![Washington County Cooperative Library Services]

Washington County Cooperative Library Services – Governance and Funding Evaluation

Project Charter

July 16, 2024

MERINA+CO

Introduction

Public library service in Washington County (County) is provided by a partnership between Washington County, nine cities, and three nonprofit organizations (together known as the Cooperative). This long-standing partnership has been in place since 1976. Washington County Cooperative Library Services (WCCLS) is a department of Washington County, and provides funding, core infrastructure, and support services to link sixteen library buildings into one countywide system which benefits all County residents. Library buildings are operated by city and non-profit partner agencies (partners), and partners provide staff, physical collections, programs, and services. The member libraries of the Cooperative include the cities of Banks, Beaverton, Cornelius, Forest Grove, Hillsboro, North Plains, Sherwood, Tigard, Tualatin, as well as the Aloha Community Library Association, Cedar Mill and Bethany Community Libraries Association, and Garden Home Community Library Association.

In February 2024, Merina+Co (MCO), a local consulting firm, was contracted to conduct an evaluation of the existing Cooperative. Under the direction of Washington County and in collaboration with representatives from Cooperative partners, MCO will be facilitating a process for evaluating the current state of the system and developing mutually agreeable solutions for both and near- and long-term improvements to Cooperative funding, library service delivery, and governance.

The purpose of this Project Charter (Charter) is to document key project information in order to establish shared understanding of overarching project goals and objectives, key project success measures, project scope, stakeholders and shared criteria for evaluating the current state and future alternatives of the Cooperative.

Background

For Washington County libraries to continue to provide these critical services to the community into the future, WCCLS and partners must explore crucial questions about funding and governance. There is increasing pressure on County and partner financial resources, and the cost to deliver service is outpacing available revenues. The system and partners would benefit from a rational and sustainable model for funding and delivering library service in our County, which would address the following needs:

- Develop a consistent funding formula with specific criteria that establishes how much County funding each partner agency receives, to equitably serve diverse communities.
- Explore a minimum or matching local funding commitment for partners to receive County funding for libraries.
- Create a countywide base level of library service, including a mechanism to plan and fund library service points based on countywide analysis of community demographic data, future developments, and geography.

Project Purpose, Goals, and Objectives

The purpose of this project is to facilitate a process to evaluate the current state of the system and develop mutually agreeable solutions to meet the identified needs. County, cities, and nonprofits all agree that the Cooperative is stronger together, support the value of public libraries in our communities, and want to work in partnership to deliver library service in a sustainable, effective, and equitable way.

Project Goals and Objectives – Phase 1 and 2

WCCLS and partners have the shared desire to address long-standing funding and governance issues, and have identified the following goals and objectives for Phases 1 and 2:

Goal 1: Improve service consistency and equity across the County.	
Objectives	**Outcome**
Establish a common understanding of current service levels and total costs	Summary of current service levels provided across the system. Analysis of total cost to provide current services.
Establish base library service levels available for all county residents	Recommendations for base library service levels, including: • Operating hours • Staffing levels, • Publicly accessible square footage, • Culturally relevant services and collections, • Technology resources and access, and • Geographic distribution of library services points, etc.
Evaluate and refine partner roles in providing base level service to the community	Evaluate the roles of Washington County, WCCLS, WCCLS Executive Board, and WCCLS Policy Group in governance of the cooperative. Determine which services WCCLS provides to support the baseline service level

Goal 2: Support community needs by creating a library system with a fiscally sustainable future.	
Objectives	**Outcome**
Identify options for funding base level library services	Recommendations for sustainable funding levels, potential funding mechanisms, etc. Potential levy rates for FY26-27 through FY30-31 to be placed on the November 2025 ballot.
Establish metrics to allocate funding for partners operating libraries	Recommendations for the use of consistent data sets (demographics, population growth, geography). Service boundaries for each partner library. Agreed upon criteria to determine funding distributions.

Project Success Measures

The following measures of success have been established for this project:

- 2/3 of nine city libraries and 2/3 of three nonprofit libraries agree to recommended proposals to the Board of County Commissioners.
- A range of sustainable voter supported funding mechanisms are identified for both near-term and longer-term needs.
- Baseline library service levels are consistent, and outputs (services) are rationally linked to

inputs (funding), and funding allocations are tied to logical and equitable metrics.

- Increased accountability for county resources and for county services provided to partners.

Project Scope

An objective and data-driven approach to developing and evaluating future alternatives for the Cooperative's model for service, funding, and governance fosters transparency and accountability within decision-making processes, building trust and confidence in the chosen solutions. To accomplish this, Phase 1 will focus on establishing a foundation for project and Cooperative success by establishing a common vision for describing success of the Cooperative. Phase 1 will also assess the current state of the Cooperative to understand opportunities for improvement and identify near-term recommendations for funding and base service levels in line with shared criteria. Phase 2 aims to identify, evaluate, and build alignment on alternative methodologies for establishing Cooperative service boundaries, funding formulas, and governance models. The selected changes will be implemented through intergovernmental agreements in Phase 3 and a roadmap of long-term recommendations will be developed in Phase 4. Table 1 provides a high-level overview and description of deliverables associated with each project task.

