Libraries & Communities: Creating Excellent Libraries

A statewide vision for Washington libraries
2008-2012

Acknowledgements

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Background

This document is a product of discussions at four, one-day conferences held in Washington State in February 2007. The conferences brought together library directors, staff and trustees, along with community members and youth and adult library customers to focus on what libraries and their communities could do to assure excellent libraries.

This statewide plan summarizes a collaborative vision towards which library leaders should strive. It is a general plan, and the objectives are to be accomplished at many levels, including local, regional and state. Not every significant library service or issue is included in this plan – only those that were deemed most critical to the future of libraries or which have not yet been fully realized.

The statewide plan provides a guide to Washington libraries as they work collaboratively to achieve mutually supportive goals. In addition, it forms the framework of the Library Services and Technology Act five-year plan that will direct how federal funds are used to support library development in the state. That plan will be contained in a companion document.

What is the context for this plan?

The library and community members who created this statewide plan for library development built it upon the unique characteristics of the libraries of Washington State.

Public libraries

With 66 public libraries, Washington State has far fewer libraries than most other states and those libraries include wider units of service, which generally produce more efficient and, often, more proficient libraries. Circulation of public library materials continues to climb, but answers to reference questions have declined since 1999.

Public library directors are positioning themselves to become key players in the early childhood arena and subgroups of public library directors are working on issues of state funding for a virtual library and renewed discussion of a statewide library card.

School libraries

School libraries may be the most threatened of all types of libraries in Washington. Numerous studies show that good library media services and staffing are related to better student performance. Still, teacher-librarian positions have been eliminated when school budgets are tight, and some school libraries in the state operate with as little as $1,000 per year for personnel and materials.

Academic libraries

Academic libraries fit the national picture fairly well.

The University of Washington library was named "academic library of the year" in 2003, and the University's information school, which trains librarians, is ranked fourth in the country by U.S. News & World Report. The states surrounding Washington have no information school.

Special libraries

There are more than 140 special libraries in Washington, although data on these libraries are proprietary and, therefore, unavailable. Washington libraries are likely to be affected by issues that affect special libraries nationwide, including the Internet and pressure to deliver on the bottom line.

The Washington State Library

The Washington State Library (WSL), a division of the Office of the Secretary of State, works in partnership with advisory committees to plan and implement programs, as well as provide training, grants, and consulting services for all public and non-profit libraries in the state. State responsibility for school library media centers rests with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. There is no higher education coordinating body for academic libraries.

The WSL 2006 budget, not including federal LSTA funding, was nearly $6 million, about 65 percent of the library's budget in 2001. Because of state legislative action in 2002, when the state faced a $1.2 billion shortfall, the state library was forced to eliminate specialized services on behalf of the legislature and state agencies.

Nationwide, the average expenditure per capita by state library agencies is $3.60. Roughly 83% of that is state money. Because Washington is one of a handful of states for which there is no state funding for public libraries, the average expenditure per capita is only $1.62 and just 66% is state money. Only two state library agencies in the U.S. spend less per capita than Washington does.

Funding from state sources support the operation of the Washington State Library's main library, the three Olympia-area branch libraries housed in different state agencies, ten prison libraries, two mental health institutional libraries, and the Washington Talking Book and Braille Library. Thirty-one states provide services to correctional institutions. Washington, with 10 correctional libraries, accounts for one-third of all such services in the nation.

An online survey for the LSTA five-year evaluation showed that the statewide database licensing project and the continuing education grants for individuals and libraries are the two most visible and positively perceived LSTA-funded efforts. WSL brokers database licenses for constituent groups. It does not put any state or federal dollars into these licenses. In addition, WSL brokers a statewide database license to

ProQuest on behalf of all non-profit libraries in the state. In that case, WSL subsidizes 50 percent of the license using federal LSTA funds.

Many other state library agencies, excluding Washington, provide web-based union catalogs (49 state libraries), full-text databases (45), state standards (42) and state aid to libraries (38). Washington resource sharing is fragmented. Interlibrary loan is not coordinated for all types of libraries as it is in many states, and no statewide online catalog exists for identifying library holdings.

Most in the library community are pleased that WSL is poised to use OCLC WorldCat for shared catalog, so that Washingtonians can begin to glimpse the full range of library resources the state has to offer. In addition, WSL has been using LSTA money to encourage virtual reference services on a distributed scale for the last six years.

The population of Washington State

The issue of diversity was often discussed during the conferences, as library leaders considered how to truly mirror the diversity of their communities. Some background information may help as library leaders consider the changing face of Washington State.

According to a projection by the State of Washington Office of Financial Management, released in March 2006, nearly one in three residents of Washington will be a member of a racial or ethnic minority by the year 2030. While the Caucasian population is expected to grow by 34.5 percent between 2000 and 2030, the Office of Financial Management expects minority populations to grow even faster. It expects that the Hispanic and Asian and Pacific Islander populations will continue to be the largest and fastest growing minority groups. Asian and Pacific Islander populations are expected to grow by 132 percent and the Hispanic population is expected to grow 150 percent. By 2030, projections show a population of 825,000 Asian and Pacific Islanders and almost 1,100,000 Hispanic residents.

While still expected to grow faster than the Caucasian population, the Office of Financial Management expects that the African-American and the American Indian and Alaska Native populations will grow at a rate less than half that of faster growing minority groups. It expects the African-American population to grow at a 60 percent rate and reach 317,800 by 2030. It expects the American Indian and Alaska Native population to grow by about 50 percent and reach 146,000 by 2030.

How was this plan developed?

Libraries are among the most public of institutions. What happens in the world outside their walls has a huge impact on what goes on inside. Librarians involved in all types of libraries around Washington State stress how important it is that libraries be relevant to the communities they serve. With that in mind, the Washington State Library held four, one-day conferences,

using the future search model, at sites around the state.

One important aspect of a future search is that participants are selected to include more than just the institution that is the focus of the conference. Instead, they include people from the larger community, the whole system that is affected by and affects the institution. While participants at the conferences included people you would expect to see at a library conference, including teacher-librarians, library directors and staff members from various types of libraries, the Washington State Library and libraries near the four sites worked hard to encourage people who don't work for libraries to attend. Each conference, as a result, included people who took time off from school or work to attend, including high school students, library school students, trustees, library customers, community leaders and elected officials. While it was not always possible to gather a large number of community members, those who made the time to attend added immeasurably to the experience.

Participants worked in self-managed small groups, sometimes mixed and sometimes with others with the same types of roles, to accomplish four major tasks:

- **Focus on the past.** Participants created and analyzed a 45-year timeline of important events in libraries, their personal lives, and the world.
- **Focus on present trends.** Participants created and analyzed a mind map of present trends.
- **Scenarios for the future.** Groups created scenarios that expressed what libraries of 2012 would look like if libraries and communities achieved excellent libraries. Then participants identified the common values, big ideas and unique ideas contained in the scenarios.
- **Goals and action steps.** People self-selected which big idea they would work on, and in groups developed two broad goals and, for each goal, three action steps.

