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Untapped source of additional funding for public libraries: *The Special Library Levy*

By Sandy Dixon, State Library

The special library levy (also called the 27 cent levy) is a potential source of additional funding for public libraries allowed by the Code of Iowa, 384.12 (21). Unfortunately, out of 947 Iowa cities, only 60 have the special library levy, although the odds of passing it are very good. In 2005, out of 18 cities which voted on the levy, 14, or 78%, passed it.

If all Iowa cities passed the levy at the full 27 cents per \$1,000 assessed property value, it would generate almost \$16 million annually in additional funding for Iowa libraries. This article will describe:

- what the special library levy is
- the steps for getting it on the ballot
- what the library may and may not do to help pass the levy

In a nutshell, the Code allows cities (including cities without their own public library) to levy an additional tax of up to \$0.27 per \$1,000 assessed property valuation for support of a public library. There is a petition and referendum required to pass the levy. The levy question is put on the ballot in regular city elections, held in odd numbered years. The next opportunity to have it on the ballot is November 2007, followed by 2009, 2011 and so forth.

Before a decision is made to pursue the levy, find out if your city is at the \$8.10 property tax limit. Approximately 80 percent of Iowa cities are at the limit and cannot levy more taxes for the General Fund. Assuming your city is at this limit, next discuss with your board the feasibility of passing a levy. For example, if your community has just passed a school bond issue, the timing may not be right to pursue the special library levy.

If a decision is made to pursue the levy, discuss with your board what more the library can do for the community if it had additional funding. Does the community need the library to:

- be open more hours
- offer a wider range of up-to-date books and other resources
- offer more special services for children and teens
- purchase up-to-date computers and other technology
- make the building handicapped accessible
- add a community room

Be ready with an answer when a community member asks, "What would the library do with the additional money?" Once you know the answer to this question, the steps for pursuing the levy are as follows:

- Share information about the levy and its benefits with your library board.
- Inform key city officials - mayor, city council, administrator, etc. (A selling point is that the decision is in the hands of the voters – they decide if they want to tax themselves a little more to support the public library.)



- Consult the city attorney about your plans.
- Ask the county auditor about deadlines for getting it on the ballot.
- Discuss the referendum wording with the board - would the community support a levy with no ending date or would it be more likely to pass it if it were in effect for five years, 10 years, etc. (The referendum wording will also appear on the petition.)
- Work on the petition, making sure the wording is identical to the language that will be on the ballot. [Note: Please see the end of this article for information about a recent Attorney General's opinion about the special library levy.]
- Discuss who will start and collect the petition (be aware of ethics issues). The petition is valid if signed by 10% of eligible voters in the last regular city election, but not less than 10 persons (cannot be signed by rural residents).
- Present the signed petition to the city council.
- City council and city administrator forward the petition to the county auditor for inclusion on the ballot.
- After the election, please notify the State Library about the outcome.

An idea highly recommended by New Hampton Public Library Director, Pat Ipsen, is to form a citizen committee made up of people who use the library regularly. An important advantage of having a citizen committee is that they are a group of informed citizens who have an investment in seeing that the funds generated from the levy are in addition to any other money the city spends on the library.

In New Hampton, which passed the levy in 2005, the citizen committee met first with the mayor and city clerk, and later the city council, to inform them of their plans. They obtained signatures on the petitions and planned the publicity which included a brochure and posters. Members asked people to write letters to the editor, had a story in the newspaper and sent brochures through the church bulletins and to teachers. They spoke to organizations such as the Rotary, sororities and senior citizens. They did a neighborhood brochure drop right before the election and sent postcards to people who had signed the petition to remind them to vote.

Said Ipsen, "I want to again encourage people to look into the special library levy. It is making such a difference for us."

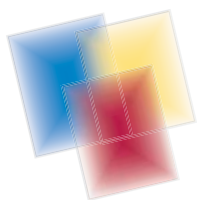
In pursuing the levy, it is important to be aware of Iowa Code 68A.505, which prohibits the use of public funds for any political purpose, including the express advocacy of a ballot issue. "Public moneys" includes direct or indirect expenditure of funds by a governmental body, the use of any property, resource, or equipment owned by the governmental body, and use of staff time during regular working hours. In addition, once a group of people have raised more than \$750 or spent more than \$750 in a calendar year for the purpose of supporting (or opposing) the levy, the group must file the Statement of Organization as a committee.

