

## Accreditation Principles

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Suggested principles regarding the administrative rules for public library accreditation (these are substantially the same as the principles used by the 2003-2005 taskforce):

1. The purpose of the State Library's accreditation criteria is to define the minimum requirements for public library membership in the Texas Library System (TLS). The accreditation process determines eligibility for most programs and services of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC), such as TexShare programs, Interlibrary Loan, funding for projects such as mobile technology, and competitive grants. Accreditation is not designed to evaluate the adequacy of a public library's staff, budget, resources, or services. Since the criteria are minimal, they are not a guarantee that any library has all the resources sufficient to maintain and operate as a "good" public library in Texas. It is also not designed to limit or restrict the number of communities in Texas that wish to operate a public library. Certain key criteria will be used to determine whether a particular library is or is not a public library.
2. Most current Texas public libraries should be able to meet any new minimum criteria; the criteria should be inclusive, not exclusive. For example, new minimum criteria that exclude more than 10 percent of the current members would seem excessive. Generally, any new minimum criteria should be set to include about 95 percent of the current members.
3. Any new minimum criteria should be clear and understandable. Communities should know with long range certainty what "number" they will be required to reach; using measures such as yearly medians or rolling averages would inject too much uncertainty. They also susceptible to math errors.
4. Any new minimum criteria should not impose a large data collection and reporting burden on libraries. We want library staff to spend as much of their time as possible on public service, not on administrative tasks.
5. Any new minimum criteria should not increase the agency's staffing required to process the data. Since we will have no more resources to analyze and report the data, the new criteria cannot require an increased workload. Further, if new criteria are complex and numerous, that would require additional resources to train and consult with local libraries, and we will not have these resources either.
6. Any new minimum criteria should not impose such detailed requirements on a local community that they have the effect of removing their local control.
7. All accreditation criteria should be designed to be enforced. While there may be reasons to "waive" a criterion in certain situations, if the waivers are widely and frequently requested and routinely granted, there is little or no apparent purpose for that criterion. If libraries can simply check "yes" or "no" to a criterion that is complicated and multi-dimensional without any outside review of the library's compliance, there is little or no apparent purpose for that criterion.
8. The minimum criteria should remain in effect at least three years. Widespread confusion and mistakes would occur if we have to revise the criteria from year to year.

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9. The minimum criteria for accreditation should also:
  - a. be reasonably attainable by a community that wants to start a public library;
  - b. be reasonably attainable by a community that has already established a public library;
  - c. be easy to explain to the local librarian, city/county administrator, or elected official;
  - d. be directly related to library services and activities;
  - e. be based on data that is timely and readily available in the libraries;
  - f. be objective, numerical data, not subjective actions;
  - g. be easy to calculate;
  - h. be a fixed target, not a moving one;
  - i. be "input-related," not "output-related"; i.e., related to the resources the library receives, not to the services the library provides to its community;
  - j. not be subject to potential wide fluctuations from year to year;
  - k. enable local public communities to control how they allocate their own expenditures, resources, services, or staff, and not be seen as attempting to limit local control of library services or operations.