The four conference sites included: Everett, just north of Seattle; Tumwater, near the state capital of Olympia; Spokane, the largest city in Eastern Washington; and Kennewick, a community in South Central Washington.

Each conference, like each community, was unique. The statewide plan includes visions and goals that were common across all conferences, such as a statewide library card, as well as some that were specific to one conference, such as the library as nurturer of democracy and intellectual freedom.

What major trends are expected to affect libraries?

This plan is intended to guide libraries for at least five years into the future. It was important, therefore, to consider what changes are likely to be emerging over the horizon that could have an impact on how libraries do their work. Participants brainstormed trends, which were added to a mind map along one wall, and then used sticky dots to vote for the trends they felt were most important.

Some of the trends below were identified at several conferences, while others received a large number of votes at one or two conferences. Overall, participants viewed the following trends as most important.

- More information, especially information available in electronic formats, and more public demand for information available quickly and 24/7.
- An increase in digital and computer access, including less-expensive broadband.
- Expanding user expectations for services such as self-help, wireless Internet, simple user interfaces, and that libraries will help bridge the growing divide between information haves and have nots.
- A greater need for marketing and advocacy, and for public library trustees with political savvy, to deal with trends such as the growth in competition for library customers and funds.
- More challenges relating to funding, among them the rising cost of resources and reduced staff to deal with an increase in demand. This has led to another trend, to focus more on obtaining alternative sources of funding beyond tax dollars.
- More collaboration and partnerships, particularly between public and school libraries and between public libraries and service agencies.
- A greater use of the library as a "Third Place," community centers with mixed-use spaces.
- An increase in the need for diversity in services, staff and collections, particularly targeted to those for whom English is a second language.
- A growth in changes affecting staffing, such as staff cuts and the need for racially/ethnically diverse staff, as well as increased pressure for training and cross training.
- An increased focus on the relationship between libraries and their customers.
- An increase in the number of young people who use the libraries as a place to hang out.
- An increased emphasis on early learning.
- Growing concerns about privacy and civil liberties.

What common values should guide Washington libraries?

Values are ideals that guide or qualify the conduct of individuals or institutions. They inform how people and organizations operate in the world. For example, an institution that has cooperation as its highest value would probably behave much differently than one that emphasizes independence.

The common values that appeared in group after group in the four conferences were:

- Equal access statewide. (Every resident and student in Washington has access to a basic level of library services available both in person and online.)
- Collaboration. (Libraries work together and with their communities.)
- Customer-centered. (Libraries design services and activities based on customer input and with customers' needs in mind.)
- Customer service. (Libraries deliver services and activities in a way that works best for customers.)
- Center of the community. (Library buildings and activities are community resources that pull people into the library.)
- Library as institution that reflects the community. (Library staff and services are as diverse as the communities they serve.)

Vision One

The people of Washington have universal access to physical and virtual resources throughout the state.

In 2012, every resident of Washington has access to the same basic level of library services no matter where he or she lives. Libraries retain their local character. Differences in funding levels continue to exist, but by working together, Washington libraries have leveled the information playing field substantially.

In the process of providing universal access, libraries have made it easier for customers to use both the physical and virtual assets of all libraries and have raised the profile of what libraries have to offer. This has created a ripple effect of increased usage in libraries statewide. In addition, aggregated purchasing has reduced the costs of acquiring materials and has given some libraries the chance to focus on specialized collections.

As a result of communications with library leaders, state legislators see the benefits of funding a statewide library card and a basic menu of databases. Libraries reach out to Washington corporations in new and creative ways, offering funding and sponsorship opportunities. And, local libraries contribute proportionately to resources available to everyone in the state.

Goal: Any Washington resident can use the physical assets of any other library.

A statewide library card would imply statewide reciprocal borrowing agreements among and between all libraries in Washington State and policies for serving residents whose communities don't currently fund libraries.

Strategies:

- Develop governing policies that help to equalize the impact on all libraries, large and small.
- Initiate a statewide program, built on best practices in other states, for statewide reciprocal borrowing.

Goal: Every Washington resident has access to a one-stop shop on the Internet that provides access to all resources available through the statewide library card.

The one-stop shop could include a statewide union catalog, a bibliographic database that records the holdings of many libraries. A single search in a union catalog reveals which libraries hold a specific title. An alternative method would be to set up a federated search across multiple library catalogs, which would not require the creation of a union catalog.

Strategies:
- Generate data, including research on best practices in other states, available grants, and options for software and hardware.
- If a union catalog is preferred, create a definition of the catalog standard, involving individual libraries in IT interface design and management.
- Identify and obtain start-up and sustaining funding from LSTA, the state legislature, and libraries.

Goal: Online databases are available statewide to every library, along with an easy-to-use federated search tool tailored to different age groups.

Federated search is the ability to search and receive results from more than one database through a single interface. So, for example, instead of searching the ProQuest database and then repeating the same search on EBSCOHost, a user could search both databases simultaneously.

Strategies:
- Identify databases and a federated search tool that would be available to all libraries in Washington.
- Identify potential sources of funding.
- Develop agreements with vendors and post the databases and federated search tool online.

Vision Two

As a result of innovative partnerships and dynamic leadership, Washington libraries are recognized as stakeholders in their communities.

In 2012, you can hardly find a major aspect of the community in which librarians aren't involved. And it's not just library directors, either. Staff members at all levels see themselves as ambassadors for the library and leaders in community life. Staff members are encouraged to take part in committees and boards outside the library, a job requirement that most librarians now view as a vital part of their personal and professional development.

As librarians carve out new roles in the outside world, libraries bring more citizens inside the library to deal with vital community issues. Libraries embrace their role of providing a neutral space for engaging citizens. They provide forums for discussion on a range of issues, which strengthens democracy and builds community.

At the heart of this outward focus is the recognition that libraries cannot and should not stand alone. Instead of operating as silos, libraries are at the center of networks that include businesses, nonprofits, government and educational institutions. They partner with businesses to create shared ventures in libraries, and use kiosks and other means to take library services to business sites. They collaborate with social service agencies to serve as a source of health information and provide space for activities like literacy tutoring.

Goal: Library staff are leaders in their institutions and their communities.

Librarians in public libraries take on leadership roles in the community, and librarians in school, academic and special libraries take on leadership roles within their institutions and communities.

Strategies:

- Establish the expectation of staff involvement in community/institutional groups, provide opportunities to exercise leadership, and reward staff members for leadership roles.
- Provide leadership training, especially to those new to the system.

