



Ohio Sunset Review Committee

Agency Questionnaire

Agency Name Ohio Public Library Information Network

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Agency's primary purpose and its various goals and objectives:

The Ohio Public Library Information Network (OPLIN) is established in Ohio Revised Code section 3375.64, "...for the purpose of ensuring equity of access to electronic information for all residents of this state." OPLIN provides this equal access to electronic information by: 1) purchasing internet connections for Ohio public library systems, which then provide direct internet services to Ohio residents; 2) purchasing access to a basic collection of digital information that may otherwise be difficult or impossible to find (www.ohioweblibrary.org), so it will be available for any resident of Ohio; and 3) assisting Ohio public libraries with technologies that help them deliver information to their users.

For Ohio residents who are unemployed and those living at or below the poverty level, OPLIN plays a critical role through public libraries by providing these residents with access to the digital information they need in order to succeed scholastically, look for employment, or participate in beneficial public and private assistance programs.

Agency's past and anticipated workload, number of staff required to complete workload, and total number of staff:

When the FY 2008-2009 budget request was submitted in October 2006, OPLIN had seven filled positions. Since the FY 2010-2011 budget, only five filled positions (5.0 FTE) have been authorized for funding. Because OPLIN relies heavily on the State Library to handle work related to fiscal, personnel, and other non-technical duties, the remaining five OPLIN staff members now focus almost exclusively on technical work. These five staff all have to be highly skilled and talented in the field of information technology in order to keep OPLIN functional. Since salaries are such a small portion of the total OPLIN budget, funds have been available to retain this talented staff. This is especially important as some public libraries are not able to take full advantage of the OPLIN-provided services because of local technical problems that are beyond the ability of local library staff to solve. In such cases, the OPLIN staff can use their expertise to assist libraries with solving such problems and ensure they receive the maximum benefit of OPLIN services.

Agency's past and anticipated budgets and its sources of funding:

OPLIN is currently funded with \$3,689,788 annually from the Public Library Fund (Fund 4S40 and ALI 350-604). In addition to that appropriation, \$2,000,000 in spending authority supports receipt of non-state revenue, primarily E-Rate reimbursements from telecommunication vendors, a federal program operated through the Schools and Libraries Division of the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC). The revenue from E-Rate is unpredictable; E-Rate reimbursements are only granted upon successful completion and review of complex applications. Typically, OPLIN can expect to receive over \$1 million annually in reimbursements; however, anticipated revenue has been received some years while in other years only a portion or none of the revenue has been received.

From FY2005 through FY2009, OPLIN's state funding was drawn from the General Revenue Fund (GRF). From FY2010 through FY2015, OPLIN was funded by a transfer of funds from the Public Library Fund (PLF). This transfer was offset by a concurrent transfer of funds from the GRF to the PLF in the FY2010-2011 biennium; in the FY2012-2013 biennium, this offsetting transfer of funds from the GRF to the PLF was discontinued.

OPLIN's annual budget has not changed since FY 2012, when OPLIN funding started to be drawn from the PLF without reimbursement. So long as OPLIN funding continues to be drawn from the PLF, it is unlikely the budget will change.

The OPLIN administrative and personnel costs are exceptionally small, comprising less than 10% of total expenditures. Therefore, increases in personnel costs do not affect OPLIN as much as they do other agencies. Instead, OPLIN struggles with: the cost of migrating to next-generation technologies; cost increases from electronic database vendors; and increasing costs for internet bandwidth, driven by the increasing demand from the citizens who use Ohio public libraries for internet access.

OPLIN vigorously strives to control these cost points, but in the end must spend whatever is required to avoid any degradation of its services to Ohio residents and public libraries. As public library users continue steadily to increase their demand for bandwidth (about 30% greater each year), particularly as unemployment resources and government services increasingly are provided only over the internet, telecommunication costs will also increase accordingly; but this service is fundamental to everything OPLIN does and cannot be eliminated, nor are service reductions in this area appropriate.

Because the telecommunications portion of the OPLIN budget cannot be reduced, it has occasionally been necessary to implement reductions in the subscriptions to online information. OPLIN, INFOhio (K-12 libraries), OhioLINK (academic libraries), and the State Library cooperate in the purchase of electronic databases for our respective users and try to contribute funds in an equitable manner, but reductions in each entity's funds available for these purchases affects the ability of all three to provide access to this premium information. OPLIN, for example, has had to eliminate statewide online access to Ohio's leading newspapers, as well as limiting the availability of Ohio legislative news reports through the public libraries.

Number of members of its governing board or other governing entity and their compensation, if any:

The OPLIN governing board is created under section 3375.65 of the Ohio Revised Code; members are appointed to three-year terms by the State Library Board. The OPLIN Board consists of eleven members who are directors, staff, and past or present trustees of public libraries. The Board actively seeks membership that represents all parts of Ohio, and all sizes of public libraries, in order to reflect the diverse interests of Ohio's 251 independent libraries, and to serve the best interests of Ohio's many library patrons and information consumers. Board members receive no compensation other than reimbursement of their actual and necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties as board members. The OPLIN Board holds public meetings six times each year; minutes of the meetings are published at <https://www.oplin.ohio.gov/content/board-minutes-archive>.

Agency-recommended legislative changes to improve organizational efficiency:

No changes are requested at this time.

Additional notes:

Although no law, federal or otherwise, requires that OPLIN be renewed, the need for OPLIN continues and is greater than in 1995, as the public library systems we support have become the backbone for internet access for so many Ohio citizens, including many who need public library internet to apply for employment or use government services. Ohio public libraries currently provide about 14,000 public internet workstations for Ohioans, and this access is critical for completing school work, searching for jobs, starting new businesses, and finding state services available through the internet. Ohio public libraries depend on OPLIN to keep them connected to the internet, and to keep essential electronic information flowing to all Ohioans.