

# Background on Library Construction Grants in Alaska

By

Daniel Cornwall, Alaska State Library

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This short paper will summarize the history of state and federal funded construction of libraries in Alaska and then move on to the new Public Library Construction Grant Program passed by the 25<sup>th</sup> Legislature and signed into law by Governor Palin on June 4, 2008.

Alaska's first formal programs related to public library construction were passed in 1970, the same year the federal government expanded the Library Services and Construction Act (LCSA). Two separate statutes for library construction passed in 1970. There was a program under 14.56.200 (1970) specifically to build and equip libraries in rural areas as defined as any community except for first class cities with populations larger than 2,000 people. There was also a Public Library Construction Grant program established at AS 14.56.350 (1970) that allowed larger communities to apply for funding.

For the rural communities that qualified under 14.56.200, a minimum 10% match was required. The matching share could be cash, land, services or "other items acceptable to the division of state libraries." Communities that applied under AS 14.56.350 were expected to match at least 40% of construction costs.

The Alaska State Library was assigned the administration of both library construction programs in the 1970 legislation. By February 1989, the program had regulations in place under 4 AAC 57.200 – 4 AAC 57.330 (1989). The regulations required an application that included an explanation of the project and the community's plan for funding the operation and maintenance of the library. Additionally, the community had to project use and space needs of the proposed library for at least 20 years out. Once an application received approval, a detailed agreement was signed.

[Paragraph added June 2019: This agreement included two sections, the first for the Alaska State Library and the second for the grantee library. The Alaska State Library agreed to two duties – to furnish funds and provide any needed advisory services. The grantee library agreed to 14 conditions relating to project management and agreeing to provide the Alaska State Library with an audit of funds on the completion of the construction project. This audit was required to receive the final construction payment from the State Library. End paragraph added in June 2019.]

While the two state library construction statutes were repealed by ch 124 SLA 1998, the regulations at 4 AAC 57.200 still appear as current regulations in the latest paper and electronic versions of the Alaska Administrative Code. The Department of Education and Early Development (EED) has recently requested removal of these regulations.

Funding for the public library grants authorized by AS 14.56.200 and 14.56.350 appears to have been mainly from federal Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) funds, and during the mid to late 1970s, from \$7,900,000 in voter approved general obligation (GO) bonds passed in 1974 (ch 116 SLA 1974). In 1980 voters approved another \$500,000 for libraries (ch 121 SLA 1980). In addition to these GO bonds, there were two major general fund appropriations for the Public Library Construction Fund - \$55,000 (ch 25 SLA 1982) and \$500,000 (ch 24 SLA 1984).

A significant number of libraries were built under LCSA grant programs. In the 1973 report, 14 Years after LSCA in Alaska, State Librarian Richard Engen wrote, "Approximately \$1,165,000 has been used in the assisting the construction of community library facilities, including \$697,842 in federal funds and \$467,121 in State funds. Buildings have been assisted in Seward, Anchorage (two branches), Sitka, Juneau, Palmer, Kodiak, Dillingham, Ketchikan, Bethel, Cordova, Soldotna, Bristol Bay, Fort Yukon, Tok, Kake, North Pole, Wrangell and Pelican."

Of the \$7,900,000 in state funds approved by Alaska voters in 1974, all but \$78,760 had been spent by the time of the 1978 *Library Development in Alaska* annual report. According to this report the bond fund resulted in 21 new, enlarged, or remodeled libraries. An October 1977 internal Alaska State Library record lists the 1974 GO bond funded libraries as: Anderson, Bristol Bay, Coffman Cove, Craig, Delta, Dillingham, Eagle, Galena, Homer, Kenai, Kenny Lake, Kodiak, Nome, Nondalton, Seldovia, Seward, Skagway, Soldotna, Valdez, and Wasilla. An undated Alaska State Library document titled Construction/Remodeling, indicates that at least eight more libraries had construction costs paid for out of the 1980 bond issue: Akutan, Gambell, Koyuk, Savoonga, Shishmaref, Sitka, Unalakleet, and Wales. According to State Library records, Wasilla, Aniak and Nikolai were given Public Library Construction grants out of the 1984 appropriation.

