directors of libraries in Bonner Springs and Kansas City, Kansas, declined. The five had a right, we believed, to extra assurances that they would be accurately represented.

To assure accuracy, Consensus sent each person we interviewed a near-verbatim transcript of the interview, and offered him or her the opportunity to clarify and to add information. In rare cases, an interviewee asked that a statement be moved off the record and, because doing so didn’t compromise the findings, we obliged.

The second reason is that a senior staff person with the Kansas City Public Library is a member of the Consensus board. It was natural, then, that the study could be seen as serving the interests of that library.

To assure neutrality, we sent a draft to the seven library directors, the state librarians of Missouri and Kansas, a national expert interviewed for the report, and a group of local advisors who are knowledgeable about libraries but have no personal stake in the outcome of the study. They were invited to review the report and to provide new data and quotes where they felt all points of view were not adequately represented.

The goal was a report about which people with differing viewpoints would say, “I don’t agree with it all, but it’s fair and my opinions are accurately reflected.”

What are the key findings?

This report covers a lot of ground. It deals with issues ranging from librarian retirements to the property tax to collaboration to how state libraries are structured, among others. We have attempted to pull out those findings that are most important. They may reflect a trend, show a significant variance from the national average, or represent an area of conflict. Some of them simply surprised us, and we thought they were worth highlighting.

What are the basic facts about local libraries?

- The five-county metro area includes five *municipal* libraries – Kansas City and North Kansas City in Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas, Olathe, and Bonner Springs in Kansas. It includes one *county* library – Johnson County – and one *multijurisdictional* library – Mid-Continent. Differences in size of geographic area served and taxing structure, though, stretch the definitions.
- There is significant variation among local libraries in terms of per capita operating expenditures, size of the collection, and circulation and visits.
- Metro Kansas City libraries receive more funding from local taxes and less from state government than the national average. The national average is 77% local and 13% state funding; metro area libraries receive an average of 90% from local property taxes and an average of 1.5% from the state.
- Two local libraries have ranked among the top ten libraries for their population in the HAPLR Index, which ranks American libraries based on input and output measures. The two are the Mid-Continent Public Library and the Johnson County Library.
- In 2003, based on weighted average scores for their libraries, Kansas ranked 8th and Missouri ranked 13th among the 50 states, according to the HAPLR Index.

What are the trends affecting libraries?

- Patrons want both traditional, book-based library services and expensive new technology that includes both hardware and online services. State and federal governments have stepped in to help assure that technology is available to all libraries, and libraries are seeking other sources of funding like grants and gifts to pay for services once funded by tax dollars. The latest data show that the cost per electronic use is an average of \$.94, while the cost per circulation for books and periodicals is \$.50.
- Although many expected the Internet to reduce the importance of library buildings, the opposite has been true. A simultaneous trend has led to communities using library buildings as the focus of community revitalization and civic life.
- In coming years, libraries will serve a changing group of patrons that includes more elderly, more immigrants, and 60 million members of Generation Y, born from 1980-1999, and the largest generational group since the 72 million Baby Boomers.
- Some expect the coming wave of librarian retirements to have a major impact on libraries, which devote an average of 60% of their budgets to staff salaries. New career opportunities for women and competition from private industry may cause a shortage of people willing to work for traditionally low librarian salaries. Others say that library schools are graduating enough students to meet the demand.

What standards are used to measure quality of library service?

- There have been no national standards since the Carter administration, when the field switched its philosophy from librarians selecting high-quality materials and measuring inputs (size of the collection, etc.), to librarians giving patrons what they wanted and measuring outputs (circulation and visits, etc.).
- With the demise of national standards, states have developed their own standards. Most are written as minimums, although some states have tiered standards with increasing requirements for libraries wishing to better

Madame, a circulating library in a town is as an evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge; it blossoms through the year. And depend on it... that they who are so fond of handling the leaves, will long for the fruit at last.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan
Anglo-Irish dramatist

*I go into my library, and all
history unrolls before me.
I breathe the morning air
of the world while the
scent of Eden's roses yet
lingered in it, while it
vibrated only to the
world's first brood of
nightingales, and to the
laugh of Eve. I see the
pyramids building; I hear
the shoutings of the
armies of Alexander.*

Alexander Smith
Scottish poet

serve their public. Librarians who need additional funding to meet the standards tend to favor the use of standards. Those who exceed the standards tend to argue for using community-based planning.

- Librarians use patron satisfaction as a key measure of excellence, while at the same time librarians complain that patrons underestimate what libraries can actually do.

How are public libraries funded?

- The great majority of funds for public libraries (77% nationally; 90% in metro Kansas City) are raised locally. In some cases, including metro Kansas City libraries, the citizens pay a percentage of the value of their property and the funds are reserved for the library. In other cases, libraries are funded from the general revenue of their city or county. Either way, use of local funding sources means that library funding is closely tied to its municipality's tax capacity. In metro Kansas City, patrons pay a higher or lower percentage of the value of their property to support libraries, depending on the tax capacity of the community in which they live.
- In Missouri, libraries can go directly to voters to request an increase in the mill levy. In Kansas, the mill levy is set by the jurisdiction within which the library operates.
- Besides the poorly funded state-operated library of Hawaii, only one state – Ohio – provides almost all of the funding for its libraries from the state income tax, although their libraries are governed locally. Ohio consistently ranks first among all 50 states in the HAPLR Index, and local librarians envy the state's funding structure. But the recent economic downturn has resulted in reduced state dollars, and Ohio libraries are closing branches and cutting hours.

How are public libraries structured?

- By donating libraries to towns and cities, Andrew Carnegie unintentionally helped assure that U.S. libraries would be decentralized in structure and serve smaller populations than their European counterparts. Today, 81%

of U.S. libraries have just one single direct-service outlet. Eleven percent of public libraries – those with a population of 50,000 or more – serve 71% of the areas with library service in the U.S.

- A recent study by Thomas Hennen showed that wider units of service such as county, multi-jurisdictional, and special districts, provide better service than smaller municipal libraries. Some states provide incentives for small libraries to merge, while others mandate county libraries or districts serving a larger population. Some experts, however, believe that there are limits to the appropriate size of a library district, and that too-large districts can be overly bureaucratic and out of touch with the community.
- At least as far back as 1974, there has been interest in merging the Kansas City Public Library with the Mid-Continent Public Library. The Kansas City Public Library covers a total of 87 square miles, 14% of Jackson County's 607 square miles. Seventy-seven of the 87 square miles are located inside the City of Kansas City, Missouri, which is 24% of the city's 317 square miles. Mid-Continent takes in the remainder of Jackson County, all of Platte County, and all of Clay County with the exception of North Kansas City. The Kansas City district's declining tax capacity and its historic (and expensive) role as a library serving the entire region are among the reasons that the Mid-Continent Public Library is not interested in a consolidation. The new Kansas City Public Library director has suggested other means to increase the funds available to his library, including expanding his library's boundaries to include all of the City of Kansas City.

What impact does collaboration have on public libraries?

- Librarians tend to be collaborative by nature, and patrons expect to have access to any library's resources, no matter where they live, so the culture promotes collaboration. Before the advent of computers, collaboration was mainly used to get books from one library to another. Today, librarians seek to share online card catalogs and databases, and state libraries try to assure that technology is available to every patron.
- Librarians say that metro Kansas City libraries are even more collaborative

than most. They identify opportunities for collaboration in funding, specialized collections, cooperative purchasing of databases and other technologically driven elements such as online catalogs and telecommunications.

What is the role of the state library?

- A nationwide study by Steve Schaefer found that financial assistance to libraries accounted for 68.6% of total expenditures of state library agencies. In Kansas, the state library provided \$4,282,000 in financial assistance to libraries, and in Missouri, the state library provided \$5,846,000. The national average expenditure per capita by state libraries for FY 2000 was \$3.74. Kansas spent \$2.56 and Missouri spent \$2.14 per capita on libraries.
- The Kansas State Library presides over 324 libraries, many very small. Over these libraries, the state has superimposed seven regional library systems, which provide supplementary services. The Missouri State Library presides over 149 libraries. The average library in Kansas serves a population of 6,735, while the average Missouri library serves 32,165. The national average is 30,133.
- Technology has modified the role of state libraries, which once rarely provided public library service directly. But now, 40 of 49 state libraries are using state and federal funds to buy databases and offer public access over the Internet, and 48 planned or monitored development of electronic networks.

Why do libraries matter?

Librarians have their own idea of why libraries matter, and so do their patrons. Perhaps your own picture of libraries is rooted in your experience as a child – the nice librarian, the smooth oak tables, the towering shelves of books. Nowadays, maybe you visit the nearest branch occasionally to pick up a novel, or maybe you camp out for hours to conduct research. Or perhaps you rarely visit the library building, relying instead on online services supplied by your library or others, like the Library of Congress.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a library is “a place in which literary, musical, artistic, or reference materials (such as books, manuscripts, recordings, or films) are kept for use but not for sale.” According to a local librarian, a library is a place, a collection of services, and a philosophy. Helen Spalding, associate director of libraries at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, said, “The library is a destination in itself, a sacred ground where community members can gather on equal footing. It’s comfortable, safe, a place where people will help you, a forum for public conversation and educational programs. A public library is public ground, an intellectual commons.”

The American Library Association [ALA] says that the library matters “because it is the only institution in American society whose purpose is to guard against the tyrannies of ignorance and conformity, and its existence indicates the extent to which a democratic society values knowledge, truth, justice, books, and culture.”¹

Libraries inform citizens, break down boundaries by serving all kinds of populations, level the playing field, preserve the past, support families, build communities, and nourish creativity. The library, according to the ALA, is a sanctuary of sorts. “Like synagogues, churches, mosques, and other sacred spaces, libraries can create a physical reaction, a feeling of peace, respect, humility, and honor that throws the mind wide open and suffuses the body with near-spiritual pleasure. But why? Perhaps it is because in the library we are answerable to no one; alone with our private thoughts, fantasies, and hopes, we are free to nourish what is most precious to us with the silent companionship of others we do not know.”²

Patrons love libraries while having little idea what libraries can actually accomplish, according to many librarians. One of them is Mona Carmack, director of the Johnson County Library. “Patrons are very nostalgic about what they think

Be a little careful about your library. Do you foresee what you will do with it? Very little to be sure. But the real question is, What will it do with you? You will come here and get books that will open your eyes, and your ears, and your curiosity, and turn you inside out or outside in.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
U.S. essayist

A note on terminology

Within the field, the word “library” can mean either the administrative entity or the building. So, for example, you can research your ancestors at the Genealogy and Local History Branch of the Mid-Continent Public Library. The administrative entity, Mid-Continent, is a library and is composed of many buildings, each of which is also a library.

libraries ought to be,” she said. “They want cushy library chairs, for example, but that’s not what they’re willing to pay for and that’s not what they really need. Patrons have no vision of what we can do. The only vision they have is based on their past experiences...I wish that they were able to see what our strengths are, that we know where the information is, how to find it and how to compile it.”

Libraries ensure that information will be there when we need it, no matter what our circumstances. Given economic ups and downs, those circumstances can change. A five-year study of library use conducted by the University of Illinois Library Research Center (LRC) found that circulation has increased significantly since March 2001, when the National Bureau of Economic Research pegged the beginning of the latest recession. At 18 libraries serving one million or more, usage was 8.3% higher than would be expected based on data collected since January 1997. After September 11, circulation in October exceeded the trend by 11.3%.³

Libraries also ensure that we can gain access to information, no matter the changes in technology or our ability to pay. Libraries bridge the digital divide, providing free access to computers and help in figuring out how to make the darned things work.

Library snapshot

Mid-Continent Public Library

Director, Paul White

www.mcpl.lib.mo.us

The Mid-Continent Public Library consists of 30 branches serving Clay, Jackson and Platte counties in Western Missouri, except for the territory served by the North Kansas City and Kansas City libraries. It was established in 1965 and is now one of the largest library systems in the United States. Mid-Continent’s Genealogy and Local History Branch is a nationally recognized genealogical resource center.

What are some basic facts about libraries?

These basic facts provide a snapshot of how libraries are structured, what they cost, and what services they provide across the country and in metro Kansas City. Unless noted otherwise, the data below are drawn from the latest (FY 2001) figures, released in 2003 by National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], which collects information from each library in the country.⁴

Using NCES data allows us to compare local libraries with national averages. The Public Library Survey is a voluntary survey conducted annually by NCES through the Federal-State Cooperative System for Public Library Data. The data are collected and verified as accurate by data coordinators who are appointed by the state librarian and operate out of the state library. The data contain some inaccuracies, though, which are noted.

Some library directors were frustrated that the data were not more up-to-date. Because two libraries did not participate in this study, however, it would have been impossible to gather data from the most recent fiscal year for every library in the region.

National averages provide a comparison point for the seven libraries that serve the five-county Kansas City region but they are not an indicator of excellence or lack thereof, in particular because most local libraries serve far more patrons and have more outlets than the national norm.

Population served and branches

Across the country in 2001, there were 9,129 public libraries, which served 97% of the population in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Of those, 81% had one single direct service outlet, and 19% had more than one (such as branch libraries and bookmobiles). Eleven percent of the public libraries – those with a population of 50,000 or more – served 72% of the areas with library service in the U.S. (See Table 1.)

Structure of metro libraries

Libraries can be structured in a variety of ways. Of all U.S. libraries in 2001:

- 55% of public libraries were municipal, which means they operate as part of the government of a single city, town or village;

Changes in leadership

This report was written during portions of late 2001 through early 2004. Dan Bradbury was interviewed before he announced his retirement as director of the Kansas City Public Library, and he is quoted in this report. His replacement, Joe Green, was also interviewed and is also quoted.

TABLE 1: Population served & branches. 2003 report (2001 data)

Library	Population of service area & (% of total population)	# central libraries	# branch libraries
Kansas City, Missouri	257,930 (17%)	1	9
Mid-Continent	650,023 (43%)	1	*31
Kansas City, Kansas	151,206 (10%)	1	3
Johnson County	358,110 (24%)	1	12
North Kansas City	4,714 (<1%)	1	0
Olathe	92,962 (6%)	1	1
Bonner Springs	6,768 (<1%)	1	0

*Mid-Continent has no central library and 30 branches, according to its director.

Library snapshot
Bonner Springs City Library
 Director, Kimberly Martin
www.bonnerlibrary.org

The Bonner Springs City Library serves the residents of Bonner Springs, a city in Wyandotte County, Kansas. It began in 1946, when members of eleven women’s clubs met to form the Library Association. Each club donated books, and the library operated out of the Bonner Springs City Hall in 1947. In 1962, the community passed a bond issue for a new city hall and library, which opened in 1963. Two years later, citizens voted to tax themselves to support the library. The library moved to its present location in the lower level of the Community Center in 1987.

- 11% were county/parish, which means that they operate as part of a county or parish government;
- 15% were nonprofit association libraries, entities privately controlled but meeting the statutory definition of a public library;
- 9% were special library districts, which means that they are districts, authorities, boards or commissions authorized by state law to provide library services;
- 5% were multijurisdictional, meaning that they are operated jointly by two or more units of local government under an intergovernmental agreement, with a jointly appointed board or other means of joint governance;
- 3% were operated as part of a school district; and
- 1% were city/county, which means that the library is a multijurisdictional entity that is operated jointly by a county and a city.
- 2% reported their legal basis as “other.” These are autonomous library entities with their own governance and funding.

In metro Kansas City, five libraries were reported by their states as being municipal:

- Kansas City, Missouri;
- Kansas City, Kansas;
- North Kansas City;
- Olathe; and
- Bonner Springs.

The Kansas City, Kansas, Library, however, also has attributes of a school district library. It is governed by the board of the Kansas City, Kansas, School District, and the superintendent of schools is responsible for administering public library services, although the library’s website notes that that responsibility is delegated to the library director. The library’s boundaries, though, include more area than do the boundaries of the school district. On the Missouri side, while the Kansas City Public Library has the same geographic boundaries as the Kansas City School District, the two entities separated their governance and administration in 1988.

The Johnson County Library was listed as a county/parish library.

Mid-Continent was listed as a city/county library in the 2003 report, although it was listed as multijurisdictional in previous years. Director Paul White

*What is more important in
a library than anything
else—than everything
else—is the fact that it
exists.*

Archibald MacLeish
U.S. poet

*Come and take choice of
all my library,
And so beguile thy sorrow.*

William Shakespeare
British dramatist

says that Mid-Continent has been a consolidated district (also called multijurisdictional) since 1978.⁵

It's important to note that Missouri libraries are independent taxing districts; they can go directly to voters for tax increases, and their budgets are separate from those of their jurisdictions. Because they are separate political subdivisions, they are special library districts, according to Missouri State Librarian Sara Parker.⁶ None of the local libraries in Missouri were designated special districts in their NCES profiles.

Operating income

Nationwide, the great majority, 77%, of all public libraries' total operating income of about \$8.2 billion came from local sources. Thirteen percent came from state sources, 1% from federal sources, and 9% from other sources, like gifts, interest, fines, and fees.

Kansas City's libraries depend even more heavily on local sources of income than the national average. Kansas City, Missouri, receives the lowest percentage from local sources, but even its 84% is significantly larger than the national average of 77%. Of the nearly \$68 million in total operating income for metro Kansas City's seven libraries, 90% is raised through local sources. (See tables 2 and 3.)

The national average is 13% from state funding, although that figure includes Hawaii, whose poorly funded libraries are state-run, and Ohio, whose libraries receive the bulk of their funds from the state. In metro Kansas City, no library receives more than 3% of its funding from the State of Missouri or the State of Kansas. Of the total operating income for the seven libraries, just 1.5% comes from state government. In FY2000, according to NCES, the average state expenditure per capita was \$3.74 nationwide. In Kansas, it was \$2.56 per capita and in Missouri, \$2.14.

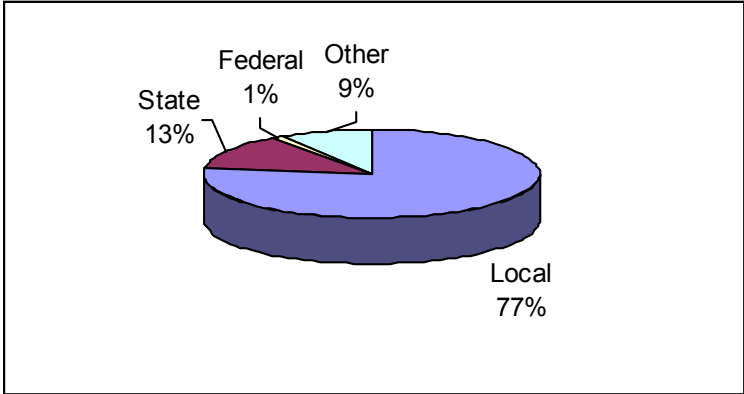
Operating expenditure

Nationwide, average per capita operating expenditure was \$27.64. The range of per capita operating expenditure among states ran from a high of \$51.58 to a low of \$12.28. (See Table 4.)

