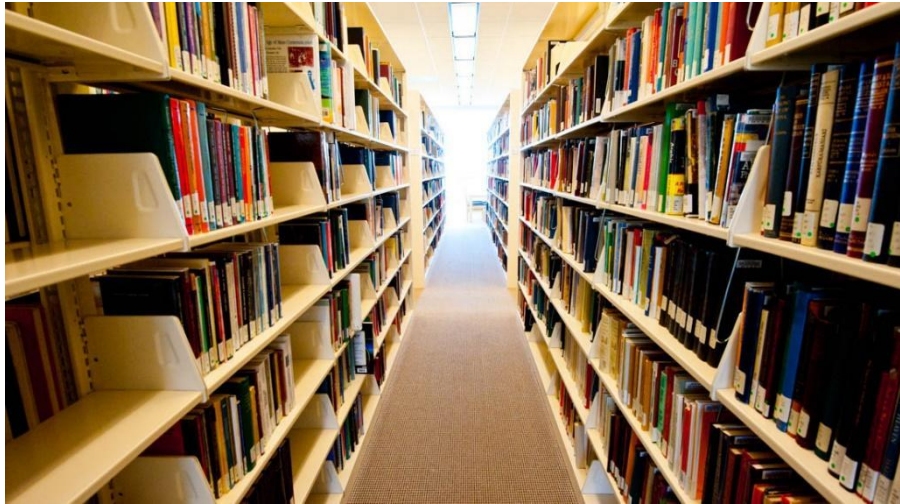


Kosciusko Leadership Academy 2023 – 2024

Library Deserts – Building a County Wide System 2.0

Expanding Library Access to those not currently served by a Library



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[The Challenge](#)

21.3% of residents in Kosciusko County are unserved by a free public library. That means out of the approximately 17,000 residents in the county 3,621 residents do not have free access to a public library. Individuals and households living in unserved townships must therefore pay for a “non-resident” library card to gain access to the public library and all of its services. The fee for a non-resident card varies based on an equation mandated by the state for libraries and is dependent upon its township census. The table below details area library non-resident card fees:

Mentone Bell Memorial	\$97
Milford	\$60
North Webster	\$98
Pierceton	\$30
Syracuse	\$86
Warsaw Community	\$96
North Manchester	\$102

In 2023 a Kosciusko County Leadership Academy (KLA) team wrote a whitepaper project investigating the problem and potential solutions. The 2023 paper and project was named “County of Libraries”. This whitepaper and project for 2024, “Library Deserts 2.0”, is a continuation of efforts to find a path forward and a solution to serve the unserved and provide free access to libraries for all Kosciusko County residents, regardless of the township of residence.

Value and Need of Libraries

A part of defining the problem is also helping to define the importance, or value, of Libraries and all of their services. The old idea or understanding of the past that libraries are only places for books is no longer true. Today most libraries offer so much more than just books. Libraries today offer a multitude of services and technology for its patrons:

- Computer Lab Services: Many residents do not have access to computers, printers, scanners, and the like in their homes.
- Online services: Wifi access and general access assistance.
- “Digital Libraries” - e-books, audiobooks, music, and more.
- Community Centers: Libraries provide public meeting spaces, daycare options, silent rooms for work and study, and access to documents like legal forms, tax forms, and assistance with job applications.

Some of these services require a library card to access, and some do not. We have found that there is a common belief, however, that all library services require a library card. This can deter some from pursuing these resources regardless.

The value of access to these services, technology, and digital medias for those without the financial means is as important in today’s world as the books themselves. Studies have shown that the level of a person’s literacy has a direct correlation to their income potential. Individuals with a “Level 3” literacy have an average annual income of \$63,000 while those with a literacy “Level 1” (those that struggle to understand basic forms and applications) have an average annual income of \$34,000.