Goal: The library is and is seen as the foundation of democracy.

Strategies:

- Provide resources in multiple formats relating to democracy and access to information.
- Provide forums for discussion on community issues, serving as a safe, neutral space for citizens to share their views.
- Act as community clearinghouses for local, regional and state governmental information to support an informed citizenry.

Goal: Libraries have mutually beneficial partnerships with community organizations.
Strategies:
- Identify existing data on community needs, or conduct surveys of community members and library customers to generate that data.
- Identify potential partners and work with them to develop projects that meet community needs. For example, libraries could ask to participate in the development of the 10-year plans for the homeless that are under way in many Washington counties.
- Implement partnerships, evaluate progress and refine partnerships.

Goal: Libraries have mutually beneficial partnerships with businesses.
Libraries provide specialized information to the business community, and businesses and libraries operate shared ventures in libraries.
Strategies – specialized information for the business community:
- Meet with existing business organizations, or convene local businesses, to identify the various information needs that could be met through partnerships with libraries.
- Survey businesses to identify research training that they need beyond basic library services, and provide specialized training to business staff for a financial contribution or in return for an in-kind donation.

Strategies – shared ventures operated within the library:
- Connect with local Chambers of Commerce and other groups to let businesses know that libraries are seeking partnerships.
- Identify possible shared ventures that would add value to library customers or the community.
- Implement partnerships, evaluate progress and refine partnerships.

Vision Three

Washington library buildings reflect the robust role that libraries play in their communities.

In 2012, library buildings serve as a central hub for their communities. As always, they are bright, inviting and comfortable places to read and use the computer, but they are so much more. One result of librarians' new roles in their communities is that they have developed a clear sense of how the library space can be used to meet community needs. This looks different in each community, of course, but in general it means that libraries are multi-use facilities with a new flexibility in their design and operation.

Meeting and performance space brings the community into the building, and some libraries have space for small shops. A few libraries have become popular sites for weddings, and one library opened a gymnasium in attached space, which has provided a new source of revenue. Drive-up windows allow people fast access to books and other materials.

This rethinking of the library space has also led to new ideas about how to use library space to serve niche markets. One library rented out specialized space for business focus groups. In another example, school and public libraries collaborated on teen libraries in local malls. The libraries were designed in consultation with teenagers, and a board composed of teens and library staff worked together to set policy for library operations. In an initiative led by teens, the library worked with social service agencies and arts organizations to offer programs on-site.

Goal: Libraries are multi-use centers of the community.
Strategies:
- Identify examples of excellent multi-use library facilities design.
- Identify the clientele and partners to be attracted through reshaping the building.
- Engage partners and the community in developing a plan of action for upgrading the facility.

Goal: Community members are involved in designing libraries to maximize library services.
Strategies:
- Identify locations that could address community niche markets such as for teens.
- At each location, pull together a policy board of the target audience and establish goals and outcomes.
- Seek partnerships with groups that could provide services on site and seek partnerships for funding.

Vision Four

Community members are actively engaged with libraries and view them as relevant and necessary.

In 2012, libraries of all types are expert at engaging their communities. They continue to connect with fiction lovers and parents of small children, and also reach beyond those traditional markets to engage other people within the community. Some communication is one-way, such as mailing the library newsletter to everyone once a year or mailing thumb drives to new residents. Most communication is two-way, though, with listening groups, focus groups, interviews and surveys.

Libraries do more than listen. They take action based upon what they hear. By listening they find, for example, that they already provide some services that non-users want but do not know are available, so libraries get the word out using non-technical language. They also hear some great ideas for improving existing services, and find unmet needs that provide opportunities for targeting niche markets.

What libraries learn at the local level provides the foundation for statewide marketing materials that target non-users and niche markets, such as business owners, younger people and people for whom English is a second language.

Libraries' eagerness to find creative ways to reach non-users is leading to some exciting new business alliances. While Google, Amazon, Starbucks and Barnes and Noble were once seen as competitors for library customers, the reality is that they share many of the same values and goals as libraries. Other businesses, too, recognize that libraries provide services that help enrich the lives of their employees. When library leaders speak in business language and identify benefits to businesses, they find willing partners in helping them market to non-users.

Goal: Libraries involve the community using focused input, with responsive output.

Strategies:
- Identify methods for hearing from the community, receive training in using those methods or seek funding to hire contract assistance.
- Through outreach, identify target markets and improvements to current and new services. Gather data that can shape marketing materials and strategies.
- Evaluate current statewide marketing efforts and define a marketing strategy that includes identified target markets.
- Develop a statewide marketing infrastructure, including customizable materials for formats like web, radio and print.

Vision Five

Librarians are valued as critical providers of early learning and information literacy skills.

In 2012, as a result of an intensive training and advocacy effort, the public respects the critical role that librarians play in education. Librarians who work with children and young people have stepped up their efforts by developing standards for early learning services. They invest in training that assures their services result in specific learning outcomes. Working together, they position themselves as leaders in early learning and speak with one voice about the value of their role.

Public, school and academic libraries are united in developing a seamless system of information literacy training. They have developed definitions of age-appropriate information literacy skills from pre-school to college and are recognized for their contribution to helping students reach their educational goals.

The role of teacher-librarian has undergone the most dramatic shift in the last five years. Previously, teacher-librarians were viewed as the most vulnerable of all library professionals in the state. When school budgets were tight, the school library was often the first casualty. But teacher-librarians, supported by colleagues in other libraries, took action. They made a forceful case for their role in helping students achieve high scores on written and portfolio-based assessments. They advocated for including library resources in accreditation standards and worked with schools of education to assure that curricula covered the role of the teacher-librarian. At the state level, teacher-librarians now have a place at the table when state-level changes are discussed.

Goal: Library staff members provide a seamless system of information literacy training from pre-kindergarten through adulthood.

Strategies:

- Develop a relevant definition of "information literacy" and identify critical thinking learning outcomes at various levels from pre-kindergarten through adulthood.
- Conduct research on best practices, develop a framework for collaboration at the local level, and create public information materials about information literacy and critical thinking as important life skills.
- Generate statewide review and adoption of the definitions, outcomes, and framework for collaboration.
- Develop regional teams to implement the framework, and assess and revise the results. The teams could be organized by type of library.

Goal: Library staff members are critical players in ensuring that students meet preschool to graduate-level assessments.

Strategies:
- Work with legislators and education leaders to include library resources in school accreditation standards.
- Work with schools of education to assure that curricula include the library's collaborative role with teachers.
- Work with state education leaders to assure that teacher-librarians are part of curriculum development and involved in state-level changes.

Goal: Libraries are leaders in early learning.