TABLE 2: Operating income. 2003 report (2001 data)

Library	Local	State	Federal	Other	Total
Kansas City, Missouri	\$12,918,175	\$187,570	\$206,474	\$2,032,104	\$15,344,323
Mid-Continent	26,612,820	340,671	3,000	1,777,255	28,733,746
Kansas City, Kansas	5,075,612	122,415	76,434	318,691	5,593,152
Johnson County	13,515,011	290,857	2,900	846,508	14,655,276
North Kansas City	575,953	6,745	0	32,698	615,396
Olathe	2,373,010	71,473	0	285,360	2,729,843
Bonner Springs	196,542	5,652	0	10,620	212,814

National average: 2001 contributions to library operating income



Metro Kansas City average: 2001 contributions to library operating income

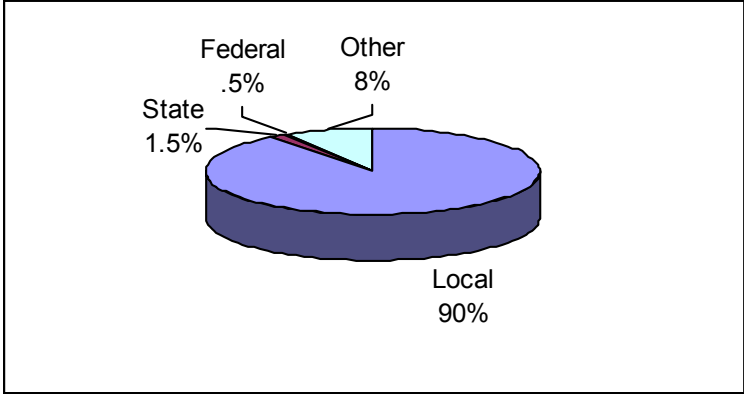


TABLE 3: Operating income for metro districts. 2003 report (2001 data)

Library	Local	State	Federal	Other
National average % of total	77%	13%	1%	9%
Kansas City, Missouri	84%	1%	1%	13%
Mid-Continent	93%	1%	0%	6%
Kansas City, Kansas	91%	2%	1%	6%
Johnson County	92%	2%	0%	6%
North Kansas City	94%	1%	0%	5%
Olathe	87%	3%	0%	10%
Bonner Springs	92%	3%	0%	5%

TABLE 4: Operating expenditure. 2003 report (2001 data)

Library	Total operating exp.	Per capita operating exp.	% spent on staff	% spent on collections
National average		\$27.64	64%	15%
Kansas City, Missouri	\$13,316,513	51.82	57%	21%
Mid-Continent	25,145,591	38.83	61%	26%
Kansas City, Kansas	5,026,316	33.31	69%	14%
Johnson County	14,938,037	41.93	64%	19%
North Kansas City	571,661	121.71	66%	14%
Olathe	2,438,235	26.28	64%	17%
Bonner Springs	219,202	32.46	58%	17%

TABLE 5: Books and serial volumes. 2003 report (2001 data)

Library	Books & serial volumes	Per capita
National average		2.90
Kansas City, Missouri	2,127,941	8.28
Mid-Continent*	2,739,902	4.23
Kansas City, Kansas	374,620	2.48
Johnson County	1,172,525	3.28
North Kansas City	40,662	8.66
Olathe	201,772	2.18
Bonner Springs	36,559	5.41

*This figure includes only books, according to the Mid-Continent director. The previous year's figure for books and serial volumes was 5,825,194 and the library had 10.01 books and serial volumes per capita.

Total operating expenditures for public libraries were \$7.6 billion. Sixty-four percent was spent on paid staff and 15% on the library collection. Public libraries had a total of 133,000 paid full-time-equivalent [FTE] staff, or 12.18 paid FTE staff per 25,000 population. Of these, 23% were librarians with the master's of library science degree from an institution accredited by the American Library Association. Eleven percent were librarians by title but without the ALA-MLS. Sixty-seven percent were in other positions.

Size of collection

The largest part of most library collections is books and bound volumes of periodicals. Nationwide, public libraries had 767.1 million books and serial volumes in their collections, or 2.8 volumes per capita. State averages ranged from a low of 1.7 volumes per capita to a high of 5.0 volumes per capita. (See Table 5.)

Circulation and visits

Total nationwide circulation of public library materials was 1.8 billion, or 6.5 materials circulated per capita. The highest per capita circulation for a state was 13.8 and the lowest was 2.1. Nationwide, library visits totaled 1.2 billion, or 4.3 library visits per capita. (See Table 6.)

Internet access

Nationwide, 96% of all libraries had access to the Internet. Ninety-one percent made the Internet available to patrons directly or through a staff intermediary. Expenditures for public library collection materials in electronic format were 1% of total operating expenditures, and expenditures for electronic access were 3% of total operating expenditures.

Each library in metro Kansas City provides public Internet terminals. Johnson County provides 308 public terminals, Kansas City provides 362 and Mid-Continent provides 239. Kansas City, Kansas, provides 65. North Kansas City has 13, and Olathe and Bonner Springs each have seven.

No place affords a more striking conviction of the vanity of human hopes than a public library.

Samuel Johnson
British author

TABLE 6: Circulation and visits. 2003 report (2001 data)

Library	Visits per capita	Circulation per capita
National average	4.30	6.40
Kansas City, Missouri	7.83	9.30
Mid-Continent	5.61	9.49
Kansas City, Kansas	4.13	6.06
Johnson County	6.74	14.29
North Kansas City	21.62	21.23
Olathe	4.79	11.18
Bonner Springs	11.55	10.24

Library snapshot

Kansas City, Kansas, Public Library

Director, Charles Perdue

www.kckpl.lib.ks.us

The Kansas City, Kansas, Public Library serves all of Wyandotte County, Kansas, with the exception of Bonner Springs. The Main Library was completed in 1966 on the site of the library's first Carnegie building (1904-1966). Its Argentine Library first opened in a storefront in 1911, and moved to its current location in 1917. The building is the only Carnegie library remaining in the Kansas City area, and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Kansas City, Kansas, is the only district in the state to be governed by a school district's board of education. It is not subsidized by the Kansas City, Kansas, School District and has no branches in school buildings.

Which trends will have an impact on libraries?

Trends that affect libraries include new technologies, new roles for library buildings, and changes among patrons and librarians. These trends are expected to change the way that libraries provide their services.

How is technology changing the role of the library?

Some say technology will make libraries obsolete, while others say it will increase the role of libraries in the lives of some or all sectors of society. What's indisputable is the fact that keeping up with even basic technology is expensive, and that it changes the role that geography plays in providing library services.

The use of technology has certainly exploded. For example, in just three years, from 1998-2001, the number of terminals that U.S. public libraries made available for the general public skyrocketed from 24,028 to 122,584, and the annual use of electronic resources went from 20 million to almost 200 million.⁷

A study on the role of libraries in the digital age conducted by the Benton Foundation in 1997 found that Americans were moving away from the public sphere – the library, town square, tavern or marketplace – and investing in technology that allowed them to communicate from home. “It may well be that the greater the investment Americans make in the home as a center for information processing, the less likely they will be to subsidize the public library. Librarians find themselves...put at risk as much by the growing investment in the private realm of the home as the withdrawal from the public sphere of the library.”⁸

At the same time, libraries are increasingly important to people without access to computers or the training to use them. Nearly 95% of the nation's 16,090 public library outlets provided public access to the Internet, while 46% of public libraries offered classes on the Internet, according to a 2001 study. The St. Louis County Library even uses Cybermobiles to take the Internet and online reference support to neighborhoods where residents would otherwise have to travel long distances to use them.⁹ Other cities have outreach sites in children's museums and shopping malls.

And savvy libraries are finding new ways to provide value-added services in the Information Age. Johnson County's Carmack serves a community in which 90% of households have access to the Internet. While patrons go online for answers to questions they once asked the reference desk, she said, “what they can't find is

We're drowning in information and starving for knowledge.

Rutherford D Rogers
Librarian, Yale

The computer is only a fast idiot, it has no imagination; it cannot originate action. It is, and will remain, only a tool to man.

American Library Association, on the Univac computer exhibited at the 1964 NY World's Fair

the best source of information on things like care for their elderly parents or breast cancer or child rearing. So what we've done is to provide more content in the form of web pages that people can search online."

Libraries straddle both the old and the new economies. They are faced with meeting the demand for expensive new hardware and online services and, simultaneously, continuing to provide traditional services. According to the *ALA Library Journal*, "In nearly all research on what users expect from libraries, content and services from both the new and old economies are demanded. From school kids to medical researchers, it has become apparent that traditional print services must exist with the new digital devices and information. It is also obvious that librarians have carved out a new role as one-on-one teachers and assistants in the deployment and use of new technology."¹⁰

Emily Baker, director of the Olathe Public Library, agreed that patrons want the traditional services along with the new technology. "People with home computers can get things online through the library website," she said, "but people also want to come to the library to see programs, to run into somebody they know, to look through the materials."

The revolution that started with personal computers and the Internet has not nearly run its course. According to *Library Futures Quarterly*, among the emerging technologies that can be expected to change public libraries are: digital assistants; teleservice (providing reference services to online users); next-generation online publishing (electronic publishing languages used to create highly structured and flexible documents); information management like new cataloging and electronic tagging initiatives; information devices like digital media players, personal digital assistants and electronic books; broadband, which allows the quick movement of large data blocks like movies and software programs; and wireless networking, through which data are delivered through airwaves instead of wires.¹¹

And while most books are still printed on paper, more periodicals are putting their contents online. Libraries must purchase licenses to make them available to patrons, with the cost determined by the size of the population served. In 1991, just seven scholarly journals were available online; by 2000, the number had grown to 3,915.¹²

The national library statistics for 2001, released by NCES in 2003, for the

first time include data on electronic use in public libraries. The data were collected by the Federal-State Cooperative Service in previous years, but this was the first year that enough libraries included the data to meet the NCES requirement for an 80% response. In an article for *American Libraries*, Thomas Hennen compared the cost per circulation for traditional books and periodicals against the cost per circulation for electronic resources such as the Internet, online indexes, CD-ROM reference sources, software, and the online catalog. He found that the cost per electronic use was an average of \$.94, while the cost per circulation for books and periodicals was \$.50. Hennen is the author of the annual HAPLR Index, which ranks American libraries.¹³

The explosion in expensive new technology requires a response at a level beyond each separate library. State libraries and the federal government have stepped in to underwrite some of the costs and to assure that technology is available to all libraries. Even then, libraries have their own decisions to make about which catalog systems to select, which databases to offer, and which new technology to purchase. These decisions require staff with expertise that is too costly for some libraries to afford. Even those that can, may find it difficult to conduct technological innovation in the public sector because it involves public funds. Accountability for the public dollar can make people risk-averse and increase the turnaround time for adopting new technology. Public librarians interviewed by the *Library Journal* cited the need for a technology think-tank to deal with rapid library technology deployment and help libraries avoid needless replication.¹⁴

What about digitizing historical collections?

Older libraries are repositories of historic documents that most patrons never see. With digitization, however, libraries can copy fragile materials and post them online, accessible for users worldwide. It's a popular, but expensive, service.

Not all of the materials in a library's collection are candidates for digitization. It works best with rare or fragile items, text rather than moving images, and, because of copyright restrictions, those in the public domain. Oversized pieces and documents in poor physical condition aren't digitized. Because the technology continues to change, digitization isn't accepted by historians as a means for preserving old documents and therefore can't yet replace microfilm. But it does reduce wear

To a historian libraries are food, shelter, and even muse. They are of two kinds: the library of published materials, books, pamphlets, periodicals, and the archive of unpublished papers and documents.

Barbara Tuchman
U.S. historian

on the original, and can provide the public with convenient access to the document.¹⁵

When offered materials in digital format, the public responds enthusiastically. For example, the New York Public Library gets 10 million online hits a month, but checks out only 50,000 books at its primary location, and the Library of Congress transmitted nearly 347 million files in the first eight months of 1999.¹⁶

Still, digital conversion is expensive. The cost of digitizing a page from a bound volume can vary widely, but is around \$.60 per page according to one estimate. This, however, is only about a third of the total costs. According to a report from the Cornell University Library, the other two-thirds goes to “metadata creation, administration, and the like.” Some say that maintenance will end up costing up to seven times the cost of creating the digital image, but most digital conversion projects have been funded by one-time appropriations from governments and foundations that don’t pay for administering the collection over the long haul.¹⁷

The largest repository of historical documents in metro Kansas City is the Kansas City Public Library, with about 60,000 items in its special collections department. Mary Beveridge, a librarian in that department, estimated the total cost to digitize the collection at about \$24 million, not including the administration costs. “What we are looking at is identifying some very high-use publications that are old enough to be in the public domain and also are so fragile that we want to avoid using the originals,” she said. “In the past, we microfilmed such titles but may pursue the digitization route in the future if it isn’t cost-prohibitive.”¹⁸

The Missouri State Library offers a digital imaging grant, intended to fund demonstration projects that embody the best practices and standards for the selection, digital capture, storage, and Web-delivery of documents. In 2002, Missouri awarded \$63,654 for five digital imaging projects at libraries around the state, including one sponsored by the University of Missouri-Kansas City libraries. The grants were funded under the federal Library Services and Technology Act [LSTA].

LSTA funds have also allowed the Missouri State Library to provide centralized Web access to the digitized special collections of archives, historical societies, libraries, and museums around the state. The Virtually Missouri website (virtuallymissouri.org) links to 16 digitized collections, and also provides guidelines for libraries regarding digitization. The site is maintained by the Missouri Library

Network Corporation as part of the Missouri Digitization Planning Project.¹⁹

The Kansas State Library has begun to digitize its historic documents as part of the Western Historic Trails Project, according to Kansas State Librarian Duane Johnson. Kansas has joined with Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico to create a regional history information database, focusing on the historic trails that ran through Kansas and the other three states. The project resulted from relationships with states in the Western Council of State Libraries. It will require systematically compiling all the printed information and digitizing it for inclusion in the database. “We think the database will be useful as an information source and as a demonstration of how historic information can be collected and put into an electronic format for education and academic research,” Johnson said.

What impact does technology have on the library as a geographically based institution?

The traditional services of a library are place-based, with decisions made at the local level. You have to go to the building to get the book, and which books are available is determined by community needs as interpreted by the librarian. But technology has opened up a new world in which one library can provide services to users around the globe, and in which a patron in Kansas City can talk to a librarian thousands of miles away. Some see that new world as complementary to traditional services, while others see it as conflicting.

A study by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U. S. Department of Education found that, “[t]he advent of the Internet and other online services has changed the library from a place to an information system. In other words, libraries are no longer limited to the information they house; they have become facilities that provide electronic access to global information resources. Moreover, emerging global digital libraries are having a major impact on the way libraries operate.” The study suggested research topics related to how global connections would change the library’s role in the local community.²⁰

Samuel Bennett, a former Kansas City, Kansas, librarian who is now program manager of the William T. Kemper Foundation, told Consensus, “As technology continues to have an impact, the library will continue to be less place-based, except as a community gathering point. But more people will be accessing the

Lunch is eaten on its front steps. The proper and the improper disport themselves in its backyard. All civilization enters its reading room at the beck of a card.

Editorial on the 75th anniversary of the New York Public Library

online branch, which people are seeing as a separate branch rather than a supplemental service.”

Experience shows that the provision of online information is likely to grow more centralized even as its users become more dispersed. Take the Library of Congress, for example. With nearly 21 million items in its collection, it's the world's largest library. Its original purpose was primarily to serve the Congress and to serve the public only as a library of last resort. But by the end of 2000, the Library of Congress had put seven million items of American history and culture online as part of the National Digital Library. It has also established the Collaborative Digital Reference Service, available worldwide every minute of every day. [According to Librarian of Congress James H. Billington, “The first question asked on it...came from a Londoner seeking information on Byzantine cooking. It was routed through a Library of Congress file server and answered in a few hours by a librarian in Santa Monica, California.”]²¹ The library is taking on a new national and global role in providing educational materials to the public.

The same dynamic is true at the state level, where state libraries are taking on new roles as providers of technology and electronic services available to residents statewide. For example, in 2002 the Kansas legislature passed and funded the Kansas Education Network, which will provide broad-band connectivity to schools, libraries, and hospitals.

Why is the library building increasingly important?

At the same time that the online impact of the library is growing, the library building is seen as increasingly important to community revitalization and civic life. Consider the fact that nearly 20 million people visit a public library each week in the United States.²² Some of them can even pop out of the stacks and pick up a cappuccino.

From 1995-2001, more than 1,300 academic and public libraries were built or renovated, some with the idea of becoming the focus of civic life. The new Carlsbad City Library in California, for example, features a 221-seat auditorium and an art gallery.²³

In our metro area, the Downtown Council took the lead in developing the

Kansas City Public Library's then-\$46 million Central Library because of the impact it could have upon downtown redevelopment. The Downtown Council formed a Limited Liability Corporation (the DTC, LLC) to purchase the old First National Bank Building at 10th and Baltimore and conduct the renovation. Its for-profit status allows the DTC, LLC to use some \$10 million in state and federal historic tax credits, which will be returned to the project. And the impact on downtown redevelopment is also expected to help lure \$20.6 million in civic and philanthropic contributions. When the project is finished, the Kansas City Library will lease the building from the DTC, LLC.²⁴

"Cities now see libraries as an integral part of their revitalization efforts. Libraries are being designed not only to handle the technology of today and tomorrow, but also are incorporating design elements such as coffee shops and other multiple use features to attract users and serve as gathering places and cultural centers," according to the *IFLA Journal*, a publication of the International Federation of Library Associations.²⁵

Even though the library is free, it still has to attract patrons who could just as easily hang out at Barnes & Noble, sip a latte, and sink into one of the overstuffed chairs to scan the latest bestseller.²⁶ It's a type of competition as new to libraries as the Internet, and libraries are responding.

The Library Center in Springfield, Missouri, was the focus of an article in the *Wall Street Journal* in May, 2000, about five months after it opened. The building includes a café and gift shop and serves as a community center. Since it opened, the library's circulation has doubled. Other libraries have had coffee shops for years, and the Los Angeles Public Library has expanded to include a Chinese restaurant and frozen-yogurt stand.²⁷ Kansas City's new Central Library will feature a café, the first in that system to do so.

The Central Library will also be organized differently than most libraries, Joe Green, director of the Kansas City Public Library, said. The structure is more like a department store than a traditional library. "People are now quick-hitters," he said. "They want to get what they want and go home. The days when people would come and browse are changing." Instead of being interwoven, the different services the library provides will be distinct. For example, all non-print material will be in one area, business information in another, and youth services will have its own

space. “All these places are now destinations, not just another corner of the building.”

The library is also playing an increasing role as community center. One librarian in New York State says that suburban sprawl makes the idea of libraries as the center of town even more important. Another librarian observes that libraries are shifting their priorities from information to social interaction.²⁸

That’s definitely true at the Johnson County Library. Its planning committee took a cue from the book *Bowling Alone* and realized it “needed to focus on community building to rebuild social capital,” according to Carmack. “If we don’t rebuild social capital, then we have a disconnect and deterioration of the community.” The library has held forums on local issues as a first step toward creating connections.

How are library patrons changing?

Libraries today are working to meet the needs of a growing population of the elderly and non-English-speaking immigrants. Libraries of tomorrow will have to attract members of Generation Y, whose oldest members recently graduated from college. That generation is the most racially and ethnically diverse in American history and almost as immense a group as the Baby Boomers.

The elderly

As the Boomers age, their numbers will inevitably affect libraries. In the Mid-Continent Public Library, according to White, “The impact of an increasing elderly population is already being felt and we are meeting that demand.” In Johnson County, the library is developing new programming dedicated specifically to seniors. Carmack said, “We have grant requests out that would allow us to provide technology in senior centers and senior residences and delivery services to get books to seniors who can’t come to get them. We’re also developing a special web page on elder care for people who are providing care to the elderly.”

New immigrants

Libraries are a valuable resource to the growing immigrant population. “We’re see-

ing so many new immigrant families, and it's important for us to serve these new Americans," said Jobeth Bradbury, director of the North Kansas City Public Library.²⁹ "North Kansas City has a huge immigrant population, including Cubans, Hispanics, East Europeans, and Asians. I've heard there are 57 countries represented here, so we're really serving a diverse population."

The same is true in Olathe, where Baker says the community is growing more diverse. "We have a quickly growing Hispanic segment that we're trying to serve, along with people from the Far East, from African nations, and from Central Europe."

The number of languages spoken by Kansas City Public Library patrons has caused its director to borrow an idea from the 1930s. Green said, "Back then, we had libraries on about every corner. Now, we're going to need to create small units that are focused on providing resources to the population. So if we have an influx of Vietnamese in an area, it's conceivable we would rent a storefront that we would fill with materials targeted to that population."