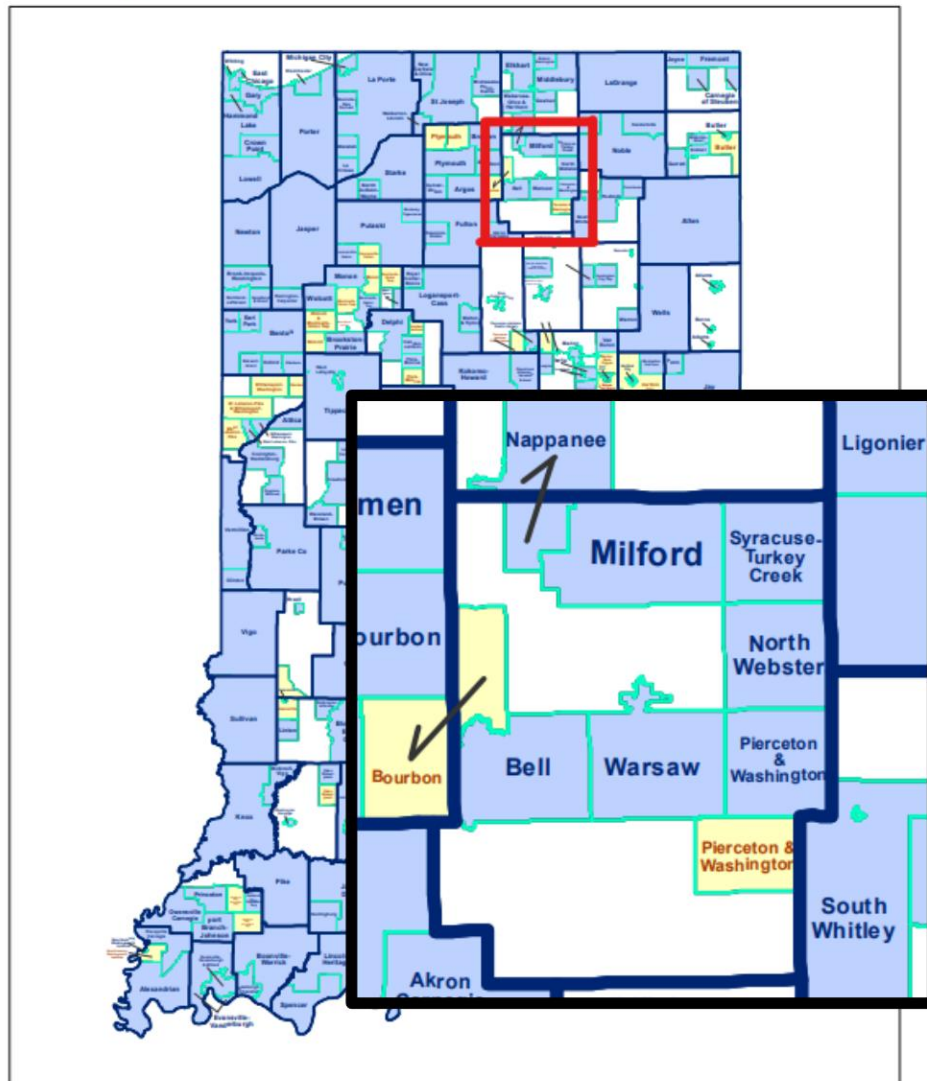
County of Libraries – KLA 2023 Recap & Summary

This project was the first step in investigating the challenge and what opportunities exist to provide coverage where currently none exists. The 3 main opportunities outlined and a brief explanation of each is summarized in the following:

1. County- Based System (Merger): *The primary benefit to the effective merging of all existing libraries in the county would be to have a one county-wide library district. This would solve “the problem” rather quickly by immediately redefining the district so that all county residents are members. That would allow any resident in the county to go to any county library and participate, check out materials, and engage with library resources. (County of Libraries, KLA 2023)* As detailed by the 2023 group, this is the most difficult and time consuming option. It would require collaboration with all existing Library Boards and townships to comply with Indiana Code 36-12-4.
2. Library District Expansion: *Expansion of Class 1 libraries is just that, expanding the defined district of an existing library. To do so an existing library may propose an expansion with the township trustee and legislative body of the township. The proposal will state that the public library seeks to combine with the township and form a single library district. The township and legislative body may agree to the expansion by written resolution. (County of Libraries, KLA 2023)* This path is different in that an existing Library and a particular township would work together to form a new taxing district and “expand” the library district into the proposed township.
3. Contracting: *Contracting is a way for a township that does not have library services to effectively team up with an existing public library. ... A library board may contract with a*