Strategies:
- Perform a statewide assessment to identify what public libraries are doing now to provide early learning, and develop a minimum set of early learning services that most public libraries will provide.
- Identify and, if necessary, create sources of training in early learning for all library staff.
- Establish evaluation and testing methods to allow libraries to track their impact on early learning.
- Create and implement a media campaign that positions public libraries as recognized providers of early learning services.

Vision Six

Library staff and services reflect the racial/ethnic and cultural diversity of their communities.

In 2012, a new group of librarians is entering library school and moving into jobs at libraries throughout Washington. These information specialists, from various racial and ethnic groups, were introduced to library service through outreach to high school and undergraduate students that began in 2007. Recognizing that many librarians were nearing retirement, recruitment was used to assure that new library staff would be available and would more closely reflect Washington's changing population.

Today, libraries routinely conduct outreach to different racial/ethnic and cultural groups to assure that libraries are meeting their needs. By involving these communities in creating new services, libraries assure that the services are appropriate, useful and popular with the people they are intended to serve.

Libraries in communities with new immigrants take it one step further, and embrace the role of helping non-English-speakers transition into U.S. culture. They form partnerships with service organizations, churches, banks, real estate agents, and trade associations to offer programs on adaptation skills for immigrants. They also partner with youth organizations and service clubs to provide bilingual homework help and college applications for young people in immigrant families.

Goal: Libraries provide services appropriate to the racial/ethnic groups in their communities.

Strategies:
- Convene local leaders of different racial and ethnic groups to explore what services libraries could provide.
- Develop and implement a plan, working with their communities, to ensure that libraries are serving diverse populations.

Goal: High school and undergraduate students of diverse racial and ethnic origins choose careers working in libraries.

Strategies:

- Conduct focus groups with high school and undergraduate students at locations around Washington State to determine what would make a career in library and information science attractive to them.
- Based upon the results, create and implement a plan to move students of diverse racial and ethnic origins towards careers in a library setting, including graduate degrees in library and information science.
- Identify methods to retain new library staff members.

Goal: Libraries offer services that help non-English-speaking populations transition into U.S. culture.

Strategies:

- Working with new immigrants and local leaders, develop a plan to engage the community, provide training to library staff and services to new immigrants.
- Identify and involve partnering organizations that will help libraries serve new immigrants.

Vision Seven

Libraries have sufficient staff and staff members are known for providing great customer service.

In 2012, the culture of libraries has shifted. Most library staff enjoy working with people. Some of this shift has occurred as a result of excellent customer-service training and new roles in the community. Some has occurred because library directors adopted a new slogan: Hire for aptitude, train for skill. Customers notice that library staff these days are more likely to be roaming around, offering help, than standing behind the service desk. Every library staff member sees himself or herself as part of the library's marketing team. Interactions with customers have become friendlier, more frequent and more adept.

At the same time, the number of staff members at some libraries has increased. This is one result of the adoption of statewide level-of-service standards, which provide guidelines for the number of full-time librarians for libraries of a certain size and offering certain services. Statistics and stories show the benefits of adequate staffing, which, combined with greater community outreach, help some libraries achieve levy lifts and larger appropriations.

Goal: Library staff members are hired for their excellent customer service skills.
Strategies:
- Identify customer-service traits and develop ways to determine which job applicants possess those traits.
- Provide up-to-date, regular training in customer service.
- Involve staff members in identifying ways to improve customer service and reward staff members for going above and beyond.

Goal: Libraries have sufficient staff members to meet statewide service standards.
Strategies:
- Gather data on service standards and adopt statewide standards for levels of service.
- Use statistics and stories to demonstrate the need for libraries to be adequately staffed to meet the service standards.

Vision Eight

Libraries of all types have stable, sufficient funding to meet the needs of their customers.

In 2012, some libraries, like some communities, still have more resources than others. But cooperatively, libraries have made great strides in assuring that each library has a base level of funding that allows it to fulfill its mission and adequately serve its customers. These achievements have been possible through savvy leadership and new partnerships with business and other institutions statewide.

Library leaders join with others to advocate for tax revenue that allows them to provide a reasonable level of service. They encourage their customers to support initiatives that ensure that libraries can provide both traditional services, like book loans, and expensive but popular newer services, like online databases and computer access.

Their new visibility, along with community outreach and marketing efforts, encourage libraries to keep moving forward. They now receive some state funding for shared services, such as online databases, a union catalog, and statewide reciprocal borrowing.

Librarians of 2012 also work with state legislators to mandate a minimum standard for funding public and school libraries statewide. That initiative has moved along, with librarians taking the message to the higher education coordinating board, parents and organizations of educators and administrators.

Goal: Citizens support spending sufficient tax dollars for public libraries.
Strategies:
- Coordinate with marketing efforts to craft a common message about the financial needs of and value provided by public libraries.
- Encourage advocacy by library supporters, such as Friends members, students, local government and seniors.

Goal: State funds help pay for resources that are shared statewide, such as the statewide library card and online databases.
Strategies:
- Craft a common message from all library and education associations focusing on the demonstrated value of shared statewide resources.
- Provide training in advocacy for librarians and key volunteer leaders.

Goal: Public and school libraries have a baseline level of funding, with state funding provided as a supplement to local funds.

Strategies:
- Promote partnerships between public and school libraries designed to raise public awareness of the value of investments in libraries.
- Identify an adequate formula for the funding of public and school libraries.
- Provide cost estimates to the state legislature and governor.

Conclusion

Library and community leaders across the state worked together to identify areas of opportunity and need, which formed the basis of this statewide plan. Naturally, not every library will choose to participate in bringing every aspect of this plan to fruition. Conversely, some libraries may move far beyond the goals written here, when their resources and interests permit. Overall, however, this statewide plan represents the vision of the future towards which library and community leaders are willing to put forth their best efforts, the vision that calls forth their energy and enthusiasm. Together, all the libraries of Washington State will help assure a brilliant future for their libraries and, therefore, their communities.

The Landscape for Change

Executive Summary: An examination of the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities of Washington libraries

Prepared for the Washington State Library by Consensus
January 27, 2007

From November 2006 through January 2007, Consensus worked with the Washington State Library to survey the landscape for libraries in Washington. What we found, using a variety of sources including national reports and interviews, a focus group with the Library Council of Washington, phone interviews with staff and volunteer leaders, and an online survey of staff and volunteer leaders and library users, was remarkably consistent in terms of how people saw the challenges and opportunities facing libraries of all kinds. While we have no doubt that the I-5 divide is real, and that there are differences between the urban and rural portions of the state and different types of libraries, interviews and surveys found more commonalities than differences.

This document is designed to serve as a source document during the creation of a five-year plan for Washington libraries. It provides a look at the landscape that exists and the beginnings of a landscape that library leaders would like to create for the future.

