

TALKING POINTS - PUBLIC LIBRARY DISTRICTS IN NEW YORK STATE

What are Public Library Districts?

- Public libraries that have publicly elected trustees and publicly approved budgets
- Three basic types include: School District Public Library – serves residents of a single school district; Special Legislative District Public Library – state legislation authorizes local election to create a district; Association Library District – private entity

Reasons to consider creating a Public Library District

- Opportunity to expand and improve services – appeal made directly to public
- Stable and predictable funding – tax support not subject to reduced appropriations
- Increased autonomy provides opportunities for expanded collaborations with Schools and other educational and cultural institutions
- Increased accountability (direct public vote to elect trustees and approve budget)
- Opportunity to bond for capital projects
- Enhanced “ownership” by community – ability to elect trustees/approve budget
- Opportunity to expand service area and ensure equity in library tax support
- Approval rate for annual public library funding referendums exceeds 90%
- Per capita tax support for libraries that are funded by direct public vote is twice as high as those that are funded by municipal appropriations

What does it take to create a Public Library District

- Visionary library board that is committed to service excellence and has a good understanding of the community’s library needs
- Positive public perception of the library – good track record of public service
- Good case for seeking the change – improve and stabilize funding, expand service area, seek equity in tax support, etc.
- Modest budget to make the transition – legal fees, consultants, etc.
- 100% commitment to the process on the part of the library board and a willingness to work hard to achieve success
- Solid education and advocacy campaign that will lead to public support for the propositions to create and fund the library and elect trustees

Still not convinced? – Ask those who have made the successful transition

- Chemung County Library District (Elmira) – new district merged two separate libraries into New York State’s first countywide library district. The library was facing closure of branches and reduced funding – it now has a stable tax base and is charting a course for future growth
- Gloversville Public Library – was on the brink of closure due to elimination of city funding. The transition to a school district form of funding and governance not only preserved the existence of the library but provided a stable tax base
- Albany Public Library faced the prospect of closing branches. After its transition to a School District Public Library it was able to double its tax support and pass a referendum to build and/or renovate five branches.
- The Middle Country Library reports on exciting new collaborations with its School District now that both are serving the same community and has established a new “Family Place” program at the library that builds on that relationship
- The above are just four of many libraries reporting good news based on their transition.

Where to get help?

- New York State Library staff is eager to assist
- Public library systems provide expertise and guidance
- Contact one of the 30 libraries that have become public library districts since 2000
- New York State Library web site has a comprehensive guide to “Creating Public Library Districts”
Web address: <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/libs/pldtools/index.html>

For More Information Contact: Bernard A. Margolis, State Librarian and Assistant Commissioner for Libraries, at bmargolis@mail.nysed.gov; (518) 474-5930; Room 10C34, New York State Library, Cultural Education Center, Albany, NY 12230