New generations

Some call the generation born from 1980-1999 Generation Y, and some call them the Millennial Generation. Whatever the name, that group is likely to have an immense impact on libraries in the future. Generation Y is the largest generational group since the Baby Boomers. Boomers included 72 million individuals, Generation X included just 17 million, and Generation Y includes 60 million. These young people are more racially and ethnically diverse than previous generations (one of three is not Caucasian), one in four lives in a single-parent household, and the Internet to them is like television to their parents' generation in terms of its role in youth culture.³⁰

According to *Library Futures Quarterly*, "The key to the public library's success lies in gathering intelligence about this generation, finding methods and techniques to appeal to them and actively promoting the targeted services."³¹

How's that going? Not so well, according to two surveys. The National Education Association found that one out of three teenagers said that reading was old-fashioned and boring, and a majority found it difficult and challenging. One bright spot is that the survey, released in 2001, found that the biggest readers were

*You become a reader
because you saw and
heard someone you
admired enjoying the
experience, someone led
you to the world of books
even before you could
read, let you taste the
magic of stories, took you
to the library, and allowed
you to stay up later at
night to read in bed.*

Jim Trelease
The New Read-Aloud
Handbook

minority youth, who find reading pleasurable and worthwhile.³² The Pew Internet & American Life Project, also released in 2001, found that less than 30% of students 12-17 used public libraries at all, and most use the Internet as their primary study aid outside the classroom. The students saw the library as confusing, inconvenient and time-consuming.³³

Will there be enough librarians?

A wave of retirements is expected to hit libraries hard. The 58% of professional librarians who turn 65 between now and 2019 entered the profession when career opportunities for women were limited.³⁴ Like other historically female professions, this one worries about attracting high-quality replacements willing to work for comparatively low salaries. With staff costs comprising about 60% of most libraries' budgets, the impact on libraries could be immense.

According to *Library Journal*, "An expanded number of net-related job opportunities, comparatively mediocre pay, and a raft of retirements both now and in the next ten years have conspired to bring about a staffing crisis. And if they aren't facing acute problems now, more libraries could feel the pinch soon. According to the Urban Libraries Council, three of four library directors currently at urban libraries will have retired by 2010."³⁵

"Our librarians at UMKC have to have two master's degrees," Spalding said. "There are fewer library schools producing librarians and it's considered a women's profession, which has historically been undervalued. Women have more career opportunities now, and if they are bright enough to go to graduate school, they may choose a higher paying profession."

The Bureau of Labor Statistics found that in 2000 the median salary for a librarian at a public library was \$38,370. BLS considers the following to require similar analytical, organizational and communicative skills as librarians: computer systems analyst (\$59,330 median); database administrator (\$51,990); computer and information systems managers (\$78,830).³⁶

And not all libraries can afford librarians with a master's of library science [MLS]. In rural areas, Wal-Mart draws away poorly paid non-MLS librarians because it offers better pay and some health insurance.³⁷ Most library directors in Kansas don't have a library degree because the salary doesn't support it. "In small

communities, they find the best people they can and pay them about minimum wage,” Patti Butcher said. Butcher is library development coordinator for the Northeast Kansas Library System, which began to improve librarian salaries a year or two ago. In 2002, the lowest salary requirement was \$7 an hour.

Low status for library work is considered to contribute to low pay. Many graduate schools are dropping the word “library” from their program name and using instead “information technology” or “information.”³⁸

Students in library schools report that they plan to seek work in the for-profit sector, and technological changes mean that libraries must compete with private industry for information-age employees. “We’re hearing more people talk about how hard it’s getting to recruit not only people with a traditional library background but those in technology and with web development experience and support staffing in those areas. The Yahoos of the world have become a fertile recruiting ground [for librarians]. That’s a crunch we are facing,” said John Nichols, director of the Oshkosh Public Library.³⁹

In some cities, like San Francisco, library workers have voted to unionize, typically joining unions that are part of a public employees unit. The Service Employees International Union is actively organizing librarians and library workers, according to a union activist. San Francisco librarians earn an entry-level salary of \$53,508 a year, about \$15,000 more than the national median.⁴⁰

The American Library Association, because it is a 501c3 nonprofit, is limited in its ability to work for compensation for its members. The ALA board voted in January 2003 to form the Allied Professional Association, which will allow ALA to conduct activities that are prohibited under its 501c3 status such as advocating for pay equity.⁴¹

Kansas City’s Green suggests that how libraries look at staff with the MLS degree may be changing. Now, people with master’s degrees often handle responsibilities that could be done by someone with a bachelor’s. “What’s happening is that library directors are beginning to say that they don’t need as many staff members with a master’s, but they’ll value those who do and put them in management positions. The value of the MLS has been increased, but the number of people with the MLS has been decreased. That’s a big change happening all over the country.”

Some libraries have found ways to recruit and grow librarians. Mid-

In my early days, I tried not to give librarians any trouble, which was where I made my primary mistake. Librarians like to be given trouble, they exist for it, they are geared to it. For the location of a mislaid volume, an uncatalogued item, your good librarian has a ferret’s nose. Give her a scent and she jumps the leash, her eyes bright with battle.

Catherine Drinker Bowen
U.S. biographer

Continent's White said, "We're in a different situation than most libraries in that we're known as a good employer with excellent benefits. We constantly have three or four librarians in development, people who are getting their MLS while they work for us. We aren't feeling the pinch that so many of the libraries are."

Not everyone sees the coming wave of retirements as a crisis. Kansas's Johnson said, "The retirement of librarians is an ongoing issue. It's been important for a long time and will continue to be. But it's exaggerated. Between 30 and 40 graduate library schools are turning out good, professional librarians at a steady pace, and recent research has shown that the market is likely to be filled by people coming out of library schools right now."

In fact, the number of students in library schools in North America jumped from 8,925 full- and part-time students in 1989 to 12,292 full- and part-time students in 1999 – up 27%. Each year more than 4,500 persons earn their master's degree in library and information science. About 80% of graduates are female and 20% male. About 11% are minority graduates.⁴²

According to *Utne Reader*, the new generation of librarians sees information as a social cause. "A new spirit seems to be energizing the profession," the magazine says, citing a variety of websites including Snarky Librarian, Modified Librarian, Renegade Librarian, Anarchist Librarian, and Rogue Librarian. Beyond having a playful side, "[t]here is a strong activist element, too, as library professionals develop new services for immigrants, resist the dumbing down of library collections, and struggle against injustice in the world at large." This generation will replace retiring librarians, many of whom began their careers in the late 1960s when librarians were beginning to see themselves as social activists and community builders.⁴³

How do we measure a library's quality?

The charge asks: How should metro Kansas City libraries best be structured, organized and funded to optimize service and performance in the future? The task, then, is to determine what constitutes a high-quality, high-performing library.

This task is more difficult than one might expect. There have been no national standards since the 1980s, although most states have since stepped in to develop their own. And, while each individual library conducts research on what its patrons want, there is precious little comparative research being conducted at the state and national level. While some quantitative data are collected, like the Public Library Association's Public Library Data Service Statistical Report, it is rare for those data to be the foundation for conclusions and recommendations that could provide guidance to the field, the public, or elected officials about what constitutes excellence or how to achieve it.

Why is there so little comparative research?

Libraries are exceedingly local institutions. Libraries exist to serve their communities, and for the 81% of libraries with only one outlet, those communities tend to be rather small. There is every incentive for libraries to use patron satisfaction as a key measure of excellence, as local patrons provide the great majority of funds, but at the same time librarians complain that patrons don't understand all that libraries can do. It's all part of a century-long debate about what standards should be used to judge excellence and whether librarians should lead or follow public tastes.

"An excellent library is a service organization designed to effectively and economically meet the needs of the community it's designed to serve," Kansas's Johnson said. "...There's so much differentiation in terms of size and nature of the service to be provided, it hasn't been possible to create a textbook guide. There's creativity in how libraries are different, and what works gloriously for one may be ignored in another. It relates to the preferences of the people you want to serve. If you build your services out of a good understanding of those preferences, that's how you'll build the best system."

Kansas City's Green agrees that meeting the needs of the community is paramount. "Our ability to anticipate what the community expects the library to be, to accelerate delivery of the services, and to adapt to what's needed, that's the defi-

I do not mean to suggest that our handsome, newly enlarged library is to be a headquarters of busy bookworms, old and young, routinely absorbing knowledge by the hour while birds sing outside and the Mets fight it out for last place in the National League. On the contrary, a good library is a joyful place where the imagination roams free, and life is actively enriched.

John K Hutchens

In program for benefit to aid Free Reading Room of Rye, NY.

...nition of excellence.” He said that libraries used to guess about what patrons wanted, but new marketing tools make it possible for libraries to target their services to very specific audiences. “If libraries don’t start moving in that direction, they’ll continue to be a community-wide notion, that every community should have a library, but they’ll be marginalized, a symbol rather than something that’s integral to the daily life of the community.”

What gets lost when individual libraries conduct planning is the ability to compare, according to Hennen, whose HAPLR Index was the only nationwide comparative study of library quality that we found. He told Consensus, “The problem is that a lot of libraries do self-assessments and do an excellent job of coming up with good goals and good objectives that are appropriate for their communities, but what you lose in that process is the ability to compare yourselves to others. If all you’ve ever known is inadequate, how does the community or the library board or staff know how to plan for excellence? ...Nationally and on a case-by-case basis, we don’t have good comparative tools.”

A task force composed of library leaders and leaders of federal agencies that deal with libraries was convened in 1998 to address the issue of research. The project was sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement in the U.S. Department of Education. The group stressed the ability of research to help librarians do a better job and meet the needs of the future. “While librarians recognize the need for research, few actually conduct research, and the research that is done in this field is often isolated and uncoordinated. Also, the quality of existing library research is mixed. Over the years, many have criticized the library and information science field for these failings.”⁴⁴

The group noted the lack of long-term longitudinal studies related to libraries, which would be vital to measuring community and economic impact. They also found that short-term research is necessary to help guide more immediate operational decisions. A “miniscule amount” of the federal dollars allocated to education research is applied toward library and information science projects, they said. The group agreed that federal agencies that fund library research should attempt to coordinate research projects.⁴⁵

What standards do libraries use to judge themselves?

Steel tycoon Andrew Carnegie provided grants that built 2,509 libraries in the English-speaking world. But Carnegie was disappointed that the individual libraries had failed to attract the support they needed to thrive. To help remedy that, the Carnegie Corporation of New York originally spurred the push for standards, starting in the 1930s.⁴⁶

In 1950 social scientist Robert D. Leigh wrote *The Public Library in the United States*, sponsored by the ALA and supported with funds from the Carnegie Corporation. He challenged the library community to consider the tension between quality selection and public demand for materials. He defined six fields of knowledge and interest to which the public library should devote its resources.

In 1966, the ALA published *Minimum Standards for Public Library Systems*. “National library standards reached their zenith in the Johnson administration,” according to Hennen. The philosophy at the time was that librarians should select materials that they felt were of high quality and needed by the community. Perhaps because quality was assumed, standards were tied to inputs, like number of books and periodicals, hours open, and staff available.

“By the Carter administration, the standards baby was thrown out with the input bathwater. Almost everything was redefined in terms of output measures,” Hennen said.⁴⁷

A leader of this movement was Vernon E. Palmour, a long-time proponent of the “give them what they want” theory of book selection and services, unpopular among librarians who felt their job was to select for quality. In 1980, the ALA published Palmour’s *A Planning Process for Public Libraries*, which Hennen said marked the abandonment of standards in favor of planning for outputs like circulation, visits, in-library use data, turnover of the collection, user satisfaction rates, use of materials in the library, and so forth.

The civil war between those who wanted to give the public what it wanted and those who wanted to guide the public’s tastes ended in an armistice rather than victory for either side, he said. “ALA opted for a planning process that let library planners choose the type of library services they wanted for the community regardless of input standards (or indeed output measures).” Individual states were left to set standards when ALA abandoned the task. ALA pursued planning processes and

A book is a fragile creature, it suffers the wear of time, it fears rodents, the elements and clumsy hands....so the librarian protects the books not only against mankind but also against nature and devotes his life to this war with the forces of oblivion.

Umberto Eco

On librarians of the year 1327 in his book, *The Name of the Rose*

A man's library is a sort of harem.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
U.S. essayist

output measures, while the states dealt with inputs, he said.

When you consider that the great majority of libraries have only one outlet and serve a small area, it's not surprising that state standards are often written as minimums, to assure that libraries meet basic criteria. According to a 2001 study of 49 states (not including Hawaii):

- 81% (43 states) define a public library for funding purposes, usually in terms of minimum requirements.
- 86% (42 of 49) of state library administrative agencies [SLAAs] award state funds only after compliance requirements are met.
- Of these, 67% (33) have an "all or nothing" requirement.
- Sixteen percent used a tiered process, so libraries can obtain a percentage of the funds for which they are eligible, depending on the percent of goals that they meet.⁴⁸

State standards can keep libraries from falling below the bare minimum, or at least justify cutting off state funding to those that do. But whether state standards promote excellence is open to interpretation. If your library needs additional funding to meet standards for collection size and expenditures per capita, you're likely to favor the use of standards. If your library has enough funding to exceed the targets, you're likely to argue against standards and in favor of community-based planning.

Hennen argues for a system of national library standards that he believes meets the needs of both ends of the spectrum. The standards, he says, should identify:

1. Minimum standards for all public libraries in America that only a very few could **not** achieve. Currently, most states have only advisory minimum standards for things like certification of library staff and hours of service.
2. Target standards that all libraries should strive for, though only **some** will reach. These are always advisory.
3. Benchmarks of excellence for libraries that only the **very few** achieve. They will help disseminate their best practices for all to emulate.⁴⁹

In addition, he recommends that genius grants be made available to libraries of excellence, which would allow them to serve as an even more powerful example to their peers.

What standards do Missouri and Kansas use?

Both Missouri and Kansas have state standards that are provided to libraries. The standards include those that are numerical, such as for number of volumes, as well as those that are prescriptive, such as for bylaws and policies for issues like acceptable use of the Internet.

Missouri standards

Missouri's standards date from 1999. In 1993, the Missouri Library Association's Public Library Council directed the formation of a committee to investigate the need for standards for public libraries. The committee found that standards were needed, solicited opinions, and created standards that were adopted by the Missouri Library Association at its 1996 annual conference. The standards were approved in 1999 by Secretary of State Bekki Cook as a policy of best practice.⁵⁰

The document sets forth standards for: structure, governance and administration; finance; personnel; public library services; assessing a library district's effectiveness; collection and resource management; physical facilities; technology; technical services and cooperative activities. The standards come with a checklist of guidelines for reaching the standards.

For example, among the standards for technical services are: materials are catalogued using the most current edition of the national standard accepted by the State of Missouri; the library's catalog is stored in electronic format; the serials list is submitted for inclusion in the state centralized catalog; and materials are processed and made available to the public in a timely manner.⁵¹

The standards were divided into three tracks for implementation. The first require time and effort but little additional funding, like development of bylaws and policies. Track two standards are those that seem to be in conflict with existing statutes and will require revision of standards or statutes. Among the track two standards are a minimum tax rate of \$.15 per hundred dollars of assessed valuation or minimum per capita support of \$15, and an annual audit by an independent CPA firm. Track three standards require significant additional funding.⁵²

According to Parker, there is no certification or rating process for Missouri libraries, and state funding is not withheld if a library fails to meet the standards.⁵³

*Being a writer in a library
is rather like being a
eunuch in a harem.*

John Braine
Writing in the *New York
Times*

Kansas standards

Kansas public library standards were developed by the Kansas State Library with assistance of the membership of the Kansas Library Association, and had to be endorsed by the State Library Advisory Commission before they were applied. The standards contain both quantitative and qualitative goals.⁵⁴ The commission endorsed the standards in 2000.

The Kansas standards identify eight library service levels based on population served: *Gateway* (fewer than 500 people); *Linking* (500-1,000); *Service Center* (1,000-2,500); *Major Service Center I* (2,500-10,000); *Major Service Center II* (10,000-25,000); *Major Resource Center I* (25,000-100,000); and *Major Resource Center II* (more than 100,000 people). The standards are adjusted for the size of population served.

For example, a Gateway library emphasizes supplying current purchased and donated materials supplemented by extensive bulk loan and/or rotating collections, while the largest library, the Major Resource Center II, is expected to provide in-depth collection and comprehensive service development “to meet the informational, reference, research, recreational, educational, and inspirational needs of individuals...”

Standards for hours the library is open range from 15-20 hours for a Gateway library to 68-80 for a Major Resource Center II. The minimum size of cataloged collections ranges from 12 items per capita for Gateway to three items per capita for Major Resource Center II. Technology standards also differ based on library classification.⁵⁵

Kansas does not use a certification or ratings process with its libraries. To be eligible for a library system grant, the systems require member libraries to meet the standards, but there are no negative consequences in law or regulation enforced by the state library, according to Johnson.⁵⁶

What does the HAPLR Index measure?

The HAPLR Index is an attempt to combine both input and output measures into a system that ranks libraries based on a weighted score. Hennen, its author, uses data submitted to the Federal-State Cooperative Service [FSCS] by each state for each

library. It uses six input and nine output measures, and each factor is weighted and scored. The HAPLR Index is similar to an ACT or SAT score with a theoretical minimum of 1 and a maximum of 1,000. The first Index was based on 1996 data. Scores are available for states as well as individual libraries.⁵⁷

The Index has its critics, and Hennen agrees with those who say that library ratings should include data that have not been required by the FSCS or received in sufficient quantities to make comparison possible, such as square footage, interlibrary loan, and, until recently, electronic, audiovisual and Internet access.⁵⁸ Hennen and others also say that the Index does not replace the additional qualitative research that is needed.

According to Dan Bradbury, who recently retired after 19 years as director of the Kansas City Public library, leaders of many urban libraries feel that the index puts too much weight on circulation and circulation derivatives like circulation per capita. “Librarians know that the highest circulation occurs in middle-class neighborhoods typically found in the suburbs, and that urban core neighborhoods have lower library materials borrowing and circulation.” The only libraries that include an urban core and fare well in the HAPLR Index are those with a larger service area, such as city/county libraries, he said.⁵⁹

The HAPLR Index includes 15 factors related to traditional library services. It focuses on circulation, staffing, materials, reference service and funding levels. Forty percent of the Index is sensitive to circulation, with cost per circulation, visits per capita, and revenue per capita each given three times as much weight as the lowest rated factors. Cost per circulation was rated lowest to highest, so libraries that spent the least received the best rating.⁶⁰ Two-point items include: percent budget to materials, materials expenditure per capita, FTE staff per 1,000 population, collection turnover, circulation per FTE staff hour, circulation per capita, reference per capita, and circulation per hour. One-point items include: periodicals per 1000 residents, volumes per capita, visits per hour, and circulation per visit.⁶¹

How do our libraries stack up?

Hennen compiles “top ten lists” of libraries classified by the size of the population served. Table 7 shows which libraries in the states of Missouri and Kansas were ranked among the top libraries for Indexes published between 1999 and 2003, with

There are times when I think that the ideal library is composed solely of reference books. They are like understanding friends—always ready to meet your mood, always ready to change the subject when you have had enough of this or that.

J Donald Adams
Writing in the *New York Times*

I've been drunk for about a week now, and I thought it might sober me up to sit in a library.

F. Scott Fitzgerald

U.S. author

An unnamed guest at one of Gatsby's parties in *The Great Gatsby*

the exception of 2001. No HAPLR Index was compiled that year because federal data were late in being released. The two states did not have high-ranked libraries in each population group, so some are missing from the chart.

Each library receives its own score, using the HAPLR Index formula. Metro area libraries received the following scores in 2003, based on data for 2001.

Library	2003 score
Johnson County Library, Kansas	869
Olathe Public Library, Kansas	770
North Kansas City Public Library, Missouri	750
Bonner Springs City Library, Kansas	694
Kansas City Public Library, Missouri	693
Mid-Continent Public Library, Missouri	692
Kansas City, Kansas, Public Library	582

How do scores for Missouri and Kansas compare to other states?

The HAPLR Index also includes ratings and rankings for each state. In 2003, Kansas ranked 8th and Missouri ranked 13th among the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Missouri's ranking shifted after a change in how the data were compiled. Through 1999, Hennen added all the scores for libraries in a state, and divided by the number of libraries to get a simple average. In 1999, Kansas had a ranking of 6th with a rating of 563, and Missouri had a ranking of 20th with a rating of 505.