The following actions can be done without violating Iowa Code 68A.505:

- library board may pass a resolution or proclamation in support of the levy
- library staff may be active in and even lead the campaign if it is on their own time
- board members may speak to community groups
- library staff may speak to community groups outside of work time
- ask the library Friends group for help

More information about the special library levy, including what the levy would generate per city, and a sample petition and ethics brochure from the Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board are available on the State Library's Web site. See <http://www.statelibraryofiowa.org/ld/funding-info/sp-levy>. If you have questions, contact [Sandy Dixon](#), program director for Library Development at the State Library.

[Note: A recent Attorney General's opinion about the special library levy cautioned that a petition including language that attempts to limit use of revenue from the levy would likely be rejected by an Iowa court. It was reasoned that the, "expenditure of tax revenue generated to support the library is determined and controlled by the governing body of the library - the board of trustees. If the voters approve a supplemental library tax levy to be used to support the public library, then the trustees can appropriate the funds for any lawful use to support the library." This opinion should not be read as calling into question the validity of previous levies that directed use of revenue from the levy.]



Ross leaves commission after 13 years of service

A reception for Iowa Commission of Libraries Chair Dale Ross was held after his last commission meeting on April 16.

"Working on the Commission has been a meaningful experience in my life," said Ross. "It had the result of putting me in touch with a cross section of people at the state level. It made me aware of the degree of people who are interested in others rather than themselves. Work done by the public and academic libraries is largely unsung, but extraordinarily important. They are the glue that holds people together. The people who serve need to be profusely thanked."

Ross was appointed to the Iowa Commission of Libraries by Gov. Branstad in 1994 and reappointed by Gov. Vilsack in 1998 and 2002. His other contributions to libraries include his election to the Central Iowa Regional Library Board in 1990 and re-election in 1994 and 1998. He has been a member of the Iowa Library Association (ILA) Foundation since 1992 and has served as the ILA Chapter Councilor of the American Library Association from 2004 to present. He is an Ames Public Library trustee and currently serves as board vice-president. He was president of the American Library Trustee Association in 2003. Ross was named ILA's Outstanding Trustee in 2000 and was ILA's member of the year in 2001.



Iowa Commission of Libraries: Front - Mary Wegner and Dale Ross. Back from left, David Boyd, Monica Gohlinghorst, Jann Freed, Daniel Boice and Rita Martens. [Not pictured - Frank Sposeto]



Left, Gerry Rowland, Sandy Dixon (State Library) and Dale.



Former Des Moines Public Library Director Kay Runge and Dale.



Left, Lily Lau, East Central Library Services Administrator; Susan Kling, Marion Public Library Director; and Dale.



Iowans join more than 400 library advocates for National Legislative Day in Washington DC.



From left, Mary Wegner, Ted Wegner, Congressman Tom Latham, Sheryl Bissen and Duncan Stewart



From left, Stewart, Bissen, Senator Tom Harkin, Ted and Mary Wegner



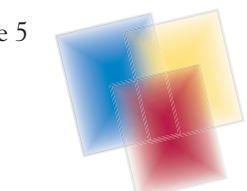
From left, Mary Wegner, Stewart, Senator Charles Grassley, Bissen and Ted Wegner

State Librarian Mary Wegner, Iowa Library Association (ILA) President Sheryl Bissen, ILA Governmental Affairs Committee Chair Duncan Stewart, along with Mary's son Ted, visited the offices of Iowa's Congressmen and Senators May 1st and 2nd in Washington, DC.

The delegates reiterated how federal Library Services and Technology Act funding is crucial in helping Iowa libraries provide high quality programs and services for 1.6 million Iowa library users. That includes EBSCOhost, the annual summer reading program, helping libraries obtain high speed Internet access, and providing libraries with the help they need to develop reading and literacy outreach programs, to name a few.



From left, Stewart, Wegner and Bissen



Be sure to check out the State Library's Web site often for the latest news!



Barbara Corson, program director for library services, State Library, was recently voted vice-chair of the IOWAccess Advisory Council. The role of the council is to create and provide a service to citizens of the state that will serve as a gateway for one-stop electronic access to governmental information, transactions, and services at state, county, or local levels. In this role, the council accepts and reviews proposals for funding of electronic projects.

Iowa Code established the council in 1998. Its 19 members are appointed by the governor for multi-year terms. Corson was appointed by Governor Tom Vilsack in 2004.