A few key points are worth mentioning:

- For almost every weakness or threat that people identified, somebody somewhere in Washington has found a way to solve it. We've included success stories, drawn from interviews, which provide a sense of what others are doing to turn problems into opportunities.

- The environment within which all libraries operate has become more competitive and libraries can no longer count on stakeholders seeing them as valuable. Librarians from libraries of all types talked about intense competition for funding in tight economic conditions. Librarians also recognized that they needed to make a strong case for their libraries in a culture in which civic values like the common good are eroding and in which people think "It's all on the Internet."

One library mails a newsletter to everyone in its district twice a year. Since they started ten years ago, "membership in our Friends went from 10 to more than 300 people. Each year we get more contributions. Our last two bonds passed by about 80 percent. I truly attribute that to our newsletter. People see the value now." Comment from a small public library

- Interview subjects saw marketing as a major weakness of libraries. Given that, we were surprised to find that many fewer saw marketing as an opportunity or, in the survey, said that marketing was something for which they wanted to receive training.

- The public sees Internet search engines as the major competition for libraries and a surprisingly high percentage – about 65% - said they wanted the library of the future to have a website with quick and easy access to reliable digital information. Interview subjects said that library databases are very difficult to use, and several said that libraries should be more assertive in asking vendors to provide a better product. None mentioned asking vendors to provide marketing support.

> *"We have two blind reader advisors. Most libraries for the blind don't have blind staff. That sends a real neat message, when someone calls and the reader advisor says, I read the book. It says that blind people do work."*
> Comment from a special library

- Library leaders said it was vital that libraries be relevant to their communities. Few, however, talked about asking the community what it wants. A handful mentioned efforts to reach out to non-users, get librarians out from behind the desk and out into the community, and to engage the public in planning.
- Changes in state laws governing education were seen as having a major impact on both public and school libraries. The Washington Assessment of Student Learning was seen as a threat to school libraries, as teachers focused on the test rather than research, and as an opportunity for public libraries that are strong in early childhood education. On the other hand, teacher-librarians saw laws mandating classroom-based assessment and a senior culminating project as being very beneficial for their libraries.
- Members of the public who completed the online survey, most of whom were heavy library users, were satisfied with their libraries. Ninety-three percent expressed high overall satisfaction. About 89% said that being "free" was the most unique feature of libraries. While many library leaders interviewed talked in terms of being free to the public, several said that the word "free" should be replaced with the concept of return on investment.

What are the national trends?

Along with traditional services like a quiet place for study, collections of books and knowledgeable librarians, libraries nationwide now provide an ever-changing array of new services. They include age-specific services, materials like DVDs and CDs, meeting spaces, computers and Internet access, wireless connectivity, online databases, and amenities like coffee shops, gift shops and used bookstores.

Research suggests several issues, which fall into two groupings, will be relevant to the library of today and of tomorrow:

Social and economic issues
- *The library as space.* Libraries are being reconfigured as gathering spaces for people, with more space for people and technology and less space for books.

- *The funding of libraries*. School librarians are not considered essential members of the learning team in many places and school boards rarely provide enough funding for the up-to-date books required for accreditation. Academic and special libraries compete with other departments for funding. Providing new technology and training library staff to use it strains the budgets of many libraries.
- *Advocacy for and marketing of libraries*. The public is aware of traditional services, but libraries have a hard time marketing databases and other electronic resources, and the public tends not to use librarians as a source of information.
- *Issues of privacy and confidentiality*. Librarians fought the Patriot Act, which did away with due process protections. They face challenges from some state lawmakers over the privacy and confidentiality of library records.
- *Legal actions and controversies*. Libraries face conflicts related to books, Internet access, social networking, and the question of who is entitled to service.

Library services and staff

- *The globalization of libraries and information*. As more information is available online, those using the information are not necessarily the people who paid to provide it in that format or who support its ongoing availability.
- *The Google-ization of information*. Google is digitizing the collections of several major libraries. Other efforts, such as Project Gutenberg and Open Content Alliance, are creating digital libraries from collections and public domain titles.
- *Changes in the use of library services*. Increased digital access to books may cause changes including cooperative collections, greater reliance on interlibrary loan and a reduced (or expanded) need to store rarely used titles. Digitized information, which libraries rent rather than own, takes a bigger bite out of library budgets. And new service roles for public libraries include: early literacy and adult literacy; workforce skills; entrepreneurship and small-business development; and serving as a catalyst for economic development.
- *The graying of the workforce*. Many current librarians will retire in the next decade. There are questions about skills their replacements will need and the role of the master's of library science.

One library has trained its staff in Every Child Ready to Read. "Before that, people saw us as babysitters or Cub Scout leaders. We told staff we want people to see you as the talented, educated people you are. It's been hard, but now people are seeing us as helping their kids pass the Washington Assessment of Student Learning...Now (staff members) know what the outcome is, and they can explain to parents that it's fine motor skills or print awareness. And kids get it, too. In summer reading, we jumped a million minutes of reading in one year. That doubled what we did over the previous year."

Comment from a large public library

- *The outsourcing of library services,* from acquisitions and technical services to the entire operation of the library.
- *The place of reference services,* now that Google and other search engines provide quick access to answers to easy questions.
- *The place in the spectrum of academic and school libraries.* The academic community struggles with some of the same issues as the public library community, along with other issues such as the role of the library in the academic enterprise and chaos in scholarly communications. School librarians have identified issues that include building the role around student achievement and literacy rather than information-literacy skills and better collaboration with all educational groups.

What is the situation at the state level?

As is the case in any state, state laws and practices, community culture and history have led Washington libraries to have their own distinct characteristics.

The Washington State Library

The Washington State Library [WSL], housed within the Office of the Secretary of State, works in partnership with advisory committees to plan and implement programs, provide training, grants, and consulting services for all public and nonprofit libraries in the state. State responsibility for school library media centers rests with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

"We're working with faculty to develop digital collections. A simple one is that we have the student newspaper digitized. We also have some other unusual print materials that have been donated to us that we're digitizing and making available."
Comment from an academic library

There is no higher education coordinating body for academic libraries.

The WSL 2006 budget, not including federal LSTA funding, was nearly $6 million, about 65% of the library's budget in 2001. Because of state legislative action in 2002, when the state faced a $1.2 billion shortfall, the state library was forced to eliminate specialized services on behalf of the legislature and state agencies.

Nationwide, the average expenditure per capita by state library agencies is $3.60. Roughly 83% of that is state money. Because Washington is one of a handful of states for which there is no state funding for public libraries, the average expenditure per capita is only $1.62 and just 66% is state money. Only two state library agencies in the U.S. spend less per capita than Washington does. Funding from state sources support the operation of the Washington State Library's main library, the three Olympia-area branch libraries housed in different state agencies, ten prison libraries, two mental health institutional libraries, and the Washington Talking Book and Braille Library. Thirty-one states provide services to correctional institutions. Washington, with 10 correctional libraries, accounts for one-third of all such services in the nation.