In 2000, a Missouri librarian noted that a large number of small, poorly rated libraries would drag down a state's rating, despite the fact that a few well-rated large libraries served most of the state's citizens. The librarian felt sure that was the case with Missouri, and Hennen said he was right. "When I changed the method to give more weight to libraries with large populations," Hennen told *Consensus*, "Missouri shot up in scores and rankings."

Using the weighted average, Missouri's ranking that year climbed from 20th to 10th, and its score from 505 to 600. In Kansas, with its many small libraries,

TABLE 7: Missouri & Kansas libraries in the HAPLR top ten

Pop. Served	Year	Rank	Library
500,000 or more (total-76 libraries)	2000	5	St. Louis County Library, St. Louis, MO
	2000	8	Mid-Continent Consolidated Library District, Independence, MO
	1999	9	St. Louis County Library, St. Louis, MO
250,000-499,999 (total-95 libraries)	2003	2	Johnson County Library, Shawnee Mission, KS
	2003	3	Saint Charles City-County Library District, St. Charles, MO
	2002	2	Johnson County Library, Shawnee Mission, KS
	2000	2	Johnson County Library, Shawnee Mission, KS
	1999	1	Johnson County Library, Shawnee Mission, KS
100,000-249,999 (total-329 libraries)	1999	3	St. Charles City-County Library District, St. Charles, MO
	2002	2	St. Charles City-County Library District, St. Charles, MO
	2000	2	St. Charles City-County Library District, St. Charles, MO
10,000-24,999 (total-1767 libraries)	2003	5	Hays Public Library, Hays, KS
	2000	1	Hays Public Library, Hays, KS
	1999	2	Hays Public Library, Hays, KS
	2003	10	Morton County Library, KS
2,500-4,999 (total-1305 libraries)	2002	8	Morton County Library, KS
	2002	7	Mary Cotton Public Library, Sabetha, KS
1,000-2,499 total-1621 libraries)	2000	5	Mary Cotton Public Library, Sabetha, KS
	2000	8	Seneca Free Library, Seneca, KS

the shift to weighted averages didn't have the same dramatic impact. Kansas fell from 6th to 8th, although its score climbed from 563 to 627.⁶²

Since then, Kansas has maintained its ranking of 8th. Its score increased from 627 in 2002 to 634 in 2003. Missouri dropped from 10th in 2002 to 13th in 2003, and its score decreased from 600 in 2002 to 572 in 2003.

Since 1999, Ohio has been ranked first among all the states for its public libraries, with a 2003 score of 713. In 2003, Mississippi was ranked 51st, with a score of 317.

Having a stable and sufficient source of funding is considered a key ingredient for library excellence.

Library snapshot

Johnson County Library

Director, Mona Carmack

www.jocolibrary.org

The Johnson County Library was founded in 1952 by mothers who put their children in strollers and pushed them from house to house to convince people to vote for the levy that established the system. The library operated on a volunteer basis until it received its first tax funding in 1955. The library has a Central Resource Library, which houses major collections, and twelve branch libraries. The library's special strengths are business reference, urban affairs, local history, genealogy, telephone directories, and U.S. and Kansas government documents.

What is the current model for library funding?

The traditional method for funding public libraries relies on local dollars. In libraries around the country, these funds are often dependent on property taxes; in metro Kansas City they are almost entirely drawn from property taxes. While the national average is 77% of funds from local sources, in metro Kansas City the average is 90%. How many of these tax dollars go to support public libraries is determined by a vote of citizens in Missouri and by city or county government in Kansas.

Reliance on the property tax is considered to have benefits and disadvantages. Supporters say it keeps libraries connected to their patrons and that it allows citizens to decide what they're willing to spend to support their libraries. Detractors say that the system relies too heavily on revenues that are likely to fluctuate, that it penalizes low-income communities, and that libraries today are much less geographically based than their taxing system.

Some libraries are looking for new ways to structure the funding system. Michigan, for example, is one state that relies heavily on the property tax, and its librarians are seeking a new approach. Michigan libraries receive funds from a locally approved property tax millage and other revenues from sources like penal fines. According to a 2004 article in *Library Journal*, "[R]ecent studies have found that this system is inequitable. If you have a major highway running through your county, with truck weigh stations catching overloaded tractor trailers, your budget is secure. But if you don't, you are out of luck." Librarians are pushing the Michigan legislature to try a new approach for funding public libraries.⁶³

And sometimes citizens take matters into their own hands. In rural eastern Washington State, libraries survived a 2002 attempt to dissolve the Stevens County Rural Library District, which serves the 75% of county residents who live in unincorporated areas of Stevens County. Most county residents pay less than \$50 a year for library services, which are levied at \$.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property valuation. But people who own more property pay more each year in taxes. Fifty-one residents paid more than \$300 in library tax, and they led the fight to dissolve the library. The ballot measure was rejected by 65% of Stevens County voters.⁶⁴

Nothing sickens me more than the closed door of a library.

Barbara Tuchman

U.S. historian

On raising funds for the
New York Public Library

It meant that New York philanthropists, New York society, would now rediscover the library... that learning, books, education have glamour, that self-improvement has glamour, that hope has glamour.

Vartan Gregorian
President
New York Public Library
On Brooke Astor's decision to devote herself to raising money for the library

What's the big picture? How does the whole system fit together?

Libraries across the nation receive income from four main sources:

- Local tax dollars (avg. 77%);
- State tax dollars (avg. 13%);
- Federal tax dollars (avg. 1%); and
- Other, which includes fines and grants, gifts and donations (avg. 9%).

Nationwide, most local tax dollars are raised from the property tax and go to pay for traditional services offered by libraries, like staff salaries and collections. State funds provide some operations dollars, generally on a per-capita basis and sometimes as a means to help assure equitable funding for poor areas, and they are increasingly used to provide statewide services related to new technology.

Federal dollars are mainly spent on services provided through the Library Services and Technology Act of 1996, which provides information access through technology and special services. Federal administration of the Act is handled through the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the funds are allocated to state library agencies according to population. Prior to the LSTA, federal funds were spent mainly to provide library services to unserved or inadequately served areas.⁶⁵ In addition, the federal E-rate program provides discounted telecommunication rates to libraries and schools.⁶⁶

The category of "Other" has grown in importance as libraries seek new sources of revenue to pay for things that once could be funded by tax dollars. This trend is caused by the rapid growth of information, increased costs for services and materials, and demands for additional services.⁶⁷

Private grant makers avoid donating for ongoing operating expenses, but will consider funding "the new and innovative, the special and extra service, and that which makes for excellence," according to a 1995 report. The largest private expenditure for libraries is the \$400 million provided by the Gates Library Foundation. Those dollars are providing cash, software, and training to wire every public library in the nation to the Internet.⁶⁸

Another trend is for libraries to charge more user fees as patrons demand online database searches and other new, expensive services.⁶⁹

How does the local property tax work?

Because so much of library funding comes from local property taxes, it’s useful to take a moment to describe how the property tax works.⁷⁰

The property tax (also called the ad valorem tax) requires that taxpayers pay a percentage of the value of their property every year to city government or other public institutions with taxing authority. The amount of the tax is affected by decisions at the state and local level, as well as by individual and business decisions and circumstances that affect the total value of property within the jurisdiction.

The state sets the residential and commercial taxable ratios, which repre-

State	Residential rate	Commercial rate
Colorado	9.5%	29%
Kansas	11.5%	25%
Missouri	19%	32%
Nebraska	2.25%	2.50%

sent the percent of all taxable property that is taxed. Residential rates are typically somewhat lower than commercial rates, and both can vary widely from state to state. For example:

The taxable value of a house in Missouri, then, would be 19% of the appraised value.

Each local municipality sets its own mill levy (also called the mill rate), which is the rate at which property taxes are assessed. The mill levy is expressed in mills, and one mill equals \$1 of property tax for every \$1,000 of assessed value. A mill levy of .33, for example, would take 33 cents for every \$1,000 of assessed value.

To determine the mill levy, the municipality adds up the total budgets of local taxing entities, like the city, county, schools, library, etc. It subtracts the estimated income from other sources, like sales taxes and fees, then divides by the total valuation of taxable real estate – what the municipality needs divided by all the resources.

Books constitute capital. A library book lasts as long as a house, for hundreds of years. It is not, then, an article of mere consumption but fairly of capital, and often in the case of professional men, setting out in life, it is their only capital.

Thomas Jefferson
U.S. president

To use an example from Saline County:

- A city subtracts the estimated amount of revenue from other sources and finds that it needs to raise \$8,423,489 in taxes.
- The assessed valuation of property within its district is \$363,286,268.
- The mill levy rate will be .023186918, or 23.187 mills.
- Therefore, a residential property owner whose house is valued at \$80,000, with a state-set taxable ratio of 11.5% and a mill rate of .023187, will pay \$213.32 in taxes.

What is the impact of a city's tax capacity?

The mill levy is also affected by a municipality's tax capacity, which reflects the valuation of taxable real estate and other income available within its borders. A low mill rate in a community with high tax capacity can raise more money than a higher mill rate in a community with low tax capacity.

Cities with high property values and/or a lot of commercial property have a high tax capacity. Basically, it means they have a large pool of tax dollars to use to pay the bills for municipal services, so they can take a low percentage of each taxpayer's assets and still end up in the black.

Two of the cities in the metro area with high tax capacity are Overland Park, Kansas, and North Kansas City, Missouri. In 2001, Overland Park had the lowest mill rate of any first-class city in Kansas. Its total levy was 7.499 mills, and the next lowest city levy was 13.324. North Kansas City, a mainly blue-collar community with an extremely healthy commercial tax base, has more than \$266 million assessed valuation within its 4.2 square miles. Its residents pay \$7.40 per \$1000 of assessed valuation for real estate.

Municipalities with lower property values or less commercial development are in the opposite situation. They have less tax capacity – a smaller pool of tax dollars with which to pay the bills for municipal services. And the bills are often higher, because these communities must pay for services not needed in newer or more affluent communities, like demolition of dangerous buildings, repair of aging infrastructure, and social services for low-income residents. Typically, that means that urban residents have a higher mill levy than suburban residents.

Another factor in determining the tax capacity is the use of tax incentives

intended to lure businesses to a community or keep them from leaving. Governments choose when to give tax incentives to a business, and the incentives mean that the business won't have to pay some or all of their property or other taxes for a specified length of time. This reduces the tax dollars available to libraries and other services like schools and police that rely on tax dollars.

“When a corporation is given the sun and the moon and the stars to stay in Kansas City and their property taxes are reduced, those tax breaks means the city loses out on property taxes,” Kansas City’s Green told Consensus. “I’ve been told that we should go to those corporations and request a donation that’s equal to the taxes that would’ve come to us, and it’s something that needs to be looked into... Either services are diminished or taxpayers have to make up the difference through increased property taxes.”

Tax capacity makes a big difference to property owners at tax time. Wyandotte and Johnson counties in Kansas provide a clear example. In Wyandotte County, the average mill rate was 168.188 in 2001, while in Johnson County, the average mill rate was 101.167.

Tax bill for homes equal to the average value for each county

	Wyandotte County	Johnson County
Average home value	\$79,472	\$194,000
Mill rate	168.188	101.167
Tax bill	\$1,537	\$2,257

A homeowner in Wyandotte County will pay a substantially higher tax bill than the owner of a home of equal value in Johnson County.

Tax bill for home of equal value for each county

	Wyandotte County	Johnson County
Avg. value of a home in the two counties	\$136,500	\$136,500
Mill rate	168.188	101.167
Tax bill	\$2,640	\$1,588

Because local libraries are funded almost entirely by the property tax, this means that library funding is very sensitive to changes in the municipality's tax capacity.

How are mill rates set for local libraries?

Missouri and Kansas use two very different systems for setting the mill levy for local libraries. Missouri libraries go directly to voters to approve changes in the mill levy, while Kansas libraries work through their municipalities, which set the mill levy. In both cases, the money raised for libraries must go to libraries and can't be used by a jurisdiction for other purposes, although in Kansas the jurisdiction can reduce the library's mill levy.

Missouri state law considers libraries to be independent taxing districts, which allows them to go directly to voters to ask for a mill levy increase. Kansas City's Bradbury said this system is the envy of many other libraries in many other states. "Libraries as a rule are an incredible value to the taxpayers, and it's one where, if the library is well-managed, voters see the return on their tax dollars... Most voters are very willing to continue to support library services." That has been true in his district, where Kansas City, Missouri, voters have elected to tax themselves at a higher-than-average rate. A typical mill rate for a metro-area library is between .30 and .35; the Kansas City rate is .50.

The Kansas system is more typical of those in other states in that Kansas libraries don't go directly to voters for operating funds. Instead, according to Johnson, the local library is funded by a tax levy on the municipality or library district, if the library district boundary is different from that of the municipality. The municipality appoints the library board and the board sets the budget within any prevailing budget limitation, such as last year's mill levy. (The only exceptions to this are the Kansas City, Kansas, Public Library, which is governed by its local school board, and special district library boards, which are elected.) The board submits the budget to the municipality, which determines the total mill levy and the levy specifically for the library.

By state law, funds levied for the library can't be used for anything else. "If a library wanted a capital development project, that is more typically an election or referendum question," Johnson told Consensus, "but for an operating levy, the

library usually works through the city or county government.”

In Olathe, for example, the library has its own mill levy, with revenues collected from city property taxes. The library receives 2.5 mills for its annual operating budget. Baker said, “If we want the mill rate changed, we have to go to the city and make a case, and it takes a city ordinance and/or an election to change the mill levy.” State funds and other grants allow the library to purchase additional items for its collection.

What are the disadvantages of the current method of funding libraries?

The traditional method of funding libraries in metro Kansas City, which relies on the local property tax, is seen by some as having several disadvantages.

It relies too heavily on one source of funds.

Governments have several income-generating tools at their disposal, and the property tax is one of them. Generally, governments try to generate income in several different ways, so that if one source of funding hits a downturn, that might be offset by an increase in another source. Kansas City’s Bradbury told Consensus, “If this were an ideal world, I would wish that we would have a diversified funding structure. Municipalities and county entities typically talk about a three-legged stool of funding, including property, earnings, and sales tax, as being a more equitable, less vulnerable basis for funding.”

Over-reliance is a problem no matter what the funding source. Take Ohio, for example. Ohio’s libraries are unique in that most of their funding comes from taxes paid to the state. That worked very well for Ohio libraries in the past; it’s the top-ranked state in the HAPLR Index and local library directors consistently said they envied Ohio libraries their funding stream. But the 2001 recession hit the state hard, and state officials have cut library funding by \$40 million over three years.⁷¹ Ohio libraries with no other source of revenue are being forced to cut hours and close branches.

I'm glad it happened in front of the library. I've always emphasized scholarship.

Doug Weaver
Former Kansas State
University football coach
On being hanged in effigy

Differences in tax capacity means less-affluent communities are at a disadvantage.

A study of Michigan libraries found that “there are great differences among communities with respect to wealth and growth rate, making the viability of local support for public libraries uncertain from one community to the next.” They found “numerous problems with the traditional model of predominantly local funding for public libraries. The first dilemma encountered is that jurisdictions with lower income levels (based on socioeconomic factors or low population density, for example) frequently received lower levels of library funding.”⁷²

Shifts in tax capacity are often seen as mainly affecting the urban core, but inner-ring suburbs also suffer as the population moves outward.

Mobility and technology reduce the importance of geography when it comes to library funding.

Library consultant R.A. Dubberly wrote that too much emphasis is placed on the paradigm of locality in funding public libraries. “Public libraries are funded and controlled by the smallest political jurisdiction possible at the same time that highly mobile populations are sprawled over many political boundaries.” He observed that a “local world view wastes opportunities for more effective use of resources through the development of shared systems.” Dubberly suggests a new system, whereby local funds are used for responding to local needs, state funds support services throughout the state at a moderate level, and the federal government expands its role to provide significantly for research, development, and technical assistance projects, along with direct per capita funding to public library systems for compensatory services.⁷³ Dubberly, a former library director, is president of the consulting firm Dubberly Garcia Associates, Inc.

What are the advantages of the current method of funding?

The current system also has its proponents. They suggest that there are advantages to the current method of funding.

It reinforces the bond between library and patron.

Library patrons see the library on their tax bill each year, which may strengthen the bond between the institution and its users. Missouri libraries, for example, must make the case to citizens each time they need to increase the mill levy, and those without a strong record of service can be expected to fail.

New York State goes further than any other in tying library funding to the public will. New York libraries go directly to the voters for their budgets each year, and the mill levies are not renewable. If citizens vote down the mill levy, the library receives no tax dollars that year.

Citizens' tax dollars remain in their jurisdiction, which allows some libraries to provide exceptional service to their communities.

For those libraries with high tax capacity, the current system works very well. Funds raised within the district stay in the district, so citizens have an incentive to support tax increases that will provide them with improved services. And libraries in affluent districts provide a picture of excellence that shows the potential of any library with adequate funding. For example, two suburban districts – Johnson County and Mid-Continent – have ranked among the top ten in the nation for their size in the HAPLR Index.

Property tax levies tend to be stable during economic downturn.

According to Hennen, property tax levies are probably the most stable and least volatile form of taxation. The sales tax, by comparison, rises and falls with economic conditions more so than the property tax, although it can be useful in jurisdictions with retail centers and resort areas.

During a recession, local property tax dollars may be significantly more stable than state funding. In general, state funds usually provide some 10% of local library budgets, and sometimes much more. (The national average, 13%, includes Ohio and Hawaii, with libraries that are entirely or primarily funded by the state.) But in metro Kansas City, libraries receive an average of 1.5% of their budgets from the states of Missouri and Kansas. While libraries could use additional state dollars, the lack of state funding may have insulated local libraries somewhat from drastic

It doesn't matter that your painting is small. Kopeks are also small, but when a lot are put together they make a ruble. Each painting displayed in a gallery and each good book that makes it into a library, no matter how small they may be, serves a great cause: accretion of the national wealth.

Anton Chekhov
Russian playwright

state cutbacks due to the recent recession.

A January 2004 article in *Library Journal* reports the results of an informal survey of state library agencies around the country, in which it found that many libraries were facing static or reduced budgets. Even some libraries with consistent local funding were reducing hours, materials and staff. The reason? Mainly this was due to cuts in state, not local, funds. In Georgia, for example, state funds account for about 20% of total public library funding, and those funds were cut by 5% in FY03 and 2.5% in FY04. As a result, some libraries have quit serving schools, while others have cut materials purchases or eliminated bookmobiles.⁷⁴

Library snapshot

North Kansas City

Director, Jobeth Bradbury

www.northkclibrary.org

The North Kansas City Public Library/High School Media Center is a single-facility system serving a community of 4,714 persons. It became a combined public/high school library March 2002. In addition to serving the residents of North Kansas City, the library also serves 1,600+ North Kansas City High School students and staff. Along with residents, the library serves those who work in North Kansas City; more than 11,000 persons carry and use North Kansas City Library cards.

How are public libraries structured?

Andrew Carnegie did more than provide access to books when he endowed more than a thousand libraries to towns around the country in the early 1900s. He also determined that the size of area served by U.S. libraries would be smaller and the structure more decentralized than their European counterparts. Municipal libraries – many very small – are still the most common type of library in the U.S. today. Had he structured his gift differently, the most common structure today might be libraries organized at the district, regional or state level.

Municipal libraries comprise more than half of all libraries but serve only one-third of the U.S. population. The other two-thirds of the population is served by county, city/county, and special district libraries – considered wider units of service because they take in a larger geographic area – or other kinds of libraries, such as those run by nonprofits or tribal authorities.

State law governs libraries within its boundaries, and each state organizes itself a little (sometimes a lot) differently. When deciding on how they will structure the provision of library services, states have a menu of possibilities from which to choose. This section explains the menu of possibilities; we'll explore how states choose to use them later in this report.

