

## **Onondaga County Public Library Free Direct Access Plan 2022- 2026**

In fulfillment of Commissioner's Regulation 90.3(a) through (d)(4)

Onondaga County Public Library (OCPL) is a federated public library system chartered to serve Onondaga County. As a federated system, it provides services to its 19 independent member libraries as well as being responsible for the 8 library branches and 2 community center libraries, and the Central Library in the city of Syracuse. The Central Library is chartered to serve all residents of Onondaga County.

### **DEFINITIONS**

**Direct Access** is defined as the ability of an individual, who resides within the boundaries of a public library system and who has a valid borrower's card issued by the system or any member library in the system, to borrow materials for home use directly from the premises of any library that is a member of the public library system on the same basis as that specified for cardholders in each individual library.

**Chartered service area** is defined as the geographic area served by a library as stated in charter documents approved by the Board of Regents and on file with the department. Please note that the phrase "and its environs" or equivalent as contained in any charter document will not be recognized by the commissioner as a valid part of the library's chartered service area. For purposes of this section, the commissioner will not recognize areas served by the library under contract or agreement as a valid part of a library's chartered service area.

**Resident borrower** is defined as an individual who resides within the boundaries of the chartered service area of a public library as defined in section 253 of the Education Law and who is a library cardholder at that library.

**Non-resident borrower** is defined as an individual who resides outside the boundaries of the chartered service area of a public library as defined in section 253 of the Education Law and who is a library cardholder at that library or at another member library of the public library system or who is a system cardholder. This definition and plan does not include or address individuals residing outside of the boundaries of the Onondaga County Public Library system.

**Library resources** are defined as the print and non-print materials owned by the library and any other services provided by the library to the resident borrowers of the library's chartered service area.

**On-site use** is defined as the ability of an individual to use library resources on the premises of a library.

**Serious inequities and hardships** are defined as those conditions which adversely affect resident borrowers of member libraries, such as when circulation of library materials to non-resident users is excessive and significantly deprives local residents of the opportunity to borrow library materials.

**Unserved** is defined as those individuals residing in geographic areas that are within the boundaries of a public library system but outside the boundaries of a chartered service area of a library which is a member of that system. Note that since the OCPL Central Library is chartered to serve all of Onondaga County there are no unserved individuals in Onondaga County

**Underserved** is defined as those individuals residing in geographic areas that are within the chartered service area of a member library and which the public library system had identified as having an inadequate level of local income to support the delivery of acceptable library services.

**Member Libraries** means the public libraries in the library system's service area chartered by the Board of Regents of the State of New York to provide public library service to the residents of their chartered service areas within the Onondaga County (and associated school districts for a school district library). This includes the Syracuse City Branches and the Central library.

**System Meeting** is a meeting called and run by the OCPL system to include representation from all OCPL system members.

**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.**

Individuals residing within the boundaries of OCPL but outside a member library's chartered service area will receive library services via:

- Free direct access at any member library
- Intra-system borrowing from any member library
- Downloadable e-content collection access
- Library services provided by the OCPL Central Library, chartered to serve all of Onondaga County
- Remote access via the OCPL website and the online catalog

Onondaga County libraries have one card which is honored at all libraries in the system, providing seamless access to all residents of the system charter area. No fees are imposed by any OCPL library on any Onondaga County resident.

**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.**

Individuals residing within the boundaries of Onondaga County in an area where a member library chooses to withdraw from OCPL will continue to receive the same suite of library services available to all residents of the OCPL service area (see #1 above):

- Free direct access at any member library
- Intra-system borrowing from any member library
- Downloadable e-content collection access
- Library services provided by the OCPL Central Library, chartered to serve all of Onondaga County
- Remote access via the OCPL website and the online catalog

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

Note that OCPL intra-system borrowing via the shared Integrated Library System combined with a system-provided delivery service is highly valued by both staff and patrons of the OCPL libraries.

OCPL member libraries believe serious inequities and hardships are present when circulation of library materials to non-resident users is excessive and significantly deprives local residents of the opportunity to borrow library materials.

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

If in the future a difference of more than 10% exists between a library’s borrowing and its lending, the impact on that library and the other member libraries will be examined by System administration and OCPL member libraries. Note that Central Library items are not included in these counts since Central Library items serve all County residents

5.

**a) Describe the unserved and the underserved populations within the system.**

Since OCPL Central Library and system is chartered to serve all of Onondaga County, technically there are no unserved areas within the county. Only a small percentage of the county's residents are not within a specific member's chartered service area, and those residents are served by whichever library they choose to visit, including the Central Library.

