

April 24, 2025

To: County Executive Melissa Agard
From: Dr. Jimmy Cheffen, Library Board President
RE: Program Service Reimbursement Proposal

Dane County Library Service reimburses libraries for their services to towns and villages without libraries. These municipalities are non-exempt (NE) from paying the County Library Tax. Villages and cities that have libraries support library service through their municipal taxes. The County Library Tax has been in place since the advent of the Library Service in 1966; it reimburses libraries for 100% of the cost of NE residents' check out of library materials. In 1999, a Facility Reimbursement was added to recognize that new and expanding libraries were built to accommodate serving NE residents in their service areas.

You will appreciate that library service has changed significantly since the Facility Reimbursement was introduced in 1999. Libraries were called upon to provide an elevated level of service in 2008 and subsequent years due to the economic recession. Libraries pivoted unexpectedly and creatively during COVID, when services were delivered in entirely creative ways. They resumed a "new normal" when in-person service was safe for library patrons; they enthusiastically returned to libraries.

Library program offerings have become fundamental to library service. While circulation of materials has grown steadily and diversified to reflect use of physical and digital materials, program consumption has seen an exponential increase. Almost 40% of people in the United States attended public library programs in 2019 ([Statista Research Department](#)) with a 23% growth in participation from 2014-2019, alone ([WordsRated](#)). Dane County Libraries are seeing attendance at all-time high levels. This is due to the quality of programs, the absence of fees for participation and the opportunity for community to connect over shared interests.

Past thought held that programming costs were included in a library's Operational Reimbursement, when circulation was thought to be the ultimate measure of library use. A comparison of Dane County Library program offerings and attendance in 1999 and 2024 dispels the notion that programming is an "extra" or "nice" service; in fact, it is core to 21st century libraries. From 1999 to 2024, program offerings increased from 3,287 to 14,084, a growth of 328%. Attendance at programs grew from 92,432 to 378,749, a 310% increase. Clearly, Dane County residents attend public library programs. NE municipalities have paid for library service according to a circulation-based system that allows DCLS the specificity of knowing where a patron lives and to charge for the number of items checked out by those residents. As libraries have grown their services beyond the checking out of materials, reimbursement for services such as WiFi, technology assistance and program attendance is harder to track.

It is the consensus of the Dane County Library Board that Dane County Libraries should be reimbursed by towns and villages for their program offerings. The model we propose is derived from the Facility Reimbursement formula that uses the percentage non-exempt resident circulation data.

That percentage is multiplied by the total circulation to define the NE use of programming. That use is then multiplied by the programming cost of \$.83, which is the average per person expenditure for programs across Dane County libraries in 2024. This determines the total Program Reimbursement budget amount, which is then distributed across Dane County libraries based on their share of service to NE residents as reflected by circulation.

2024 Circulation at DC Libraries	5,721,250
% total circ by NE residents	12.89%
Total circulations by NE residents	737,647
Total per circ program cost	\$.83
Total Program Funding Required	\$612,247

	2024 Circ by NE	Percent of Service	Share Prog Funding
Belleville	6,142	0.83%	\$5,098
Black Earth	6,486	0.88%	\$5,383
Cambridge	6,927	0.94%	\$5,749
Cross Plains	24,057	3.26%	\$19,967
Deerfield	5,511	0.75%	\$4,574
DeForest	70,035	9.49%	\$58,129
Fitchburg	10,954	1.48%	\$9,092
Madison	106,993	14.50%	\$88,804
Marshall	8,819	1.20%	\$7,320
Mazomanie	3,767	0.51%	\$3,127
McFarland	26,698	3.62%	\$22,159
Middleton	72,854	9.88%	\$60,469
Monona	12,368	1.68%	\$10,265
Mt. Horeb	47,153	6.39%	\$39,137
Oregon	60,828	8.25%	\$50,487
Stoughton	46,620	6.32%	\$38,695
Sun Prairie	109,217	14.81%	\$90,650
Verona	60,385	8.19%	\$50,120
Waunakee	51,833	7.03%	\$43,021
TOTAL	737,647	100%	\$612,247

The impact on the County Library Tax for this reimbursement addition is relatively small. The 2025 County Library Tax levy estimate is \$.0003389119. With the Program Reimbursement, the levy would be \$.0003639719, or about \$11 on a \$400,000 home.

The Library Board looks forward to your review of this proposal and addressing questions you or your staff may have. We bring this proposal to you in the spirit of sustainable library service for all Dane County residents. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions. Thank you for your consideration of this worthy support of Dane County's libraries.