Again, Hennen will be quoted liberally on this topic, as he was on the issue of standards. Hennen's article, "Are Wider Library Units Wiser?" was published in *American Libraries* in its June/July 2002 issue. The article tests the assertion, often made by library leaders, that wider units of services will produce better libraries. He found that, "in most cases, wider units of library services are, indeed, wiser." The article was based on data supplied by states to the Federal-State Cooperative Service.⁷⁵

And, again, lack of other sources of comparative data point out that the library field is lacking in research.

What are the main ways in which libraries are structured?

Libraries can be structured in one of several ways. As is true for the rest of the nation, municipal libraries predominate in metro Kansas City.

Technology is so much fun but we can drown in our technology. The fog of information can drive out knowledge.

Daniel J Boorstin

Former Librarian of
Congress

On the computerization of
libraries

People ought to listen
more slowly!

Jean Sparks Ducey
Librarian
On confused requests
such as “Do you have the
wrath of grapes?” and “I
want a book about the
Abdominal Snowman.”

Municipal libraries

Municipal libraries are the most common form of library in the United States, comprising 54.6% of the total but serving 34.2% of the U.S. population in 2001. Municipal libraries operate within the boundaries of one city or town. Often, the municipality provides services such as payroll and maintenance that would otherwise be included in the library’s budget. Municipal libraries had an average per capita operating expenditure of \$23.69 in 2001.

In the five-county area, five of the seven libraries are considered municipal: Kansas City and North Kansas City in Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas, Olathe and Bonner Springs in Kansas.

The three smallest libraries – North Kansas City, Olathe and Bonner Springs – have boundaries that exactly correspond to those of their municipality. The two Kansas City districts are quite different, though, in terms of geographic boundaries.

While the Kansas City Public Library is considered a municipal library, its boundaries include only a small portion of the city and an even smaller portion of the county. Instead, the library’s boundaries correspond to those of the Kansas City School District. According to figures supplied by the library, the district covers 87 square miles. Of them, 77 square miles are located inside the City of Kansas City, Missouri, which equals 24% of the city’s 317 square miles. The library’s 87 square miles covers 14% of Jackson County’s 607 square miles.

In contrast, the Kansas City, Kansas, Public Library is as much a county library in its geography as is the Johnson County Library. Both districts take in an entire county with the exception of one relatively small municipality – Olathe in Johnson County and Bonner Springs in Wyandotte County.

The five municipal libraries serve an average population of 102,716. The largest population served is the Kansas City Public Library, with 257,930. The smallest is North Kansas City, with 4,714. The per capita operating expense ranges from \$121.71 in North Kansas City to \$26.28 in Olathe, according to NCES data released in 2003.

The State of Kansas has 324 libraries, many of them municipal libraries in small towns. Butcher, with the Northeast Kansas Library System, says that small towns have a strong commitment to their libraries. “In our very small towns,

there's still that huge commitment to their own local library. We see a huge identification among people at the local level. In the smaller communities, people are more likely to physically go to the library than in the larger metro areas.”

County/Parish libraries

Thirty-eight states have county libraries. County libraries comprise 11.4% of all U.S. libraries, but serve a percentage of the population – 33.9% - that's about three times greater. County libraries have the lowest per capita average operating expenditure of any of the types, at \$19.10, but as Hennen points out, their population numbers often include rural residents who would not be included in population figures for municipal libraries.

The Johnson County Library is the only county library in the five-county region. It serves 358,110 residents, and has an average per capita operating expenditure of \$41.93.

City/County libraries

Nine states have city/county libraries, which comprise 0.6% of all U.S. libraries and serve more than three times that – 2.0% - in population. The per capita annual operating expenditure is \$14.70. Again, the low cost may be because rural residents are included in the population served.

There are no city/county library systems in metro Kansas City.

Multijurisdictional libraries

Multijurisdictional libraries comprise 5.6% of all U.S. libraries and serve 9.9% of the population. Their average per capita operating expense is \$23.52. Many multijurisdictional libraries are multi-county, but some encompass one or more municipalities. They don't usually have either elected boards or taxing authority.

Lack of taxing authority can be a major disadvantage. Hennen found that, without taxing authority, the library board must go to two or more independent municipalities for operating and capital funds, and they tend to pass the buck. In his state, Wisconsin, such multijurisdictional non-taxing libraries operate on 50% less funding per capita than their municipal counterparts. By contrast, taxing district

libraries in Illinois operate on half again the per capita revenue of their municipal counterparts.

According to Missouri's Parker, the Mid-Continent Public Library was formed under a law that authorizes consolidated public library districts, which also may be called multijurisdictional. "Such consolidation results in new political subdivisions," she said. Jurisdictions can also contract with one another for library services, a method used in nine geographic areas in the state.⁷⁶

While the Mid-Continent Public Library is considered multijurisdictional, because Missouri law gives it independent taxing authority it bypasses the difficulties faced by other such libraries. It could be considered a special library district, but it has been called either a multijurisdictional or a city/county library district in reports prepared by Missouri for NCES.

Mid-Continent includes Platte county, Clay County except for North Kansas City, and Jackson County except for the area served by the Kansas City Public Library. It serves 650,023 persons, and has a per capita operating expenditure of \$38.83.

Special district libraries

Special district libraries are the fastest-growing type of library organization, according to Hennen, although only 19 states have laws that permit them. In other states, they use joint-powers agreements among municipalities or counties to establish multijurisdictional libraries. Kansas state law allows special districts, which are used mainly in rural areas of the state, and all Missouri libraries operate like special districts. Special districts comprise 8.6% of all U.S. libraries and serve 8.5% of the population. They have an average operating expenditure of \$29.65.

Special districts, Hennen said, are generally "separate taxing districts established to provide public library service and operate with a uniform property tax established by referendum. They are normally governed by a board of trustees that is elected or appointed."

Special district libraries have the advantage over multijurisdictional libraries in that they have a uniform tax and a separate governance structure that overrides the various political jurisdictions. However, since districts are not supported by a parent municipality, they have to provide their own building, insurance, pay-

roll, etc., which means that, most often, very small special districts aren't cost-effective. "There is evidence that the level of per capita support for public libraries is greater for district public libraries than other public library organizations," Hennen said.⁷⁷

So what is the right size for a public library?

Libraries in metro Kansas City range in size from the tiny North Kansas City to the immense Mid-Continent. Is bigger better? Yes, say many, and that seems to be the trend. Others say there's such a thing as too big, and even some very small libraries provide high-quality services to a loyal population.

Hennen says the three main benefits of wider units of service are:

1. Economies of scale. "The same number of total staff can be focused on customer service rather than going toward administrative overhead. If the organization gets too large, secondary layers of management and bureaucracy can develop, of course, but that is not inevitable. Good managers and alert boards avoid this pitfall."
2. Use of impact fees. These fees are levied as an up-front cost on new homes, to offset the impact that a new household has on the ability of a library to sustain its service level. These fees are far more workable in larger units of service.
3. Reduction of per-capita spending gaps. Spreading the tax burden across a wider area reduces the impact of differences in the tax capacity between one jurisdiction and the next.

A task force in Wisconsin recently recommended changes in how that state's libraries are structured. The task force found that distance – the size of the district – was not as big an impediment in the delivery of services as in the past, and recommended changing state statutes to prohibit libraries that serve less than 200,000. The current statute prohibits libraries serving less than 100,000.⁷⁸

Missouri's implementation plan for its library standards, released in 1999, also suggests restructuring for wider units of service: "Because it takes more money on a per capita basis to run a small library than a large one, many communities cannot raise sufficient funds to support the measure of service set forth in the Missouri Standards for Public Library Service. Where the level of financial support

Knowledge is not simply another commodity. On the contrary. Knowledge is never used up. It increased by diffusion and grows by dispersion.

Daniel J Boorstin
Former Librarian of
Congress

Science and Technology revolutionize our lives, but memory, tradition and myth frame our response. Expelled from individual consciousness by the rush of change, history finds its revenge by stamping the collective unconscious with habits, values, expectations, dreams. The dialectic between past and future will continue to form our lives.

Arthur M Schlesinger, Jr
U.S. historian

makes it impossible to meet these measures, alternative methods of providing library service should be considered. For example, combining small localities into a larger library unit or contracting for local service with an existing, strong library unit are ways to make effective library services available to any community, regardless of size.”⁷⁹

And, in fact, 37% of state library agencies (18 of 49) provide state funds to encourage multijurisdictional cooperation. “This type of grant is to encourage service efficiency and consistency by providing funds for independent public library communities to merge into one multi-county system or to encourage multiple city libraries within a county to merge and form one county library (or any other kind of cooperative effort that is generated in order to establish a larger geographic service area),” according to researcher Steve Schaefer in a 2001 article in *Public Libraries*.⁸⁰

Kansas has a different system. Over the state’s 324 libraries the state has superimposed a support system of regional libraries. The Kemper Foundation’s Bennett was a librarian with the Kansas City, Kansas, Public Library for 17 years. “In Kansas,” he said, “they have seven regional libraries and they tax rural areas, and the regional libraries provide services to small libraries that couldn’t otherwise afford them. In Kansas, every little town has its small library, supported often on less than \$8,000 a year.”

How big is too big?

Bennett cautions that a large, centralized district may not be able to provide the kind of services that patrons want. “With large library systems, to attain economies of scale, they’ll have centralized processes. A few people at the main library will select materials for the whole system. They can try to get input from the neighborhoods and try to tailor to those neighborhoods, but it’s not the same as doing it from the individual locations.”

Even the best library director can be overwhelmed by managing a very large district, such as would be created if some local libraries merged. Johnson County’s Carmack said, “Very few of the very large systems in this country are effective. The large systems burn out the directors, and when you burn people out and you don’t have continuity of leadership, that’s not good.”

In Minnesota, Carmack directed a six-county, 5,000-square-mile special-district library that was created when one large municipality and six counties consolidated. “We provided great service for a rural area, but man, was it a tough job. It was my perseverance and strength that was really necessary. We had a formula and each member of the district paid according to the formula. I had budgets adopted on a one-vote majority of a 25-member board. That’s the kind of burnout I’m talking about. Dedicated professionals will do it, but it takes a special kind of managerial ability.”

Kansas’s Johnson agrees that consolidations should not be undertaken lightly. “I see no magic in consolidation for the achievement of significant money saved or dramatically enhanced service provided,” he told Consensus. “You need to go back to community analysis and identify whether the community you have under consideration is a relatively unified whole for which you’re trying to design the best pattern of library service. Does that territory need to include one or more libraries? You can’t start from the premise that consolidation is good, therefore we’ll put these two libraries together. It might work, but it might not. This is not to suggest that there isn’t an opportunity for effective consolidation, but I’ve never seen it happen, quite honestly, that libraries were consolidated and service was improved.”

Would there be benefits to merging some municipal libraries to achieve wider units of service?

It depends on which districts are being discussed and on whom you ask. In general, informed outside observers say that it would make economic sense to merge some districts, but that politics would pose a problem, perhaps an insurmountable one.

Olathe, Bonner Springs, and North Kansas City

Of the five municipal libraries in the metro area, two (Bonner Springs and North Kansas City) are very small, and one is mid-sized (Olathe). All three would be obvious candidates for mergers, but in none of those cases are the municipal libraries interested in merging. Just the opposite, as the libraries vigorously assert their right to serve communities that value having their own libraries.

North Kansas City's Jobeth Bradbury told Consensus, "It's real important for us to continue with the individual library system we have now. Back in the 1970s, there was an effort to merge us with Mid-Continent and it failed miserably. North Kansas City...is a small community in a large metro area. It's fairly safe, it's secure, it provides wonderful services to its residents...We have Cerner and other industry and business here, so during the workday we have a huge influx of people. We have 9,600 library card holders with just 4,700 in population, and we're happy about that. There's a lot of grassroots support for this library. The city has certainly shown its support by spending \$5 million on the new building...But I will say, as director, that I want to do everything short of (a merger) to work with other libraries to provide services to the area. I'm for blurring the lines as much as possible."

Olathe Director Baker said that reciprocal arrangements with the Johnson County Library allowed her smaller system to provide excellent service. "Our combined customers use the same automated services. We can see each other's holdings and we jointly purchase online databases." She said the size of her system allows the library to tailor its services to its patrons. "We can look at Olathe specifically and find what its residents want, what they do for work and play, what they're asking at our service desks...Most public libraries of a certain size are going to buy some of the same items, but after you buy the bestsellers, then it's community needs that guide your decisions."

While their larger neighbors might be willing to incorporate the three smaller libraries, none seems interested in forcing the issue.

The other two municipal libraries are both large urban districts, Kansas City and Kansas City, Kansas.

Kansas City, Kansas, Public Library

If the municipal library in Kansas City, Kansas, were merged, it would likely be with Johnson County. The urban district serves 151,206 patrons, and spends \$33.31 per capita on operations, compared with a population of 358,110 and a per capita operating expenditure of \$41.93 in the suburban district.

County libraries are considered wider units of service, though, and the Kansas City, Kansas, Public Library would seem to fit that description. It operates

within a city that has merged its government with the county, and it serves all but one small municipality that exists within the boundaries of Wyandotte County. In this respect, it functions much like the Johnson County Library, which serves the 40-some cities and towns in Johnson County, with the exception of Olathe.

Another issue is tax capacity. Wyandotte County has a very low, and Johnson County has a very high tax capacity. Some may question whether the region's libraries can achieve excellence given the disparity in resources. If equity is considered a goal, a merger would be one – but not the only – means to achieve it.

The director of the Kansas City, Kansas, Public Library, Charles Perdue, declined to participate in this study. Carmack, Johnson County's director, said that the two libraries had never discussed a merger.

Kansas City Public Library

The other candidate for merger is Kansas City with Mid-Continent. In this case, Kansas City may be in favor of being incorporated into the Mid-Continent system (although there are options that fall short of a merger), while Mid-Continent is opposed. When the possibility was studied back in the 1970s, their positions were reversed.

The Kansas City Public Library is the oldest in the metro area, founded in 1873. The Central Library downtown is historically “the” public library of the metro area, with strong collections and a lot of depth. According to the library's collection development plan, the Central Library's collections include extensive holdings, usually dating back to the library's founding, in federal documents, Missouri documents, local history, genealogy, Western history, outlaws and lawmen, the Civil War, African-American history, and historic children's literature, among others. At least 50% of the use of the old Main Library could be attributed to out-of-district customers, according to Green, although it's impossible to tell how many patrons were there primarily for the special collections.

The Kansas City Public Library was established along with the Kansas City School District and shares the district's boundaries. The library and school district shared administration, too, until they became separate entities in 1988.

The Mid-Continent Public Library was established to serve the rest of Jackson, and all of Clay and Platte counties. The Mid-Continent structure was de-

A library, to modify the famous metaphor of Socrates, should be the delivery room for the birth of ideas—a place where history comes to life.

Norman Cousins
U.S. author

signed to complement that of Kansas City. It didn't try to create a main library that would compete with Kansas City's, instead choosing to view its libraries as branches of equal importance.

In 1973, when the Institute for Community Studies convened the Committee on Public Libraries, the Kansas City Public Library was considered the better system. The committee released "Future Alternatives for Kansas City, Missouri, Public Library" in 1974, noting that "...the aggressive initiating library has been Mid-Continent, seeking relationships with the Public Library, the latter reacting to the initiative of the former..."⁸¹ Some feared that if Kansas City merged with Mid-Continent, the urban district would reduce its standards and job benefits and lose touch with the needs of the inner city.⁸²

But the Kansas City Public Library had problems of its own. The report said, "The Kansas City Public Library...finds itself faced by difficult problems, both organizational and fiscal, brought about primarily as the result of the disparity between the service area and the financial base of support for its services and by the operation of the Library as a part of the school district." It found that the Kansas City Public Library was a regional facility serving an area of 3,500 square miles, with a tax base for operations that included only 87 square miles in Jackson County, Missouri.

"The taxpayers in this relatively small area...are thus bearing the total cost of an institution whose services are area-wide." It also found that the tax base it had to draw upon was "a shrinking proportion of the total regional base." Between 1968 and 1972, the assessed valuations in Jackson County outside the library's boundaries had increased by 32%, while those within the boundaries had increased by little more than 3%.

"In short, the Kansas City Public Library is contributing to the educational and economic growth of the metropolitan region by placing its extensive resources at the disposal of its residents, particularly those connected with business and industry, but it is reaping none of the benefits from this growth and gets no financial support from suburban users."⁸³

The Committee on Public Libraries recommended that the Kansas City Public Library be separated from the school district, which took another 14 years to occur, and that it become part of a multi-county consolidated library system includ-

ing Cass, Clay, Jackson and Platte counties. The consolidation was supported by Missouri's state librarian, who said that Missouri's 50 previous mergers of city and county libraries had not resulted in any decline in standards of quality.⁸⁴ The Kansas City Public Library leadership, though, chose to remain separate from Mid-Continent.

In 1986, Kansas City Public Library voters doubled the levy to \$.31, and again in 1996, voters increased the levy to \$.50. While the average family income within the district is 70-75% that of the rest of the metro area, Kansas City voters tax themselves at a higher rate than others. The only higher library levy in the state is in its other major urban district, St. Louis, with a levy of \$.55.

The disparity in tax capacity has continued since the Committee on Public Libraries released its report. In 2002, for example, *The Kansas City Star* reported that a drop of \$97 million in the valuation of business property in Jackson County would cost the Kansas City Public Library \$800,000, 5% of its \$16 million operating budget. The county executive's office blamed the drop on an economic downturn and on companies having moved out of Jackson County.⁸⁵

The Kansas City Public Library continues to serve those who live outside its boundaries. According to the library's reciprocal borrowing statistics, from July 2000 through June 2001, 27% of its total circulation was to residents of other districts. Residents of the Mid-Continent Public Library were by far the largest borrowers, at 18.30% of Kansas City's total circulation.

Before retiring, Kansas City Director Bradbury supported the idea of merging the two districts, although it wasn't the topic of board discussion. And, according to an article in *The Kansas City Star* in January 2004, leaders of the Kansas City Public Library "have discussed contacting other metro library systems to consider a mutually beneficial merger."⁸⁶

Bradbury said that while the politics might be difficult, the actual process of agreeing to merge is fairly simple. According to Missouri law, any consolidated public library district may enlarge the area it serves by incorporating into it any county, city, municipal, school or public library district. The petitioning district may be admitted into the consolidated district upon majority vote of the board of trustees of the consolidated public library district at the prevailing tax rate of the consolidated district.⁸⁷ Bradbury said that as a public or political matter, the board

*That a famous library has
been cursed by a woman
is a matter of complete
indifference to a famous
library. Venerable and
calm, with all its treasures
safe locked within its
breast, it sleeps compla-
cently and will, so far as I
am concerned, so sleep
forever. Never will I wake
these echoes, never will I
ask for that hospitality
again.*

Virginia Woolf
British author
On being denied, on
account of her sex, use of
the library of a university
she called "Oxbridge" -
either Oxford or
Cambridge

*Libraries keep the records
on behalf of all human-
ity....the unique and the
absurd, the wise and [the]
fragments of stupidity.*

Vartan Gregorian
President
New York Public Library

might want to hold a referendum to determine the public's wishes.