Administration of existing state grants and awards of LCSA money came to a firm end in 1998 with the repeal of the urban and rural Public Library Construction Grant program and the enactment of the federal Library Technology and Services Act (LSTA) which specifically excluded library construction from grant consideration.

After a ten year break, there is once again a formal Public Library Construction Grant program. In 2008, the 25<sup>th</sup> Alaska Legislature passed SB 119 (ch 55 SLA 2008), a bill that established the construction grant program as well as a separate program to provide operating and materials assistance to school libraries. The new grant program is established with the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development. Grants, when funded, will be available for up to 50% of the total proposed grant project costs. As of this writing new regulations have not been developed, but the Legislature directed an eligibility priority for communities that do not yet have a public library as described in AS 14.56.356(a)(2). Eligibility for the construction grants are laid out in newly established AS 14.56.356:

Sec. 14.56.356. Eligibility.

(a) To be a library eligible for a grant under [AS 14.56.355](#), a library must be

(1) publicly owned and operated by a community; and

(2) a public library as described in [AS 14.56.400](#) that is not a public school library.

(b) An applicant for a grant under [AS 14.56.355](#) must provide matching funds from

(1) the local government entity in an amount not less than 20 percent of the total proposed grant project costs; and

(2) private donors in an amount not less than the amount remaining of the total proposed grant project costs after the state and local contributions are made toward the project.

Various stakeholders in Alaska's library community have been tracking perceived needs for library construction since 2004. A 2004 Building Needs Assessment conducted by the Alaska State Library identified 22 communities that indicated they needed a new library building: Aniak, Coffman Cove, Cordova, Craig, Girdwood, Homer, Juneau, Ketchikan, Moose Pass, Mountain View, Naknek, Nome, North Pole, Ouzinkie, Petersburg, Pilot Point, Seward, Shageluk, Sutton, Talkeetna, Tenakee Springs and Wasilla. To this list, a map compiled by staff at the Ketchikan Public Library in Summer 2008 adds Anchorage, Barrow, Kodiak, Kotzebue, Palmer, Sitka, Thorne Bay and Trapper Creek.

There was public support from communities during the hearing process for SB 119. During hearings in the Senate, people from Ketchikan (two people), MatSu Borough (two people), Petersburg (six people) and Seward (one person plus city council resolution) testified in favor of the public library construction provisions of SB 119.

Libraries have demonstrated their interest in new library construction through surveys and legislative testimony. It appears that the new public library construction grant program will be well utilized when funded.

## For Further Exploration

A number of archival and published resources were used in preparing this paper. These resources may be useful to people expanding on the history of public library construction in Alaska as well as to people interested in other topics in Alaskan library history.

### Archival Resources from the Alaska State Archives

- Box 51780 – Library Construction Grants (Fairbanks North Star Borough to Anderson), 1976-1980
- Box 51781 – Library Construction Grants (Homer – Port Lions) 1976-1980
- Box 51783 – Library Construction Grants (Homer – Saxman) 1976-1980
- Box AS 24755 – Library Directors’ meetings, Governor’s Advisory Council 1991-1997
- Box AS 24764 – LSCA grant materials 1991-1997
- Box MP 50 – LSCA and State funded project blueprints 1986-1999
- Box AS 17171 – Meetings of Governor’s Council on Libraries 1966-1990
  - See especially 14 Years after LSCA in Alaska, which appears in the folder “Governor’s Advisory Committee 1973-74.

### Published Materials

- Alaska State Library. *Library Services and Construction Act ... Annual Report*. (various years)
- Alaska State Library. *Long Range Program: Library Development in Alaska*. (various years)
- DeForest, Emily. *Libraries: Alaska Built*. Sourdough, Winter 1987, v. 24, no. 1, p. 7.
- Kolb, Audrey. Library Construction Grants: Help for Many Alaskan Communities. Sourdough, Winter 1986, v. 23, no. 1, p. 15.