

RCLS Direct Access Plan 2007 - 2011

The Ramapo Catskill Library System encompasses three counties: Orange, Rockland, Sullivan and a portion of southern Ulster County, with 47 public libraries. The total population within the System's service area is 739,977. A total of 49,707 people (6.7% of population) live in unserved areas. This does not reflect the 24,409 people (3.3% of population) who live in unserved areas which are covered by contracts for service with member libraries, and are entitled to services.

1. Describe how all individuals residing within the boundaries of the System but outside a member public library's chartered service area will receive library services.

All residents of the RCLS service area are entitled to library cards from their home libraries, defined as those libraries supported by the municipalities or districts in which the residents live. "Supported" is defined as financial support either by charter or by contract.

The Direct Access Plan (the Plan) recognizes the need for communities to provide tax support for library services to their residents, and further acknowledges that communities which do so should neither be expected nor required to provide free library services to residents of communities which do not support library services. The Plan promotes the use of contracts to expand library services to communities lacking a chartered library. Throughout RCLS libraries have used contracts with school districts and townships to provide services.

Individuals residing in jurisdictions of under 10,000 population outside the chartered service area of a member library and with no contract for service from a chartered library, shall be entitled to an RCLS library card to be issued by any member library. This card shall entitle the individual to the use of RCLS and NOVEL databases, and use according to restrictions allowed under Commissioners regulation 90.3, d, 2, ii and iii; specifically: borrowing of print materials older than one year, including fiction and non-fiction books and periodicals; and program attendance where such attendance is not restricted to the member library's residents only. Borrowing of audiovisual materials, print materials newer than one year, and use of local purchased databases will not be allowed.

Individuals residing in jurisdictions with populations of over 10,000 are subject to the terms of Commissioner of Education regulations.

Anyone living in the RCLS service area is entitled to walk-in access to materials on-site at any member library (per 8NYCRR 90.3 d, i) and to the use of materials at the central library, Newburgh Free Library, supported by central book aide.

2. Describe how the system will assure that those persons living within the system boundaries in an area where a member library chooses to withdraw from the system, or where a chartered and registered library was never a member of the system, will be served by the system.

All chartered and registered libraries now within RCLS boundaries are members of the system. Should a member library choose to withdraw from the system, residents from that library's service area would continue to be eligible to borrow materials purchased with state central book aid funds from the central library and to access the Novel and RCLS funded electronic databases.

Residents served by newly chartered and registered libraries which have not joined the system, will be served by RCLS in the same manner as stated in paragraph 1.

3. Describe what the system considers "serious inequities and hardships" and the criteria used by the system to make the determination.

RCLS considers that it represents "serious inequities and hardships" when unserved populations refuse to tax themselves for contracted library service at a realistic cost, relying instead on the collections, services and funds of member libraries, which places an unfair burden on member library taxpayers. There is no other service in which residents of one taxing jurisdiction are expected to support services to residents of another taxing jurisdiction.

A realistic cost for contracted service must take into account the diversity of the RCLS service population, and that member libraries serve economically diverse rural, suburban and urban areas. The fairest measure of library support would thus be equal to the lowest denominator of average or median local tax support paid within the jurisdiction's county. For 2005 (the most recent available comparisons) this would be the overall average per capita tax support for Orange (\$40.52) and Rockland (\$92.78) counties and the median per capita tax support for Sullivan (\$16.59) and Ulster (\$30.63) counties. These amounts will be updated annually.

After repeated attempts to negotiate a contract in accordance with this guideline, the terms section 6b will apply.

"Serious inequities and hardships" also occur when residents of one member library use a neighboring library in numbers disproportionate to use of their home library. See section 4.

4. Describe what constitutes excessive out of chartered/contracted service area borrowing in the system.

Excessive out of chartered/contracted service area borrowing occurs when a net 10% or more of an individual library's circulation is by residents of other RCLS member libraries and/or a net 5% or more of that circulation is attributable to patrons from a single member library, and the pattern of use has continued for six months or more.

Another form of excessive out of chartered/contracted service area borrowing occurs when an RCLS member library's patrons borrow as much, or more, in total from other libraries as they do from their own library, and that borrowing is not reciprocated by residents from the corresponding member libraries.

Either or both libraries affected by excessive use can file a complaint per section 7 below.

The statistics to identify these situations are available through our online circulation system.

5a. Describe the unserved and under served populations within the system.

Unserved populations exist in pockets throughout the RCLS service area and have been mapped by the NYSED Division of Library Development. The total untaxed/unserved population is 49,707. There are also unserved jurisdictions which have entered into contracts with a chartered library and provide tax support for service. The total population covered by contracted service is 24,409.

Under served populations are those whose chartered/contracted library service is not equitable according to system standards as defined in this plan. Typically, the library has a budget which does not meet the criteria set out in section 3 above. Patrons of such libraries are tacitly encouraged to rely on other system libraries for convenience of hours, depth of collections, Internet access, program offerings and knowledgeable staff to meet their needs.

5b. Describe the criteria used by the system to identify libraries as having an inadequate level of local income to support the delivery of acceptable library services (under served). List those libraries so identified.

Libraries falling below NYS minimum library standards number 7 - 9 and 11 per their annual report, and/or with a per capita tax support less than the denominators specified in section 3 above, may be considered under served. The case of each such library will be considered individually based on geography, service population size, ratables and fund raising efforts.