**b) 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 service (underserved). List those libraries so identified.**

The OCPL criteria for determining an adequate level of support is the member library's ability to comply with minimum standards for public libraries as described in New York State education law and New York State Commissioner's Regulations ([http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/excerpts/finished\\_regs/902.htm](http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/excerpts/finished_regs/902.htm)). Each member library reports on their compliance with the NYS minimum standards in the annual report. If the library is in compliance with the minimum standards, or if the Commissioner of Education has granted a waiver from one or more of the standards, the library is deemed to have an adequate level of support.

All libraries in OCPL report compliance with NYS minimum standards or have a waiver granted by the Commissioner of Education.

Thus said, all libraries can benefit from additional sustainable funding. OCPL supports libraries working to achieve this with trustee training sessions, distribution of information from NYS Library DLD and other information sources regarding funding, and through consultation with the OCPL system staff.

**c) Describe the actions the system will take to expand the availability of library services to unserved and underserved individuals residing within the boundaries of the system.**

Since the inception of the system in 1976, all member libraries have pointed to one library card as a tangible product of cooperation and collaboration, and all OCPL member libraries all direct or indirect access to their collections by residents of Onondaga County.

Onondaga County is a compact geographic area, with most residents within a short distance of a library building where they are welcome, regardless of their physical location within the County.

In addition, the system is pursuing services (such as mobile maker kits and popup library equipment), which can be provided to the smaller libraries and outside of traditional library buildings enabling an increase in library services in areas any level of service.

**d) Provide a timetable for such actions.**

These actions are ongoing.

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

The OCPL Executive Director, the OCPL Director of Library Information Systems, and the OCPL Member Services Coordinator work with member directors, member library trustees and the OCPL Board and administrators.

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

**a) Without the prior approval of the Commissioner of Education**

Agreements may be made with the approval of the OCPL Administration and a majority of member libraries for certain limitations to the plan. Examples of such modifications are restricting holds on new materials for a specified period of time to local borrowers only and blocking holds on certain popular, expensive, fragile, or rare items if purchased with local funds. Items not holdable may be available for use or borrowing by card holders who go to the holding library (“on-site use”).

It is noted that the access to electronic library materials is at this time being dictated by the vendors of the electronic resources and the access is not under control of the purchasing library. However, in many cases, electronic library materials may be available for on-site use in the owning library by any resident of Onondaga County.

After recommendations from a system-level electronic content committee, certain electronic resources are purchased with system funds for use by all residents of the system. The system also supports consortial platforms for e-content and all member libraries purchase materials for those platforms to be shared by all residents of the system.

**b) With the prior approval of the Commissioner of Education**

Although the system does not anticipate the need for any modifications requiring the prior approval of the Commissioner of Education, the following path may be followed by a member library:

A library may request a waiver from the Commissioner of Education to impose restrictions beyond those mentioned in this plan if a majority of the other member libraries agree to support such a waiver. The request for this waiver will be made in writing to OCPL and must include the following elements:

- Element 1 - Documentation of the serious inequities and hardships affecting the resident borrowers of the member library making the request.
- Element 2 - The proposed restrictions that will be implemented and a description of the anticipated impact on resident and non-resident borrowers.
- Element 3 - Recommendations for remedying the underlying inequity with a proposed timetable for action.

**7. Describe how the system will assure that member libraries are complying with the system free direct access plan approved by a majority of member libraries.**

Upon adoption by the OCPL Board of Trustees and approval by the Commissioner of Education, the OCPL Free Direct Access Plan will be distributed to all member libraries and posted on the OCPL website. OCPL will lead a discussion on the Free Direct Access Plan at a regular OCPL System meeting to review the plan in detail and reinforce the importance of compliance with the plan.

OCPL will be prompt and responsive to any queries or concerns from member libraries regarding compliance with the OCPL Free Direct Access Plan

**8. Describe how the system obtained member library input to the plan for free direct access.**

From the guidelines: A simple majority vote by the member libraries is needed to approve the free direct access portion of the system plan. A copy of the vote results must be attached to the system plan. (<https://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/fda/guidelines.htm>)

Therefore this plan was developed as below:

- Draft plan developed by OCPL staff based on previous Free Direct Access Plan and experiences within OCPL involving resource sharing and free direct access issues.
- Distributed for review and consideration to the OCPL member directors.
- Reviewed and discussed at the 7/20/2021 OCPL System Meeting.
- Approved by OCPL Member Directors at the 8/3/2021 OCSLD Meeting.
- Approved by the OCPL Board of Trustees at their 8/18/2021 meeting.