Table 1: Description of tasks and associated deliverables for each project phase

Project Task	Overview	Deliverables
Phase 1		
Task 1: Project Management and Engagement/ Communications Planning	Establish a foundation for project success by facilitating development of a clear and concise Project Charter and Stakeholder Engagement Plan.	+ Project Charter + Stakeholder Engagement Plan
Task 2: Information Gathering and Benchmarking	Conduct a thorough period of information gathering focused on building a better understanding of the "current state", including Document and Data Review, Internal Stakeholder Engagement, Community Engagement, and Benchmarking	
Task 3: Defining Success	Utilize collaborative work sessions to develop a shared vision and criteria to provide a unified and objective framework for evaluating specific alternatives and options for service, funding, and governance moving forward.	+ "Definition of Success" including shared values and interests, vision, and agreed-upon criteria.
Task 4: Defining the Current State	Perform and present a detailed assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the current Cooperative through the lens of each Partner organization, the combined Cooperative, and the community as a whole by utilizing the shared vision and criteria to assess the current model and identify the opportunities and challenges.	+ Current state assessment report outlining current service levels and costs to provide current levels of service.
Task 5: Future State Analysis – Base Service Levels and Near-Term Funding	Utilize the identified gaps in service, funding, and governance to begin the process of determining the near-term opportunities to advance the Cooperative's path towards the definition of success. Utilize collaborative work sessions to establish clear alternatives for providing a defined level of service while also modeling cost impacts across the Cooperative as a whole.	+ Future-state baseline service levels and costs assessment + Three to five funding alternatives for FY26-27 to FY30-31.
Phase 2		

Task 6: Future State Analysis – Service Boundaries	Conduct benchmarking research and analysis to identify and evaluate alternative methodologies for establishing service area boundaries. Utilize collaborative work sessions to build consensus and develop recommendations regarding a preferred methodology and factors for establishing service area boundaries in alignment with the shared criteria.	+ Report outlining recommended service boundaries for libraries.
Task 7: Future State Analysis – Funding Formula	Conduct benchmarking research and analysis to identify and evaluate alternative methodologies for funding allocation formulas. Utilize collaborative work sessions to build consensus and develop recommendations regarding a preferred funding allocation methodology in alignment with the shared criteria.	+ Report outlining recommended funding formula criteria and distribution methodology + High-level financial projections for the Cooperative, WCCLS, and each Partner based on the recommended formula.
Task 8: Future State Analysis – Governance	Conduct benchmarking research and analysis to identify and evaluate alternative governance structures. Utilize collaborative work sessions to build consensus and develop recommendations regarding a preferred alternatives for addressing primary governance challenges in alignment with the shared criteria.	+ Report outlining recommended near-term governance improvements.
Phase 3		
Task 9: Intergovernmental Agreements	After determining near-term recommendations for service levels, service boundaries, funding formula, and governance improvements, facilitate a process for proposing, reviewing, and adopting revisions to the intergovernmental agreements (IGAs).	+ Draft intergovernmental agreements
Phase 4		
Task 10: Long-Term Recommendations and Roadmap	Identify, evaluate, and map a realistic and sustainable path forward toward the Cooperative's long-term future in alignment with the shared criteria.	+ Report outlining long-term recommendations and a roadmap for implementation.

Project Stakeholders

Engaging stakeholders and securing buy-in is vital for the success of the project and the long-term sustainability of the Cooperative. A separate Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Plan has been developed to establish the strategy for engaging stakeholders. The purpose of this section is to identify the key project stakeholders involved in collaborating through the work of this evaluation and their relative level of engagement and impact on decision-making. The following stakeholders make up the primary project team:

- **Washington County Board of Commissioners (BCC):** governing board of the Cooperative
- **WCCLS Executive Board:** advisory body to WCCLS staff and the BCC consisting of executive administrative leadership of partner agencies/organizations
- **WCCLS Policy Group:** advisory body to WCCLS staff and the WCCLS Executive Board consisting of library directors of partner agencies/organizations
- **WCCLS:** leadership and staff from the County providing operational funding, critical infrastructure, digital collections and support services to the Cooperative
- **County Residents**

As project sponsors, Washington County's Board of Commissioners has directed and supports the following level of engagement for the primary project stakeholder groups using the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)'s spectrum for mapping impact on decision-making (Figure 1).

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions. County Residents	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. WCCLS Policy Group	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. WCCLS Executive Board	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

Figure 1: IAP2 Spectrum Matrix For defining level of engagement and impact on decision-making related to the project

The WCCLS Executive Board, Policy Group, and the community all have a significant role in informing and shaping the outcomes of this project.