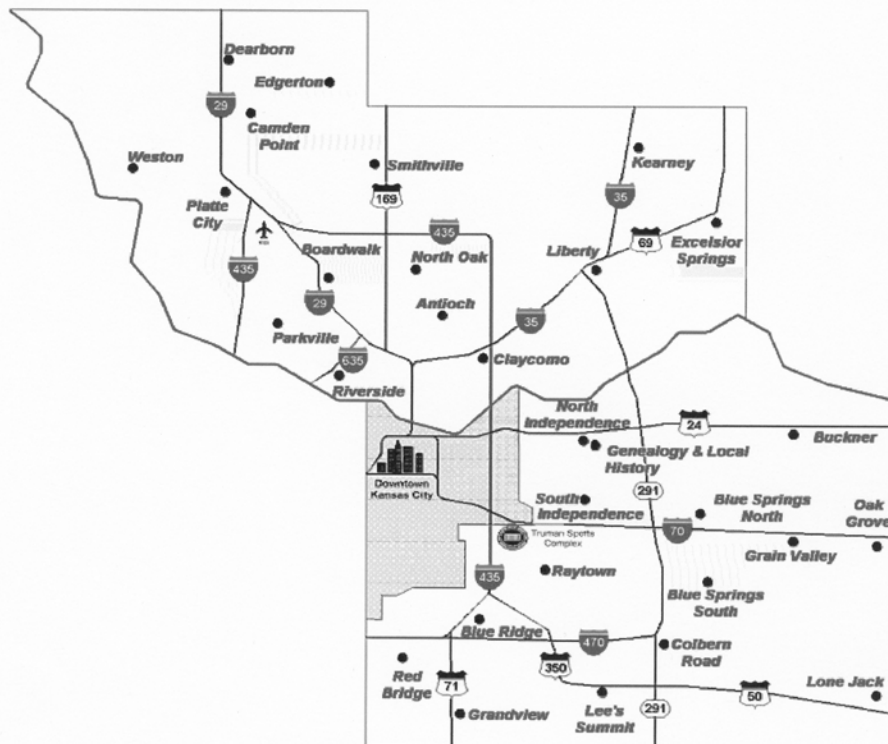
When a suburban group approached Mid-Continent about merging recently, the request was denied. A Cass County citizens' group tried to convince the Mid-Continent board to incorporate that county's library system, and after study the board turned down the request in January 2004. The citizens opposed the consolidation of three Cass County libraries into one, and raised enough signatures to place the merger proposal on the ballot if the Mid-Continent board had agreed. But the board found that adding another county would create too large a Mid-Continent system. If the county had merged with Mid-Continent, state law required that county taxpayers pay the same levy as the existing rate for Mid-Continent, which is more than double the current Cass County rate. Some believed that Missouri's Hancock Amendment, though, would have disallowed that, and instead that Mid-Continent would need to lower its tax rate to conform to Cass County's.⁸⁸

Convincing the Mid-Continent Public Library board that it is in their best interests to consolidate with Kansas City may be even more difficult. The reasons that Kansas City would favor a merger – low tax capacity and its historic (and expensive) role as a library serving the region – are the same reasons why the district might be considered a liability to a suburban district like Mid-Continent.

Mid-Continent Director White told Consensus, "I actually started my library career working at the Kansas City system in the 1960s. I'm aware of how it was and how it is now. They just can't offer what they could before."

White told Consensus that when merger was discussed back in the 1970s, the two districts were much more equal in their ability to tax. "The current metropolitan district has some real strikes against it. So much of the tax base has been abated through TIF and Chapter 100 abatements, they just don't have the tax base to draw from. We're at a 33-cent levy, while they have a 50-cent levy...Obviously, there is enough [economic] growth to maintain the growth in Mid-Continent in the suburban areas. On the other hand, the Kansas City district has just lost another \$800,000 because assessed valuations on businesses were dropped. It makes it a much harder proposition to deal with when there is a constant loss in funding."

White says that there are also differences in philosophy between the two districts. "We have built or remodeled 35 buildings for \$23 million, compared to \$47 million for Kansas City's (new) downtown library, and our branches are all



The map shows the boundaries of the Kansas City Public Library, the gray area, and the Mid-Continent Public Library. The North Kansas City Public Library is just north of the river, and is not marked. This map appears on the Mid-Continent website. No map was available from any source that would show the boundaries of all the library districts in the metro area.

equal.”

The bottom line, according to White: “The Kansas City system would come with significant liabilities, and ones that are continuing to grow.”

For Bradbury, that’s exactly the point. “Kansas City is the hole in the middle of the donut...It lost \$97 million in assessed valuation last year. It’s not a one-time budget blip, it’s permanently lost value. Wrapped up in that story is part of the equity issue. While Kansas City lost \$97 million, the county as a whole gained several percentage points in assessed valuation...There was sufficient growth in the rest of the county to make up the loss in Kansas City. That one year is a microcosm of what happens year after year...It’s spreading the future of library service over the broader metro area and giving everyone the best library service possible for the dol-

Every library should try to be complete on something, if it were only the history of pinheads.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr
U.S. writer, physician

lar,” he told Consensus.

Because Kansas City’s tax capacity is low, the library has focused on raising additional funds through grants, donations, and creative financing of large projects. The \$47 million Central Library, scheduled to open in March 2004 in a renovated downtown bank building, is being paid for with tax credits, donations, and lease payments from the library, a financing package developed with the help of the Downtown Council. At the Plaza, a private developer will build an office tower on land the library owns, where the old branch operated. In exchange, the developer will construct a new library on the site and contribute \$2.5 million for new library furniture and books.⁸⁹

Dan Bradbury shaped the Kansas City Public Library during his 19-year tenure as director. When Joe Green was hired to replace Bradbury after his retirement, he brought ideas that were shaped by his experiences working in libraries in other states. He said that the idea of a merger should be studied very carefully before it was undertaken. “I’ve seen some real disasters when things weren’t thought through,” he said. “You’ve got to convince the voter it’s going to make things better.” While political barriers could be overcome, the philosophical differences could be insurmountable. “The successful systems are the ones that have a mission that satisfies the organization. Our mission is different from Johnson County’s, which is different from Mid-Continent’s. Whose mission is *the* mission?”

Short of a merger, Green offered an idea that could expand the tax capacity available to the Kansas City Public Library. It is to redraw the service area of the Kansas City Public Library so that it is coterminous with the city limits of Kansas City, Missouri. The two Kansas City branches that fall outside the city limits would be incorporated into Mid-Continent, and the three or four Mid-Continent libraries within the City of Kansas City would be incorporated into Kansas City. “It would widen the tax base, and it would do for us what’s been done for Mid-Continent by providing us with developing areas that will eventually need a library.”

How have other city/county mergers worked?

A relatively small percentage of public libraries – 0.6% – are city/county systems. Because many were created by mergers, they offer lessons that could be applicable to any mergers in metro Kansas City.

Of the city/county districts, the largest is the Miami-Dade Public Library System. The route it used to become a city/county library is fairly typical for these kinds of systems, according to information available from 13 of them. In 1965, the City of Miami and Metropolitan Dade County agreed that Miami would provide public library service to unincorporated Dade County and to municipalities that did not provide their own municipal library service. In 1971, the City of Miami transferred its library system to Metropolitan Dade County, which has retained responsibility in the years since.

The most recent transfer of authority occurred in 1990, when the Library Association of Portland, Oregon, transferred ownership of the library's assets to the people of Multnomah County.

Four directors of city/county libraries were asked for interviews and two responded to our requests – Diane J. Chrisman, director of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, and Mary Kay Hooker, director of the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library.

Buffalo and Erie County Public Library

Diane J. Chrisman, director

It's hard to imagine a more complex structure than that of Buffalo and Erie County. Back in 1953, three existing libraries – Grosvenor (a reference library), Erie County (which contained 22 separate libraries) and Buffalo – were merged by New York State special legislation. Responsibility for operations was transferred to the more financially stable Erie County government. Today, Erie County owns the Buffalo library building, which is the system's central library. It does not own the 15 urban branch library buildings, or those of the 22 separate county libraries, some with their own branches, that contract with Erie County for service.

The City of Buffalo is responsible for the 15 urban branch library buildings, and each suburban or rural municipality within Erie County is responsible for the library buildings within its boundaries. Each of the 22 county libraries has its own governing board appointed by its municipality, a system that Chrisman says makes governance more complicated, but also builds a strong base of support for libraries.

The operating costs for all the libraries are paid for by the county. All the

Readers transform a library from a mausoleum into many theaters.

Mason Cooley
U.S. aphorist

librarians throughout the county operate under the same contracts, and they all get paid the same due to civil service and union regulations.

Director Diane Chrisman said, “Since many of the libraries were small and not well funded, it made sense to get them together for purposes of resource sharing and economy of scale. At that time, the point was not only to provide equitable library service, but to get a better organization, efficiency and consistency.”

Capital costs – the library buildings themselves – are the responsibility of each municipality. This, she says, is the remaining area of inequity. “[T]he city branches in Buffalo, which is very poor, are not in very good condition at all. But in the towns in suburban areas, where the wealthier communities are located, there are many beautiful, well-maintained libraries.” She has found “an attitude on the part of city dwellers that suburban residents get all the beautiful new libraries. They don’t understand that the local municipality is paying for the facility. That’s one of the reasons that the county is looking at paying for some city libraries.”

When asked if she would recommend a combined city/county library system, Chrisman told Consensus, “I absolutely would do it. It’s brought a measure of equity.”

Atlanta-Fulton County Library

Mary Kay Hooker, director

If you set out to find a library director who would warn against merging urban and suburban libraries, the obvious choice would be Mary Kay Hooker, director of the Atlanta-Fulton County Library. After all, a staff reorganization there led to a lawsuit by eight white librarians that resulted in a \$25 million reverse discrimination judgment against Fulton County in 2002 (later reduced to \$16.9 million).⁹⁰ Yet Hooker, who has been director since 1999, is an enthusiastic supporter.

The City of Atlanta began providing library service to Fulton County in 1935, and in 1982, Georgia voters passed a constitutional amendment that transferred responsibility for the library system from the City of Atlanta to Fulton County. Since 1982, the library has been funded entirely from Fulton County taxes. Hooker told Consensus, “The advantage is that there’s a view that’s over the entire county, an effort to have equity of services throughout the county. Traditionally wealthy areas have high quality, but now so do poor areas. There are not two levels

of service. We do that by our educational requirement for staffing, by careful allocation of materials, by uniform expectations for performance standards of staff, and by community input."

It's not as if the change was easy. The library structure had been very top-down, she said, and cut off from the community. Two directors before her had cited board micromanagement when they resigned, but Hooker said that a strong board was needed in order to restructure, reconnect with the community and better use the strengths of staff members. "We've tried to move beyond stereotypical library organization models. In doing so, you rattle some cages."

As part of that effort, the Atlanta-Fulton library transferred 28 employees, eight of whom were white. In many cases, the employees moved from what were basically clerical jobs to more challenging work running branches, developing special services, or doing literacy outreach. The eight white employees alleged that racial discrimination caused them to be moved from the prestigious main library to branches. Although they won their lawsuit, some continue to work for the library. Hooker says those who stayed enjoy their new positions.

Under Hooker, the library's philosophy emphasizes a grassroots approach that takes decision making close to the patrons. This keeps the large district responsive to the community and builds new connections, she said.

"Some libraries like to have purchasing that emanates from central library headquarters, so that everything is done uniformly, like stocking a grocery store," Hooker said. "We don't do that. We have branch managers select materials that are uniquely needed. That takes more effort, but it also generates community support and requires that librarians be involved in their communities. This is new, it began with my administration, but we're seeing positive performance outcomes."

Atlanta-Fulton also divides its branches into clusters. "You may have a wealthy, large regional branch working with a small inner-city branch," she said. "They're challenged to design programs that appeal to the whole area. It makes the staff more cognizant of what it takes to run a large city library, it creates a management perspective that was missing before, and it encourages community support. Often, branch librarians are alone. They don't have anyone to call up for support. This way, they can meet regularly and work on shared goals. They even share computer tech people, who can solve complex computer problems so they don't have to

wait for Central to send somebody."

Another way in which Atlanta-Fulton encourages connections is with its Friends (of the library) program. Hooker said that the county includes areas that are hyper-rich as well as areas in which one in four residents can't read. Branch patrons can be very different, and rarely have the chance to connect. "Every branch is charged with having a Friends group," she said, and the twenty Friends groups meet as a council and lobby together. "You've got a very strong advocacy group throughout the political spectrum, which is what you need."

Asked if she would recommend merging a city and county district, Hooker said, "I would just do it. You can't have two tiers of service. If you're going to be a library, you're going to provide one quality of service...Do the right thing. Any of us can be poor or disadvantaged, but with the right services, you can lift everyone with a rising tide. We believe the library can be a catalyst for growth and development, and for redeveloping urban areas."

Library snapshot

Olathe Public Library

Director, Emily Baker

www.olathe.lib.ks.us

The Olathe Public Library serves the residents of Olathe, the county seat of Johnson County, Kansas. The library was established in 1909 with the help of the Ladies' Reading Circle, a club that continues to meet once a month.

It has a main library and one branch library, which opened in 2000. Olathe Public Library is known for its history and genealogy collection that reveals Olathe's past.

“Only two classes of books are of universal appeal. The very best and the very worst.”

Ford Maddox

Library snapshot

Kansas City Public Library

Director, Joe Green

www.kclibrary.org

The Kansas City Public Library is the oldest in the metro area, founded in 1873. The library was established along with the Kansas City School District and shares its boundaries. The library and school district became separate entities in 1988. The library has a new Central Library, in a renovated bank building downtown, and nine branches. It has the largest collection of historic materials of any library in the metro area.

Can collaboration make a difference?

Collaborative projects can ameliorate some of the difficulties that arise when several libraries serve one region, and can be a means of assuring that even the smallest libraries have access to basic capabilities. Librarians tend to be collaborative by nature, and patrons expect to be able to gain access to any library's resources, no matter where they live, so the culture promotes collaborative efforts.

Collaboration can stretch beyond sharing online databases and similar projects to include collaborative methods for gaining funding. Kansas's City's Green is among those suggesting a bistate sales tax for public libraries. He envisions a special taxing district that would include Johnson, Miami and Wyandotte counties in Kansas, and Platte, Jackson, Clay and Cass in Missouri. The proceeds from the 16th-of-a-cent sales tax would stay with the library district within which it was raised. "It would enable libraries to get a leg up, financially speaking," he said. "Most of us would say, if (patron) expectations are at this level, we need more money."

What are the major regional collaborative projects?

Before the advent of computers, the primary goal of collaboration was to get books and other materials from one library to another for interlibrary loans. Technology has added a new element, as libraries seek to share online card catalogs and databases, and state libraries try to assure that computer capabilities are available to everyone.

KCMLIN: Kansas City Metropolitan Library and Information Network

The Kansas City Metropolitan Library & Information Network (KCMLIN) is a multi-type library consortium serving 48 libraries on both sides of the Missouri/Kansas state line. KCMLIN offers a web-based centralized interlibrary loan and delivery service, professional development and continuing education, library tours, Internet service, the ECLIPSE Community Information Network, the KCMETRO-LINK database project and a Cybrarian development project.

KCMLIN was established in 1978 with the mission to promote "the effec-

tive development, coordination and sharing of human and material resources in the metropolitan area of Kansas City." Institutions in the network represent public, academic, school, health science and special libraries as well as more than 100 individual members who participate in the network.

KCMLIN has developed the web-based Interlibrary Loan System. All full members of KCMLIN can participate in this service, which includes the ability to search the Kansas City Library Consortium catalog, the Johnson County Library catalog, the Olathe Public Library catalog, the Mid-Continent Public Library catalog, and the Kansas Library catalog.

KCLC: Kansas City Library Consortium

KCLC was created in 1991 to provide easy access to information, share resources and improve customer service in an economical fashion. Starting with the Kansas City Public Library and seven local college and university libraries, KCLC has grown to 29 members and is expanding regionally.

Members have a current combined bibliographic database with more than 2.5 million items, plus online access to indices, journals and a wide variety of other resources via the Internet. KCLC has helped its members in upgrading telecommunications and workstations, consulting on planning for new technology, and provides group access to commercial database subscriptions and resource sharing, and help with converting old systems to new or transferring existing systems.⁹¹

While not all libraries in the region choose to affiliate with KCLC, including Mid-Continent and Kansas City, Kansas, all major libraries will soon use the same automation system used by KCLC. "The end result is that all of the major libraries in the metropolitan area will be on the same automation system, purchased separately," Mid-Continent's White told Consensus. "All databases will be searchable simultaneously from any location."

What are the main statewide collaborative projects?

KANAnswer

KANAnswer is a statewide online information service that was created by the Kansas Library Network Board. With KANAnswer, any resident of the state with an

These are the favored ones—year after year—read under dim spot lamps in taxis or air shuttled, balanced on subways, carried on boardwalks and into bathtubs. They develop broken spines, pages like prune skin or go to their reward in the land of lost umbrellas.

Donald Walker
Associate director,
branch library programs
and services,
New York Public Library
On library books that are
most often worn out or
stolen

Internet computer can communicate in real time with a librarian to get help finding answers to questions, or to get referrals to other sources of help. KANAnswer also provides answers to non-Kansans who have questions about Kansas. The Kansas State Library manages this collaborative effort, as well as the Kansas Library Catalog, on behalf of the partners in the collaborations.

Kansas Library Catalog [KLC]

The Kansas Library Catalog is a computerized listing of holdings in 600 libraries across the state. The KLC lists more than five million items, and Kansas residents can search the catalog for the library that has the item(s) they need. Through KLC, the state's libraries can efficiently perform interlibrary loan.⁹²

KANFind

KANFind is a collaboration with state university libraries and others to create a family of databases that all libraries can use and make available to their patrons with the Kansas Library Card.⁹³

MLNC: Missouri Library Network Corporation

MLNC is the Missouri regional network for Online Computer Library Center, Inc. [OCLC] information services, as well as a provider of related electronic services and content, and training in the management and use of information. It was founded in 1981 by 31 Missouri libraries. Except for OCLC, MLNC products and services are available to libraries and institutions outside of Missouri. Its workshops included topics like web search engines, HTML, Library of Congress subject headings, and introduction to imaging technology.

OCLC is a nonprofit membership organization serving 43,559 libraries in 86 countries and territories. It was founded in 1967 by university presidents to share library resources and reduce library costs. It introduced an online, shared cataloging system for libraries in 1971 and an interlibrary loan service in 1979, and FirstSearch service in 1991. The center of OCLC is the WorldCat database, which holds more than 48 million cataloging records created by libraries around the world, with 400 languages represented.⁹⁴

MOREnet: The Missouri Research and Education Network

MOREnet provides Internet connectivity, access to Internet2, technical support, videoconferencing services and training to Missouri's K-12 schools, colleges and universities, libraries, teaching hospitals and clinics, state government and other affiliates. Established in 1991, MOREnet is part of the University of Missouri system, and is based in Columbia, Mo.

All Missouri citizens have MOREnet Internet access through the Remote Electronic Access for Libraries (REAL) Program. REAL provides Missourians the opportunity to use the Internet for research, formal and continuing education, business and recreation at their local libraries. REAL is sponsored by the Missouri State Library, which also funds the shared online reference resources available to all MOREnet customers.

MOBIUS: Missouri Bibliographic Information User System

MOBIUS is a consortium of academic libraries with member colleges and universities in the state of Missouri. Fifty charter members began the project in January 1999; other institutions may join as the project progresses.

The largest single project for which MOBIUS is responsible is The Common Library Platform. The CLP creates a virtual collection of the approximately 14 million items in the libraries of Missouri's colleges and universities and creates a single user interface that allows faculty and students to request library materials using any personal computer in any location with access to the Internet. Requested materials are delivered within one or two days of being requested by the MOBIUS Delivery System. Other projects under consideration by MOBIUS include consortial licensing of electronic information resources such as electronic journals, cooperative collection development, and a cooperative storage facility.

MOBIUS is supported by a combination of state appropriations and member fees. The MOBIUS Consortium Office (MCO) is located at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

MOBIUS was intended to be available to public libraries, as well as academic libraries. Parker told Consensus, "It does not appear to me the directors of large libraries in Missouri are able to agree on a common library platform, which is what MOBIUS is. Such an agreement was possible for academic libraries and MO-

No place affords a more striking conviction of the vanity of human hopes than a public library.

Samuel Johnson
British author

My residence was more favorable, not only to thought, but to serious reading, than a university, and though I was beyond the range of the ordinary circulating library, I had more than ever come within the influence of those books which circulate round the world, whose sentences were first written on bark, and are now merely copied from time to time on to linen paper.

Henry David Thoreau
U.S. philosopher

BIUS moved ahead to success.”⁹⁵

Where are there other opportunities for collaboration?

Librarians say that metro Kansas City has an extremely healthy foundation for additional collaborative projects. Librarians cite potential in terms of special collections, cooperative purchasing of databases, and shared technology.

“We have to figure out how to ignore political boundaries because that’s what our patrons do,” said Johnson County’s Carmack. And for the most part, local libraries have managed to provide service to all patrons, no matter where they live. “The metro area has the best reciprocal arrangements I’ve seen,” she says. “Patrons don’t know where the (system) boundaries are – it’s seamless service. We have a strong foundation for collaboration.”

