**Fiscal Facts: Library funding remains a priority for Wisconsin local governments**

Recent trends in how Wisconsin local governments fund their local libraries suggest they remain a priority, even as the way in which libraries serve their communities is rapidly changing.

From 2000 to 2018, Wisconsin public libraries’ operating revenues and expenditures rose around 40% across city libraries, 70% across suburban and town libraries, and over 100% across rural libraries. By comparison, the Consumer Price Index rose 45.8% over those years.

In 2000, 86.8% of the $164.2 million in revenues that supported libraries in Wisconsin came from either municipal or county sources, such as the property tax. In 2018, that rose to 89.9% of $256.4 million of overall funding. In the same time span, libraries’ share of the funds allocated by counties and municipalities for culture, recreation, and education rose from 34.0% to 38.2%.

Reflecting the changing role of libraries, spending increases across categories have varied since 2000. Compared to a 59.5% increase in overall library spending from 2000 to 2018, spending on library materials has only increased 11.9%.

Though it remains a relatively small portion of library budgets overall, spending on contract services has skyrocketed, increasing 95.0% from $6.1 million to $11.9 million, possibly to assist patrons in using the new software and information technologies that are fixtures in today’s libraries.

These funding trends, based on data from the state Department of Public Instruction, suggest that municipalities and counties have viewed libraries as a priority and have kept up their commitments of local taxes and discretionary state aid. Of course, it is uncertain whether that funding can be sustained in the face of competing service demands in challenging local budgets.

*This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at wispolicyforum.org.*