An online survey for the LSTA five-year evaluation showed that the statewide database licensing project and the continuing education grants for individuals and libraries are the two

highest visibility and most positively perceived LSTA-funded efforts. WSL brokers database licenses for constituent groups. It does not put any state or federal dollars into these licenses. WSL brokers a statewide database license to ProQuest on behalf of all nonprofit libraries in the state. WSL subsidizes 50% of the license using federal LSTA funds.

Many other state library agencies, but not Washington, provide web-based union catalogs (49 state libraries), full-text databases (45), state standards (42) and state aid to libraries (38). Washington resource sharing is fragmented. Interlibrary loan is not coordinated for all types of libraries as it is in many states, and no statewide online catalog exists for identifying library holdings.

Most in the library community are pleased that WSL is poised to use OCLC WorldCat for shared catalog, so that Washingtonians can begin to glimpse the full range of library resources the state has to offer. In addition, WSL has been using LSTA money to encourage virtual reference services on a distributed scale for the last several years.

State libraries nationwide must respond to federal initiatives, such as the Patriot Act and Child Internet Protection Act. State policymakers expect increasing challenges to privacy and free speech issues that may be at odds with existing state law. In some states, legislators have already proposed the requirement of (often ineffective) Internet filters as a condition of state funding.

Other statewide issues include what many observers feel is a divide between the I-5 corridor near Seattle and the rest of Washington. The I-5 divide influences politics, Internet bandwidth, and much else. Overcoming the divide is a challenge to developing library services to all state residents.

"In my library, I make myself indispensable to our teachers. I won't be heard as a single voice, but if they say we can't get along without this library, administrators and other decision-makers have to listen."
Comment from a teacher-librarian

The state of Washington is home to Microsoft and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which put computers and Internet services in libraries nationwide, and the Seattle area is considered one capital of the information age.

Public libraries

Washington has far fewer libraries than most other states and those libraries include wider units of service, which generally produce more efficient and, often, more proficient libraries. Circulation of public library materials continues to climb, but answers to reference questions have declined since 1999.

Public library directors are positioning themselves to become key players in the early childhood arena, in response to Governor Gregoire's establishment of a Department of Early Learning. Subgroups of public library directors are working on issues of state funding for a virtual library and renewed discussion of a statewide library card.

School libraries

Many interview subjects said they considered school libraries the most threatened of all types of libraries in Washington. Numerous studies show that good library media services and staffing are related to better student performance. Still, teacher-librarian positions have been eliminated when school budgets are tight and some school libraries in the state operate with as little as $1,000 per year for personnel and materials.

Academic libraries

Academic libraries fit the national picture fairly well, with the exception that there are many fewer Washington libraries in institutions providing bachelor's degrees for either general or liberal arts than in the nation as a whole.

"The director built the collections in the libraries, both print and databases, based primarily on patron requests. This is a very subtle difference from saying what you think people need, to asking people what they want. People were invested because they asked for it."
Comment from a mid-sized public library

The University of Washington library was named "academic library of the year" in 2003, and the university's information school, which trains librarians, is ranked fourth in the country by *U.S. News & World Report.* The seven states surrounding Washington have no information school.

Special libraries

There are more than 140 special libraries in Washington, although data on these libraries are proprietary and, therefore, unavailable. Washington libraries are likely to be affected by issues that affect special libraries nationwide, including the Internet and pressure to deliver on the bottom line.

What is the situation for the libraries of Washington State?

Consensus conducted primary research in November through January of 2006 that included a focus group with the Library Council of Washington, phone interviews with 31 staff or volunteer leaders of libraries of all types, and two online surveys that drew 283 public responses and 340 staff responses.

Interviews with library staff and volunteer leaders

During the interviews, we asked subjects to tell us the strengths and weaknesses of their libraries compared to competitors. They said that competitors include Internet search engines, online resources like audible.com and scientific websites, big-box bookstores, coffee shops, television, movie and movie rental services, the video gaming industry, for-profit children's play centers, and students' extracurricular activities.

We also asked interview subjects to tell us the major threats and opportunities affecting their libraries, and the one thing they would like to see as a result of a shared vision among Washington libraries.

Strengths identified by interview subjects

When asked what their libraries do better than competitors, 31 library directors and volunteer leaders mentioned an average of three strengths each. They mentioned the following four strengths most often:

- **Information (26 mentions, 25% of responses).** Libraries provide accurate and complete information, unique materials, and reference services.
- **Library as place (17 mentions, 17% of responses).** Libraries provide a welcoming, neutral and safe space where people can gather and learn, and serve as centers of the community.
- **Customer service (14 mentions, 14% of responses).** People from larger libraries cited friendly, helpful customer service, while those from smaller libraries cited personal relationships with customers.
- **Tailored services (11 mentions, 11% of responses).** Libraries offer services tailored to their customer base or for niche markets within the community as a whole.

In addition, at least five people mentioned strengths in children and youth services, training in information literacy, services that bridge the digital divide, and services for everyone.

Strengths identified by the Library Council of Washington

The Library Council of Washington [LCW] serves as an advisory committee for the Washington State Library on library development issues and the use of federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funds. During a focus group in November, LCW members identified strengths, many of which were also heard during interviews and in the surveys.

Strengths identified only by LCW include:

- Libraries have defined their role(s) broadly.
- State law allows direct taxation for public libraries.
- The number of public library administrative units has been kept to a minimum.
- There are effective library leaders in all segments of the library community.
- There is an emerging trend of multi-type library cooperation.
- There is some practice of resource sharing and a desire to expand the practice.

Weaknesses identified by interview subjects

When asked what their libraries do worse than competitors, library directors and volunteer leaders mentioned an average of two weaknesses each. They mentioned the following four weaknesses most often:

- **Marketing (22 mentions, 35% of responses).** Libraries fall short in putting the customer at the center, getting out into the community and reaching non-users.

One library provides home delivery, which is cost-effective because the area served is so large that bookmobiles couldn't cover it all. "We mail directly to people in their homes and they can return postagepaid. We're piggybacking on the post office; they're our delivery service. We have an 80-90 percent ontime return rate." Comment from a large public library

- **Collections (10 mentions, 16% of responses).** Libraries fall short in accessibility and convenience of collections, and in offering current materials and bestsellers.
- **Online resources and new technology. (9 mentions, 15% of responses).** The complexity of libraries' online databases is a weakness, as is adopting new technology.
- **The physical space (7 mentions, 11% of responses).** Libraries fall short in offering enough and the right hours and providing a comfortable environment.

