

The State Aid Public Libraries program during Covid-19

As the COVID-19 Pandemic continues, the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) has created guidance to ensure that libraries will be able to meet State requirements for State Aid to Public Libraries. We know libraries and their services become especially crucial during economic downturns, providing internet access, computers, job searching resources, and professional reference services for those who are affected. It is critical to keep libraries open, funded, and staffed so that they can continue to give residents information and educational resources in this time of need.

1.

What changes have been made to the State Aid to Public Libraries program due to the impact of COVID-19?

When COVID-19 hit in March 2020, libraries still had several months ahead of them in which to meet the materials expenditure requirement and the hours open requirement. The MBLC recognized that with the closure of library buildings, it was likely that many libraries would have difficulty meeting these requirements. In April, the **Commissioners voted*** to count all libraries as having fulfilled both the materials expenditure requirement and the hours open requirement for FY2020. This matters because libraries need to have met these requirements in order to apply for the FY2021 State Aid to Public Libraries program.

* <https://mblc.state.ma.us/news/news-releases/2020/nr200406.php>

2.

Do we still need to meet the Municipal Appropriation Requirement (MAR)?

Yes. The **MAR*** is in statute. However, waivers of the MAR exist to help libraries maintain certification even if they do not receive full MAR funding. As long as libraries meet other requirements, most notably materials expenditure and hours open (see #1), they are eligible to apply for a waiver. As part of the **MAR waiver process***, Commissioners review petitions for waivers during their January meeting and vote on MAR waivers at their February meeting.

* <https://mblc.state.ma.us/programs-and-support/state-aid-and-aris/regs-standards.php>

* <https://mblc.state.ma.us/programs-and-support/state-aid-and-aris/policies.php>

3.

Will the MBLC make other changes to the program for 2021 due to the pandemic?

FY2021 program requirements remain unchanged for the time being. However, MBLC staff are closely monitoring the COVID-19 situation and its impact on library services. Safety is a priority for staff and patrons and no library should provide services unless it is able to do so safely. Commissioners will consider adjustments to program requirements as needed.

4.

We're in challenging economic times, why should my municipality stay certified in the State Aid to Public Libraries program?

Libraries typically see an increase in usage during an economic downturn and being certified in the program can help meet residents' needs by giving them access to millions of items from across the state. This access through statewide resource sharing actually saves your community money because not every item a resident needs has to be purchased. See how many items your residents borrowed from other libraries and how much your community saved; and learn more about why staying certified is important for your residents and community

<https://mblc.state.ma.us/programs-and-support/state-aid-and-aris/benefits-state-aid.php>

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