

NJ Library Construction Bond Act - June 18, 2019 Update:

The movement to establish the Library Construction Bond initiative was a grassroots effort led by the New Jersey Library Association. Without their hard work, commitment, and belief in the value that libraries provide to their communities and the state, this program never would have materialized.

The State Legislature passed this bill shortly after midnight on July 4 2017. The bill benefitted from strong bipartisan support in both the State Assembly and the State Senate.

On July 21, 2017, Governor Christie approved P.L. 2017, Chapter 149, which called for a referendum for the New Jersey Library Construction Bond Act. This act authorized the issuance of \$125 million in general obligation bonds to finance capital projects at public libraries. Under the bill, grants to libraries will support 50% of the cost of any approved project financed by bond proceeds and the libraries (through their own funds or those of their local governing entity) will support 50% of the cost.

The referendum, passed on November 7, 2017 by a 60/40 margin.

The State Library, working with TESU, started immediately to lay groundwork for this program. Tina Keresztury, the former program manager from the earlier library construction program initiated two decades ago, joined us on a very limited basis immediately following the election to guide us through the necessary processes.

We owe the previous administration a thank you for advancing the referendum to the ballot; however, they were not in a position to move the initiative itself ahead in their few remaining months. As a result, it was not possible immediately to build on the momentum that brought about the legislative and ballot success.

In retrospect, this was not necessarily a bad thing. In establishing this program, there was a need to be thoughtful about what is happening in the state, in communities, and in libraries.

This past autumn, once the other required agencies and offices were all available to participate, we were able to advance the initiative. Through our work with the 7-8 other agencies involved, we have learned from them of difficulties that

occurred in other similar programs, and developed a stronger program as we moved forward.

We know there is a great need in NJ for the services and community support that libraries provide. As we are framing the program, it is with the goal that these investments reach across many communities and align with broader state investments. The Library Construction Bond program should not be seen as a peripheral initiative on the outskirts of the state's agenda. Rather, it is in alignment with and fits into broader investments in the communities of New Jersey.

In order to get a glimpse of the immediate need, on May 1, 2019 the State Library distributed a quick turnaround survey, which closed May 17. The Survey identified over 170 projects totaling over \$370 million. We recognize that ultimately the number will be significantly higher, but this at least provides some estimate of the upcoming workload.

In the last week of May 2019 we have reached a major milestone. On May 30, the DRAFT Library Construction Bond Regulations were officially received by the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) on a timeline appropriate for publication in the July 1 Register. July 1 marks the beginning of a 60-day public comment period, to be followed by a 30-day response period, and then within several weeks the adoption and reposting of the final regulations and an announcement of the solicitation for proposals. The application window will allow 90 days for submission. The State Library anticipates grant applications being due early in calendar year 2020.

Applications will be reviewed by a committee who will make recommendations to the State Librarian. Once the State Librarian has finalized the slate, it will be submitted first to the University President for approval, and then to the State Legislature for their action.

We all recognize that this is not a massive amount of money. However, because we are investing in libraries, this is a major investment in our residents and communities. These investments will reach beyond the structures themselves. They are investments in individuals, families, and businesses in our communities through supporting learning, education, economic growth and stability. These projects are intended to be of strong and lasting value to their communities.