One library director said a promising new solution to staffing problems, particularly for libraries that can't offer big-city salaries, is distance learning offered through the University of Washington. "People can stay where they are and earn their master's. We grow them where they're planted rather than try to get them from somewhere else."
Comment from a large public library

In addition, at least two persons mentioned weaknesses in staffing, computers, serving teenagers, and building partnerships.

Weaknesses identified by the Library Council of Washington

LCW members identified the following weaknesses, not duplicated by either the interviews or surveys:
- No statewide library card.
- Fragmented interlibrary loan.
- Very little development of shared integrated library automation systems.
- Inadequate band-width penetration statewide.
- No funding to support broad-based resource sharing.

Threats identified by interview subjects

The key word was "relevance" when people talked about the major threats facing their libraries, such as the Internet, competition for tax dollars, and a public that no longer assumes that libraries are valuable. Each interview subject was invited to offer three threats.
- **The Internet (12 mentions, 14% of responses).** The idea that "It's all on the Internet" was perceived as a threat by the most interview subjects.
- **Funding (10 mentions, 12% of responses).** Libraries are threatened by competition for public dollars and problems with the property tax and initiative process.
- **Support (8 mentions, 9% of responses).** Building community, school and organizational support for libraries is seen as increasingly vital as people are less likely to assume that libraries add value.
- **Staffing (8 mentions, 9% of responses).** Not being able to attract enough and the right staff members by providing adequate salaries, recruiting diverse and multilingual staff members, and, for teacher-librarians, dealing with the deprofessionalization of the profession.

- **Legislative issues (8 mentions, 9% of responses).** The Washington Assessment of Student Learning is seen as a threat to school libraries, as teachers focus more on the test and less on research. Another state-level threat is lack of state funding for libraries.

In addition, at least five interview subjects mentioned threats including community attitudes, the changing world of information, becoming irrelevant to young people and losing relevance by not keeping up with technology.

Threats identified by the Library Council of Washington

The LCW identified these threats, not mentioned elsewhere:

- **Legislation and initiatives**, including Initiative 747, requirements for a supermajority for some levies and for tax levy lifts, and a climate that discourages financial reserves.
- **Potential instability of some public library tax bases** through annexation or incorporation of new communities.
- **Changing social climate**, including the impact of the closure of mental health facilities on library clientele.
- **Changing support for traditional library practices**, including "fair use" in an electronic environment and diminished support for Library of Congress cataloging.
- In the past, libraries owned print materials, which were in their permanent collections. Now, libraries are challenged by the choice between **leasing and purchasing information**.

A consultant connected a small special library with a public library in an affluent area. When customers donate hardbacks to the public library, it sends the extra copies to the special library. "We've received 31 boxes of current materials, a couple months to a couple of years old, things I wouldn't purchase because I have other priorities. It's great. It surprises the patrons when they see more current books on the shelves."

Comment from a special library

Opportunities identified by interview subjects

Each interview subject was invited to offer three opportunities.

- **Niche markets (15 mentions, 21% of responses).** Early learning, services to seniors, businesses, life-long learners, students and immigrants were all cited as promising niche markets for public libraries. Teacherlibrarians mentioned services to subgroups of students, such as those doing classroom-based assessment projects and seniors completing a senior culminating project.
- **Digital information and technology (12 mentions, 16% of responses).** The promise of new technology, digital collections, online databases, the opportunity to bridge the digital divide, and open-source software were seen as opportunities.
- **Reference services (10 mentions, 14% of responses).** The vast amount of information available online provides opportunities to help people manage it and make it easier

to find, to provide instruction in information literacy, and to provide customized information.

- **Libraries as the center of communities (8 mentions, 11% of responses).** Libraries have the opportunity to serve as gathering places for the public, students, and other users, and to help drive a community's development.

In addition, at least seven persons mentioned marketing, collaboration, and outreach and partnerships.

Opportunities identified by the Library Council of Washington
LCW members identified the following opportunities:
- Pacific Rim business opportunities.
- Washington is home to Microsoft.
- Because Washington governs by public vote, the opportunity to go to the public with a request for funds for libraries.
- Libraries can develop return-on-investment statements at all levels, using existing templates.
- The academic community can forge alliances that compete with and may replace expensive subscriptions.

What interviews identified as the most important result of a shared vision
We asked interview subjects, if libraries in Washington were guided by a shared vision, which one result would be most valuable to their libraries. Two responses received by far the most mentions:

- **Communities view libraries as relevant and necessary (10 mentions; 31% of responses).** The key to relevance was seen as meeting the needs of each community, recognizing that how that looks will vary from place to place.

- **Citizens have a statewide library card and/or virtual library (10 mentions; 31% of responses).** Respondents recognized the challenges of a statewide library card, but said it could help with marketing and serving unserved or remote areas. The virtual library was seen as a way to level the information playing field.

> *"In almost all counties in Washington you vote by mail. Before election day, people were trying to put their ballots in the book return. The election supervisor said they wanted to install permanent ballot return boxes at every branch, so people could return their ballots there. I thought that was a great community service."*
> Comment from a large public library

In addition, at least three persons mentioned collaboration and reaching new audiences. At least one said libraries would be seen as educational institutions, state funding, core services offered at every library, and more prominence for the state library.

Online survey of library administration, staff, support staff and trustees

Of the 340 respondents, about 29% were library administrators or managers, about 43% were library staff, about 20% were paraprofessionals or support staff, and about 8% were library trustees.

While most of the 340 respondents were from public libraries (45.6%), enough responses from the school (20%) and academic (24.7%) communities were also collected to make comparing the different groups relevant for some questions. In addition, 3.5% were from government, 2.1% were from medical or legal, about 1% from corporate and 0.3% from tribal, with about 1% from other libraries.

Service challenges

The survey asked a series of open-ended questions, asking respondents to note the first, second and third most important service challenges they faced.

- Overall, **funding** ranked as one of the most importance service challenges. Library administrators mentioned funding 40 times and librarians 79 times. Trustees, however, mentioned it just a few times, usually linked to a service, as in "there's not enough funding to…"
- **Staffing** was the other top concern. Issues of inadequate pay, lack of staff, concern about staff training, and future lack of staff were all mentioned.

Technology and digital resources

Concerns about digital resources showed up in both the challenges and training responses. The concerns centered on costs, staff training, and public use of the resources. Four survey questions took a closer look. Three-fourths of respondents said they had purchased digital resources, nearly 85% used their operating budgets to do so, and about 60% said the purchases had affected other parts of their budgets. When asked where the needed funds for digital resources should come from, the two sources most often chosen were state dollars (37%) and local dollars (24.5%).