One area of agreement is that libraries, which currently specialize in certain types of information, should continue to do so in the future so long as they share their resources. According to North Kansas City’s Bradbury, libraries should do a better job of communicating their special collections. “In North Kansas City, we only have 4,700 residents, but we have a great collection of books on trains. There’s no reason for other libraries to have train collections just like there’s no reason for us to develop a strong genealogy collection when Mid-Continent has a great one. We need to communicate what we have because, believe it or not, customers travel from library to library. A real library user moves around.”

When library users don’t move around, the collection moves to them. White told Consensus that Mid-Continent makes its materials available through KCMLIN, an organization he said could use more resources to provide additional services. “That network goes to public and special libraries, and making our special collections available is helpful.” Mid-Continent has one of the three major genealogy collections at public libraries nationwide, including the entire US census on microfilm, which draws visitors from around the world. “By the nature of it, a lot of the material is reference, but we do have a large circulating collection of genealogy materials, about 7,000, and we’re looking at adding another 7,000 in circulating materials... We do quite a hefty business in transporting those collections. We’re one of the top ten lenders and borrowers throughout the state.”

Along with his idea for a special taxing district for libraries, Green sees the

potential for collaborative outreach. “Rather than build more libraries, let’s find other ways to deliver library services such as books by mail or bookmobiles, or by providing transit to libraries. The transit issue is a significant one in the metro area. If we had more money, I’d like to find ways to make library services more accessible, either by taking the services to people or by bringing people to libraries.”

Library directors say that cooperative purchasing of databases and other technology is ripe for collaboration.

North Kansas City’s Bradbury said, “It would be great if we all offered the same resources technologically. You could go to one spot and see however many databases. We offer hardly any databases because they’re so expensive. If we could all pitch in and all purchase databases together, if you walked into the North Kansas City Library and used one of our computers, you’d have access to the same databases as if you were at the Johnson County Library.”

Kansas City’s Bradbury agreed that pooling funds for shared databases makes sense for the region. “The way...databases are sold, they’re licensed for a geographic area and you pay based on the population. The ideal solution would be if we could all contribute to the pot and buy more services for the money and make them available to the metro area. I don’t know of any metro areas that have done this across state lines.”

Carmack told Consensus, “Technology is the most important, such as collaborative online catalogs, low-cost telecommunications, shared informational databases, both those we purchase and those we develop ourselves.” She added that the libraries already do shared programming, citing a recent grant for a seven-library arts program.

Regional or even state-wide funding may also be appropriate for some collections at local libraries. The special collections of the Kansas City Public Library, such as those focusing on Missouri Valley history, the extensive business collection of the Johnson County Library, and Mid-Continent’s genealogy collection could all be candidates for regional funding.

And, according to Green, at least two states—Maryland and New Jersey—fund their oldest library statewide because their collections are statewide resources. Statewide funding may be appropriate for historical collections and for libraries of great depth, such as the Linda Hall Library, which focuses on science.

What role does the state library play?

State programs and state funds can be a catalyst for increased quality of service and for changes in how libraries are structured and funded. This section explains the role of the state library and trends in what state libraries do. The next section will explain how some states have reorganized libraries within their borders to improve library service.

The National Center for Education Statistics in the U.S. Department of Education collects data on libraries. What follows is drawn mainly from its “State Library Agencies: Fiscal Year 2000,” a report released in November 2001.

What services and funds do state libraries provide?

Because each state was responsible for the creation of its own state library administrative agency [SLAA], the structure and functions of each are slightly different, but most provide the same basic services. All but four state libraries in the U.S. are located in the executive branch of government.⁹⁶ Funds for public libraries are funneled through the SLAA, which determines how the funds will be spent. The head of an SLAA is the state librarian.

All state libraries provide these types of services to public libraries:

- administration of Library Services and Technology Act grants;
- collection of library statistics;
- continuing education programs; and
- library planning, evaluation, and research.

All but one state library provide:

- consulting services;
- library legislation preparation or review; and
- review of technology plans for the E-rate discount program.

More than three-quarters of state library agencies, including Kansas and Missouri:

- administer state aid;
- provide interlibrary loan referral services;

- provide literacy program support;
- offer reference referral services;
- set state standards or guidelines; and
- provide support to summer reading programs.

Kansas and Missouri are not among the twelve that reported accreditation of public libraries, or among the 22 that certified librarians.⁹⁷

The state library in Kansas has one main outlet and two other outlets; Missouri has one main outlet. Both Kansas and Missouri serve the general public and state government.⁹⁸

Here is how Kansas and Missouri compare with other state libraries in two key areas:

State library agency income FY 2000	Total dollars	State sources	Federal sources	Other
Nationwide	> \$1 billion	84.6%	13.7%	1.8%
Kansas	\$6,747,000	79.3%	20.0%	0.7%
Missouri	\$11,591,000	76.4%	23.4%	0.1%

Average expenditure per capita, FY 2000		
National	Kansas	Missouri
\$3.74	\$2.56	\$2.14

Financial assistance to libraries accounted for 68.6% of total expenditures of state library agencies. Over two-thirds of such expenditures were targeted to individual public libraries (46.9%) and public library systems (21.6%). In Kansas, the state library provided \$4,282,000 in financial assistance to libraries, and in Missouri, the state library provided \$5,846,000.⁹⁹

In a library we are surrounded by many hundreds of dear friends, but they are imprisoned by an enchanter in these paper and leathern boxes, and though they know us, and have been waiting two, ten, or twenty centuries for us—some of them—and are eager to give us a sign and unbosom themselves, it is the law of their limbo that they must not speak until spoken to; and as the enchanter has dressed them, like battalions of infantry, in coat and jacket of one cut, by the thousand and ten thousand, your chance of hitting on the right one is to be computed by the arithmetical rule of Permutation and Combination—not a choice out of three caskets, but out of half a million caskets, all alike.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
U.S. essayist

“The paperback is very interesting, but I find it will never replace the hard-cover book—it makes a very poor doorstep.”

Alfred Hitchcock

How are the Kansas and Missouri state libraries structured?

Kansas State Library

The Kansas State Library presides over 324 libraries, many very small, that are served by seven regional library systems. According to Johnson, Kansas state librarian, the system reflects the state’s populist tradition of local control.

“For more than 100 years,” Johnson told Consensus, “Kansas laws have supported the establishment of a local library in any community that wants to tax itself. By that pattern of development, we have a strongly entrenched program of library development that relies on that local identity.”

In 1965, the state created seven regional library systems that provide services to the small local libraries. Each of the seven regional systems operates fairly autonomously, with its own board of trustees and executive board. “The regional systems have been a huge success for Kansans who did not have library service,” Johnson said. “It has strengthened service in cities and smaller communities.”

Governance of the state library system is provided by the Kansas State Library Advisory Commission. The commission has oversight of the budget, “but doesn’t get in the way of local decision making,” Johnson said. The library commission is appointed by the governor and serves as an advisory board to the state library and the governor.

In 1981, the state library formed the Kansas Library Network Board [KLNB] to act as its research and development arm. “The network board has authority to conduct research for useful lines of development in the library and information networking in the state,” Johnson said. KLNB is composed of gubernatorial appointees representing all types of libraries.

KLNB operates several initiatives, including Blue Skyways (the Kansas web service), the Kansas Library Card (which allows residents of Kansas access to statewide databases), and the Western Trails Project (through which four Kansas institutions are digitizing historic materials, in collaboration with Colorado, Nebraska, and Wyoming).

The State of Kansas provides an average of 6% of library funding for Kansas libraries, according to Johnson, with the federal government providing 1% and

local communities providing 93%.

Missouri State Library

In a letter to Consensus, Missouri State Librarian Parker wrote, “The State Library is charged by law to furnish information and council as to the best means of establishing and maintaining libraries. We also encourage local support for the betterment of local library service and generally promote an effective statewide public library system.”

Missouri libraries are envied by those in other states because they can go directly to citizens for approval of tax levies. According to Parker, “Missouri is a state that believes in local autonomy and local control of its public libraries. Chapter 182, which sets out various ways libraries are formed, makes libraries in Missouri political subdivisions governed by citizen boards. My role as the State Librarian is to encourage that local empowerment and work for the success of local libraries.”

The Secretary’s Council on Library Development, appointed by the Secretary of State, is a group of advisors on matters that relate to the state’s libraries. The group recommends programs and serves as an advocate for libraries.

In the 1970s, Missouri began to build regional networks similar to those in Kansas to provide services to member libraries. “Missouri abandoned that approach at the end of the 1970s, and I do not see it being resumed,” Parker wrote.

How has the role of the state library changed?

Considering the lack of research on other library topics, it will come as no surprise that there is also a lack of comparative data about state library administrative agencies [SLAAs] nationwide. A 2001 study conducted by Steve Schaefer and published in *Public Libraries* found that library literature on methods that SLAAs use to fund public libraries was nearly nonexistent. Previous data were collected for SLAA librarians, and were “not necessarily designed for discovering national patterns, trends or emerging philosophies,” he wrote.¹⁰⁰

After conducting his own research, Schaefer found dramatic changes in the 1990s that reversed trends identified in the 1980s. Most significantly, he found, “there are developing indications that demonstrate a rebirth of SLAA interest, par-

*Literature is my Utopia.
Here I am not disfran-
chised. No barrier of
the senses shuts me
out from the sweet,
gracious discourse
of my book-friends.*

Helen Keller

icipation, and leadership in providing direct and indirect public library service to all citizens of the state.”

What was once the role of the state library?

Just as the Library of Congress was originally intended to provide library service only to federal legislators and employees, so most state libraries were created to provide service to state legislators and employees. Since then, the role for SLAAs has expanded.

In 1849, states began providing what was usually a modest amount of funds to support public libraries “out in the field,” according to Schaefer. Funding increased after World War II, and mainly helped to create new libraries or to encourage existing libraries to expand their services.

Eventually, SLAAs took on a monitoring role over public libraries. For example, to receive state dollars, libraries needed to employ certified librarians and receive satisfactory audit reports, among other criteria. “However,” Schaefer writes, “there was not any concerted effort on the part of the state to take on the responsibility of providing library service directly to the people. The state did not make any attempt to usurp primary control of the administration of the library. The major responsibility of providing library service remained and still remains with the local community. Library agencies used grants as a stimulus rather than expending these same funds to provide direct service to the residents of the state.”

In the 1980s, the public resented taxes in general and programs at all levels were cut. By 1992, many states had dramatically cut back or frozen financial support for libraries. The situation looked grim.

But in the mid-1990s, state support for public libraries increased, rising from 8 to 12% between 1992 and 1997. What reversed the trend? Schaefer says the increased state support was a direct result of technological advances, and has brought a role for state libraries in providing services statewide.

Schaefer found that technology has modified the role of state libraries. Until 1990, SLAAs rarely provided public library service directly. With technology, though, 40 of 49 SLAAs are using state and federal funds to buy databases and offer public access over the Internet, and almost all (48 and D.C.) planned or monitored the development of electronic networks.

“By so doing, some SLAAs are building library service programs considering the entire state’s population as the SLAA’s constituency.” These technological services are generally provided through the local library, which “are serving as gateways to state-run electronic databases.”

State library agencies in 46 states had combined expenditures for statewide database licensing of over \$32.4 million. Texas had the highest expenditure (\$3.1 million) and South Dakota the lowest (\$5,000). Kansas spent \$379,000 and Missouri spent \$950,000 on databases.¹⁰¹

What must libraries do to receive funds from state library administrative agencies?

Sometimes SLAAs provide operating dollars on a per-capita basis, and sometimes state funds are tied to desired outcomes, such as a reduction in inequities, increased local funding, and wider units of service.

Sixty-nine percent of SLAAs (34 of 49) grant funding on a per-capita basis. According to Schaefer, per-capita funding is simple and easy, but it benefits the most populated communities.

Schaefer’s study found that 35% of SLAAs (17 of 49) provide state funds using a state equalization grant. Equalization funds may be provided instead of or in addition to per-capita funds. Equalization grants help areas without a sufficient tax base to support a minimum level of public library service.

State funds can be used to encourage local communities to provide programs or to increase local library funding. Of all SLAAs, 22% (11 of 49) use state funds for non-punitive incentives to encourage locally funded programs. These funds might be used, for example, to reward a city-funded library that allows county residents without a library to use its services. Twenty-seven percent (13 of 49) use state funds as an incentive to increase local funding, such as a matching grant tied to the level of local funding.

Thirty-seven percent of SLAAs (18 of 49) provide state funds to encourage multijurisdictional cooperation. Schaefer said, “This type of grant is to encourage service efficiency and consistency by providing funds for independent public library communities to merge into one multi-county system or to encourage multiple city libraries within a county to merge and form one county library (or any other kind of

*Sir, he hath not fed of the
dainties that are bred of a
book; he hath not eat
paper as it were; he hath
not drunk ink: his intellect
is not replenished; he is
only an animal, only
sensible in the
duller parts.*

William Shakespeare
British playwright
Love's Labor's Lost

cooperative effort that is generated in order to establish a larger geographic service area).”

The 2001 study also found some unique programs. SLAA officials mentioned, among others, a property tax (base) loss fund and a set-aside fund for collaborative projects.

What about state funding for libraries in Missouri and Kansas?

If there is agreement on anything among librarians in both states, it is that not enough state funding is available for their libraries.

The Kansas City Public Library receives 55 cents per capita from the State of Missouri, which amounts to less than 1% of its budget. And the funds received dropped recently because the 2000 census showed the district lost population. According to Dan Bradbury, “Despite the best efforts of some really good and effective state librarians and elected people, Missouri simply doesn’t have a very strong commitment to supporting library services at the local level. They believe it to be a local option rather than a state-mandated necessity. Other states feel quite differently. They believe that the state has an investment in education, which they define as schools and public libraries. They put their money where their mouth is, and Missouri doesn’t.”

Mid-Continent’s White told Consensus that Missouri’s equalization funds weren’t sufficient to narrow the gap. “There is a state aid law in effect here in Missouri and it does have an equalization element, to take care of the poorer districts. Unfortunately, there are not enough dollars put into that to have much effect. I don’t foresee that the Missouri economy will increase so much that there’ll be surplus funds to provide that state aid where it would have an effect in urban or rural areas.”

The great majority of Missouri’s 149 libraries receive less than 10% of their funding from state sources, while just 18 receive between 10-15% from the state, according to the Public Library Funding FY 2000 Statistical Report from the Missouri state library.

When asked what role the state of Kansas must play in assuring that its libraries reach excellence, State Librarian Johnson said, “The state of Kansas needs to participate in funding...It’s required by the state constitution that the state sup-

port education in a faithful and ongoing manner, and libraries are an important component of education.”

Asked the same question, Johnson County’s Carmack said the state could provide “(m)ore money and the development of standards. We do have standards (for libraries), but I’m thinking of standards for the amount of funding the state provides. Again, that’s subject to politics and the economy.” According to Carmack, the state’s goal is to provide 10% of the funding for its public libraries, a goal that hasn’t been reached.

Johnson said that along with providing funding, the state should “provide leadership for creative library service, and be responsible for whatever centralized support services that libraries say they want to receive. There are some things that a large entity like state government can do that an individual library cannot. Those are the areas in which the state should provide attention, like our statewide catalog, so we can get needed information from one area to another, and leadership for development of library services in response to new developments like technology.”

Finding the perfect model for state funding – one that reduces inequities, provides stable and adequate funding, and isn’t subject to political pressures – is a job that has yet to be completed.

Carmack said that the ideal system varied according to the population served. “If I could create the perfect system, it would be one that has the ability to get support from its public. Those systems seem to me to be working very well. But to have that support, you need an educated populace. In cities without an educated populace, you’re not likely to get the support...To deal with inequities between urban and suburban, the use of state or regional funding is ideal. In affluent areas, we can avoid the politics if we go to the people. There’s no one answer.”

Until recently, most librarians pointed to Ohio as the model that was closest to perfect.

What models do other states use?

The State of Michigan, which ranked 30th in recent editions of the HAPLR Index, wanted to improve the way the state funds and structures public libraries. The Michigan Public Library Funding Initiative Group [PLFIG] hired consultants from the Information Use Management and Policy Institute, School of Information Stud-

ies at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida, to make recommendations. The consultants identified three states that they believed represented best practices – Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Florida – and recommended changes that would bring Michigan in line with those best practices.¹⁰²

Why have librarians in other states envied those in Ohio?

Unlike any other state, Ohio provides almost all the funding for most of its libraries from the state income tax. (Of Ohio's 250 libraries, 64 get more than 10% from local property tax sources and several get more than half, with just one at as much as 83%.)¹⁰³ Until the recent economic downturn, the funding was stable, substantial and rarely subject to political pressure. State funding is credited for Ohio's enviable first-place showing in the HAPLR Index, which it has held since 1999.

Hennen told Consensus, "The best model I know of in terms of funding is in the State of Ohio. It's a really good partnership between state and local government. The way the funding works is it forces libraries to think globally but be governed locally, and that's a darned good way to do it."

Not surprisingly, Ohio is the envy of librarians in other states.

Kansas's Johnson said, "Ohio is a great model for library funding because the state had the political will to designate a small percentage of the state income tax specifically for local library development. That constitutes a strong source of state funding, which gives them a tremendous advantage. We'd love to do that in Kansas. It not only provides an additional resource for funding, it also provides impetus for good network planning, good library mutual support and cooperation. It really has generated a lot of peripheral library activity that comes from a strongly supported library service in the state. A strong basis of funding is a major strength."

As Missouri's Parker points out, Ohio's funding structure is often envied, but so far at least, never duplicated. "The history of how Ohio was able to gain earmarking of the state income tax is a history not found in any other state."

Until 1932, when it was viewed as a burden to property owners, Ohio libraries were funded by a real estate tax. In 1931, the State of Ohio passed an intangibles tax on income from stocks, bonds, and intangible properties, and those dollars were allocated to public libraries until 1985, when the intangibles tax was repealed by the state legislature. Beginning the next year, 6.3% of the state income

tax was designated to fund public libraries and local governments through the Library and Local Government Support Fund [LLGSF]. In 1992, because of a stalled state economy, library funding was frozen at 1991 levels. In the next biennium package, the funding level for libraries was temporarily set at 5.7%, which was placed into permanent law in 1996.”¹⁰⁴ By FY2000, state funds provided about \$457 million to public libraries in Ohio, an average of more than \$40 per capita.¹⁰⁵

Ohio public libraries receive financial support from the state’s LLGSF, but they also may receive funds from local tax levies and programmatic and grant support from the state library. The LLGSF covers 50-95% of local library budgets. Every month, the state sends the funds to each county’s budget commission, which distributes the money among libraries within its jurisdiction. Each library receives a guaranteed share, and an equalization formula is used to distribute the excess funds.

Local tax levies account for 5-50% of individual library support. Local funds are important in counties where state money has to be split among many libraries.

State-sponsored programs provide access to networked resources, services to the blind, funding of regional library systems, and federal grants distributed at the state level, for a FY2000 total of \$13.5 million.

According to the study conducted for the Michigan Public Library Funding Initiative Group, the LLGSF has succeeded for several reasons. “First, the law put public libraries on a par with public schools by providing a stable revenue stream. Second, LLGSF is part of permanent law, which shields it from political attack; even though the tax percentage was reduced from its original level, Ohio libraries do not endure a yearly budget process initiated by the Governor’s office.” The last reason is that the changes were implemented over time, which gave libraries the chance to adjust.

But it’s not just the funding that sets Ohio libraries apart. Ohio has a long-term commitment to encouraging wider units of service. In 1977, the state capped the formation of municipal libraries, so county district libraries are the only new libraries that may be formed. There are only 40 municipal libraries and four township libraries in the state; 64% (56) are county libraries.