- **County Residents** will be *consulted* to provide feedback on current and desired library services at key points throughout the project.
- The **WCCLS Policy Group** will be *involved* throughout the project to ensure that their perspectives as subject matter experts in library services are consistency heard, understood, and considered.
- The **WCCLS Executive Board** will *collaborate* in defining the success of project outcomes, evaluating alternatives, and reaching collective agreement on the proposed alternatives for the Cooperative's future approach to service, governance, and funding.
- The **Washington County Board of County Commissioners (BCC)** will have final decision making regarding the outcomes of the project and items to be put forth to the community for voting.

While the BCC has final decision-making authority regarding project outcomes, the WCCLS Executive Board, Policy Group, as well as WCCLS Staff and County Administration, each have critical roles and responsibilities in accomplishing the desired project outcomes. Table 2 outlines high-level roles and responsibilities for specific project activities. In addition, the perspectives and expertise of Partner library boards, governing bodies, associations, and staff serve as key inputs into evaluating the current and future state of the Cooperative.

Table 2: RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) Matrix used to define project roles and responsibilities for specific tasks

	Responsible *for doing the work and fulfilling the objectives of the project*	**Accountable** *for the outcomes of the work and critical decisions*	**Consulted** *on critical questions, challenges, and decisions*	**Informed** *of project progress and outcomes*
County Residents		**Vote on potential levy rates** for FY26-27 through FY30-31	Consulted on **community perspective** the current state and desired future state of the Partnership through community engagement efforts.	
Board of County Commissioners (BCC)		Provide **final decision** making on project outcomes.		Kept informed of project progress and outcomes.
WCCLS Executive Board		Accountable for ensuring the **interests of the respective Partner organization and associated subject matter experts (finance, library operations, etc.) are accurately represented** in the evaluation. Accountable for ensuring the necessary project **information is communicated** to respective governing entities and Policy Group members. Accountable to Partners for **prioritizing the success of the countywide library system** in project outcomes.	Consulted on **Partner organization perspective** in the establishment of shared criteria, the definition of the current state, and the definition of the future state for the Partnership.	

WCCLS Policy Group		Accountable for providing accurate and complete information and **subject matter expertise** to their respective WCCLS Executive Board members in support of the evaluation.	Consulted on **Partner library subject matter expertise** in the establishment of shared criteria, the definition of the current state, and the definition of the future state for the Partnership.	
WCCLS	Responsible **for supporting MCO in accomplishing scope of work** and providing any requested and relevant information to support the evaluation.	Accountable to Partners for **prioritizing the success of the countywide library system** in project outcomes. Accountable to the CAO and the BCC in ensuring **accurate representation of the County's interests** in project outcomes.	Consulted on **WCCLS and County perspective** in the establishment of shared criteria, the definition of the current state, and the definition of the future state for the Partnership.	
Washington County Administration (CAO)		Accountable for ensuring **the scope of work is accomplished** by the Project Management Team. Accountable to Partners for **prioritizing the success of the countywide library system** in project outcomes. Accountable to BCC in ensuring **accurate representation of the County's interests** in project outcomes.		Kept informed of project progress and outcomes.

Shared Vision and Criteria

The efficacy and sustainability of project outcomes is dependent on first establishing a collectively agreed-upon vision and criteria for the future state of the Cooperative. The shared criteria provide a basis for evaluating the current state of the Cooperative to identify gaps in the ability of the Cooperative's existing service, governance, and funding mechanisms to achieve the desired results. The shared criteria will additionally provide an objective framework for evaluating alternatives and reaching collective agreement regarding proposed future baseline service levels, near-term funding options, service boundaries, funding allocation methodologies, and governance models, as well as long-term changes to the Cooperative.

The following shared criteria[1] have been established for this project:

Service

S1	Ensures equitable access to materials, information, and resources
S2	Is responsive to the needs of our diverse community
S3	Leverages the use of resources across the Cooperative to create efficiency and economies of scale
S4	Provides a consistent level of base services to all community members
S5	Maintains unique library identities
S6	Addresses differences between Partners in ability to provide services

Funding

F1	Allocates funding according to a transparent and objective methodology
F2	Provides reliable and stable funding sources
F3	Sustains base service levels
F4	Optimizes the use of Cooperative resources to provide library services at a reasonable cost to the community
F5	Allocates resources to promote system-wide outcomes
F6	Continually invests in library services
F7	Addresses the differences in available funding capacity and constraints across the Cooperative

Governance

G1	Provides Partners a meaningful role in governance and decision-making related to the Cooperative
G2	Provides a long-term solution for governance and decision-making
G3	Enables Partner libraries to make operational and policy decisions that reflect individual community values
G4	Establishes a unified vision and direction for library services
G5	Provides mutual accountability over Cooperative services and funding
G6	Provides representation for all community members in the County
G7	Facilitates efficient countywide decision-making in response to community needs

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[1] The Shared Criteria are an aspirational vision for the ideal state of the Cooperative and provides a framework for evaluating key trade-offs and factors in deciding how to make service, funding, and governance improvements in line with the Shared Vision. The Shared Criteria DO NOT represent a comprehensive list of what is possible or will be accomplished.