

Becoming a Public Library in Alaska

Why?

Any community in Alaska may form a public library to serve their community and apply for an Alaska Public Library Assistance Grant. The Alaska State Library is the agency which determines what is necessary for a library to qualify as an eligible library. The standards that the state library follow to make decisions of eligibility are found in Alaska Statutes and in professional library management practices. The requirements are to help libraries maintain the purpose, expertise, and assets to remain a viable and useful resource for the entire community.

The following are some benefits of becoming an eligible library:

- The library is eligible to apply for a yearly operating grant of up to \$7000.
- The library is eligible to apply for Continuing Education (CE) Grants.
- The library is eligible to apply for Interlibrary Cooperation Grants.
- The library is eligible to apply for E-rate.
- The library is eligible to apply for Online With Libraries (OWL) funding.
- The library is eligible to use the statewide 800# Reference and Interlibrary Loan service.
- The library is eligible to use other services through the Alaska State Library.

The staff at the Alaska State Library can always help a library improve its services, find solutions to problems, and make the best use resources.

Requirements

If you become an eligible Alaska Public Library, there will be things that you will need to do to become and remain eligible. Here is a summary of the most important actions:

- Expend local funds of at least \$7,000 for project purposes (volunteer help may be used here).
- Provide at least the following services free to residents of the municipality or community:
 - Establish and maintain a collection of books and other materials for loan;
 - Provide access to interlibrary loans;
 - Provide reading or other educational programs for children; and
 - Provide reference information.
- Maintain appropriate number and timing of open hours.
- Be aware of the existing and ongoing educational requirements for the library director.
- Expend at least \$3,500 on library materials and online services for each outlet.
- Have trained paid or volunteer staff on duty in the library during the scheduled open hours.
- Submit online the Annual Alaska Public Library Report by September 1.
- Maintain accurate records for auditing purposes.

The process for a brand new library

A new library needs to be in active operation for **a full year** before applying for the Public Library Assistance Grant. At that point it may apply for the grant during the open period of January 1 through April 1 by completing two forms: the **Public Library Assistance Grant Application** and the **New Library Addendum form** found on the [Alaska State Library Grants Webpage](#).

To help in the planning process here is a summary of questions asked on the two forms:

- What is the legal structure of the library?
 - Public library founded by city or borough ordinance; submit copy of ordinance
 - Public library founded by a nonprofit group; submit copy of articles of incorporation and minutes from quarterly nonprofit library board meetings
 - Combined school/public library in which a city, borough, or nonprofit agrees to operate a library in partnership with a school district; submit memorandum of agreement between city, borough, or nonprofit and school district
- On which date did the new library opened to the public?
- What are the current opening and closing hours for the library for each day of the week?
- How many hours has the library been open on average each week?
- Is the library open any hours in the evenings or on weekends?
- How many weeks is the library open during the fiscal year (July 1 – June 30)?
- How much has been spent on library materials for patron use this fiscal year? Attach receipts for these purchases. (Include purchases of books, periodicals, audiovisuals, games, etc.).
- What is your planned budget for next fiscal year including local match funds and/or fair value of volunteer labor?
- Please describe any children's programs you have held since the library opened.
- How many reference questions have you answered since the library opened?
- How many items have been checked out to patrons since the library opened?
- How many interlibrary loans requests have you provided to patrons since the library opened?
- How will your library collections be increased or improved?
- How will ILL service be increased or improved?
- How will reference service be increased or improved?
- How will children's programs be increased or improved?
- Attach a written collection development policy to this form.
- Attach a mission, goals, and objectives statement or the strategic plan for the library to this form.

Helpful information can be found in the **Alaska Public Library Assistance Grant – Guidelines** document found on the [Alaska State Library Grants Webpage](#). This guide can help describe in more detail the eligibility requirements.

Also, staff at the Alaska State Library are always happy to help with various aspects of your application process, such as examples of collection development policies, how to purchase materials, and writing effective policies and goals.

We “were” an “eligible” library before

If you were an eligible library in the public library assistance program at some earlier time, you “may” be able to more quickly reenter the program. The best thing to do is contact the Grants & Statistics Librarian (tracy.swaim@alaska.gov) to review your eligibility and grant history. Libraries who have no outstanding issues (such as missing annual reports, delinquent audit requests, or unpaid refund requirements) may bypass the New Library requirements. You will be asked to update your collection development policy, Mission, Goals, and Objective Statement, and any Governance documents.

Again, helpful information can be found in the **Alaska Public Library Assistance Grant – Guidelines** document found on the [Alaska State Library Grants Webpage](#). This guide can help describe in more detail the eligibility requirements.

Staff at the Alaska State Library are always happy to help with various aspects of updating your documents, such as collection development policy ideas and writing effective policies or goals.

Final “practical” thoughts

Public libraries have entered and left the program over the years. Here are a few things to consider as you decide if applying for a Public Library Assistance Grant will benefit your library and community.

The annual report is a substantial report which each library is required to fill out by September 1 of each year. It is an online report which asks about the library budget, programming, circulation, collections, and other management or technical questions. It does require planning to collect the data needed all through the year to be input before the September 1 deadline. Often, it also requires working with a financial person in the city or school district to produce the necessary budget numbers. Will you have the time and commitment to do this?

Being open at least 48 weeks and the appropriate number of hours each week can be a staffing burden for some communities. It is easy to “burnout” if it is only a small group working to keep the library open. Are there enough volunteers or staff in your community to maintain the minimum weekly hours and at least 48 weeks open to the community?

There is a requirement that the director must receive at least six hours of approved continuing education over a determined two year period. These classes can be in person or online, and the Public Library consultant at the State Library can help find appropriate education opportunities. Will the director of the library be willing and able to seek out approved training to meet this requirement?

If your community has not had a library before, the residents may have received books and other materials from Alaska Mail Services. Once you become an public library all residents will lose this service. It will be the responsibility of the library to help the patrons get the resources that they want. Will Alaska Mail Services patrons in your community support the switch?

Becoming an eligible public library in Alaska can offer many benefits to your community. Hopefully, this document has presented some of the practical and time requirement aspects of going through the process.