township and the contract must outline the manner and extent of library service as well as the amount of compensation for the extension of the library service. The township can then levy the funds sufficient to meet the contract terms. (County of Libraries, KLA 2023)

Library Districts and Areas Under Contract, 2020



Creator: Indiana State Data Center
Data Source: Indiana State Library, November 2021

Additional details on the 2023 project and findings can be found at:

<https://www.kosciuskoleadership.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/kla-2023-county-of-libraries-whitepaper.pdf>

Our 2024 Focus - Contracting: Townships & Libraries

Our focus for “Library Deserts 2.0” was to advance forward where the 2023 group left off. Based on initial conversations and our review of the 2023 project, we felt that contracting between the townships and libraries could yield the greatest likelihood of advancing our goal, and also feasible in the timeframe available for our project.

Contracts are as varied as the parties developing them. Our group acquired copies of existing contracts between townships and county libraries as a starting point. We drafted our own contract template based on different contracts we reviewed, as a talking point and catalyst for action.

Our group determined that the State Highway 15 “corridor” townships (Plain, Clay and Lake Townships), would be the locations of the majority of the unserved population. Our goal was that at least 1 township would agree to contract with a Library to set a precedent for other townships and libraries to mirror and move forward.

Our efforts found several “types” of township-library contracts being used in various other locations:

1. “Per card” - Count & Invoice: A library simply tracks residents from a specific township acquiring library cards, and invoices the townships for compensatory cost. Positives in this method of contract were that townships know precisely how many cards they are or will be paying for. There is no money “wasted.” In this scenario everyone who would want a card would get a card. The negatives in this method is that it is somewhat labor intensive for the libraries. The library and township are constantly dealing with counts,

and periodic invoices. Additionally, there would be no limit to how many cards could be issued, so townships would not have any cost control.

2. “Cap” – Set number of cards: The township agrees to pay for a set number of library cards per cycle. Once the number of users requesting cards is met, the remaining requestors would have to pay for their own cards. A current example is the contract in place between Monroe Township and Pierceton Library here in Kosciusko County. The positives to this method is that there is cost certainty for townships. This can be budgeted and managed. Negatives with this method is that demand could exceed supply. Some patrons still would need to pay for their own cards.

There are any number of other configurations that could be contractualized. Whatever both parties can agree on, if it’s workable, it can be done. Other contracts we have seen involve the use of a 50/50 system, for example (a patron pays for half the cost of a card vs. a whole cost and the township pays the rest).

Examples of the contract we developed and several actual contracts we were able to obtain are included as attachments to this report.

Our Efforts

As noted above, our group focused on the use of contracts between un-served townships and libraries to assist the unserved. Fall and early winter 2023 was focused on gathering our knowledge and data to hopefully use in 2024 towards this goal.

In December 2023, initial contact was made with several township leaders regarding the possibility of contracts with libraries.

In January, 2024, our group met with several library directors from Kosciusko County. This meeting yielded invaluable information on out-of-resident card cost, statistics, and the general views of the library directors as it related to the three “solutions” we were exploring (county system, expanding tax district, contracts).

In February, 2024, a second meeting was held with many library directors and other interested parties concerning a path forward. Further contact was made with townships.

In March, 2024, a portion of our group delivered a presentation to the quarterly meeting of all township trustees, presenting to them the data, information and suggestions of what we had learned over the prior months and from the 2023 whitepaper group. A third meeting was also held with several library directors.

There is a meeting planned for April 24, 2024, in the distinct hope of bringing together the interested township leadership and library directors to facilitate solutions moving forward.