Iowans Elected to BCR Board of Trustees

Gregory Cotton, technical services librarian at the Russell D. Cole Library at Cornell College, Mount Vernon, IA, was elected on May 11 to serve as president of the BCR Board of Trustees for the the 2007-08 term. Cotton was recently elected to a two-year term as at-large trustee on the BCR Board, and just completed a three-year term as a BCR representative to the OCLC Members Council.

State Librarian Mary Wegner was also elected to the BCR Board of Trustees Executive Council. The three remaining members of the Executive Council also have ties to Iowa: Gina Millsap, former director of the Ames Public Library and now executive director of the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library, Topeka, Kansas; John Pollitz, former director of the O'Keefe Library at St. Ambrose University and now associate university librarian, Oregon State University Libraries, Corvallis; and native Iowan Ann Joslin, State Librarian of Idaho.

Sheryl Taylor, director of library services at the John and Louise Hulst Library at Dordt College, Orange City, IA, has been elected by OCLC libraries in the BCR region to a three-year term on the OCLC Members Council. As a BCR OCLC Members Council representative, Taylor also has a seat on the BCR Board of Trustees.

Claudia Thornton Frazer, digital initiative coordinator and librarian at Cowles Library, Drake University, Des Moines, IA, is also a BCR OCLC Members Council representative.

The Bibliographical Center for Research (BCR) is a nonprofit, multistate library cooperative that has served the library community since its founding in 1935, providing cost-effective library and information services. Today BCR serves more than 1,086 voting-member libraries in 42 states, Canada and Guam. Agreements with state library agencies in Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming allow any library located in those states to use BCR services as a member institution.

The State Library maintains a statewide membership in BCR so that all Iowa libraries can benefit from its services. As State Librarian, Mary Wegner has a permanent seat on the BCR Board of Trustees. For more information, visit the BCR Web site at www.bcr.org.



Pictured top to bottom, Greg Cotton, Sheryl Taylor and Claudia Thornton Frazer

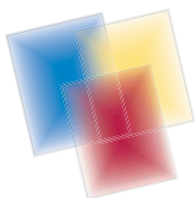
Certification Update

Congratulations to the following public library staff certified for the first time through the State Library's Iowa Certification Program for Public Librarians.

Richard Bangma, Pella
Beth Burrow, Waverly
Julie Edwards, Cumberland
Nicole Hayter, Des Moines
Jeffrey Meyer, Slater

Alvina Reitsman, Sanborn
Cary Rueter, Sibley
Natalie Struecker, Indianola
Scott Zimmer, LeMars





More news from around the state

Residents of Bondurant voted 82.5 percent in favor of a new community library and public safety facility. The current library is 1,920 square feet compared to the nearly 7,255 square feet the new library will provide. The city is in the process of issuing \$1.35 million in bonds for the new library building, which will incorporate more computers, a community room, expanded kids and teen areas, an outdoor patio and a coffee bar in the lobby. The total cost of the new library is estimated at \$1.6 million.

"We are so thrilled that the public supported the bond issue," said library director Karen Pederson. "It is very affirming to know that public libraries are so important to our citizens and continue to be places where people value all the services. The excitement and anticipation are building in the community as we get closer to construction."

The Independence Public Library is going to break ground for a new library in a few short months. Said library director Laura Blaker, "the community is pleased and excited about having a new library. We know because private donations from individuals, households, businesses, and the spelling bee fundraiser account for more than half of the pledges and donations in the \$3 million dollar project." Funds coming from the City of Independence, Vision Iowa (Community Attraction and Tourism), the McElroy Trust, the Carver Foundation, and Buchanan County will make up the remaining \$1.4 million dollars.

The new library, at 14,200 square feet, will be approximately six times the size of the current Independence Public Library. It will feature a community room, children's area, young adult area, adult area, study rooms, computer areas, and more. Other amenities will be a fireplace, comfortable seating, handicap accessibility, access to all materials, and a park-like setting. The timeline for the project is groundbreaking in May and construction completed by early summer 2008.