Training

Survey respondents were asked if they would seek training from WSL in the next three years. About 7% said they would not, and nearly half said they would. The remainder said they weren't sure.

Librarians and trustees also indicated that they were interested in three initiatives of the state library.

Community Needs	Percent that Agree or Strongly Agree
Early learning initiatives	75.6%
Literacy initiatives	75.3%
Multi-language library services	67.1%

* The question read, "There is a need for _____ in my community." Possible responses were: Strongly
disagree, disagree, neutral, agree or strongly agree.

What is the public's perspective on libraries?

Consensus crafted an online survey with a mix of close-ended and open-ended questions, and asked librarians to invite their users to complete it. Of the 283 users who did:
- 92.6% used public libraries most often,
- 4.2% used college/university libraries,
- 2.5% used school libraries, and
- 0.4% each used a government or other library.

Not surprisingly, survey respondents were heavy users. Two-thirds said they used the library weekly or daily. Past research – in particular, the OCLC study – indicated that "borrowing print books, researching specific reference books and getting assistance with research" were the top three activities at the library for their survey respondents. Responses from the Washington users parallel those results:
- "Check(ing) out books, videos or CDs in English" was the major activity reported, with about 90% of respondents reporting they did this frequently.
- Nearly 60% indicated they asked staff reference questions occasionally to frequently.
- Libraries are in-and-out activities for slightly more than half of respondents, who say they rarely to never read or study there.
- About 60% indicated that they rarely to never use the library for career or job information.
- Two-thirds reported that they used library computers occasionally to frequently.
- Three-fourths said they rarely or never use the history/genealogy materials, and two-thirds said they rarely or never attend meetings, classes or other events at the library.

Libraries online

The large majority of respondents, about 93%, said they visited their library websites at least once a month, with about one-third saying they visit the website every day. Nearly 80% used the website to log into their library accounts and to request books or other circulating items.

One library held three brunches for local nonprofits to talk about how they could pool their common interests. Among the results, the library hosted workshops on bookkeeping for nonprofit treasurers and on fundraising for board and staff members. "Networking in the community is vital and who better to play the role of the facilitator than the library?"
Comment from small public library

A surprisingly high rate of use was indicated for library online databases, with a combined frequent and occasional use of about 73%. In the OCLC study, awareness of library electronic resources was just 39%; we suspect the difference in response may be due to the fact that the OCLC study drew from a general population, while our survey drew from those who used the library frequently.

Relatively few persons, just 21.3%, use the website to ask a reference question. But people do use the Internet, despite not using the "ask-a-librarian" feature that many libraries

offer. Some 45% said they search the Internet when they need information, one-third help themselves at the library, about 14% search the library website and one-tenth say they ask a librarian. Respondents acknowledged their preference for Internet searching by identifying search engines as the main competition for libraries, at 46.3%.

User satisfaction

At 93%, respondents expressed high overall satisfaction with the library they report using most, although 56% report that they use more than one library. Most of that use, 61% in rural areas or small towns and 54% in the urban or suburban areas, is public library to public library. Library collections were the top reason for satisfaction, followed by staff. The much smaller percentage of dissatisfied customers was unhappy with collections and staff.

Respondents were invited to suggest ways to improve service:

"The way people are using the library is changing. We just did a customer satisfaction survey and 33% of patrons are using libraries to pick up reserves and 90% are really happy with self-check. So the staff members that used to check books out for people are enriching their jobs by doing more with the community."
Comment from a large public library

How can libraries improve?

Comment Type	Percent Reporting
Collection issues (more books, magazines, CDs, audio books)	30.6%
All is good	14.2%
Concern with computer technology or use	12.7%
Facility concerns (parking, shelving, use of space)	11.6%
Expand hours	8.6%
Customer service improvements/More staffing	8.2%
Programming (types or audiences)	3.7%
Libraries need more money (generally)	1.1%
Marketing/Education needed	1.1%
Other (babysitting, smaller fines, hold waits, etc.)	8.2%

* The question read, "Type what one thing the library could do to improve service."

** There were 268 valid responses to this question (i.e., not "I don't know").

Most respondents, 89.4%, feel that libraries are unique. Customers overwhelmingly stated that "free" was the most unique feature of libraries.

What is unique about libraries?

Comment Type	Percent Reporting
Free/Available to all/Open access	35.5%
Amount and variety of resources	24.9%
Staff	14.3%
Community meeting place/Atmosphere of learning	9.4%
Source of trustworthy information/Source of information	3.7%
Everything you need under one roof	2.9%
Access to rare or out of print books	1.2%
Other (i.e., "really, really clean amazing restrooms")	8.2%

* The question read, "Please type the MOST unique thing about libraries."

** The percentages do not add to 100% due to rounding. There were 245 valid responses to this question (i.e. responses other than "I don't know").

Libraries in the future

The final set of questions was designed to identify important needs libraries must meet in the future. Mainly, the responses are more reflective of how people currently use libraries. The only surprising response was that 65.4% report a very high need for a library website that provides easy and quick access to reliable digital information. It was surprising because Internet searching, which does not guarantee reliable information, is currently the preferred way to seek information. The following table rates the future need for different services:

Needs	Very High	High	Mod.	Low	Very Low
Place to check out bestsellers and other reading material	59.0%	30.0%	8.8%	1.4%	0.7%
A source of information for research	64.7%	24.0%	9.9%	1.1%	0.4%
Librarians to answer questions in the library	48.4%	28.6%	18.4%	3.9%	0.7%
Librarians to answer questions online	31.4%	33.9%	28.6%	5.3%	0.7%
To be able to access and/or use entertainment materials	30.7%	29.3%	28.3%	9.5%	2.1%
Have a place to study and read	38.2%	33.9%	21.6%	4.6%	1.8%
Have a place to be with other people and socialize	14.5%	16.6%	34.6%	23.3%	11.0%
Have a place for cultural events, community learning and/or meetings	30.0%	29.7%	27.2%	9.5%	3.5%
Have a library website that provides easy and quick access to reliable digital information	65.4%	25.8%	7.4%	1.1%	0.4%

Current and future support

Both the staff/trustees and the public were asked about financial support for libraries in the future.

Staff members and trustees were asked to respond to "The public values what we offer and will financially support our needs in the future, even if it requires additional funding or tax increases." Of respondents, 24.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed, 34.1% were neutral and 41.7% agreed or strongly agreed.

One library is working with new towns in the area, taking part in the planning process to create a town center. "We need to become the center of the community and I don't know that we've done that in the past."
Comment from a large public library

Members of the public were asked, "How willing are you to help pay for your ideal library through increased taxes or appropriations?" Of respondents, who are mainly heavy users of libraries, 56.9% said they were very willing, 38.2% said they were somewhat willing, and 4.9% were not willing to help pay for their ideal library.