There are currently 8 libraries which fail to meet the specified NYS minimum standards. They are: Albert Wisner (Warwick), Cragmoor, E.B. Crawford (Monticello), Gardiner, Goshen, Livingston Manor, Moffat (Washingtonville), Monroe.

There are currently 17 libraries which have per capita local tax support below the denominator for their county. They are:

Orange County - Albert Wisner (Warwick), Moffat (Washingtonville), Monroe, Montgomery, Port Jervis, Town of Crawford;

5b. *continued*

Rockland County - Finkelstein Memorial (Spring Valley), Piermont, Rose Memorial (Stony Point), Suffern;

Sullivan County - Fallsburg, Liberty, Livingston Manor, Roscoe, Sunshine Hall (Eldred);

Ulster County - Gardiner, Wallkill.

Annual report data regarding collection size, electronic resources and staffing as relate to population size will be used to identify libraries which may need assistance in analyzing their patron's satisfaction level.

5c. Describe the actions the system will take to expand the availability of library services to unserved and under served individuals residing within the boundaries of the system.

RCLS staff and trustees will work with member libraries to encourage and assist them in their efforts to improve services and approach local officials for improved funding.

- Libraries that currently do not hold budget votes will be informed about chapters 259, 414 and special district status.
- Meetings will be held with libraries identified in section 5b to review state standards and system policies that govern system services.
- Governing authorities in unserved jurisdictions will be notified of the need to provide tax funding if full library service is to be allowed/continued.
- The three regional library associations within RCLS borders, the Director's Association Direct Access Committee and the Plan of Service Committee will be encouraged to participate in meetings with affected jurisdictions.
- Member libraries subject to over use by residents from other member libraries will be encouraged to invoke the restrictions allowed in this plan as a means to reinforce the reciprocity that is the cornerstone of direct access.

5d. Provide a timetable for such actions.

Unserved areas which have the ability to tax themselves for library service under sections 255 or 256 of Education Law will be given one year from the implementation of this Plan to do so either by contract with a neighboring library, or by action to charter a new library.

Untaxed areas which do not have the ability to tax themselves will be given two years from the implementation of this Plan to do so. (The additional year is allowed because of the time needed to effect enabling legislation and conduct a referendum.)

All meetings described in 5C will be held by 2009 and under served populations will be encouraged to improve their funding and/or comply with system standards.

Following the timetable described above, the residents of under served library service areas and jurisdictions which do not contract or tax themselves for library services may lose access to full library services. These residents would continue to have access to the services of the Central Library and some System and State supported services.

5e. Identify who will be responsible for carrying out these actions.

Adequate funding is the responsibility of the member libraries. Encouragement of improved library services throughout the system is set forth in section 5c above. RCLS is responsible for educating the public, especially untaxed/unserved communities, with regard to the terms its Direct Access Plan.

6. Describe the conditions under which modifications to the free direct access plan can be made.

All recommendations for modification of the Plan shall be initiated by the Director's Association (the Association) Direct Access Committee (the Committee) at the request of a member library and must be approved by the Association and ratified by the RCLS Board of Trustees.

a. Without the prior approval of the Commissioner of Education

Once this Plan has been accepted by the State Education Department, residents of unserved/untaxed communities will be advised of the need to tax themselves for library service in accordance with section 5a above. At the expiration of the deadlines specified, and upon request of any member library affected, the Committee will consider the circumstances and the efforts expended by the community against which the complaint is lodged, and will recommend a course of action to the Directors Association. If the recommendation is that services to the community be discontinued (excepting on site use of resources and borrowing of CBA titles as specified in section 1, paragraph 5 above) and it is approved, the plan will be modified to exclude residents of that community.

In individual cases regarding overuse according to section 4 above, either member library affected may file a written complaint with the Committee. The Committee will review the circumstances regarding the complaint and make a recommendation to the Association. Recommendations approved by a majority vote of the Association and ratified by the RCLS Board of Trustees will become modifications to the Plan.

b. With the prior approval of the Commissioner of Education.

After the expiration of the deadlines specified in section 5d above, and documentation that efforts to contract with an unserved area with a population of under 10,000 were unsuccessful, a member library may file a written complaint with the Committee. The Committee will review the circumstances regarding the complaint and may recommend that a waiver be sought from the Commissioner of Education denying free direct access to residents of the affected area.

In individual cases where the Committee recommends actions beyond those spelled out in the free Direct Access guidelines as permissible without prior approval of the Commissioner of Education, the RCLS Board, will send a letter to the Commissioner asking that the additional actions be permitted.

7. Describe how the system will assure that member libraries are complying with the system free direct access plan.

Member library and RCLS staff will review the statistics generated by the automated network to monitor direct access activity.

Complaints regarding violations of the Direct Access plan will be referred to the Direct Access Committee.

Guidelines for Committee action regarding complaints are as follows:

- complaints must be presented in writing by an affected member library, including information about the actions taken by the affected library Boards to resolve the problem(s)
- complaints will be discussed with representatives of all parties concerned (member libraries, community representatives)
- resolutions will be directed toward improving reciprocity
- recommendations for resolution of complaints will be approved by the Association and the RCLS Board of Trustees
- when required the RCLS Board will send a letter to the Commissioner of Education

Adopted by the RCLS Board November 20, 2006.

Approved by the Directors Association September 20, 2006.

Approved by a majority of member library Boards of Trustees between September 25 and November 10, 2006.

Approved by the Division of Library Development March 29, 2007.