Throughout, we were met with multiple challenges. First, in January, 2024, several new leaders were elected or appointed among the townships and library directors. Those being newer

to their jobs were understandably more devoted to other important tasks. Second, was cost. The contracts being explored would number in the thousands of dollars for townships to potentially commit to. Townships, as any governmental agency, need to be careful about how public dollars are being allocated. For libraries, many work-hours would have to be dedicated to tracking data/information for these contracts, as well as other contributions where library staff are already stretched thin.

Nevertheless, we also encountered a general enthusiasm and supportive feelings for the overarching goal we were pursuing, with virtually every group we spoke to. We are hopeful that the April 24 meeting will produce additional discussions among townships and libraries heading deeper into 2024.

Reciprocal Agreements – An Unexpected Surprise

An interesting and unexpected result somewhat related to our main mission occurred as a result of our Library Director Meetings. A Reciprocal Agreement was penned and completed between North Webster and Manchester as a result of introductions and common goals discussed during our group meetings. A reciprocal borrowing agreement is between libraries to allow each other's patrons to check out materials. Participating libraries extend borrowing privileges to each other's members. While this was not our goal for this project it definitely illustrates the importance of communication and networking. A reciprocal agreement is a great way to expand a library's materials and services by pooling what can be limited resources.

Summary

In summary, although our group wasn't explicitly "successful" in reaching our goal of library services for the unserved, we *have* moved this project forward significantly. First, we have gathered various library leadership into candid discussions in support of the goal we are seeking. Second, we have helped to bring attention to the unserved to the township leadership directly, and to show that solutions are possible, and how those solutions may be reached. Third, we have a path forward even beyond the schedule of KLA to hopefully continue the momentum we have helped to create.

Recommendations on Next Steps

For future teams passionate about picking up where we have left off, our recommendation would be to keep the communication and facilitation of collaboration with the county library directors as a primary means to the end. While they all requested additional investigation into the possibilities of the county wide alternative, they all acknowledged the significant challenges and extended timelines with doing. All directors made comments on how this project was important to them also for future growth of their operations. All of the library directors we spoke with mentioned they keep very detailed records on patronage and requests. The number of visitors per year also has an impact on their budgets so all directors were excited to find ways to increase their patronage for the overall benefit of the library.

Communication with the individual township boards, while not as easy and receptive, is also a critical path to moving the path of contract forward. The library director mentioned they will begin tracking the number of people they turn away and from what townships to aid in the

visibility of the magnitude of the problem, as well as having the data to talk with more certainty to the different townships on exactly how many residents in their townships are seeking services and are not able or willing to pay.

Lastly, the concept of communicating to township residents was discussed towards the end of our official project time. On the surface this sounds like a great way to get the word out to residents that have tried in the past and won't again. The lack of past data is detrimental in quantifying the size of the population in a township wishing to have library services. The concern that was raised was if that would be viewed negatively by the township leaders as a kind of a negative campaign against them. There has been some momentum gained with the township leaders and the fear was if this was not perceived well it might sour the relationships between the Library Directors and the Township Boards. Additional conversations on the topic might be a good idea with the township leaders prior to just blasting the campaign out there.

All in all, the contractual path has made a lot of progress and seems to be the faster path to getting to a solution, even if that is the first step towards the longer term play of a county wide system.

Attachments

1. Library District Expansion Quick Guide*
2. Monroe Township, Kosciusko County Contract: With Pierceton & Washington Township
Library 2023
3. Wilmington Township: Township Contractual Agreement for Library Services 2023
4. Contractual Agreement for Library Services: For Residents of North Township, Marshall
Country, Indiana
5. Contractual Agreement for Library Services: For Residents of Polk Township, Marshall
Country, Indiana
6. Contractual Agreement for Library Services: "A Template Draft by the 2024 KLA Team",
For Residents of _____ Township, Kosciusko County, Indiana
7. Formula for Township Contract Costs: The formula authorized by the State Library for
calculation of fees.