

Today's library goes far beyond books

Michael Strickland • 01/20/2023

“The only thing that you absolutely have to know,” said Albert Einstein, “is the location of the library.”

Today's library goes far beyond books. In Idaho, especially in small and/or rural areas, the library can be the only place in town to hold a meeting, access reliable, high-speed internet, conduct a private telehealth appointment, or serve as the safe afterschool space.

Based on the needs of their local communities, public libraries loan a variety of items, including board games, learning kits, fishing poles, and musical instruments, and offer an array of support and services, such as help with an employment application or class assignment, resources for changing jobs or starting a business, health and nutrition assistance, and even being a local passport center.

Libraries are funded on the local level, and in Idaho, that funding varies dramatically. For example, in fiscal year 2021, the Prairie District Library had only \$80 to spend on new materials for their collection. And almost 28% of Idaho elementary schools have between zero and \$100 allocated each year from their school district for the purchase of books for the school library.

Local libraries and school libraries elect trustees who are responsible for approving collection development policies. If any resident wants to challenge a book in a library, that issue is handled at the local level.

The Idaho Commission for Libraries (ICfL) is a state agency that assists the more than 850 public, school, academic, and special libraries in Idaho to best serve their communities through: statewide programming and resources, like Read to Me and Libraries Linking Idaho (LiLI); consulting; continuing education; partnerships; and aid to underserved populations, such as the visually impaired through the Idaho Talking Book Service.

The ICfL also supports digital inclusion, through which libraries in the Gem State help Idahoans have access to information and communication technology vital for life in the 21st century. The ICfL facilitates state and federal broadband funding for public libraries, can provide needed technology, particularly to small libraries, and offers information and consulting support. In addition, the Commission offers the e-branch service to public libraries, which enables them to have a web presence, provides a digital skills website, and is lead on the formation of the Digital Access for All Idahoans Plan.

The ICfL provides continuing education grants and professional development opportunities for Idaho library staff. Through the Idaho Digital E-Book Alliance (IDEA), the ICfL makes more than 24,000 e-book and e-audio titles available at no cost to Idaho's public and school libraries. In addition, the ICfL fosters a number of early literacy initiatives, including Jump Start Kindergarten and My First Books, through which, more than 535,000 books have been distributed to children in Idaho since the program began in 1997.

The ICfL also manages federal funding for library projects in Idaho, such as those through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER), which is funding of up to \$1,250,000, and the recent American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding of \$1.8 million that was granted to 48 Idaho libraries. The ARPA funding provided a significant boost to libraries as they helped to keep students learning and adults earning during the pandemic and beyond. Another source of federal funding the ICfL hopes will be supported during the 2023 legislative session is that through the Library Facilities Project. The more than \$3.5 million could be utilized by Idaho libraries to address critical infrastructure needs. This type of federal funding that is allowed to be used for library construction/infrastructure is rare.

The Idaho Commission for Libraries works to help Idaho's libraries meet — and exceed — the ever-evolving needs of their communities. For more on the ICfL, visit <https://libraries.idaho.gov>. (<https://libraries.idaho.gov/>)



About Michael Strickland

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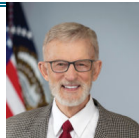
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Our leaders can achieve these eight goals if they are serious about improving Idaho education.