*Diagram - front of new
Independence Public Library*

A Decorah Public Library staffer is the recipient of the Public Library Association's "Grow Your Own @ Your Library" institutional scholarship pilot program. Kristin Torresdal will begin pursuing an MLIS degree in September. She has been active in the Decorah library since childhood. According to library director Lorraine Borowski, Torresdal will continue working at the library while earning her degree. The Public Library Association awarded nine public libraries grants of \$8,000 each. One library from each of the nine Public Library Data Service population categories was selected. More information about the program is available at <http://www.pla.org>.

Kristin Torresdal





The Waverly Public Library began celebrating its 150th anniversary with an open house on Sunday, April 15th.

"A steady stream of people strolled past the exhibits, munching sugar cookies and drinking punch," said library director Sarah Meyer-Reyerson. "There were kids with balloon hats, balloon motorcycles and balloon flowers, as well as a recycled book castle complete with windows, a product of Lynn Montague's Art Adventure students."

Retired Waverly-Shell Rock High School Art Teacher Lynn Montague and a group of young artists created a tower of books to commemorate the library's anniversary. Books were collected from area libraries that had weeded their collections. The young artists included Maaiké Frerking, Ryan Johnson, Selena Kaisinger, Julie Kirkpatrick, Rachel Lynch, and Ashley Maley. Assisting the artists were Youth Librarian Sue Reiher and Carl Dillon.



Throughout the history of the Waverly Public Library there have been many turning points. It was a strong core group of people in 1857 who formed the original Waverly Library Association, among them William Harmon, known as the founder of Waverly. The subscription was \$2 per year for the use of the whole collection. In 1867, the library became a free public library, open to all. In 1904 there was a heated debate about whether Waverly should accept Andrew Carnegie's gift of \$10,000 for a new library building. Some believed that Carnegie's requirement of \$1,000 per year of tax support was too steep and too binding. However, the Carnegie library was opened in Waverly in 1905. A bond issue was passed in 1966 to pay for a wrap-around addition to the library. In 1996, a bond issue was passed for a new library building, and \$1.5 million was raised through private gifts and grants.

"There have always been people who have stepped forward to say that a library is vital to this community," said Meyer-Reyerson.

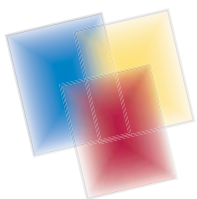
Other events throughout the year will include book discussions with local authors, a regular newspaper column on what people were reading over the decades, a time capsule, trivia contests and "mystery" readers' photos in the newspaper.



Former Waverly library directors Pat Coffie, left, and Jane Huck attended the Sunday open house

Reminder:

*The meeting minutes of the Iowa Commission of Libraries can be found at
<http://www.statelibraryofia.org/about/gov>*



More than 200 attend Kids First 2007



Thursday's keynote speaker, Steven Layne



The conference gave participants time to share their own stories.



Roy Kenagy as "Sponge Bob" talks about celebrating libraries, communities, toddlers and parents.



Left, Katie Dryer of Pella introduced author Nancy Carlson

"Kids First was wonderful! I came back with SO many ideas - the preconference with Saraj Ghoting was almost too good - I hardly know where to begin with all of that good information. Well done again on Mary's part!!" - From an enthusiastic participant

Kids First 2007 was held April 25, 26, and 27, 2007 at the Gateway Hotel and Conference Center in Ames, Iowa.

This year's theme was "Kids @ Your Library." A preconference was presented by early childhood literacy consultant, Saraj Ghoting. In her presentation, "The Fun and Facts of Early Literacy," Ghoting shared information about enhancing storytimes in libraries by providing six early literacy skills for parents and caregivers.

Thursday, April 26th, started with a dynamic keynote address by Dr. Steven L. Layne. "Why God Made Librarians" not only entertained the attendees, but shared the important role that librarians play in children's lives.

Lunch was followed by author, Nancy Carlson, who shared her experience as a writer. She told stories about her own life, as well as how she develops ideas into books.

Breakout sessions on various youth services topics were also held on Thursday.

Friday morning, keynote speaker RoseMary Honnold shared background information for working with teens, as well as her vast array of programming ideas for librarians to use in their own libraries.

Friday lunch featured author Deb Caletti. She talked about her personal recollections about growing up with books and her thoughts about how books continue to influence her life. Breakout sessions were also held on Friday.



State Librarian Mary Wegner



Left, Mary Cameron, conference coordinator, State Library, and RoseMary Honnold, Friday's keynote speaker



Nancy Huisman, Applington Public Library, is Captain Underpants



Author Deb Caletti held a book signing