With the downturn in the economy, though, Ohio libraries have suffered from massive budget cuts. “Unfortunately,” Hennen told Consensus, “a lowering

When it's summer, people sit a lot. Or lie. Lie in the sense of recumbency. A good heavy book holds you down. It's an anchor that keeps you from getting up and having another gin and tonic. Many a person has been saved from summer alcoholism, not to mention hypertoxicity, by Dostoyevsky. Put The Idiot in your lap or over your face, and you know where you are going to be for the afternoon.

Roy Blount, Jr.
U.S. humorist
From “Summertime and the Reading Is Heavy”

*When I am dead,
I hope it may be said:
"His sins were scarlet,
But his books were read."*

Hilaire Belloc

tide lowers all boats and that's what's happening now in Ohio. The governor has just moved to radically reduce funding to Ohio libraries, which means every library in the state suffers simultaneously."

The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, for example, began cutting staff and reducing hours in September, 2002, and was expected to close five branches as the result of losing \$4.3 million in funding for that year. That library typically receives 95% of its funding from the LLGSF. With a reduction of more than 7% in state personal income tax collections, the LLGSF had fewer dollars available for libraries, and the library receives no local support from tax levies or bond issues.¹⁰⁶

What was the impact of restructuring efforts in Pennsylvania?

In the last five years, Pennsylvania has undertaken a major restructuring in the way it funds libraries. As a result, state aid to public libraries has increased by 100%, a quarter of libraries report that their local governments have given or promised increased funding, and substantial increases in circulation, collection expenditures, computer availability, hours open and staff training have been reported.

In 1998, the Pennsylvania Library Association recommended that: "(1) Libraries should remain local institutions which are organized, governed and principally funded at the local and county level; (2) The \$2 per capita local support requirement for state aid, not changed since 1961, should be increased to \$5 per capita with consideration given for disadvantaged communities; and (3) The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania should take on a larger partnership role to provide the following:

- Basic, consistent library service, particularly for rural communities and economically disadvantaged library users statewide, to be achieved through a significantly greater state investment than the current ratio of \$1 in state funds for every \$6 spent on libraries;
- Stronger state incentives to leverage greater local financial support;
- Continued coordination of services, resources, and training;
- Ongoing funding for improved and new library technology; and
- A phased-in investment of an additional \$18 million from the state.

Pennsylvania's model recognizes that "libraries that do not meet basic per-

formance requirements are not worth funding.” As a result, 76 Pennsylvania libraries no longer receive state aid. Libraries that spend more than the minimum of \$5 per capita in local dollars and that meet additional incentive-for-excellence standards receive additional state funding.

The state also provides Equalization Aid, which reduces the amount of local funds a library must spend to qualify for Quality Libraries Aid. These dollars are allocated based on a formula that includes per capita and flat grants to libraries located in economically distressed municipalities.¹⁰⁷

Between 1999-2000 and 2000-2001, Pennsylvania state aid to public libraries increased more than 100%, from little over \$30 million to little over \$62 million. Since the 2000-2001 increase in state aid, 24% of libraries report that their local governments have given or promised increased funding; circulation rose by 10% over the first two quarters of 1999; collection expenditures are up 11%; libraries have increased the hours open by 8%, with weekend hours up 39%; the hours paid staff spent in training rose by 97%; and libraries increased public access computers by 32%.

In the 2000 HAPLR Index, based on 1998 data, Pennsylvania had a weighted average rating of 402 and ranked 43rd. In 2003, based on 2001 data, Pennsylvania moved to 40th with a rating of 424.

How does Florida encourage wider units of service?

Since 1961, Florida has supported the development of county libraries because they provide larger units of service where tax support can be more broadly distributed. Florida seeks to centralize library operations and provide incentives for local government funding. State aid involves four types of grants: operating, equalization, multi-county, and establishment.

Libraries apply for grants and must meet certain criteria to receive awards. The first is that a county must designate a single library administrative unit and a governing body (two or more governments may joint to establish a consolidated library or cooperative). Grants are incentive-based, and distributed according to the level of local funds invested.

Operating grants are available to any library that meets state aid requirements. Equalization grants are for counties below the state average for both the ad-

“Having been unpopular in high school is not just cause for book publications.”

Fran Lebowitz

justed value of one mill and the per capita local library support; low-income counties that spend above the state mill average on libraries receive twice as much equalization revenue as those that spend below the state average. Multi-county grants provide base funding if three or more counties are involved in one grant, and are used to support multi-county services. Establishment grants provide up to \$50,000 one year only. Construction grants match local dollars at 100% for library construction.

In 1999-2000, Florida spent a total of \$36,642,900 on its libraries.

“Importantly,” the consultants write, “Florida has expressed the priority it places on funding public libraries by establishing grants that take into account the scope of political threat. Ideally, state aid is funded fully; however, the political reality of library funding is recognized in Florida, and the state acts upon its concern for public libraries. State aid is an annual state appropriation, yet Florida has mandated the yearly funding of Equalization, Multi-county, and Establishment grants. Operating Grants are the only category of grants subject to funding threats.”

In 2000, based on 1998 data, Florida had a weighted average rating of 448 and ranked 34th. The 2003 HAPLR Index, based on 2001 data, showed that Florida libraries had moved to a ranking of 29th with a rating of 457.

What principles should guide a state’s restructuring of libraries?

When they studied the system within which Michigan libraries operate, the consultants from the Information Use Management and Policy Institute at Florida State University found that “the state laws and regulations affecting public libraries are confused and pit public libraries against each other for funding, that state aid to public libraries is significantly inadequate to meet the information needs of Michigan residents, and that the Library of Michigan is unable to perform effectively as a state library.”

The consultants recommended a variety of means to improve Michigan libraries and bring them in line with best practices in Pennsylvania, Florida, and Ohio. The strategy for implementing these changes called for major revisions in state law, and the strategy was based on these principles:

- Begin with a clean slate for the comprehensive reorganization of statewide

funding and operation of public libraries. Visualize the best laws and regulations, and work toward that best-case scenario.

- Simplify and reduce the laws governing public library organization and funding. “Straightforward and clear funding mechanisms reduce the stress of explaining policies to patrons, and empower citizens to become more effective supporters of libraries.”
- Increase the total amount of state aid available to public libraries.
- Provide incentives for improving library services. Public libraries should receive baseline state aid as well as aid that is linked to increased performance.
- Require accountability by providing standards for quality and accountability for services.
- Establish a transition period for libraries to meet new services and funding standards.
- Encourage public libraries to take a role in state and local economic development. Tax abatement laws have hurt public library funding; the public library needs to be a partner in local economic development efforts and not a victim of that process.
- Above all else, do no harm. In particular, do not allow a reorganization effort that is partisan-driven.
- Promote statewide access to and use of information for ALL state residents.

The consultants also identified critical success factors for implementing the strategic plan:

- Leadership among MLA, LM, coops, key library directors, etc.
- Agreement among the public library community on strategy.
- Grassroots support for a carefully developed and implemented statewide campaign.
- Development of political support for the strategic plan.

Writing and reading are not all that distinct for a writer. Both exercises require being alert and ready for unaccountable beauty, for the intricateness or simple elegance of the writer's imagination, for the world that imagination evokes.

Toni Morrison
U.S. author

What actions might we take?

It is the intention of Consensus to involve citizens in determining what should be done and in taking action. After a thorough review of the report, however, the Kansas City Consensus Board of Directors believed the public would find it useful if the board began to identify the most critical problems and the types of actions most likely to solve them. This interim step is intended to start discussion, not end it.

In this, as in all matters of public judgment, values come into play. Public judgment is reached when citizens have accepted the consequences of whatever actions they want to take. Public judgment is not volatile, and there is a high level of consistency with a citizen's views on one issue and his or her views on other issues. Public judgment requires moving away from individual opinion and toward a shared understanding about what is in our best interests as a public. Public judgment is informed but not driven by information. Instead, it is distinct in two ways: 1) it weighs alternatives and takes into account a variety of factors; and 2) it considers values, and emphasizes the normative, ethical side of questions rather than the factual, informational side.

Wider units of service

Metro Kansas City includes five libraries that are classified as municipal, a classification that typically indicates a small unit of service. A study by Thomas Hennen has confirmed the belief among library directors that wider units of service are more efficient, with smaller per-capita gaps in expenditures, than small units. The logical next step, then, would be to consider merging those municipal libraries with larger libraries nearby.

There are three small municipal libraries in the five-county area: Olathe, Bonner Springs, and North Kansas City. Together, they serve less than 8% of the population. According to their HAPLR scores, the three libraries ranked 2-4th highest among the seven local libraries. Would it make economic sense to merge these small libraries with their larger neighbors? Yes, although their HAPLR scores indicate that, despite their size, they are providing service of a competitive quality. The board believes, however, that mergers should not be forced on these small libraries. If the small municipal libraries merge, it should be a merger initiated by them, not imposed upon them.

The Kansas City, Kansas, Public Library is also a municipal library, but its service area is wider than the classification would indicate. It, like the Johnson County Library, serves all of one county with the exception of a small municipality. Even though the Kansas City, Kansas, Public Library is a larger unit of service, it is ranked lowest of the seven local libraries. A merger is unlikely to help.

The last of the municipal libraries is the Kansas City Public Library. This, the oldest public library in the metro area, was established in the late 1800s when its 87-square-mile area consumed much of the developed portion of the City of Kansas City. That is no longer the case. The Kansas City Public Library serves the region—27% of its total circulation is to residents of other districts—and it manages the largest collection of historical materials of any library in the metro. It can collect taxes, however, only from a small area of the urban core, with a tax base that shrinks due to corporate relocations and tax abatements. Its patrons, who have a per capita income level that's about three-fourths that of the metro average, have voted to tax themselves at the highest rate in the five-county region. The value of fairness comes into play when considering what should be done.

While the Consensus board believes that the size and economic condition of the Kansas City Public Library's service area is a substantial threat to its future, it is not convinced that a merger with the Mid-Continent Public Library is the best way to solve the problem. Mid-Continent's structure, with 30 branches and no main library, was designed to complement that of Kansas City and the philosophies of the two districts seem quite different. And, given the economic liabilities facing the Kansas City Public Library, it is highly unlikely that the Mid-Continent board would agree to include that library in its district, a necessary step for a merger unless it is initiated by state legislative action.

Instead, the Consensus board is intrigued by Director Joe Green's idea of expanding the size of the Kansas City Public Library to include all of the City of Kansas City. It appears to be a reasonable step that would increase the unit of service and provide access to a suburban tax base. This would require "trading" some branches between Kansas City and Mid-Continent, but it would allow the two libraries' administrative structures to remain distinct. The board suggests that an even better option would be to have the Kansas City Public Library serve all of Jackson County. States are more and more often mandating county libraries. This

There are three rules for writing the novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are.

W. Somerset Maugham

*Knowledge unfits a child
to be a slave.*

Frederick Douglass

would give the Kansas City district a unit of service similar to the Johnson County and Kansas City, Kansas, libraries, although still smaller than Mid-Continent.

Another option is to increase the size of the Kansas City Public Library's taxing area without changing its boundaries. This option would allow regional support for regional and statewide resources held by the Central Library. That library houses an extensive historical collection, some of which dates from the 1870s, and other books and serial volumes that are long out of print. The collection is used by patrons throughout the region, but the cost is not shared. At least 50% of the use of the old Main Library can be attributed to out-of-district patrons, although figures aren't available that show what percentage used the special collections.

The board offers two options for sharing the responsibility for funding this resource. The first is to develop a regional taxing district and regional oversight board that would fund and govern the operations of the Central Library that pertain to regional historic and other special collections. The second would be for the State of Missouri to declare the Central Library a statewide resource, and provide state funding for special collections that are of value to residents statewide. In both cases, regional or state funding could also be made available to other libraries that provide regional or statewide services, but our focus here is on the extensive, and expensive, collections of the Kansas City Public Library.

No matter which option is used, there should be further study to assure that the action taken will be efficient and effective. Additional research may find even more appealing options.

State funding

The states of Missouri and Kansas provide a miniscule amount of funds to local libraries, an average of just 1.5% of their operating budgets compared to 13% nationwide, and the per capita expenditures of the two states on library services is significantly below the national average, as well. For years, governors and legislators in the two states have not viewed libraries as integral to the economic and educational health of their states, which we believe they are.

The state libraries have taken on new roles as providers or organizers of state-wide services, particularly in the area of technology, for which they should be applauded. But lawmakers must allow them to do more, particularly in terms of

assuring that areas with a low tax capacity are not left behind. State funding – drawn from an extremely wide area – can be critical in increasing equity of funding to poor areas. The current level of funding is woefully insufficient to do the job.

We recognize that, given the status of the budgets of Missouri and Kansas, additional funding for anything is unlikely at the moment. We also recognize that, because local libraries receive so few funds from their states, they were less damaged by the recent recession than those where state budget cuts prompted reduced hours and branch closures. But the board asserts that libraries are more than just a local option. Libraries are a statewide resource, on par with our schools, that have a right to expect adequate support from state government. We define adequate as providing 10%, not 1.5%, of local libraries' budgets.

Regional tax for shared programs and services

Local taxpayers fund an average of 90% of the operating budgets of their public libraries through the property tax. The property tax is more geographically based than libraries themselves and it penalizes areas (typically urban and rural rather than suburban) with a low tax capacity. And, while the funds raised through property tax were sufficient to fund traditional services, it is insufficient to pay for the expensive new technology that patrons need and want, which costs almost twice as much per use as book-based services.

The states of Missouri and Kansas could legitimately be expected to provide additional funding to help solve the problem. Until that takes place, it is up to local citizens to step forward.

Most local libraries are very collaborative and have a long history of shared technological and other programs. A bi-state sales tax, or separate taxing mechanisms in Missouri and Kansas, would provide funds for technology and other regional programs and services. It would build upon a strength that already exists, and allow libraries to work together to meet needs that their patrons are likely to consider important. A regional tax would promote the economies of scale that come from shared databases and online journals, without requiring that libraries merge to achieve them. In addition, supplementing the property tax with a regional sales or other tax would lend stability to the funds available for local libraries.

There are a variety of ways to organize this tax. If local control is consid-

"I suggest that the only books that influence us are those for which we are ready, and which have gone a little further down our particular path than we have gone ourselves."

E.M. Forster

ered important, it could be set up so that funds would stay within the jurisdiction, but available to pay for shared regional programs and services. Or the funds could be combined and then used to pay for regional programs that library directors or an independent board of advisors agree are important. Library directors and other stakeholders would need to consider the most appropriate way to structure the tax and the use of its proceeds.

Voter approval for Kansas library mill levies

Missouri libraries can go directly to voters for approval of library mill levy increases, while Kansas libraries cannot. In Kansas, the jurisdiction within which the library operates sets the mill levy. While funds raised through the mill levy must go to the library, the jurisdiction can lower the mill levy if it chooses. Missouri's system gives citizens the opportunity to choose how much they are willing to spend and it allows libraries to make their case to the public directly, while the Kansas system does not. Citizens and libraries are better served by citizens having the opportunity to decide what they are willing to spend on their local libraries, rather than having that decision in the hands of others. Kansas, a populist state in so many other ways, should adopt the system used by Missouri and clear the way for direct communication between libraries and their patrons.

Additional research on library funding

While there are some benefits of having libraries funded almost totally through the property tax, there are also some significant disadvantages that suggest the method of funding libraries deserves scrutiny. Recommending the restructuring of how all libraries in Missouri and Kansas are funded was outside the scope of this report, which was intended to assure the health of libraries in metro Kansas City. We recommend that the state libraries of Missouri and Kansas, working with library directors and others, consider new options for funding their state's libraries. In particular, we urge the state libraries to look for options that reflect the changing role of geography in how people use libraries, and that provide relief for urban and rural communities with low tax capacity.

These recommendations are a beginning. There are a variety of ways to frame the

problem, and many possible solutions. To assure that our libraries continue to serve as an integral part of our community, it is up to citizens to decide what matters, what they're willing to pay for the services they want, and, working with library professionals and others, how best to achieve the optimum results.

What are the next steps?

Libraries serve everyone in the region and on this issue, in particular, it is important to involve citizens in determining what should be done to assure that they have access to high-quality libraries well into the future.

Consensus's next step, therefore, will be to convene a citizen panel composed of 12 individuals from around the region. Members of the panel would roughly reflect the demographic and geographic make-up of the community, and would not include any current board or staff members from local libraries. In 3-5 meetings over three months, the panel will review this report and recommend to the Consensus board:

1. what actions should be taken immediately, by Consensus or others;
2. what additional data are needed before a recommendation for action can be developed; and
3. what additional citizen involvement is needed, through public forums or other means, before a recommendation for action can be developed.

Throughout the process, Consensus will continue to keep library directors and state librarians informed and will invite their feedback on recommendations for action.

Appendix A

Resource Persons

We all know that books burn—but we have the greater knowledge that books cannot be killed by fire.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

We appreciate the individuals who were generous with their time and expertise. The persons below were interviewed by the writer, and were invited to provide comments on the draft. Their willingness to assist us should not be considered an endorsement of this report.

Library directors

Emily Baker, Olathe Public Library

Dan Bradbury, Kansas City Public Library

Jobeth Bradbury, North Kansas City Public Library

Mona Carmack, Johnson County Library

Joe Green, Kansas City Public Library

Paul White, Mid-Continent Public Library

State librarians

Duane Johnson, Kansas

Sara Parker, Missouri

Readers & advisors

Samuel Bennett, program manager, William T. Kemper Foundation

Tom Brown, director of library and media services, Trant Memorial Library at Donnelly College

Patti Butcher, library development coordinator for the Northeast Kansas Library System

Lola Butcher, staff reporter, *Kansas City Business Journal*.

Helen Spalding, associate director of libraries, University of Missouri-Kansas City

A special thanks to **Thomas Hennen**, author of the HAPLR Index and several articles about the structure and funding of libraries. As the report states (over and over), there are few comparative studies about libraries, what they offer and how they're structured. The writer relied on Mr. Hennen to provide information that was otherwise unavailable. His articles, an interview and numerous emails were absolutely critical to this report. The writer appreciates his knowledge and his graciousness in sharing it.

Appendix B

About KC Consensus

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Jennifer Wilding, report author, jenwilding@aol.com

Consensus puts the *public* in public policy. We provide citizens with the neutral environment and the tools they need to understand, analyze, and address public policy issues that affect the Kansas City region.

Consensus currently directs KC Forums, a collaborative effort with the Center for the City at UMKC and funded by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. Through KC Forums, citizens come together to deliberate about important issues, to find common ground and to take action. For more information, go to www.kcforums.org.

Consensus began its work in 1984, and has completed citizen studies on a range of issues. We work with laypersons to develop sound conclusions and innovative recommendations based on accurate findings. By studying issues like downtown revitalization, regional leadership, minority business development, safe neighborhoods and many others, Consensus has provided citizens with a voice and with connections to the business, civic, and government sectors.

Our work has resulted in new laws, new programs and approaches to many issues. It has also led to hundreds of citizens having the knowledge, skills and connections they need to have an impact on decisions that affect their lives.

Consensus is a “virtual” organization, with an active working board and no office space or full-time staff members. This structure allows us to provide services to the community at a low cost while still maintaining high quality.

In addition, Consensus is available to provide consulting services in public policy research, public communication and civic engagement to government, business and not-for-profit clients metrowide.

*Outside of a dog, a book
is man's best friend.*

*Inside of a dog, it's too
dark to read.*

Groucho Marx
U.S. comedian

The Consensus Board of Directors

President. **Susan Rohrer**, Leadership 2000

Secretary/Treasurer. **Therese Bigelow**, Kansas City Public Library

Fred Andrews, community volunteer

Howard Higgins, Eckard

Ellen Junger, Hallmark

Vince LaTona, LaTona Architects

Charles Renner, Husch & Eppenberger

Joel Whitaker, Sprint

Jennifer Wilding, report author

Appendix C

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The true felicity of a lover
of books is the luxurious
turning of page by page,
the surrender, not meanly
abject, but deliberate and
cautious, with your wits
about you, as you deliver
yourself into the keeping
of the book....This I call
reading.

Edith Wharton

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*The greatest masterpiece
in literature is only a
dictionary out of order.*

Jean Cocteau

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"The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who cannot read them."

Mark Twain

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